

Keyifli Okumalar Dileriz

Binlerce kategoride milyonlarca PDF e-kitap, ders kitapları, dergiler ve romanlara platformumuz üzerinden ücretsiz ulaşabilirsiniz.

RESMİ WEB SİTEMİZ

<https://rantey.org>

Yedek ve Duyuru Kanallarımız

Sitemize erişim engeli gelmesi veya adres değişikliği durumunda aşağıdaki kanallardan güncel giriş adresine erişebilirsiniz:

- Telegram: <https://t.me/birkitapbir>
- WhatsApp Kanalımız : <https://whatsapp.com/channel/0029VbDHv8uE50Us4lvMoc0Y>

A NOVEL



JUNKY

TORRI HEAT

Copyright © 2022 by Torri Heat

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in brief quotations within reviews and otherwise permitted by copyright law.

This is a work of fiction.

Any aspect of this work — names, characters, places, and/or incidents — are products of the author's imagination and/or used fictitiously.

Any resemblance to actual events, locales or persons (living or dead) is purely coincidental.

Cover Design by Books and Moods

Interior Formatting by Gee at DarkbyDesign

Editing by Lauren Alsten

OceanofPDF.com

Contents

Dedication

1. Savannah

2. Felix

3. Savannah

4. Theo

5. Savannah

6. Luther

7. Savannah

8. Felix

9. Theo

10. Luther

11. Savannah

12. Felix

13. Savannah

14. Luther
15. Savannah
16. Theo
17. Luther
18. Savannah
19. Felix
20. Theo
21. Savannah
22. Luther
23. Savannah
24. Felix
Savannah
Thank You
All About Torri
Also by Torri

OceanofPDF.com

For those wild and crazy dreams I'll never stop chasing.



OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 1

Savannah

I had a vision.

Not the kind you see in movies—the ones where psychics see the future and the year of your death and that kind of bullshit.

No. I had a real vision. A goal, if you will. My own thrift shop, filled to the brim with collectables you'd never be able to find anywhere else. Every nook and cranny would be stuffed with trinkets, and people from miles around would come to see me, Savannah Miles, a self-made legend. Maybe I'd even have my own TV show. Life hadn't always been easy for me, with the darkness pulling me down every opportunity it got, but I had found an outlet in treasure hunting. We didn't have a lot of money growing up, so my keepsakes became anything I could find at thrift stores and flea markets.

Some people called it hoarding. I called it love.

Finding the perfect thrift was a high nothing else topped. Not even sex could surmount the thrill of rummaging around the loaded shelves of a random shop. I didn't like to consider the fact that maybe I hadn't had good sex.

But back to my vision, otherwise known as the reason I found myself in this shit town a few miles from my childhood home. The dream of opening my own shop had seemed unreachable, until a Great Uncle Alfred I'd never heard of died and left me a small sum of cash. I didn't know the guy, but I was never one to look a gift horse in the mouth, either. The inheritance wasn't a lot, but enough to either pay off my oppressive student loans or put a down payment on a place I could call my own. Getting approved for a mortgage might be difficult, but I wouldn't have to worry about loans if I bought a cheap enough place.

You already know what I did. The student loans would always be there, but if I didn't jump on this opportunity, it might have disappeared before I had the chance to turn my dream into reality.

I threw down the tacky red apron from the local diner I had worked at since college, and walked out on my sexist pig of a boss, middle fingers held high. That night, I'd called a real estate agent, a woman with bottle-blond hair and a smile fragile enough to crack with the right amount of pressure.

This was how, the next morning, I found myself standing in front of what was little more than a pile of rubble. But the

bones...they were the most beautiful bones I had seen in my life. As my realtor stood off to one side, tapping away on her phone and probably expecting a quick “no,” I tiptoed up the worn steps.

“Is it a Victorian?” I asked, not bothering to look back. She was probably still pecking at her phone. I made a mental note of the rotting wooden siding.

“Technically it’s post-Victorian. 1907. But nobody knows what that is, so we just call it Victorian.”

Works for me.

A tall steeple rose over the large bay window showcasing the two-story foyer that overlooked the porch. Ornate detailing framed the roof’s gables. In the front garden, a tree was split in two, looking like it had been struck by lightning. It was beautiful. It needed a lot of love, but hard work had never scared me before. Behind me, the realtor called out other details, but I barely listened, too focused on my exploration. “Now, we are far away from town, so phone signals may be difficult to come by.”

She wasn’t wrong. We had driven ten minutes on an abandoned, single-lane road before we even made it to the house’s expansive gravel driveway. But nothing she said could’ve swayed me. I was in love. Besides, it wasn’t anything money couldn’t fix, and for the first time in my life I had money to blow. Bad plumbing? I’d find a repairman. Rural internet? Coming right up. I cupped my forehead to

the window and peered inside. “Not a huge issue. I’m sure I can figure that out. Can we go in?”

From what I could see, the interior was in better shape than the peeling exterior. Antique rugs lay on original hardwood floors, and some furniture remained as well. I could envision my shelves lined with all my treasures, and maybe even a tea table set where people could stop and have a rest before they trekked back into town. Based on the furniture I could see, who knew what other goodies awaited me inside.

“Unfortunately not,” she called back, punctuating her sentence with quick taps on her phone. “The bank foreclosed on this property years ago. They’re still selling it ‘As Is,’ which means you can’t see inside, but you can’t beat the price.”

I turned to the side, the biggest smile on my face. She wasn’t wrong about that either—it was a steal. I could buy the place outright, and still have money to fix it up. The garden was overgrown, but you could see the beauty beneath the weeds and vines. I wished I could’ve looked into the backyard, but the padlock on the iron gate and the ivy crawling up the bars warned me to stay out. Still, I could envision the secret garden on the other side.

The realtor popped her head up from her phone, finally noticing me once more. “Shall we check out the next place?”

“No.” I shook my head, and her perfectly made-up face fell. “This is it. This is the house I want.” I ran my hand along the banister, imagining the beautiful wood grain remaining once I sanded off the ugly paint. This had to be one of those moments everyone talked about. The moments where everything changed. This was the start of the rest of my life.

Her face contorted with confusion. I knew she had never expected me to choose this house. This was supposed to be the house that made all the other houses on her roster look better. “Are you sure? You haven’t even seen the interior. It could be derelict.”

It could’ve been a thousand things, but it didn’t matter. I didn’t care. I was certain. This was it.

I bought the house without ever going inside. The lawyer gave me a funny look when I went to sign the paperwork once he realized what property I was buying. “It’s a foreclosed property. Did you even look inside?”

“Nope.” Not even a stuffy lawyer could dull my excitement today. Keys first, adult problems later. At least, that’s what I was telling myself. “I’ll get a home inspector to check it out after I move in.”

“You know, I’ve heard some funny stories about the house over the years. The kids say it’s haunted,” he remarked, barely looking up from the paperwork he was pushing toward me.

I smiled. A few ghosts had never bothered me before. But if I had known what awaited me on the other side of the

door, I would've paid a lot more attention to his warning.
I would've never stepped foot inside.



Moving days are always special. A breath of excitement, and the unknown. But also a taste of wanting it to be over, to be settled in and ready for the next part. Moving always felt like a combination of standing still and changing everything you'd ever known.

Of course, this moving day was completely different than anything I had known before. This was my first real house. Mine, and mine alone. I had gotten a late start, despite barely sleeping the night before. I drove my ancient pickup truck, every pothole and dip in the gravel road threatening to burst my tire. All my worldly possessions rode in the back. Safe and sound in my pocket rested the keyring to my new life, lying heavy against my thigh, a reminder of all the good things awaiting me at the end of this tree-lined path. I was moving in by myself. My best friend, Brynn—who had helped me move into the small apartment I'd rented—was teaching overseas in Korea for the year. We had been texting back and forth ever since I signed on the dotted line and became the proud owner of my dilapidated Victorian. She was excited to visit when she was home for the holidays, and I couldn't wait to show her all the before-and-after photos of my hard work.

It didn't mean flying solo wasn't scary. Being alone with my thoughts was frightening. The darkness I kept at bay most of the time was slowly seeping into my vision, filling my ears with the hollow sound of silence. Dad would be so damn proud.

My dad was the only family I had ever known, and he was gone. He had been the one to tug me back from the ledge, time and time again. He was the one who told me I was worth it, when everything in me screamed I wasn't. He had been there for me since the day I was born, even when his family turned his back on him for knocking up my mom out of wedlock. Even when my mom ran off, too unstable to be a young mother to a fussy baby. Dad did the best to raise me, but I still found myself depressed as a teen.

But Dad never left. Not even when the shadows took over, knocking my grades down to barely passable, and narrowing my options for college to the local community one. He cheered me on when I graduated, even though my business degree meant nothing to me, and even less in the real world once the pandemic hit. He took me out for dinner to celebrate my new job, waitressing at the diner where he had worked since I was a baby. I took the job feeling like it would bring me even closer to the man I so admired. Plus, a steady paycheck was nice. He held my hand, reassuring me it would be okay, even as the cancer stole his energy, and eventually his life. He had been gone three years now, but I knew he was still looking out for me.

The silence scared me the most. Because who was there to pull me back from the edge of sanity when my demons called to me? What would I hear when the monsters of my mind scratched at the door, demanding entrance?

Something people never told you? Loneliness was heavy. It weighed on your shoulders, a burden to carry. Because now you had to contain everything you needed to survive within yourself, instead of spreading the weight amongst people. Sometimes it was enough to topple you over, destabilizing the ground you once thought was solid. And if you didn't have a solid support to begin with, well...you were screwed.

But luckily...I had Brynn. We had met in grade school, having each other's backs every step of the way. When my dad died, she pulled me up and pieced me back together, and was my cheerleader every step of this journey. I wouldn't be here without her. Here, where my dreams were coming true. A house of my own. My shop. As I pulled into the semicircular driveway, it was like Brynn knew from halfway around the world. I hopped out of the truck and pulled my vibrating phone out of my pocket. My signal was weak at best, flickering between one bar and nothing as I watched, but I had already mentally prepared for the possibility.

Brynn: Happy moving day! I can't wait to see this monster you've spent Great Uncle Alfred's life savings on. Xoxoxox

Brynn: You know, Granny used to tell me wild stories about some of the houses in that town. I'll have to bring her out over Christmas break.

I grinned, looking up at my new home in all its glory. Surely Granny couldn't have wild stories about my house. It was too damn perfect. Somehow, it was even more spectacular in the sunny glow. I could see its full potential now, painted creamy white, with deep-red roses climbing trellises around the large porch. Movement from an upstairs window caught my eye, a shifting of one of the heavy curtains. My breath caught in my throat as I watched, expecting to see it move again. But the fabric stayed still, taunting me. For a minute, I considered the haunted rumors held some truth.

Although it was early, I was exhausted. I quickly sent a text back to Brynn, knowing it was getting late in Korea and she was probably waiting for me to respond before she went to bed. I could picture her clearly, dressed in her old university shirt with the holes in it, her vibrant red hair pulled up on top of her head.

Savannah: Just got here now. I can't believe I get to call this house MINE. Pinch me.

Brynn: No can do, kiddo. You deserve every moment of happiness.

Savannah: Awww. You're obviously sleep deprived. Get to bed.

Brynn: Will do. Just calling Granny first.

Savannah: Give her my love!

I tucked my phone into my pocket. Brynn's Granny had been a mother figure for both of us growing up, and even though she was in a home now, I had only the fondest memories of her. Brynn was right though—she had some wild stories. I turned toward the back of my truck. My apartment had been small, and my few belongings would barely fill one room in the massive house. But that was what thrift stores and flea markets were for, right? I'd bring my boxes inside, get settled, take stock of what was already here, and then come up with a plan. I grabbed the first box out of the pile, balancing it on one hip, and grabbing my key with my free hand. This was it. This was the moment I had been waiting for since I had first laid eyes on the house.

Hell, I had been waiting for this moment my entire life. A place to call my own. I walked up the porch steps, enjoying the way they creaked under my footsteps, as if adjusting to the weight of their new owner.

I couldn't breathe as I slipped the key marked "front door" into the knob, my heart thumping as the locks clicked out of

place. Would it be everything I had imagined on the inside? This couldn't have been a mistake. Everything felt too right for it to be wrong. The door stuck, jammed with age and disuse. The humidity probably wasn't helping, either. I threw my shoulder into it and felt it bow beneath my weight. Since rust was a hazard of thrifting, I knew I had some lubricant spray stashed in my truck. I'd go out and find it as soon as I dropped this box in the living room. If the door ever decided to unstick.

Finally it gave, swinging open to reveal the entryway of my dreams. Dark wood caressed the walls, and a sweeping staircase punctuated the edges of the room, filling the high ceiling. In the middle, a heavy, brass chandelier hung low-in desperate need of a polish, and most likely, new bulbs. Built-in cabinets occupied either side, heavy mahogany that emphasized the aura of the house. I took a step inside the doorway, wanting to get closer, to touch and feel every bit of my new residence.

I thought buying the house was my moment everything changed. My first footstep into the house proved me wrong-the real moment everything changed. A gust of wind pushed against my back, forcing me to stagger deeper into the foyer. I dropped my cardboard box as I stumbled forward, trying to stay on my feet. Behind me, the door slammed shut.

"What the fuck?" I muttered. I had wanted to leave the door open until I found my rust spray, to fix the jam. I

remember thinking, Just my luck, having to pry open a door two seconds after I walk in. I sighed, wrenching at the heavy door with all of my strength. Definitely fucking stuck.

I scrubbed my hand over my forehead. No matter. There had to be a backdoor. I wandered through the carved arch to my left, pausing inside what looked to be the dining room. This was the room I had seen through the bay window, curving to the front through the parlor. All the furniture looked custom to the room, the long table still set with delicate china. The hardwood floors carried through this room, covered with a well-worn rug. Rich blue wallpaper lined the walls, and I immediately understood the care the original owners had taken in building this place. Every detail was carefully considered. I hoped I would make them proud with what I planned to do when I renovated. The room looked perfectly frozen in time, a memory waiting to be revisited. I trailed my finger over a cornflower-blue plate, expecting dust to coat my finger. Surprisingly, though, the tableware was clean. In fact, I would've expected a lot more dust everywhere for an abandoned house, but the inside seemed to be in much better condition than the outside. The realtor must have gotten her story wrong—obviously the bank had people checking in on the place. Sure, there was some wear and tear, but in overall cleanliness and condition? I couldn't have asked for better.

A thump from the second floor startled me. I whirled around. My heart thudded in my ears, and I struggled to

hear over it, to figure out who else was here with me. I waited one moment, then two. A third, to be safe. But the house was utterly silent. I chewed on my lip, giving my head a quick shake. The grumpy lawyer and his ghost stories had gotten to me. That was the only explanation. This house was locked up tight as a drum-no one was getting in or out. Old homes had creaky floors and settling foundations. Maybe a family of mice had made a home in an unused bedroom somewhere.

Except, those were pretty big mice to thump so loud.

Except nothing. I had bigger things to worry about than an old ghost story or two. Namely, finding where the hell the back door was.

Noise forgotten, I trekked across the dining room and entered into the small kitchen. For such a large house, one might've expected a bigger kitchen. But they weren't popular when the house was built, so the room was quaint; usable, at the very least. A cheerful yellow paint coated the walls, and I could picture how happy the family who had lived here must have been. Oak cabinets lined each side, and at the end stood exactly what I was looking for-the back door.

I dragged my hand behind me, caressing the wooden countertops as I walked. Again, the lack of dust surprised me. I needed to know who the bank's cleaning people were, and how I could convince them to stay on. I would never be able to replicate this level of quality, especially not once I

filled the home with my antiques. Speaking of which, I was going to have to find space for them all. There was a hell of a lot more furniture left behind than I expected. Worn and well-used, but in good condition. I would have to scour through it all and see what was worth money, and what would be better off going right to the dump. Pots and pans filled the kitchen, along with the rest of the dishware from the dining room. I was tempted to keep the dishes for myself, because the color was stunning...

But first things first. Fixing the gummy front door. The back door should have opened out into the garden, and like the front door it was beautiful, though it needed some TLC. I gave the handle a quick twist, expecting the door to give easily, but instead it stayed in one place.

You have got to be kidding me...I stood on my tiptoes, looking out the window to see what was stopping the door from opening. The culprit was immediately evident—a large padlock chained the door handle to the frame. I guess the previous owner didn't take any chances with break-ins. One of the keys on my new massive keyring had to open it, but it didn't exactly help me now. I yanked my phone out of my pocket, ready to shoot off an angry text to Brynn, only to see I had no signal in the house. Of course.

I groaned. I was going to have to jack open a window. I stomped up to the closest window and tried to wrench the old wooden frame up as hard as I could. It didn't budge. Cocksucker...obviously the humidity had affected more than

just the doors. I systematically tried each window in the kitchen, none of them shifting in their ancient frames. Irritation was building, and I tried to tamp it down. None of the dining room windows opened either. This was getting ridiculous. There was one more I could try, and then I'd have to break a window. When I approached the large bay window overlooking the porch, I didn't even bother trying to open it-the frames were painted shut. I could chisel it open...if I had my chisel. Which I didn't. Because why would I have any of the tools I needed?

Annoyed now, I stormed back through the kitchen, ignoring all the details I had been so captivated by when I first saw them. I snagged the decorative tea towel hanging off the stove, and wrapped it around my fist. It was the first time I had been locked in a house instead of out of it, but I figured the tricks would be the same. I needed to decide which window would be the cheapest to replace. The bay window in the dining room would probably be the easiest to crawl out of, but expensive. Unless I could manage to smash one of the small panels to the side. It would be a tight fit, but big enough for my ass to crawl through, and the sides didn't have any stained glass.

I tightened the tea towel around my knuckles, winding my arm back. I closed my eyes, took a deep breath in, and swung forward.

My hand didn't move. I opened my eyes, a scream inching its way up my throat when I saw fingers wrapped around my

fist. From a hand that didn't belong to me, attached to a tanned arm, connected to a lean body. A man-an incredibly good-looking man-held me back from smashing my window of choice.

He smiled, but it didn't reach his eyes. "I wouldn't do that if I were you."

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 2

Felix

My only source of entertainment was watching realtors use the house as bait. It was a tactic to sell whatever house they actually wanted to lure their clients into buying. I knew what a realtor was thanks to Theo, and I knew what they were doing thanks to my own powers of deduction. Because you see, after years of having nothing else to do, people were incredibly easy to pick apart.

They always arrived early in the morning—obviously the first visit of the day. The realtor never even bothered to walk up the steps. And the same people never came twice. These were the rules of the house buyers.

I liked rules.

And one of the rules I had for myself was this—always watch the front of the house. The last thing I needed was another Theo. God, he was a pain in my ass. And don't even get me started on Luther. I needed to make sure no one else stumbled in through the front door. So from my second-floor

bedroom, I watched her sniffing around with the bleach-blonde realtor woman. She also had blonde hair, but it was softer. More natural. The color of corn husks at the end of the season. She had the kind of curves I wanted to run my hand across, and as she climbed the porch, I could make out the smattering of freckles across her perfect nose. I willed her and her long, silky locks to stay away. To get back into the realtor's fancy silver car, and drive off down the dusty gravel road like they all had, on to find their real houses. To their real lives.

I knew the minute she stepped out of the car-this one was different. It scared me. But I knew I couldn't stop her. What could I do, other than bang my hands against the windows, and wail? I had tried once before, when a group of loud teenagers had stumbled up the steps. It had worked, in the sense they had run off terrified. But it had also drawn more attention to the house, which was the last thing I wanted. People wanted to see the "haunted Victorian at the end of Hastings Road."

I was here to atone for my sins. My sins, and mine alone. Anyone else who ended up here was an unfortunate accident. Which meant I could only watch in horror as the pretty thing climbed the steps, stars in her bright hazel eyes.

I couldn't remember the last time I had touched a woman, and I craved to feel her, to run my fingers through her silky hair while I gazed into her eyes.

If she knew what was good for her, she'd rush back into the car and drive far, far away from here.

Eventually she left, and I sighed. Half in relief, half in disappointment. She was safe, away from me. Until an engine woke me from my nap a few days later. I hurried to my window. I expected to see another flashy car, another couple with glazed-over eyes. Instead I saw the blonde woman, hair piled high on her head, driving the ugliest truck I had ever seen in my life. The back was loaded with cardboard boxes.

No. No. No. No. No. This was not happening. No. No way.

Being stuck in a house for eternity with two other guys? Awful, but not the worst thing I could imagine. No, that title would be reserved for being stuck in a house for eternity with the prettiest woman I had seen in a hundred years. There was only one way it could end-badly.

I sprinted out of my bedroom, stumbling over my own feet.

"Felix, bro? You okay?" Theo popped his head out of his bedroom, running his hands through his shaggy blond hair. I had told him a million times to cut it, but he wouldn't. Usually he'd clap back at me to cut my own damn hair, which was a joke. He'd laugh at my expense while I fumed, because our hair hadn't grown so much as an inch since the day we'd arrived.

I rolled my eyes, not bothering to stop running. "I'm fine, and for the last goddamn time, I am not your bro."

“Whatever, man,” he said, completely unbothered. Theo was utterly unflappable, and it drove me absolutely insane. In fact, the only time I had ever seen him bothered in the thirty years we had been stuck together was when he ran out of his impressive pot stash. In fairness to him, he had made it last a lot longer than it should’ve. I had tried it once, too bored and lonely to say no when Theo had offered. I didn’t like it, which wasn’t surprising considering rule number two.

Always keep a level head. If I ever hoped to get out of this house alive, which was unlikely, I needed to be prepared for anything. So, no alcohol. No drugs. I needed to be sober at all times.

Not that I could begrudge him. After all, we each had our vices. Things we could smell, taste, dream. Theo’s was weed. Booze. Whatever he could get his hands on to not feel the emotions churning beneath the surface of his skin. And on a level I would never discuss with him, I understood why he did it.

A conversation for a different time, because right now I had to stop the blonde woman from opening the door. I made for the stairs, but before I could even round the long hallway’s corner, I heard it.

I felt it.

We all did, because the house was as much a part of us as we were a part of it. And the satisfaction, the utter glee, of a

new soul being absorbed within nearly took my breath away. Fuck.

The sounds echoed up the hall, someone tripping, swearing, and the front door slamming shut. I sank to my knees before I could stop myself. A curse was one thing. I had brought that on myself. But to be trapped in here with her? I was certain I could already smell the shampoo she used that morning. Strawberry scented, and intoxicatingly sweet.

This was officially my worst nightmare. My vices were the small tastes of freedom I enjoyed every so often, and this woman who had unknowingly stumbled into a house of horrors was the biggest breath of fresh air I had tasted in decades. And her hair...God, it brought back memories. Memories better left buried.

In this house, you could either let your past haunt you, or you could forget you ever used to have a life outside these walls. A real life. I chose to do the latter. I couldn't let this newcomer fuck up my streak. Now she was officially one of us, I would stay far, far away from her. Difficult to do, but not impossible. Downstairs, the woman was muttering to herself, cursing as she wandered into the dining room. I shook my head, wondering how the hell I could avoid her. Keep my sanity. The one good thing about this house had been the lack of women. Women hadn't exactly been a good experience for me in my pre-house life.

“I thought the whole haunted house thing would’ve scared everyone off for at least another decade or two.” Luther’s gravelly whisper caught my attention. We tried to give each other as much distance as possible, so the fact he was willingly speaking to me was a surprise. He chewed on the inside of his cheek. “Fuck’s sake. She doesn’t look any older than Theo, and we all know how that went.”

I didn’t want to think about it. I shrugged. “I’m sure you’ll tell her what to do soon enough.”

Luther groaned. “Grow up. How many times do we have to go over this bullshit?”

I tightened my hands around the railing, ignoring Luther and listening to the young woman bang at the back door. She’d figure it out herself. We all had. Sure enough, footsteps stormed across the kitchen, back through the dining room. Would she be a crier? A screamer? I wasn’t sure which way she would go. From my vantage point on the landing, I watched as she tightened a tea towel around her fist, and I instantly knew what she meant to do. Damn. Why couldn’t she have been a crier?

“Do you want to deal with her?” I asked Luther.

He merely raised one dark brow and gestured towards our new roommate. “Please. Be my guest.”

Fucking jerk, took charge of everything else except for this. I should’ve known better than to even ask. Glaring, I tiptoed down the stairs towards the very thing I wanted to run away from. I wasn’t sure I would make it to her in time.

She was winding her arm back, ready to smash through the front window. As much as I didn't want her here, I couldn't let her hurt herself either. I snatched her tightly bound fist with my hand, trying to ignore the sparks shooting through my body with the smallest of touches.

I watched her process what was happening—the fact she wasn't alone. She wouldn't be alone ever again. The thought brought a smile to my lips as she turned her face towards me.

“I wouldn't do that if I were you.” She was even more beautiful up close. A pretty little thing who had absolutely no idea what she had stumbled into.

She opened her mouth to scream, then closed it again, pulling her other arm back, subtly, like I wouldn't notice. But rule number three was to always be ten steps ahead. By the time her free fist sailed toward my face, I had it clutched into my other hand. “I wouldn't do that either. Whatever happened to manners? I swear, people these days have no idea what constitutes good manners.”

“Who the fuck are you, and why the fuck are you in my house?” A frown creased her smooth forehead, and I couldn't help but laugh at her misplaced sense of propriety.

“Darling, I could ask you the same thing.” She tried to pull out of my grasp, but I squeezed her wrists tighter.

She glared, anger radiating hot off her smooth skin. The fact she was angry, not afraid was surprising, and incredibly attractive. “Let me go. I'm getting out of here, and then I'm

calling the cops on you. You have approximately five minutes to get the hell out of my house before they show up.”

I rolled my eyes. If only the police were my biggest problem. “First, this isn’t your house. It’s mine.”

Before she could open her mouth to protest, I took my hand off the wrapped wrist and slapped it over her mouth. “No interrupting.”

If looks could kill, I’d be nothing more than a pile of ash on the floor. I found myself staring into her eyes, a unique hazel blend I don’t think I had ever seen before. Damn, she was stunning. But, no. If we were going to survive this house together, I couldn’t afford to give in to a pretty face.

“As I was saying. This is my house. You are now a guest.” Her lips were warm under my palm, her flesh pressing against my skin. “Second, you can’t break a window. Or a door, or pick a lock. Because you can’t leave. You, my darling girl, are now a fixture of this house.” Some long-forgotten emotion pricked at my heart, reminding me of who I used to be. Who I was, once upon a time.

I watched those beautiful eyes as they processed what I was saying. Her lips opened and closed against my hand. I saw the moment when she realized I wasn’t a ghost, but that there wasn’t something quite right about me either. Something about this whole interaction broke the rules of logic she had lived by for so long. The confusion sank in, a million questions lingered beneath her skin, but none of

them transferred into words. And they wouldn't, as long as I had my hand over her lips.

"I'm going to take my hand away from your mouth now, okay? No screaming, please. I hate it when women scream." She nodded, wide-eyed, and I dropped my hand.

The pieces were still fitting together in her mind, and I knew as much as she wouldn't want to believe what I was saying, a bigger part of her already felt the connection to the house. As surreal as it was, she knew. She knew what I was saying was true. The fight dropped out of her body, and I released her other wrist. Still, I expected the question. "What the hell do you mean I can't leave?"

I sighed, running a hand through my hair. I took a few steps back, sinking into the armchair in the corner of the dining room. She didn't move, and for that I was grateful. I didn't need a repeat of Theo's escape attempts. This was my third time giving this speech, and it never got any easier. But for some reason, I couldn't look into her eyes as I told her the truth. I looked at my hands, the wall, anywhere except for her. I stared at the beautiful prison of my own construction. Each wall and floor I had once loved so dearly, I now loathed with a passion. The furniture made me sick, and given enough time, she would make me sick too. "What I mean is, this house is jinxed. Cursed. You became a part of the curse the second you walked over the threshold. Once you step foot inside, you can never leave."

I looked up at her, seeing a true understanding of what I said reflected back at me. “Welcome to the last home you’ll ever know.”

OceanofPDF.com

The title card for Chapter 3 features a dark green background with a repeating white damask pattern. The word "CHAPTER" is written in large, white, distressed block letters at the top. Below it, the number "3" is written in a large, white, distressed font. At the bottom, the word "Savannah" is written in a white, cursive script font.

CHAPTER 3

Savannah

This was a joke, right? Some kind of bad prank they did for all the new people who moved into town. Make a big deal out of the “haunted house” in the woods, get some sucker to buy it, and then pretend the haunting was real. It would make for a great reality show. One I would probably watch, laughing as the poor schmuck tried to discern fact from fiction.

Except...I knew. I knew what he was saying was the truth. I had felt it the second I stumbled into the entryway, some unassuming force taking control over my soul. Not a possession, exactly. Nothing sinister. More like a joining. Like I was part of the house, and the house was part of me.

But I couldn't accept it. There had to be some way out of here. He just hadn't figured it out yet. I unwrapped the tea towel from my fist, watching the man out of the corner of my eye. He sprawled out in a velvet armchair, the fabric cushioning him like he had sat there for decades. Which, if

what he was saying was true, he very well might have. But he didn't look much older than I was.

I looked at him, and he stared steadily back at me. He was no ghost, that was for sure. His hand against my mouth had been warm, solid. Flesh and bone. There was no denying he was also hot, in an old-school kind of way. His thick, dark hair was longer than the current style, and framed his olive face. Dark eyes watched me. He was handsome, but something was off, something I couldn't put my finger on. An out-of-style suit coat caressed broad shoulders, oddly formal for the occasion. "What's your name?" I asked. If we were going to be lifetime roommates, we might as well be on a first-name basis. At least until I figured out a way to leave.

"Felix." His finger traced the outline of his full lips, and I found myself following the line. "What's yours?"

"Savannah. You can call me Sav, though. Everyone does." I pulled my eyes away from him, looking around the house for an exit Felix might have missed. Felix. What a funny name. It sounded absolutely ancient. "Why can't you break a window?"

Felix sighed. "I told you. The house is cursed. The doors won't open. The windows are unbreakable. I saw you trying to bust out and I had to stop you before you hurt yourself. They'll just push you back. Once you're in, you're in for life."

I nodded, but there was something he wasn't telling me. I just had to figure out what. Could I go up through a

chimney?

"Before you even offer up any solution, I've tried. All of them. Every. Last. One." He sounded bored as he spoke, as if he'd rather be doing anything else.

I narrowed my eyes, annoyed he had seen through my façade. "Exactly how long have you been trapped in here?"

This seemed absolutely absurd. I was having a conversation with a man who claimed to be trapped in a cursed house, and who was telling me I was trapped, too. And yet we were trading names as if we were at the local coffee shop. Had he tried digging out through the basement?

"I'm 29." His eyes locked onto mine, daring me to say anything otherwise. He looked 29, but he hadn't answered my question.

I tapped my fingers against my thigh. "Not what I asked."

"Are you sure you want the real answer? Are you sure you can handle it?" Felix didn't look away, a small smile curving his lips. A challenge if I had ever seen one.

He was going to be sorely disappointed if he expected me to let it go. I never did. "How long have you been trapped in here?"

Felix was quiet for a moment. I half expected another vague answer, another challenge. Instead he answered in a voice little more than a whisper. And before he spoke, just like how I knew he was telling the truth about the curse, I

knew what he was going to say. I knew. “My house was cursed in the year 1907.”

Knowing what he was going to say and hearing the truth out loud were two completely separate things. The room spun around me, and I could hear Felix talking to me, but I couldn’t make out his words. 1907. 1907. Holy fuck. 1907 was the year the house was built. And if he was 29 in 1907 that would mean...“You’re telling me you were born in 1878?”

“Yes, that’s right-” He stopped midway in his sentence to answer my shocked question. “Are you okay?”

I rested my hand against the wall, waiting for my heartbeat to stop racing. If I looked half as bad as I felt, I probably looked like a fucking ghost. “I think I need a minute.”

“Take all the time you need.” He was looking at me curiously, but also with a sense of resolve. Like he had done this before. Fuck. Had he done this before? How many people had walked through these doors? Maybe I was one of dozens. I had no idea how this curse worked. Felix looked really good for...144? Maybe he was cursed to be a vampire.

Maybe...maybe I was here to sustain him for another decade or two.

I couldn’t breathe. There wasn’t enough air in this house, and what little there was, was thick. I was breathing in fucking soup. This was a dream. Not a dream, a fucking nightmare. The wall was slick under my sweating palm, and

I needed oxygen. Except according to Felix, I would never breathe fresh air again in my life. “Do any of the windows in this godforsaken place open?”

Felix shook his head. He moved as if to get up, and then sat back down. “No. The windows don’t move, and they don’t break even if you smash them with a hammer. It’s cooler in the basement, if you want to try there though.”

“Yes, please.” I got up off the wall, wiping my hand on my T-shirt. A cool basement where I could be by myself and cry sounded perfect. Maybe I could scope out the place for Felix’s coffin while I was there. Jesus. I wasn’t sure reality had sunk in yet. “Where is it?”

“The door is in the kitchen, opposite the sink.” He cocked his head to one side, appraising me. “Do you want me to come with you?”

“No!” I shook my head, my bun swaying from side to side. Then I realized I might have sounded a bit aggressive, and Felix may or may not have been a vampire, and I really didn’t want to get on his bad side. But all I wanted was to be alone, process whatever the hell was happening, and mourn. I should’ve been afraid about going down into a basement by myself, but as weird as Felix was, I didn’t get any serial killer vibes from him. Besides, if I couldn’t find his coffin, I could dig my way out through the dirt walls. Bet he hadn’t tried that before. “No. I’ll be fine. Thanks though.”

Felix nodded, propping his ankle across one knee. “I’ll be happy to answer any questions you have when you’re

ready.”

Somehow, he didn't exactly sound happy. Of course it would be just my luck, to piss off my new vampire roommate on day one in a cursed house. Next he'd tell me the neighbor was a werewolf. I left Felix in the dining room, following the simple directions to a door I had missed on my earlier search for an exit.

Felix's voice followed me into the kitchen. “Washroom is at the back if you think you're going to be sick.” I rolled my eyes. Ass.

The basement door was open a crack, with dim light spilling out, but it was also at least ten degrees colder than the rest of the house. I swung the door open wider and took the rickety steps as quickly as I could into the chilly basement.

It was old and merely functional, but clean. Cement floors and walls that at least were in good condition. Good news—I hadn't bought a house with a bad foundation. Bad news—cement walls meant digging a tunnel to freedom was out. I sat down on the bottom steps, gulping in cool breaths of air. My heart rate slowed to a manageable speed, and my thoughts cleared. Felix didn't seem to be insane. And if he was a vampire, he would've already chained me up down here. Instead, he had saved me from hurting my hand when I attempted to break a window. He had explained the situation to me, as best as he was able to. I thought...I was safe. For the time being. The house didn't seem spooky,

which helped. Rather, it gave off a forgotten vibe, like a memory not important enough to cling to.

“You must be the reason Felix was losing his shit this morning.”

I whipped my head around to find a shirtless man a bit younger than me looking at me curiously. He held a mason jar filled with a dark liquid. I was so shocked, I couldn’t speak. I hadn’t expected to see another living houseguest in here, but I supposed it made sense.

He took a sip of the drink in his hand and offered me an easy smile. “I’m Theo. It’s nice to have a pretty face to look at instead of those two fuckheads.”

Theo was completely different than Felix. His smile was relaxed and real, his ripped jeans slung low on his hips. Even the way he complimented me didn’t seem forced. I smiled back, then paused. “Did you say two fuckheads?”

“Ah. Guess you haven’t met Luther yet then.” Theo took another sip of his drink. “Oh, I’m sorry, how rude of me. Would you like a drink?”

I hadn’t realized how thirsty I was until he offered. Should I be accepting drinks from a strange man in a house I was supposedly trapped in? Absolutely not. But logic had gone out the window about the time I crossed the threshold. Besides, he was drinking it, so it couldn’t be poisonous. “Please. If you don’t mind.” Hopefully it was iced tea.

He shrugged, holding it out to me as he walked over. “Be my guest. Unless you have cooties. Then you can fuck right

off.” Theo winked, and I couldn’t help but laugh.

Something about his personality was so likable, and made me feel like I was at home, even in this fucked-up situation. Felix on the other hand...he was handsome, but an ass. I grabbed the glass. It smelled vaguely alcoholic, and I gratefully took a swig, expecting wine.

It wasn’t fucking wine. I spat it out onto the concrete floor, looking up at Theo in horror as he laughed. “What the hell is this?”

I changed my mind. He was indeed trying to kill me.

Theo stopped laughing and gave me a sheepish grin. “Sorry, I couldn’t help myself. It’s hooch. I make it myself down here.” He took the mason jar back from me and took a deep swig. I was both horrified and impressed he was able to drink it like it was water.

“Fucking hooch,” I muttered. “I really am in prison.”

He laughed, and I found myself wanting to laugh along with the easy sound, so full of life even in a dark basement. “Come on now. It’s not bad.”

I snorted. “Not bad if it’s the only thing you’ve drank in fifty years.” I paused, staring at Theo out of the corner of my eyes. He was still sipping at the hooch as if it were tea. “Please tell me it isn’t the only thing you’ve drank in fifty years.”

Theo ran a hand through his shaggy blond hair. “I haven’t been here as long as Felix. Or Luther, for that matter.”

“So how long exactly have you been stuck here?” I crossed my fingers, hoping he’d say only a few months and give me some hope of escape. He looked and acted pretty young. There was no way he could be over 100. Could he?

“1992. So, thirty years. Give or take a few months. Most of 1992 was a blur to be honest with you.”

I was stunned for a minute. Theo had been stuck in here for longer than I had been alive, and yet he still looked like a university student. Give him a hacky sack and a guitar and he could’ve been one of the art students who congregated on the front lawn. “But you look so young.”

“That’s the magic of the house for you. The curse. Whatever you want to call it.” He shrugged, smirking. “Probably better for Felix to explain it. I’m not sure I get it, even after thirty years.”

I sat back down on the bottom step, trying to process everything. Maybe this was all a bad dream, and I would wake up. “I just have so many questions.” Like how, and why, he had entered the house to begin with.

“May I?” Theo gestured with his mason jar to the space next to me, and I nodded. He sat, the wood giving way with a soft groan. “I just realized I never even asked you your name.”

“Savannah,” I murmured. His thigh pressed against mine, and the warmth was relaxing, soothing to my soul.

“Well, Savannah, I’ve had a lot of time to think about our...predicament here. And I’ve come to one conclusion.”

I turned to face him, realizing his eyes were the bluest of blues. In another life, another situation, he would've been striking-the kind of guy you saw on billboards, and in magazines. But behind the ease and the laugh, hidden by those blue eyes, I recognized something I saw in myself. Pain. Struggle. He gave me a small smile, and I returned it. "What's that?"

He held the mason jar out to me. "The only way to survive this place is to be very very drunk."

"Well if you insist." I took the glass, our fingers briefly touching. This time the hooch was easier to swallow, warming me in a nice way. I wouldn't put it in my top ten favorite drinks, but it wasn't bad. I passed the glass back to him, and this time our fingers lingered as they brushed past. When I looked into his eyes again, I saw the connection and understanding of two people in a fucked-up situation they had no control over-when the only way to survive things was to make the best of it. Or, in Theo's opinion, to be incredibly drunk.

I could get behind that. "Do you miss it?" I asked.

He held up a finger as he took a deep swallow. "Miss what?"

"The outside world. Fresh air. The sun. Or does it get easier?"

Theo was quiet for a moment. "I'm not sure I had anything to miss out there to be an accurate enough judge."

“What do you mean?” I took the proffered glass, a pro by now at drinking the disgusting concoction. I wasn’t sure I wanted to know how he made it—hopefully a toilet wasn’t involved. Instead of thinking too hard about the manufacturing process, I just took a drink and handed it back.

“I mean...” He took another sip, a frown creasing his forehead. I was already feeling the effects of the homemade booze, so he had to be absolutely smashed. Or was just a pro at holding his liquor. “I was trapped before I ever stepped foot inside this house. It took being here to realize it. And now it doesn’t matter, does it?”

I snatched the glass back, and this time the drink seemed almost enjoyable. I was definitely drunk. But at least I wasn’t worried about accidentally buying a jinxed house anymore. I was more concerned about the beautiful, sad man next to me, and the idea he might have never gotten to tell his story. Maybe he never would.

I could give him that opportunity. I bumped his shoulder with mine. “Tell me.”

OceanofPDF.com



Numb. That was the only way I could function.
Absolutely, completely, totally numb.

Honestly, I wasn't sure how people managed to function without feeling weightlessness. How did they survive feeling it all?

I had no idea. It was all too much for me. The feelings. The emotions. Besides, wasn't it more fun to feel nothing?

Sometimes, in my dreams, I could still smell the smoke. I still felt the ash settling against my cheek. But that was absurd, because I hadn't even been home.

You see, my life changed when I was sixteen. I should've been going to football games and driving around with friends, embracing our newfound freedom. Thinking about universities and taking my girlfriend to the movies. Instead, after a night out, I arrived home to cop cars and fire trucks. Firemen swarmed the house I had grown up in, dousing the

still-smoking shell even after everything had been reduced to embers.

A somber police officer took note of my shocked face, the duffel bag abandoned at my feet. I couldn't tell you if my friend had left or not. I couldn't even tell you the name of the friend who had dropped me off.

I listened as the cop explained to me what happened. A neighbor had called after seeing the flames lighting up the dark night through their bedroom window. My parents were found in their bedroom, my mom in the bathroom, my dad at the door. They thought he had been trying to figure a way out for both of them.

Lucky. That's what the cop called me. Lucky I hadn't been home. Lucky to still be alive. Lucky one foster family or another would be willing to take in a teenager on the verge of aging out.

I didn't feel lucky. I felt alone.

The first foster family lived in a different school district than my own. I quickly learned being a football player didn't make friends at my new school. I learned a bunch of other things from my new pals as well.

How to sneak out without my foster parents knowing, not like they cared.

How to lie.

How to smoke a joint without coughing.

How to fuck.

How to alternate between uppers and downers until I couldn't remember anything. Couldn't feel anything.

I was lucky I lasted with the first foster family for as long as I did. But even though the foster parents passed me off like I was nothing, everyone else seemed to like the new me. Teachers were wrapped around my little finger. Missed assignments or classes meant nothing, because I could talk my way out of it. I was popular in my new crowd of friends, too. Everyone wanted to be friends with Theo.

The cool thing about being emotionless, was how easy everything was. Nothing bothered me, got under my skin. How could it, when my skin was already nothing but an open wound, burnt to the core?

College went out the window, along with anything else other than beer and weed. Sometimes MDMA if I could get my hands on it. But I wasn't picky. Anything worked.

"Buddy? Where did you say you were going again?"

I blinked awake, having lost an entire span of time while wrapped up in my thoughts. I appeared to be in someone's truck. Wasn't unusual. I was hitchhiking my way across the country. I hoped to end up in California. 24/7 sun sounded right up my alley. I'd have to find a job at some point. My pockets had grown increasingly thin over the last four years, most of my parent's insurance money spent at the liquor store instead of college classes. "As far west as you'll take me."

We were somewhere in Ohio at this point, if the street signs were to be trusted. Next to me, the driver sighed, an old man. “You sure? I’m headed up north after this town here. I don’t mind taking you with me. You look like you could use a good meal or two. Besides, it looks like it’s going to storm. You don’t want to get caught on the road when it starts snowing.”

I shook my head. “No thanks. If you don’t mind dropping me off at a motel or something though? I’ll get a room for the night.” I didn’t need kindness or generosity. I needed to be numb, and whatever high I had was quickly wearing off. I needed another hit, and I probably wouldn’t be able to snag it in this nice man’s truck. “Honestly, anywhere will do,” I mumbled.

Fuck, this feeling shit was for the birds. I didn’t want to feel. I wanted to be fun Theo, the one who didn’t give a shit. The one who girls wanted to date, and guys wanted to be. Not this Theo. Sad Theo who aged out of foster care, and whose parents died in a house fire.

“You don’t need to do this alone.” I wasn’t sure if I actually heard the driver whisper it, or if it was a figment of my imagination.

I didn’t say anything. We passed the rest of the drive in silence, and I watched the dark clouds roll in. Winter was early this year, and I would’ve put money on the fact the old man was right, and we were going to see snow tonight. He pulled into an almost-empty motel parking lot, a “vacancy”

sign flashing in one window. I was counting down the minutes until I would be high, hopefully the second I stepped inside the motel room and could spark my joint.

I thanked the old man and got out of the truck before he could once again try to convince me to join him for dinner. Thanks, but no thanks. I didn't do pity. I didn't look back as he pulled out. I slung my duffel bag a bit higher up over my shoulder and entered the small lobby.

"One room for the night," I muttered, pulling my wallet out.

"Sorry. We're full."

My head shot up at the harsh words. "Excuse me?"

The clerk was an older woman, dressed in a tidy shirt and carefully pressed pants. Her eyes held little warmth as she looked me up and down. "We're full," she repeated.

I followed her gaze and looked myself up and down. My jeans were ripped at the knees, and my plaid shirt swallowed my lean frame. I touched the ends of my hair, dirtier and longer than they were normally. "Your sign says vacancies. And your parking lot is empty."

She shook her head, not one tight curl moving out of place. "Sorry. Guess you'll have to find somewhere else to conduct your business tonight."

Bitch. What did she know about hardship? I looked out the window, the clouds looking fuller and darker by the minute, a purple bruise spreading across the darkening sky. "But it's going to snow."

Her face shut down entirely, not betraying one iota of feeling. "Sorry."

Sensing defeat, I turned around and stormed out of the small office, the glass door slamming behind me with a rattle.

"Fucking bitch. I'll show her fucking business," I huffed. Turning around, I could still see her through the glass watching me. She'd probably call the cops, but I didn't care. At least going to jail would mean I'd have a warm place to sleep tonight. I flipped her my middle finger as I dug into my pocket for the butt of a joint I had left there earlier, alongside my lighter.

The joint was a bit crushed, but still smokeable. I lit it up, taking a few deep pulls before it crumbled to ash in my fingers. Whatever. I had a bag full where that came from, and already the THC was hitting my bloodstream. In a few minutes I wouldn't care about my wasted life, my dead parents, let alone the stupid motel bitch. I sat down at the curb, weighing up my next choice as my body grew more and more weightless. First things first-I needed a place to wait out the storm. A forest lined the edge of the motel's lot and I figured that would be my best bet. Trees would hopefully provide some coverage and warmth from the snow.

I trekked off, pulling my flannel closer around my body as the wind began to howl and rage. This storm was going to be more of a fucking bitch than the motel clerk.

I wasn't sure how long I walked for, but dusk gave way to full dark, and the temperature dropped to bone-chilling. Eventually I stopped to dig around in my duffel for a sweatshirt to pull on. I hated wearing clothes, but this was an obvious exception. If I had known I would be roughing it, I would've brought a fucking coat.

"Whatever," I mumbled, a smile growing on my face. Because at least I had my weed. It would keep me warm until the morning.

Up ahead I could almost make out a light through the trees. Worked for me. I followed the dim light as it grew brighter and brighter, until the pinprick became an obvious lit room inside a large house. I stopped, tripping over my feet. Maybe I was fucking lucky after all. I could camp out on the porch. There were no cars in the long driveway, and the only sign someone might be home was the singular light on. Maybe the door would be unlocked and I could sneak in.

I tiptoed up the stairs, the wood giving way with only the lightest of creaks under my weight. I paused outside the door, waiting to hear if anyone noticed, or would greet me with a shotgun, but it was silent.

The light snow was growing heavy, and I didn't have a choice. I needed to get inside. Now was the time to find out if I was actually lucky or not. I tried the doorknob, found it unlocked, and pushed it open.

So far, so good. No shotgun-yet. I toed the line of the threshold, but before I could decide whether or not to fully

enter, the decision was made for me. Some unseen force pushed me inside, and I was thrown to the ground face first. My jaw hit the floor with a smack.

“Fuck,” I swore. “Some fucking welcome.”

“It wouldn’t be a curse if it were pleasant.”

I looked up to see a clean-cut guy standing over me, hand outstretched to help me up. My apologies died on my lips, along with my high, as I realized what he had said. “Curse?”

The guy grimaced, and I continued to stare at his hand from the ground. I wasn’t sure I wanted to hear what he had to say next. I wasn’t sure I had a choice. “I’m Felix. And I have some bad news for you.”

That was the moment I truly realized I was anything but lucky.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 5

Savannah

“Theo , I...” I was at a loss for words.

I knew he had experienced pain-true pain-the moment I looked into his eyes, but I hadn’t been expecting a story so filled with sorrow.

He held up his hand. “Please, don’t say you’re sorry. I’m so sick of people saying they’re sorry.”

“I wasn’t going to.” I held the hooch in both hands, the jar nearly empty at this point. My body heated, and my fingertips tingled. I was sure if I stood up, I’d be as drunk as anything. But for right now, sitting next to Theo, I was enjoying a warm glow. His leg pressed against mine, and I leaned into the touch, comforted by the caress of another who understood the fucked-up situation we were in. “I was going to say I understood.”

“Do you though?” Theo pierced me with those blue eyes of his. I was unable to look away, like we were having more of a conversation with our stares than we were with our

words. “Do you really understand what it feels like to be alone in the world?” His voice had dropped to a low whisper, and he shifted closer to me. His breath was sweet, and slightly bitter, an odd combination from the alcohol.

“I understand more than you know.” I leaned in further, entranced by his calm presence, and intoxicated by more than just the booze. I understood why Theo was down here in the basement, drinking until he couldn’t feel. I knew why I took the hooch when he offered it to me. I completely got why I was drawn to his touch, talking so closely our lips were nearly pressed together.

Because sometimes it was easier to focus on one feeling than it was to acknowledge the rest. You couldn’t think about making the biggest mistake of your life if you were too drunk to feel your fingertips. You couldn’t regret a moment that never happened if you were throwing yourself completely into something-or someone-else.

Theo took the jar from my hand and set it down on the stairs. When he turned back towards me, he cradled my head in one hand, tracing my lips with the fingertips of the other. His touch was nothing more than a gentle breeze, pulling me in a direction I was already headed. “Sweet girl, I wish you didn’t.”

Something tugged at my heart, squeezing it. I looked away. “Me either.”

He laced his fingers into my hair, making me look at him, into his eyes I wanted to drown beneath. His other hand

feathered down my neck. "One day you'll tell me your story. But not today."

With those words, he closed the distance between us, capturing my lips in a deep kiss. For a moment I found myself doubting. Unsure. Frozen. Was I really doing this? And then I remembered everything that had happened since this morning, and the surreal reality I now found myself in. My body remembered what to do.

I kissed him back, winding my hands around his lean shoulders. His skin was warm to the touch, and his breath quickened. His tongue danced with mine. With a moan, I clung to both him and some sense of normalcy. Theo pulled away with a gentle smile, one that reached his eyes and made the skin surrounding them crinkle in a delicious way.

"Sorry," he mumbled. "I guess I got a little carried away."

I shook my head. "Please don't apologize. Kiss me again." I wanted the safety and reassurance another body brought me. I wanted to ground myself in the moment, remind myself I was still here, even as I floated away on a buzz.

Theo ran his hand through his waves, giving me a smirk. "If you so insist."

He tugged me to my feet. Around the corner from the wooden staircase and the dirty cement floor stood Theo's brewing supplies, all situated on an ancient rug. He sat down on the rug, and pulled me on top so I straddled him, a leg on either side of his lap. He looked at me, brushing a stray hair out of my face. "Now, where were we?"

There was something so casual, yet intimate in those few words I couldn't stop myself from tangling my fingers in his hair and pulling his face towards mine. Our lips met in a clash of desperation and passion, a need to know we weren't alone in this hell hole. His hand slipped under my shirt, sliding up my ribs.

"Is braless a thing in 2022?" he whispered.

"For me it is." I grinned against his mouth, pulling his hand back to my bare breast. He eagerly ran his fingertips across my nipple, teasing it until it was hard and reaching for his touch. Theo leaned backwards, lying on the ground and taking me with him. I rolled my hips against him, needing some kind of friction to ease the growing ache between my legs.

Theo groaned under me. "Take them off."

High on booze and Theo, I did just that, kicking my pants off as he helped tug them down. I unbuttoned his jeans before I could think too much about it, and he slid them down low enough for his cock to spring free. Propped up on my elbow, I ran my other hand around his thick length, imagining how it would feel inside me. I smirked. "Was underwear not a thing in 1992?"

"Not for me." He reached for me, pressing the head of his dick at my slick opening. "But I take it you aren't complaining."

Things were so easy with him. Theo deserved to be free and living his life, not rotting away in this house. But he was

here, and so was I, and we had to make the best of it. “Not in the slightest.”

With a glance up at me to make sure we were on the same page, he pushed inside me with a soft moan.

“Goddamn.” I fell forward, clinging to his shoulders as I let my body adjust to stretch around him. “It’s been a while.”

“Try thirty fucking years,” Theo muttered. When I snuck a look at him, laughter danced behind his eyes. I smiled, and he began thrusting underneath me.

Every hard push of his cock drove deeper into me, making me forget everything that had gone wrong. We moved together in time, our breaths syncing as our speed became more urgent, our hands grasping for any bit of skin we could find. I could feel my release building low, spiraling through my veins, and I wanted nothing more than to find it with Theo. His hands gripped my hips, pulling me harder against him, bruising my flesh.

“Come for me, sweet girl. I’ve got you,” he murmured, rocking my hips on top of him in a rhythm sure to drive me over the edge. “I’ve got you.”

“Oh, Theo,” I moaned. “Fuck me...” I was lost to the pleasure, not a thought in my head except for how Theo’s cock urged me to chase my orgasm.

Theo removed one of his hands from my hip, dragging his thumb across to my clit. He rubbed slow circles as I fucked myself. “Show me how pretty you look when you come.”

His quiet words combined with the overload of sensations had me shaking and trembling around his cock as I came. Beneath me, Theo continued to roll my hips through my release, moaning softly as he found his own orgasm. We stayed connected for a moment, enjoying the quiet that came after really good sex. But I couldn't be sure if it was the quiet, or just a desperation to stay in this bubble of bliss before returning to the dank basement of our reality.

I rolled off him onto the scratchy rug, waiting for my breathing to return to normal, and my heart to stop pounding. "Well that was..."

"Definitely something." He laughed, and I couldn't help but join in. Because if nothing else, it was definitely something.

I reached down to my feet, grabbing for my discarded pants before pulling them on. They were dirty, but I figured it didn't really matter. If I was really stuck here for eternity, whoever was here would see a lot worse than dusty jeans.

"Did you bring anything in with you when you walked through the door?" Theo asked from the floor.

"Umm..." I had to think about it. So much had happened since that moment, it all seemed like a blur. I'm sure the alcohol wasn't helping. "I brought in one box."

"Hope it had clothes in it. We don't exactly have a ton of women's clothes between us."

Fuck. I hadn't even considered the gender side of things. I wasn't sure what the box contained, but it definitely was not

clothes. “Shit. Guess I’m wearing these jeans for the rest of my life then.” For whatever reason, I found this idea absolutely hilarious. I burst out laughing, unable to stop the laughter from bubbling over.

It only took a moment before Theo was laughing as well, I’m sure because of the sounds of hysteria I was making.

“What the fuck is happening down here?”

I jumped up, wiping my eyes and straightening my clothes the best I could. Midway up the stairs stood a man, older than either Felix or Theo. In this house that meant absolutely nothing, because he could’ve gotten trapped in here last week for all I knew. His brown hair was thick and curly, and a mustache framed full lips. Dark jeans hugged muscular thighs, and he was so tall he had to stoop in the stairwell. And damn, he was hot, too. To be completely honest, my older man fantasy stood in front of me, brought to life inside the dream I was living.

Stop, Savannah. I was chalking my thoughts up to the temporary insanity of learning I was inside a house of horrors. It was the only explanation I had for why I had fucked a guy I had just met, and was now lusting after his-much older-roommate. But the way he was looking at us made me feel like I had been caught doing something inappropriate. The warmth from the alcohol made me want to do it again, see how far I could push him until he snapped at me.

“Luther,” Theo greeted, still on the floor. He seemed entirely relaxed, pants still undone around his hips. He rested his head back on his arms, and shot me a grin like we were co-conspirators. I wasn’t sure I wanted to get in between whatever pissing contest the men were engaging in.

Luther gripped the railing underneath his hand, the wood groaning in protest. “Felix sent me to make sure you weren’t harassing our new guest. Instead I see you’re fucking her.”

“Savannah. Her name is Savannah.”

I offered up a small wave, instantly regretting my choice. My awkwardness made me feel even younger compared to his mature confidence.

“Hello, Savannah. I promise we aren’t all animals like the basement dweller here.” Luther gave me a wink and a smile, and instantly his face changed. I could see the warmth brewing behind the sternness. I wondered what else would make him smile like that.

Theo groaned, getting to his feet and zipping his jeans back up. “Shit, man. Savannah’s an adult. Just like Felix and me.”

The older man’s smile immediately dropped. “Whatever. Felix wants to call a house meeting. Be upstairs in five. And leave the fucking hooch in the basement, will you?” With that, Luther turned and stomped up the stairs, much louder than the quiet way he had snuck up on us previously.

“So...how many people live here exactly?” I toyed with the bottom of my shirt as Theo made his way to the bottom of the stairs.

“Just the three of us. Felix first, then Luther, and then me. And now you.”

Just the three of us. And now you. I wasn't sure this was a club I wanted to be a part of.

Something must have shown on my face, because Theo pulled me against his shoulder, and pressed a gentle kiss onto my hair. “It'll get easier. I promise. I know it seems overwhelming right now, but it will get easier.”

I nodded, trying to smile even though I wanted to cry. “I guess I don't really have a choice, do I?”

“Thatta girl.” Theo laughed and pulled me behind him. “Now come on. Let's go see what Felix and Daddy Luther want.”

If Brynn were here, she would've freaked out. It was probably better she wasn't. Daddy Luther.

Well, shit.

OceanofPDF.com



CHAPTER 6

Luther

When a male penguin falls in love with a female penguin, he'll comb the beach for a perfectly smooth pebble to present to her as a proposal. Seahorses get "married," swimming with their tails entwined.

I had never been lucky enough to experience a love like this. But it was nice to imagine such a thing, wasn't it? And now I was here, trapped in this house for eternity. It would never happen. Instead, it would be me and my books until one of us rotted.

I was pretty sure it would be me crumbling to dust first, my books sitting on the shelf for the next sad soul to come tripping into the house.

But these facts cycled in my brain as I turned away from Theo and the new girl-Savannah-to meet Felix in the living room.

Puffins mate for life and raise a single baby together each mating season. Beavers spend as much time bonding with their life partners as they do building their dams.

Maybe this girl, this woman, would be my chance. Maybe not, considering she had been in the house for an hour, maybe two at most, and was already fucking Theo's brains out in his makeshift basement brewery. Not like I could blame the poor kid. He had been stuck in here for far less time than either of us, and was the youngest when he was cursed as well. At least I had lived a good chunk of my life before this. Love had never been involved. Definitely not the kind of love I read about in the books that lined the library walls.

For the first decade, I had moped around, pissing off Felix more and more with every word I spoke. I wasn't sure our relationship was ever repairable. Two people should never be trapped for so long with only each other. Maybe if we were on the outside, it would be different. Probably not, but we wouldn't be stuck together, two opposite ends of a magnet being forced to interact.

I had always known the library existed, but in my second decade here, I grew desperate enough to explore it. I fell in love with the dark space, the faded chairs, and the sweeping walls of bookcases. I started with the encyclopedias, moving on to the classics that would be worth thousands in used books stores-if anyone could ever get their hands on them. And then I read them all again.

And again. The library became my sanctuary. The facts became weights to keep me grounded to reality, as if knowing what happened in the outside world made me a part of everything passing me by. Looking at life in the black and white helped me process things that felt impossible to comprehend.

It's impossible to hum while you hold your nose. Newborns can't cry tears.

I was trapped inside a cursed house. And Savannah was the prettiest woman I had ever seen in my life. I could see why Felix had been so preoccupied with her, and why Theo had seduced her. I could also understand how Theo had been the one she chose. He was easy, in a way Felix and I would never be. It seemed like people would naturally gravitate towards Theo. I was jealous of him for that, but I had never been quite as jealous as when I saw Savannah straightening her clothes as she stood, the smell of sex heavy in the air.

For humans, sex was a survival mechanism. I knew it as clearly as I knew my name, and what my face looked like in the cloudy mirrors. After all, seeking pleasure was one of the strongest human instincts. When everything you've known was shaken up, it was only natural for two young, good-looking people to bond physically. Sexually.

And fuck if I didn't want to be him. What would it feel like to have her roll her hips against me, moaning my name as

she came on my cock? Would it be like everything I had been imagining my entire life?

“Cat got your tongue?”

I shook my head, ridding myself of the dangerous thoughts, and turning my attention to Felix. He stood by the unlit fireplace, arms crossed in front of his chest. Theo didn't like us lighting the fireplace, not that it mattered. We had never really used it before he arrived, either. Our resources were limited, and what was the point in burning wood? The living room was over the top, which was probably why we never used it. Everything was either heavy and dark, or ornate and uncomfortable. Not to mention a living room was where you were supposed to spend time with your family, and we were far from a family. We could also hardly call existing here living.

“Theo was fucking her,” I muttered, stopping myself from elaborating. “He was fucking Savannah, in the basement.”

I expected Felix to look pissed, angry Theo was already messing with the house dynamics. They were unstable, sure, but they were still there all the same. Instead, I saw something unexpected flash across his eyes. Jealousy. I had to have imagined it, because Felix was a man of few emotions, and fewer words. I guessed living in a house for almost a hundred years on your own would do that to you. As soon as it was there, it was gone, his face reverting back to the emotionless mask I had grown used to seeing. “He

should know better. We can't afford for them to fall madly in love, then decide they hate each other."

"Absolutely." Felix and I agreed on very little, if at all. On this, I was fully on his side. Mainly because I didn't want Savannah to fall in love with Theo. I wanted her to fall in love with me, to share my bed at night. Apparently, Felix wanted the same. And if we all wanted her...none of us should have her. It would only ever end in disaster. The hurt feelings and emotions on overdrive while the four of us were trapped inside this prison would end in one of us murdering the rest. I was certain of it. "Although, if I were his age and a girl who looked like Savannah showed up here..."

Felix's words were sharp, cutting through the stagnant air. "And how exactly does Savannah look, Luther? Like your daughter? Because she's sure as hell younger than I am."

I was an absolute idiot. How could I have been so stupid to think Savannah would go for someone like me? I looked positively ancient compared to Theo's boyish good looks. That wasn't even taking into account my house age. And to let my feelings slip to Felix, of all people, was a rookie mistake. I tried to play it off, shrugging my shoulders. "I only meant she's a pretty girl. That's all. Anyone can see that."

"Anyone can see what?" A sweet voice interrupted our conversation. I narrowed my eyes at Felix. Savannah didn't need to know all of our dirty secrets on day one.

I spun around to greet her with a smile, my grin nearly dropping when I saw her hand in hand with Theo. As if she

could sense my discomfort, she dropped his hand and stepped slightly away. Theo, as usual, was shirtless. If he hadn't arrived in the dead of winter, I would've doubted he had ever shown up with a shirt in the first place. "Nothing of importance."

"Mmhmm..." she mumbled, and immediately dropped her eyes to the floor. Fuck. I was a dick.

I opened my mouth to apologize, but Theo immediately cut me off. "What's the big happy family meeting for anyways?"

"I take it these meetings aren't common then?" Savannah asked, turning away from me and back to Theo.

Turn back, I wanted to say. Look at me again. Give me a chance. I thought we shared a glance in the basement, but her current body language was telling me otherwise. I must have been mistaken, hope clouding my judgment. God, what I wouldn't give for one more look.

The symptoms of cabin fever were easily spotted. I learned the signs from my books long after I had recovered from them. Trouble sleeping. Change in appetite (not like this was a problem...). Lack of patience. Trouble concentrating. Those last two returned full force the moment I laid eyes on Savannah in the basement. I felt like a man possessed, ironic considering I was in a haunted house. And yet I wasn't a ghost. I was flesh and bone, with the same earthly needs as anyone else.

“Not quite,” Theo responded. Felix covered up a laugh behind me, and I didn’t have to look at him to know he was rolling his eyes. You learned everything there was to know about a person after a few years of no outside interaction. The same with your surroundings. I could navigate this room with my eyes closed. The worn velvet couch, facing the brick fireplace where Felix stood. The hardwood stretching from wall to wall, shiny in some places, dull in others. Walls covered in a dark green wallpaper, decorated with roses of the deepest red. Sometimes they were romantic when I stared at them. Sometimes they reminded me of blood, taunting me with a reality I would never again experience. The lights in the room were dim, but they were better than before, and definitely better than nothing. Before I got here, Felix had still been living with the original copper wiring. Luckily, I had picked up a thing or two from my electrician father when I was young, and it had stuck with me.

“What Theo means,” I said, rejoicing inside when Savannah looked at me once more. “Is that after you’ve lived with the same people long enough, house meetings aren’t really necessary. You know more about each other than you could ever care to know.”

Savannah nodded, blinking slowly. She was tugging on a tendril of hair that had come loose from her bun, and I wanted to peer inside her mind and see exactly what she was thinking. How was she processing this insane situation? On the outside, she seemed completely calm.

I couldn't stop myself from asking. "What's on your mind, sweetheart?"

She cocked her head to the side, as if to analyze me. It was disconcerting. I was used to being the person analyzing things, not the other way around. "I'm trying to figure out why I'm not more freaked out. Shouldn't I be losing my mind? None of this makes sense, and yet my brain is just accepting what the three of you are telling me."

"It's the magic of the house," Felix interjected, somewhat sarcastically. "Come and take a seat. I'm sure that's not your only question."

Savannah nodded and walked towards the couch. She brushed against my body as she passed, and I couldn't help but shiver at the electric touch. I had obviously gone too long without human contact, and my body automatically responded. When I looked up, Theo gave me a funny look. Shit. I really needed to hide my emotions better when Savannah was involved, otherwise all three of us wouldn't survive. If you could call what we were doing survival. It was a stretch at best.

"Doesn't anyone come looking for you?" she asked.

It was something I had to wrap my head around too, when I first entered. How does no one realize we're trapped in here?

I sighed, knowing she wouldn't like the answer. "Felix explained it to me like this. If people care enough about you, they'll be able to find you. Otherwise, people merely

stumble upon us. Teenagers, mostly. Daring each other to step on the front porch. We've gotten pretty good at scaring them off."

Savannah's eyes shuddered. "Hence the haunted house rumors."

"Exactly." I knew what she was processing now, her mind scanning what I had just said. That no one cared about us enough to come find us. Maybe if we were lucky, she had a boyfriend who would come looking. Although, judging by the events of the basement, I guessed not.

Theo and I joined Felix and Savannah in front of the fireplace. Theo perched on the arm of the sofa, his foot propped up, his knee sticking out to bump Savannah's shoulder. Their touch was so casual and easy...what was I missing? I took a seat in one of the old leather wing chairs that edged the room.

Felix nodded towards Savannah. "The magic of the house is quite simple, and incredibly complex at the same time. Once you enter the house, you can't leave. You essentially became a part of the house when you crossed the threshold. That's why it doesn't feel strange to you. Your logic wants to fight it, to contradict what we're telling you with reason and facts. But your heart and soul know better. They can feel the house in your veins, pulsing through your lifeblood."

I watched her carefully as she examined her arms in silence, looking for the non-existent entrance the house had captured her through. I knew what Felix meant. You sensed

it the moment the curse hit you. The feeling of no longer being alone in your thoughts. The sensation you were no longer an autonomous being.

She shook her head, more bits of hair flying loose from the messy bun. “So absolutely nothing can come in or out? What about mice? Bees? Flies?”

“Look around you, darling.” My heart contracted at the pet name Felix used so effortlessly, not that he could tell—or cared. “Do you see any creatures in here besides us?”

“No. But it still doesn’t make sense. Shouldn’t the house be filled with things that can’t leave? Or die?” Her forehead creased with the last word she spoke, and I longed to kiss her concern away.

This time, it was Theo’s turn to shrug. “It’s like they can all tell something’s off with the house. Not even my distillery in the basement attracts them. Spooky, when you think about it. That animals and insects can sense something wrong when all four of us couldn’t.”

“I loved the house the minute I saw it,” Savannah murmured, and I strained to hear her whisper. “The realtor tried to talk me out of it. The lawyer, too. But I thought this house was my dream come true. Everything I had ever wanted...”

We were all quiet now, processing her truth in our own ways. I was sure for all of us, one way or another, this house was supposed to be a sanctuary of sorts. A safe haven.

“There was a beetle that got in, what was it...five years ago

now?" I suggested with a smile, an attempt to change the mood.

Theo laughed. "Yes! We followed that fucking thing everywhere for days."

Savannah giggled behind her hand. She was fucking gorgeous. "A beetle was your entertainment? You must be kidding me."

"Listen," I said. "We're bored as hell here most of the time. So anything out of the ordinary, like you showing up, or a beetle finding its way in, is crazy exciting. That beetle was basically like our pet."

"I can't believe I'm being compared to a beetle." She grinned. "Wait. Was? What happened to it?"

I chewed my lip. "Um. Well."

"I stepped on it," Felix answered for me, blunt as ever. "I didn't realize where he was, and I flew down the stairs one morning. And..."

Savannah's smile fell. "So you can die then. Inside the house. But how does that make sense? You're almost 150 years old."

Felix tapped his fingers against his thigh, a nervous habit I had long come to recognize. I wasn't sure which part of this situation was making him uncomfortable. "You can..." he trailed off, and then started again. "We've deduced that inside the house you can't die of things like starvation or thirst. Lack of sleep. But if you were to get sick or injured... there's nothing that can be done."

“So what do you guys eat if you can’t starve to death? And what’s the point in Theo making hooch in the basement?” She looked around the room, seeing her surroundings for the first time. “Do you even have a fridge in here? How do you survive in a Victorian house?”

“Edwardian, technically,” I piped up. “The house was built in 1907, so it’s an Edwardian house.”

Savannah narrowed her eyes at me. “The realtor told me no one knew, or cared, what came after Victorian, so they lumped it all together.”

“Yes, well, the realtor told you wrong.” I smiled, even though internally I was kicking myself for thinking she’d find it interesting.

“How old are you exactly?”

I laughed. “Does it matter?” Would she be completely turned off once she realized I was old enough to be her father? Technically, so was Theo, but he didn’t look it.

She nodded. “It does to me.”

I sighed. “I’m 45. Have been since 1975. Will be for the next thousand years too.”

I watched her eyes widen as she processed the information. Bad? Good? I was desperate to know.

“Anyway,” Felix interrupted. “No fridge. But again, food isn’t necessary.” He looked away from her for a moment, and then pinned her with his gaze again. To my surprise, she stared right back at him, unblinking. “Think of the curse like the tale of vampires. We don’t age inside the house, but we

also do not require sustenance. We essentially exist outside of time, our bodies frozen from the moment the curse takes effect. As for Theo's hooch..."

"Gotta survive somehow, sweet girl." Theo winked at her, and I half expected her to swoon right under our noses. "Although I am getting down to my last few cans of fruit. Don't know what I'll do after that."

"I don't even want to think about a sober Theo," I muttered, but Theo only grinned at me.

Savannah ticked things off on her fingers. "Okay, so no creatures. You can die, but not of old age. No food, but Theo likes alcohol. Am I missing anything?"

"One more," Felix leveled her with a sharp look. "No fraternizing with the housemates...sexually. We're all stuck together, and that could only ever end in misery for all of us."

For the first time, I saw Savannah's backbone. She squared her shoulders, refusing to back down. "You can't be serious." She shot a quick glance around the room, briefly catching my eye as if to ask me, did you tell him? "You can't seriously think you can tell me what to do."

Felix darted over to her, taking Savannah's chin into his hand in a possessive way I had never seen before. His voice was deadly quiet. "From this point on. No. Fucking. Fraternizing. Are we clear?"

"Crystal," Savannah spat, still shooting daggers.

I watched their interaction, a long-dormant fire alighting deep inside my core. I didn't even care it was happening with Felix, not me, because I was so captivated. Savannah wasn't afraid-of anything-and that was sexy as hell. A new fact to add to my mental notebook. Savannah was the prettiest woman I had ever seen, and I had never wanted someone as badly as I wanted her.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 7

Savannah

Fuck Felix and his fucking rules.
Who did he think he was?

I had been in the house for less than a day, and already I wanted to punch him square in the face. I had stormed out of the living room not long after that moment between us. One of us had to break first, but I couldn't look into those dark eyes any longer. I had a feeling if I stared too long, they would drown me.

No fucking fraternizing. I scoffed, running my hand along the smooth banister in the foyer. Who even said fraternizing anymore? People from fucking 1907, that's who. The stairs, which took up most of the room, were elegant and curved, covered in a deep green carpet. A delicate white pattern traced its way from riser to riser. I assumed the bedrooms were upstairs. Not like I cared, having no plans on fraternizing with any of the men in the house.

You fucked Theo, my traitorous brain reminded me. But our fraternizing had been pure survival instincts. A need for comfort and companionship. Nothing more. I closed my eyes and sighed, hesitating on the bottom step and wondering how the hell I had wound up here. This was supposed to be my big break, my chance at a fresh start in life. Something new to focus on. At least the house was pretty-everything I had imagined it would be. Then my eyes landed on a door I hadn't noticed before, to the left of the dining room, nearly hidden by the sweeping staircase. A bathroom maybe?

Curiosity dragged my feet towards the door, nosiness made my hand turn the knob. Locked. Definitely not a bathroom then. What the hell would be locked up in a house everyone had been stuck in for years? Didn't they know everyone's secrets?

Obviously. Because Felix knew Theo and I hooked up, before we even made it to the living room. Luther had told him, without asking. Just like that my anger was back, clouding my vision, pumping hotly through my veins. Fucking Felix. I should've known he thought himself to be king of the castle by the way he sat in the chair while he explained things to me in the dining room, or the way he held court only minutes ago. My thoughts repeated as I stomped up the stairs. I was surprised none of the guys tried to follow me, but they probably wanted to give me some space. If I had seen my face when I left, I would have

probably given me space, too. I couldn't believe the other two went along with what he was saying. Sheep.

Fraternizing. Fucking. Sheep. I climbed to the top of the stairs, a long hallway stretching both ways. Doors lined either side, some open, and some closed. I picked a direction and walked, trailing my hand along the smooth wallpaper. Every so often, there was a slightly darker patch of wallpaper, rectangular and perfect, as if a picture had been removed. Weird. If I was trapped in a house for the rest of my life—which I was—I'd want the pictures to stay. Memories of better times. Didn't surprise me in the slightest Felix didn't give a shit though. Ass.

I passed a bedroom with a messy, unmade bed and a few pairs of pants tossed around. Theo's, if I had to assume. The lack of shirts sold me if nothing else. The bedroom across the hall was slightly tidier, but still lived in. Stacks of books sat on the end table next to the large bed. Another thick stack was piled on top of the old dresser. Luther's room. I hadn't spoken to the older man much yet, but from what I knew of him, this had to be his domain. The next bedroom seemed untouched. A bay window identical to the one downstairs hugged the wall—this must have been the bedroom in the gable I had seen outside. The bed was made with tight hospital corners, and the drapes were tied back neatly. If I had to claim a bedroom, it might as well be this one. I sat down on the bed, flopping backwards and closing my eyes. I suddenly felt absolutely exhausted. If I kept my

eyes closed, I was certain I could sleep for twelve hours. How much time would I be able to sleep and pretend I wasn't in this situation?

"What the hell are you doing in my room?"

I shot up, my eyes flying open to see Felix glaring at me from the open doorway. He was so silent, I hadn't even heard him come upstairs. I blinked. "I didn't think anyone was living in this room, so I thought I'd claim it." Your fucking majesty, I added in my head.

"Well, it's mine. And I don't like people in it. You can claim the white room across the hall." He leaned against the doorframe, his height making the small space seem even smaller.

I held my hands up. "Whatever." I got to my feet, glowering at him as I tried to squeeze back out into the hall.

I stopped halfway through the doorway, tilting my chin to look up at him. "There was a doorway in the foyer. Behind the stairs, but it was locked. What's in there?"

"Don't go near that door ever again. Do you hear me?" Felix was tense, ready to pounce, which only made me more curious about what he was hiding behind the door.

"Is it dangerous?"

He gritted his teeth. "No. But it's not for you. You will not try to open it again. Understood?"

"Fine," I snapped, and turned to leave once more. I wasn't sure if I was more angry or annoyed at this point, but

neither emotion was something I wanted to share with his Highness. “You know what, no. No.”

Felix rolled his eyes, crossing his arms. “No, what?”

“You can’t boss me around, and think I’ll go along with it. If we’re going to really be stuck with each other for the rest of our lives, you need to know you can’t tell me what to fucking do.” I narrowed my eyes, but my heart was pumping, racing with the thrill of standing up to him.

He raised his eyebrow and leaned forward, caging me in the doorway with an arm on either side. “Oh, darling. You see, I can do just that. Because this is my fucking house. You being trapped in here doesn’t make this any less my house. So you’ll listen to me with a smile on your pretty little face, and say nothing.”

I leaned into his body, invading his space like he invaded mine. “You can’t possibly be serious.” The air between us was thick, charged with the tension of two people who didn’t want to back down. Felix would be sorry he ever challenged me. I may have looked sweet on the outside, but on the inside, I had to claw my way back from Hell one too many times to put up with his bullshit.

Felix smirked, saying nothing. The smirk irritated me more than anything, annoying me even more with how good his chiseled face looked with the cruel expression. Our faces lingered inches apart, and it was impossible to differentiate one angry breath from the other.

I couldn't keep my mouth shut. "This isn't 1907. Women aren't property. We can't be owned and controlled, despite whatever backwoods mentality you still possess from being locked up in this asylum for so long. Women have opinions. I have a voice."

"This wouldn't be half as fun if you didn't have a voice." Felix lifted one hand off the doorframe, brushing a rogue strand of hair away from my cheek. The gentle touch was unexpected, and my brain went into overdrive trying to process it.

"Wha...what the he—" I was cut off by Felix's lips against my own, bruisingly hard as they moved against me. I was too shocked to do anything besides kiss him back, leaning into his desperate touch. His fingers tangled in my hair, twisting a handful back until we separated, forcing me to look up at him. The smirk was gone, something unidentifiable drifting behind his dark eyes. I came back to reality, slamming my palms down on his chest. "What the hell was that? What happened to no fucking fraternizing?"

"I make the rules." He snatched my wrists, holding them still before I could wind up to do it again. Maybe next time I'd aim for that perfect face of his. How fucking dare he be so presumptuous. "Don't tell me you didn't enjoy my kiss, Savannah."

"I didn't." But my brain and my body were obviously operating on two different circuits. My brain rationalized exactly how much this man annoyed me, thinking he was in

charge and knew what was best for me. My body cried out for more, wanting to run my hands down his chest. I wanted to explore how deep the darkness behind his eyes went. Did it poison every cell in his body, leaching into his very core? Or was it only surface deep, an act for everyone else to see?

“You did,” he corrected, offering me a crooked smile on his full lips. It seemed less cruel this time, if only fractionally. “You might hate me. I might piss you off with the way I do things. But you want me. There’s not a single shred of doubt in my mind, darling.”

What an absolute fucking prick. A correct prick. But I’d never let him know. I opened my mouth to contradict whatever bullshit he was planning on spouting next but was stopped once more by his kiss. This time I had a choice. I could push him away, yell and scream. Or I could admit my darkest cravings and give into the kiss.

I gave in. Felix stopped kissing me for a moment, his lips curling into a smile against mine. “There’s a good girl,” he cooed.

“Fuck off and kiss me,” I muttered. I’d cave into my urges, but I wasn’t going to let him know how good his words warmed me from my toes to the tip of my head. I didn’t realize I had been one for praise before, but the way Felix’s words affected me told me completely otherwise. I wanted to be so goddamn good for him.

He obliged, not another word spoken. My hair was pulled tight in his grasp, and I rested a hand on either of his

cheeks. Our lips moved with perfect synchrony, giving and taking in the most delicious way. One of his hands left my hair, slid down my neck, and tugged me closer.

I moaned as he pressed our bodies against each other's, not an ounce of space between us. His erection pushed against my stomach, thick and long. Would his cock be as nice as Theo's?

God, I was a hoe. Trapped in a house with three hot guys, one who I boned within a few hours, and another who I was now hooking up with, one I wasn't even sure I liked. But he was a damn good kisser, I'd give him that. Our tongues toyed with each other, both trying to dominate. I dragged my hands up his face, winding them in his dark, thick hair, clinging for purchase against the waves of passion.

Felix's hand crept lower, brushing over my breasts, never breaking the kiss. I felt a small smile on his lips as he realized I was braless, but he didn't stop, moving lower, until he was above my waistband. He broke the kiss for a moment, cocking his head. "May I?" he whispered.

I nodded. "Please."

He unbuttoned my pants with ease, hissing as he slid his hand over my underwear. They were already damp with desire from our frantic kisses, and heat from our fight. Really, was there anything sexier than make-up sex?

His fingers found what they were seeking. "You're so fucking wet for me. Maybe you do want to be my good girl after all."

All I could do was moan, words forgotten by his gentle touch.

Felix dipped his head into my shoulder, kissing my neck as he moved lower. Soon enough his fingers found my clit and began swirling slow circles with a soft caress. His kisses grew more desperate on my neck, harder and needier. But he didn't change his slow tempo. The contrast was exhilarating, and I craved more. I wanted him. I wanted to feel his cock between my legs, and to hear him sigh my name as he sank into me. These thoughts only added to the sensations building pleasure in my core. His fingertips teased and taunted, those circles never ending as my body began to rock against his hand. I gripped his back, and his kisses turned to licks and bites against my neck. For a man who was nearly 150 years old, Felix was damn good at touching.

My body surrendered to the unforgiving rhythm, my hips bucking into his touch. Still he didn't speed up. I was so fucking close, desperate for release. And like he knew what I needed, Felix finally began to move his fingers quicker against my clit.

"Oh, fuck!" I cried out as I came, clutching at Felix's back. I was sure the poor man would have nail marks up and down, but he didn't say a word, rubbing me through my orgasm.

I closed my eyes, resting my head against the doorframe. We were at another crossroad now. We could stop. Or we

could take it further.

I couldn't fuck two guys on the same day. Could I? I wanted to, no doubt about that. But it had never been a path I considered going down before. Then again, I had never been thrown into a cursed house with three ridiculously attractive men.

Felix pulled away, barely, and withdrew his fingers from my pants. "We...we should...stop," he panted.

"We should stop," I agreed, trying not to sound as breathless as I felt. But when I met his eyes, it was apparent neither of us actually wanted to stop. Lust and desperation fought for victory in his gaze. Felix caged me against the doorframe once more. This time, I didn't mind. This time, it was more of a turn-on than a turn-off, now I knew what those strong, powerful arms were capable of.

Every time either of us breathed our chests brushed against each other, a whisper of what had just happened. I want you. I crave you. I need you. I tipped my head, looking up at Felix as we stared into each other's eyes. There were secrets hidden behind those eyes, restless and begging to be set free. I wanted to hear every last one he was keeping to himself, until he was raw and bare before me. I had a feeling Felix without any walls would be a beautiful sight. Would he tell me now, while we were here, bared to each other?

But I supposed if you wanted to get to the end, you had to start at the beginning. "Did you ever love this house?"

Felix dropped his hands from my hair, turning away from me. Now I'd done it. The end. No more truths, no more honesty. He sat down on the bed, giving me an odd look. "Once. I loved it once upon a time. When it was filled with hopes and dreams, instead of memories and regrets."

"What happened?" I took a chance and crossed the room, sitting next to him on the bed before he could stop me. "How did the house become cursed?"

"That's a long story." He sighed, resting his hand on the back of mine. He swirled soft circles around it, mimicking the same motion he used to drive me crazy only minutes before. I had to convince myself to stay focused.

I pulled back, Felix's expression dropping ever so slightly. I wasn't leaving. I crossed my legs, giving the handsome man with so many secrets my full attention. "Good thing we have the rest of our lives for you to tell me."

"My story isn't pretty, darling."

I shrugged. "Whose is?" He was kidding himself if he thought any of us had perfect pasts, pristine records. My soul was cracked in a thousand places, stained and flawed. He'd figure it out soon enough.

"If you're sure." Felix took a deep breath, steadying himself. "I've never told this story to anyone before."

I rested my hand on top of his. "Then I'm honored to be the first."



CHAPTER 8

Felix 1997

The first time I saw her I was a young man, full of hopes, dreams, and money. Money I had plenty of. Money could fix any problem in the world. That's what my father had instilled in me, before he died of the fever and left me his fortune. My mother died soon after of a broken heart. Or so they said. I wasn't sure if I believed in love, because my parent's marriage seemed nothing more than a marriage of convenience, and my mother's death, her fear of being a widow at only forty.

I returned home from college to sit at his bedside as he told me everything he believed would help me become a great man. A good man wasn't good enough, for my father at least. I had to be exceptional. The best of the best. The best clothes, the greatest education. A beautiful home. All of it paid for with my father's money, earned off the sweat and labor of the workers in his factory, who had none of those things. Talking about such things was beneath us. And

because I was desperate to be great, I followed his words as if they were law.

My father passed, because money could fix anything—except death. I went back to school, as per his wishes, notified by a telegram only weeks later my mother had joined him in whatever awaited us after this life. She went quickly, and there wouldn't have been enough time to rush home even if I had known earlier. So I stayed at school, finished my program, and headed home in the spring, ready to take over the family business as the new head of my one-man family.

Time passed and I fell into a routine—monotonous, but simple. I woke up and went over the company's ledgers at breakfast. I visited the factory in the morning. Supply ordering was done in the afternoon, and at the supper table. Sundays were for church, a ritual I kept out of habit rather than belief. Because if money was king, where did God fall into the mix?

I knew the women of the town wanted to marry off their daughters to me. I wasn't clueless. I was young, relatively good-looking, rich, and available. Everybody and their mother knew it. Church was constantly filled with ladies telling me about this relative or the next. They couldn't help themselves, tapping me on the shoulders and pointing out the women I didn't care about.

“My niece, Cora, would be perfect for you, Felix. Simply stunning, and the best cook you'll ever meet.”

Like women of our standing ever stepped foot in the kitchen.

“Felix, you must meet my daughter, Adaline. Beautiful black hair. She sings like an absolute bird, too.”

If I wanted to hear a bird sing, I would buy a damn bird, not wed a wife.

“Did you see how pretty our Emma looked at the service last week? She’s a pious one for sure. What a wonderful wife she would make for you.”

Because piousness was really what I was looking for.

But I kept these thoughts to myself, smiling and nodding, politely agreeing while knowing I had no intentions of ever courting, let alone marrying, any of these women. I had money, and I was destined to be great. These women were simply okay. Subpar. I wanted the best.

So I kept to my rules, and my routine. More and more I thought about how nice it would be to have a companion to live life with. To celebrate wins with. And maybe, just maybe, to love. Love would be a bonus, but not a necessity. After all, hadn’t my parents’ marriage worked without love? Really, a wife was another step on the social ladder, an excellent addition to the money that had gotten me so far.

Then it happened. I saw her, as I was coming out of the factory one afternoon. She was with a friend, and they were stepping out of the grocers, arm in arm. She was laughing, tossing her golden hair back as it shone in the sun. She was the prettiest thing I had ever seen in my life, and I knew

right then and there I would do whatever it took to make her mine.

Hannah was her name. Hannah. I used to roll her name around in my mouth, letting the vowels slide over my tongue. I would daydream about our life together, the children we would have. For the first time I knew what it felt like to truly love someone.

She didn't come from money, but that didn't bother me. I had more than enough of it for both of us, and she was pretty enough for people to ignore her shortcomings. Whatever she wanted, she got.

"Fe," she'd coo, batting those long lashes at me. "You love me, right?"

I would smile and squeeze her hand. She wouldn't let me kiss her yet, claiming it to be improper. "Of course I do, my darling."

"The dressmaker has the most beautiful dress in the window. I'd love to wear it and make you proud at the Smith's dinner next week."

I bought her dresses and hats. Bikes, and roller skates. Riding lessons, and paints. Flowers and the most delicate pieces of jewelry. All of it necessary to prove herself to society, she'd say. And all of it necessary for me to prove my love to her.

I was so clouded by love and beauty I didn't see her for what she really was. I just wanted to make her happy. I

didn't stop to notice she never once told me she loved me in return.

Summer turned to Fall, and the trees began to lose their leaves. I wanted to ask Hannah to marry me, and so I bought the prettiest ring I could find, smiling as I imagined it on her delicate finger. I had the cook plan a meal of all her favorites, and dressed myself in my finest suit. Her mother came to the dinner as well, as a chaperone. We ate the meal, before I dropped to one knee before her chair.

"Hannah, will you do me the honor of making me the happiest man alive, and becoming my wife?"

There were no tears, or over-the-top professions of love. From Hannah at least. Her mother broke down into tears, overwhelmed with emotion her daughter was marrying so well. Hannah only smiled and offered her hand for me to slide the ring on. "Of course I will, Fe. But I want something first. As a wedding gift."

The ring looked stunning on her ivory finger. I would do whatever she asked. "Anything for you."

"This house," she waved her hand around the dining room I had grown up in. "It's too old. It's not modern anymore. All I can think about when I'm here is your parents. You can't possibly expect me to live in such a place." She wrinkled her perfect nose.

I followed her gaze around the room, only seeing walls and a roof. It was a house, and a house was a house. The

family inside it was what made it a home. “You don’t want to live here?”

Hannah shook her head. “No. The Moores are selling the back part of their land. The part past the pond. Wouldn’t it be nice to have a place to call our own, Fe? Something that was just ours.”

“If you’re sure...” I wasn’t sure a new house was necessary. But my father had taught me to be a great man, I needed to have the best of the best. Hannah was the best. And if Hannah needed a new house to be mine forever, then I’d build her a new house. “Yes. Let’s do it.”

“Oh, Fe!” she cried, jumping out of her seat.

I didn’t stop to think about how she was more excited about the house than the proposal.

I went to the bank the next morning, declaring my intent to purchase the acres from the Moores. The banker smiled at me. “I’m happy to help, sir. But that portion of land has been settled by travelers. That’s why Mr. Moore is selling it. Are you sure you want such an undertaking?”

I thought about it for a moment. Hannah wanted the land. And I wanted Hannah. “I’ll deal with it.”

I walked out of the bank the proud new owner of a parcel of land in the woods, and one step closer to the woman of my dreams. The next day, I visited my new land, to examine exactly how many travelers were now trespassing on my property.

There were a dozen or so makeshift tents set up, with dogs and horses tied off with ropes. Children played in the small circle in the middle of the tents. I marched down the hill, armed with a sense of propriety, my deed, and money. The children stopped playing as I approached and ran off into different tents. I stood awkwardly for a minute or two, before a gnarled old woman stepped out of the largest tent. “Who are you, boy?” she asked.

“Felix, ma’am. I purchased this plot of land, and I intend to build a house on it. I’ll need you and your family to vacate the area as soon as possible.” I offered her a smile that usually helped me with the church women, but received only a frown in return.

“We’ve lived here for years, and never bothered anyone. Why would we have to move now?”

I sighed. Obviously, this was going to be more difficult than I expected. “I just explained, ma’am. I’m building a house here for my fiancée. I can offer you money to find somewhere else to settle.”

She shook her head, lips pressed tightly together. “Your money means nothing to me, and neither does your bride. This is our home. And it’s almost winter. We have children, and it’ll take time to find somewhere else to live before the snow falls.”

I rolled my eyes. Like a bit of snow ever hurt anyone. They were already living in tents. Nothing I said or did persuaded

her. Her face grew more pinched, wrinkles appearing where there were none before.

“Ma’am, if you are truly unwilling to move, then I’ll have to get the police involved.” I was exhausted. Why couldn’t she have been reasonable, and taken the money? I would’ve been more than generous.

“Come back with your police then and see what happens,” she challenged.

I left, disappointed but not defeated. Hannah would be mine, one way or another. Luckily, unlike the travelers, the cops were willing to see the logic of money. They followed me out to the parcel, armed with batons and handcuffs, threatening jail time or beatings to those who didn’t comply. The tents were dismantled, and the children packed up. The horses were hitched to wagons, and it took a shockingly short amount of time before their homes were reduced to nearly nothing. I stood off to one side, watching the proceedings with satisfaction, until the old woman appeared in front of my face. I had to pretend like I hadn’t nearly jumped out of my skin at her surprise arrival. She carried a bag on her back that seemed much too large for her small frame. A dirty-faced child whined at her feet.

“You’ll regret this, boy,” she spat, picking up the child. “You’ll get what’s coming to you.” I turned away, and addressed the closest policeman instead, trying to pretend like her haunting words didn’t affect me. I watched the police herd them off the land, making sure they were long

gone before I turned back to town. I was conflicted. Sad for the travelers leaving their home, but filled with an overwhelming and complete happiness that I was now able to give the love of my life what she so badly desired.

Construction began the next morning, the old woman's words ringing in my head. You'll regret this, boy. I tried to ignore the voice, focusing instead on building the most beautiful house I could imagine. Each element of the house was carefully selected to be of the newest fashion, and the highest quality. I couldn't have Hannah being ashamed of our new home. The house was decorated with the finest materials, and I even hired a man from the city to install the newest form of electricity so Hannah wouldn't have to mess about with oil lamps at night. A plumber was also hired, to install the first indoor bathroom the small town had ever seen. I wasn't about to make Hannah use a chamber pot, and I wanted her to be able to take baths whenever she wanted. And of course, I built a special room for myself, just off the foyer. The house was for Hannah. Everything was for Hannah. But I thought maybe I could let myself have one room.

I bought the nicest furniture, arranging the rooms so they were ready for my new soon-to-be bride to move right in. The cook stocked the pantry with everything we could possibly need, so Hannah wouldn't have to worry about anything for ages. The handymen hung paintings that reminded me of Hannah, sunsets that looked like her hair on

Sunday mornings. Lakes that reflected the shade of blue she liked to wear. Gardeners planted rose bushes all around the house, the same shade of red as Hannah's full lips. They would look so beautiful in full bloom. Maybe we could even be married in front of them, if Hannah wasn't opposed to a non-church wedding.

Before I knew it, the house was completed. I arrived one Sunday afternoon to do a final walkthrough. I wandered the rooms, picturing how Hannah and I would spend the rest of our lives together. She would meet me there shortly, and finally get to see her new home.

A knock at the door had me straightening my shirt, wanting to look my best for Hannah's first time at our new home. But when I swung open the door, it wasn't Hannah. It was the old traveler woman on my doorstep. "What are you doing here?" I asked.

She glared at me. "I warned you, boy. I told you not to mess with us. You kicked us off all the same. Right before the snows, too. By the time we found a new place to camp, many of my people died of the cold."

"It was my land. I bought it fair and square." I threw my shoulders back, ready to remove the old woman by force if necessary. I felt bad about the deaths, but it wasn't my fault they had chosen to live the way they had. Was it? I reminded her, "I offered you money, if you recall."

"Money means nothing to me," she spat. She rubbed her hands together. "You were warned, and now you'll get

what's coming to you. You wanted to live in this house, you can live in it for the rest of your sad life."

"What the hell are you talking about?" But the woman paid me no mind, chanting on my porch.

"From the grace of air, and strength of the ground. My desire knows no bounds. You are sealed to the roof you made. Never wilt, never fade. My power is given by the moon and touched by the day. Until you are free of sin, here you will stay."

"You need to leave, now. I mean it." Still she chanted, growing louder. In the front yard, amongst the blue and sunny skies, a bolt of lightning struck one of the trees. The tree cracked and peeled into two, reminding me of the sounds of bones.

"With fire I cast, with smoke it will stain. Let this curse not be in vain." And then just as suddenly, she stopped, staring at me with eyes that were too clear. *"You will forever share a lifeforce, each of you keeping the other alive."* She paused. *"You won't need sustenance. You'll never grow. You won't die of old age. But at least you'll have your house, right?"*

She cackled, and my blood ran cold. "What...what do you mean?" I stuttered. "You're insane." She shrugged. "Maybe. Or maybe I'm the sanest person you've ever met in your life." She took a step off the porch, but at this point I was pissed. I took a step forward, my foot passing over the threshold.

A strong wind immediately blew me back, slamming me against the winding staircase railing I was so proud of.

I frowned, scrambling to my feet. Again I tried to follow the old woman out the door, and again I was thrown back. Again. And again.

The old woman laughed. "I told you, boy. You can't leave. Of course, people can join you in your curse. But once they step inside, they too will be cursed to never leave. Don't worry. I'll make it so people don't miss you. People in town won't think it's odd that there's an abandoned house. Except for your wonderful fiancée of course. I'm sure she'll want to see you."

She waved and stepped onto the path. "You'll be sorry you messed with me!"

I was still ranting when Hannah appeared at the end of the drive. She began picking her way up the path carefully, looking radiant in a cornflower blue dress I had bought her. I watched as her smile froze in place as she studied my appearance. She stopped on the first porch step, hesitating. Thanks to the wicked winds pelting me, I looked a mess, blown and disheveled. My hopes of looking perfect for Hannah were long gone. "Fe? Who are you yelling at?"

"Oh, Hannah, my darling. Thank goodness." I had never been more grateful to see her perfect face in my life. I was immediately reassured. Even if I was stuck, we could be stuck together. We could spend an eternity together, just us and our love.

I told her about the travelers I had run off, and the old woman who had shown up. I told her about the curse, showing her what happened when I tried to step out the door. While I talked, her face grew more and more somber.

“So you really can’t leave?” she asked.

I shook my head. “Apparently not. I haven’t searched for a loophole yet. But don’t you see? This is really a blessing in disguise! A thousand lifetimes spent with each other, with no interruptions. Just us, forever.”

Hannah looked at me for a moment, then slowly swung her head from side to side. “No. I’m not coming in there.”

My heart sank as I watched her face fall. “What do you mean?”

“I mean, Fe, you’ve been fun and all, but I’m not wasting the rest of my life in a house in the woods with you. That’s insane.” This wasn’t my Hannah. I wasn’t hearing clearly. “You don’t mean that.” She lifted a slim shoulder, not half as bothered as she should be.

“I’m sorry, Fe. This is goodbye. This curse is none of my business. You were the one who ran them off, after all.”

My mouth dropped open, the veil finally lifting. My heart was crushed as it fell. “Excuse me?”

“Goodbye. Thank you for everything.” She turned and stepped off the porch, taking the same path as the old woman. Scrambling from window to window, I banged on the glass as she refused to look back and acknowledge me. I was a toy that had grown old. Like my family’s home,

outdated. Unwanted. She would find a new sucker now, and I would remain in the house she begged me for until I rotted.

I ran over to the dining room, watching her walk away without so much as a look back. I kept banging on the glass, screaming. "Hannah! Hannah, don't you dare do this to me! Hannah!" Tears were openly streaming down my face now as I thought about the rest of my life spent in this stunning godforsaken house. "I thought you loved me! Hannah!" I screamed and banged and yelled in vain as her beautiful blue dress swished out of sight, never to be seen again. Eventually I tired, slumping to the floor while my head sank to my chest.

All the money in the world couldn't help me now. I was jinxed.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 9

They

Quiet conversation caught my ear as I climbed the stairs to my room. Interestingly enough, it was coming from Felix's room, which was normally the quietest of all. Quiet, and pretty, because Felix had the nicest room in the house. Facing south, it caught the most sunlight, and felt the most free. I tiptoed down the hall as silently as my still slightly buzzed body would allow. I was curious to see what he could possibly be saying to Savannah. If I was honest with myself, I was mildly jealous at their alone time as well.

Which was crazy. No less crazy, I supposed, than being stuck in a cursed house, unaging, for the last thirty years of my life. No less crazy than the ridiculous series of bad luck that struck me continuously. I had known Savannah for less than a day, but I wanted her to be mine, and mine alone.

I wasn't dumb. I saw the look Luther gave her when we walked in together. I couldn't help but notice how Felix

tensed as he looked Savannah over from top to toe. It would've been a lie to say that wasn't my intention when I grabbed her hand right before we entered the dining room. I wanted them to be jealous, to see how she was drawn to me, just like all those girls had been in my past. There was something about knowing people were jealous of you, and what you could do. The advantage of having something they didn't that made me feel actually lucky.

Three dudes. One girl. And all of us wanted her. This could only be an absolute mess, right? But we had been trapped in isolation for far too long for a pretty girl not to have an effect on all of us. We would've had to have been dead to not notice her. To be fair to her, I wasn't sure she wanted any of us. I hadn't stopped to ask. But her body language had spoken more than words ever could.

Even my doubt over what Savannah really wanted didn't stop me from creeping towards the open doorway. Making people jealous made me feel lucky, but the flipside sure didn't. Actually feeling jealous sucked. I could only make out every other word, my slightly drunk brain unable to connect the dots.

"...stuck...almost...years...Luther..." Felix's voice.

Felix must be telling her how long he was alone before Luther unknowingly stumbled into this shitshow. I was curious how much of his story he had told her. As far as I knew, not even Luther had heard the whole thing. Another

footstep closer, and another shuffle, and I could make out Savannah's sweet tone.

"Felix...sorry...no...gone through..."

Not like she was very sweet at all when we were fucking in the basement. My depraved soul knew another when I saw it, and sweet Savannah was as corrupt as they came. Who else took a look at this ramshackle house and fell in love with it? What kind of deviant heard my story, and then immediately had sex with me? No, there was darkness there. Like called to like. I could almost grip Felix's door trim now, if I was really careful.

"Don't...fine...long time..."

And then, silence. What were they doing in there? I needed to see. I curled my fingers trying to peer inside the room, only for my grip to slip and leave the rest of my body sprawled out on the floor. Fuck's sake. I looked up to see Savannah sitting in Felix's lap, fingers tangled in his hair. His hands were invisible under her shirt. Both looked shocked, although whether it was from getting caught or seeing me, I wasn't sure.

I waited for the flames of red-hot jealousy to flicker through my body as I lay there rigidly. Savannah's face flushed, and Felix's hair was the most mussed I had ever seen. I expected irritation, annoyance that I had moved so quickly on the first woman I had seen in thirty years. Instead, I felt something different. Something more powerful and all-consuming.

Lust.

I didn't care I wasn't the one making Savannah moan. I wasn't bothered that my hands weren't on her. Felix wasn't my favorite dude in the world, but if we could both pleasure Savannah, and both feel good in the process...what was the problem? Pretty much all social code had gone out the door with whatever freaky magic was happening in here. Now the only problem was how to bring it up. Continuing to lie on the floor watching them silently, as they stared at me, was not the chill vibe I was going for.

"Um....hi?" I offered an awkward wave.

Felix glared, obviously pissed at the intrusion. But if the fuckhead was so bothered, he should've shut his door.

"What do you need, Theo?"

"I just wanted to make sure Savannah was okay. She seemed pretty upset when she left the room." Weak excuse, man. Weak. Fucking. Excuse.

"She's fine," Felix snapped.

Savannah pulled Felix's head away from her. "Excuse me? I think I can answer for myself." She turned towards me and offered a smile. "Come here, Theo."

I pushed myself off the floor, unable to stop the grin from spreading across my face. I didn't know much about this girl, but her smile was the sunshine I had been missing for decades. She listened to my story—really listened—without pity, or judgment. So if she asked me to come closer, I would run to her side.

She removed her fingers from Felix's hair and grabbed my hand with hers. "I'm good. Really. It's been a crazy and overwhelmingly insane day, and I'm still not sure I'm not imagining this whole thing. But I'm getting there."

It should've been strange, her holding my hand while she sat on Felix's lap. But except for Felix's lethal glare, it felt completely natural. Her hand fit inside mine perfectly, and I wasn't imagining the electricity that sparked between our touch. She stared at me with those big hazel eyes, and I was unable to look away.

I see you, I thought. I hear you. I couldn't stop myself from flipping her wrist over and pulling it to my mouth for a kiss. She sucked in a quiet breath, and I was almost positive Felix growled.

I didn't realize we were in a werewolf movie, dickwad. I shook my head, not wanting the moment to collapse around us. If it meant I got Savannah, I could put up with Felix. I could put up with it all for a genuine, real, chance at being lucky. And the way she smiled at me...man, I felt luckier than I ever had.

Something about her smile made the four walls of this prison fade away, warming the rooms that felt damp no matter what. Touching her made everything better. I had fucked girls before, sure. But none like Savannah. The girls I had sex with before were hard. Rough around the edges. Broken down into tiny little pieces that cut you like glass shards.

I was tired of bleeding. I wanted to be whole. And maybe Savannah was that chance for me. If she was, I wasn't going to let it slip away.

My mouth still pressed against the tender skin of her wrist, I smiled. "Is this okay, sweet girl?" I murmured, enjoying the way her body tensed against my breath. It was clear I affected her.

She knew what I meant. Is this okay? Felix and I, both touching her. I knew what I wanted, and couldn't care less about Felix. But I wanted to know what she thought. Was it pushing things? Did she like him more than she liked me?

Savannah turned away for a moment, looking back at Felix. I was certain she wanted this. Wanted us. Both of us. Her skin was hot and flushed under my touch, and her breathing was still heavy. But she needed to know what Felix thought first. Whatever she saw there must have been enough for her. Understanding, maybe. Or acceptance. Maybe even resignation. She looked back at me, desire and apprehension mixing in her eyes.

"Yes, please," she whispered.

Fuck, she was pretty when she was so polite. I gripped the back of her neck and pulled her face to mine for a kiss. I was already hard, my cock straining against my jeans, and I wanted nothing more than to sink into Savannah—wherever she'd let me. I opened my eyes, Felix glaring at me over Savannah's head, but I gave zero shits. We could put up with each other for a few moments, couldn't we? For this?

I deepened the kiss, sliding my tongue along Savannah's full lips. Felix still sat there, doing nothing except tightening his grip on her hips.

Come on, man. You know how to share a girl. Do something. And then it hit me. Felix probably didn't know how to share a girl. Not only had it been over a hundred years since he had seen a woman, was sharing really a thing in 1907? Menages? Had the poor dude ever even had a blowjob? My eyes widened, horrified, and I tightened my grip in Savannah's hair to distract her from my shock.

Okay. Guess I was steering this ship. I didn't know how Felix would react, but he had a choice between joining in or getting the fuck out at this point. I knew what I'd choose. I led Savannah's hand down to Felix's cock, his hard-on easily evident in his thin pants.

I pulled away from her lips for a moment, long enough to brush hair away from her ear and whisper, "Can you handle two, sweet girl?"

She nodded, released my hand and began rolling her hips against Felix. He moaned and clutched her even tighter. His dark eyes looked lighter now, lit by a fire of passion. I was happy to fuel it if it meant I got to watch this goddess in action. I moved behind Savannah and lifted her shirt up. Remembering her bralessness made me groan as I tossed her shirt into the corner. Her breasts were now right in front of Felix, and he stared at them, wide-eyed. I leaned over, tweaked one of Savannah's hard nipples until she gasped. I

nodded towards her other breast, indicating Felix should take a turn.

He lowered his mouth slowly onto her breast, clamping his lips around her nipple as I played with the other. The sounds coming out of Savannah's mouth were heavenly and had a direct line to my cock. Not wanting to take my fingers away from her, I used my free hand to undo my pants, shuffling them over my hips in desperation.

"Oh, fuck," Savannah moaned. "Sweet fucking Jesus."

Lord, I wanted nothing more than to see that pretty face as she came one more time. I pulled her hair, tugging her away from Felix, who looked up in surprise. Savannah breathed heavily, and watching her chest rise and fall captivated me. "Get on the bed. On your knees," I muttered, fisting my cock in my hand to release some of the pressure.

She got to her feet in front of Felix, and I stopped her. "Wait." I spun her around to face me, and dropped to my knees. I undid her pants, pulling those and her panties down, helping her step out of them. I smiled up at her, a predator going in for the kill. "Go on, now."

I smacked her ass as she turned, not missing the moan that slipped out from both of us. Felix still sat on the bed, fiddling with the button on his pants.

"Stop fucking around, get undressed, and then sit on the bed. Head at the headboard, feet under Savannah." I had snapped at Felix before, pushed to my limits-rare as that was-but I had never ordered him around like now. But if he

wanted to play, then I was going to teach him how to play my way.

He glared at me, cocking his head to the side like he wanted to protest, but he did what I said, settling in on the bed. Savannah moved in between his legs, stroking his hard cock and watching me. Anticipating my next move. I petted her hair, feeling the golden strands weave between my fingers. "Show me what a good girl you are, and suck his cock until he comes."

She grinned at me, immediately bending over and taking Felix's cock into her mouth. She moaned, muffled, and Felix joined with vocalizations I'd never heard out of him before.

I smirked, situating myself behind Savannah. "Don't tell me you've never fucked a girl before, Fe. I need you to last more than ten seconds."

"I...have..." he stammered, his hands resting on Savannah's head now. "Just not with another guy. And definitely not one...so...fuck me." He groaned, Savannah's head sinking impossibly lower. "Pretty. Holy fuck."

"Try for at least five minutes, will you, dude?" I grabbed Savannah's hips and lifted her ass in the air, making sure not to disturb her head. I slid my fingers between her legs, not surprised to find her soaking wet. I slipped one finger inside her tight little pussy, enjoying the way she pushed back against me, and moaned over Felix's cock. I stroked her back and forth, and then added a second finger to join the first.

She raised her head. "Oh, fuck, Theo, please," she begged. "Fuck me."

I leaned over, still fucking her with my fingers while I pushed her head back down on Felix's cock. "I told you to suck his cock until he comes, sweet girl. Don't disappoint me."

Savannah went back to bobbing up and down, her hips meeting each thrust of my hand. I wasn't sure who was moaning louder, her or Felix, but I hoped like hell Luther was locked up in his library.

Once Savannah was near crazed with desire, soaking my hand, and continually moaning, I withdrew my fingers. Before she could protest, I lined my cock up at her slick folds, and slowly pushed my way in.

Fuck, she was so goddamn tight. I couldn't remember ever fucking someone who felt as good as this-sober or high. She made a tiny cry, but didn't stop sucking. Felix's eyes were closed, his fingers grabbing at Savannah's hair for dear life. Next time, I'd make him swap places.

Next time?

Of course there would be a next time, who was I kidding? I began to thrust in and out of Savannah, enjoying the way my hips controlled her mouth wrapped around Felix. There was always such a rush when you saw a woman pleasing another man, especially when you were pleasing her. I groaned as I sank inside her again, gripping her hips so hard my fingertips left indents in her skin. She felt so goddamn

good, but I wanted her to come before I lost control. I wrapped one of my hands around her and down, finding her swollen clit. I rubbed a quick rhythm, keeping in time with my cock. Her pussy wrapped around me so damn perfectly, I didn't ever want to leave. "Make him come now, Savannah," I demanded.

She added her hand to his cock, and Felix's breath grew shallower. Her head was bobbing quicker, and I added more pressure to her clit as I rubbed. "Come with him. I want to see you both come at the same time."

Felix's hips were shaking, and he pushed Savannah's head down. I pressed my thumb into her clit. "Now, Savannah."

Felix cried out, pumping his cock into Savannah's mouth before falling still. Underneath me, Savannah's pussy clasped me even tighter, her body shuddering with her own release. Seeing the two of them fall apart together drove my hips harder, until I was roaring through my orgasm.

Fuck. Definitely hadn't expected this to happen. I pulled away from Savannah, grabbing the old towel hung behind the door to clean myself off before turning back to the bed. By the time I got back, Savannah was in the middle, a satisfied grin on her face, and Felix was on the other side, staring up at the ceiling.

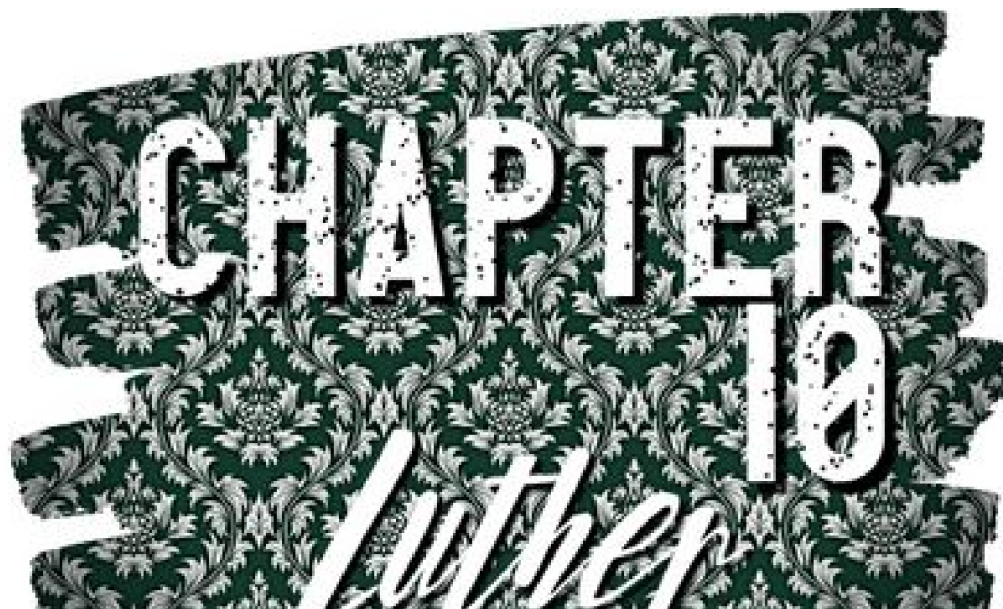
"Well..." Felix started. "That was something."

I couldn't stop the laughter from bubbling out, and Savannah soon joined in. Felix even smiled. At least I knew he enjoyed himself.

Content, I pulled Savannah into my arms, letting her curl her back against my chest. Her ass rested on my lap, and I had to convince myself to leave her alone, even as my cock demanded more. The poor girl needed rest. I wrapped my arm around her waist, surprised when the jealousy still didn't come as I watched her reach out for Felix. She tugged him closer, wrapping her arms around his neck. It only took minutes before her breathing evened out, and she fell into a sound sleep.

Felix looked at me again. I expected him to kick me out of his bed. I would fight him on it, though. I wasn't ready to leave Savannah's side. Except this time he didn't glare. He gave me a look of understanding, a willingness to try new things he probably had never considered before. He'd had a taste, and I didn't think he'd ever go back. I sent him a crooked smile, letting my eyes drift closed.

When I woke up that morning, I had expected a day like any other. Dull. Boring. Drunk. Instead I was falling asleep in Felix's bed, with the most stunning creature slumbering between us. And for the first time in a long time, I remembered what hope felt like. With the taste of it on my tongue, I let my dreams take me away.



CHAPTER 10

Luther

Poltergeists are called “noisy ghosts” because they can interact with the physical world—our world. Signs of a ghost living in your house can include a room being oddly cold, or hearing whispers when no one is around. The word comes from the Old English word, *gast* or *gost*, which meant spirit or soul. Our house wasn’t exactly a haunted house, considering we lived with no ghosts, other than ourselves.

For the most part, our house was absolutely, positively silent. There were no groans and creaks you’d expect to find in a century home. We didn’t have loud conversations with each other, and there were no music players in the house to speak of. For all intents and purposes, our cursed house was pretty tame.

So we lived in quiet. Which is why an odd scuffling woke me up before the day had even broken free of the murky gray dawn. I sat up straight in bed, my eyes immediately

searching every corner of the room. According to experts, break-ins happened more in the summer than any other time of the year. They also usually happened in the middle of the day. Except it wasn't summer. It wasn't the middle of the day. And no one in their right mind would break into this house.

Except for Theo, but God only knew what he was on when he stumbled inside. So if someone wasn't trying to get in, then someone was trying to get out. I had a pretty good idea who was attempting to escape.

I rolled out of bed, sliding on the jeans and shirt I had carefully folded the night before. When I first had gotten stuck in the house, I had been a slob. I never made my bed. I left my clothes everywhere. I just didn't care. What did it matter? But when I started my research, I realized the importance of a clean home. My information might have come from a 1900s women's magazine, but I was pretty sure the facts still held true.

An organized home was a happy home. A clean home meant a relaxed brain, and more time to focus on myself. Cleaning your house meant your husband would love you, and would never leave you. The last one was a bit of a stretch for me and my personal situation, and definitely outdated, but the rest of it worked for me. So my bed was carefully made, and my clothes tidied every night before I fell asleep.

Which meant it was easy for me to dress, and tiptoe down the stairs after Savannah. She was wearing the same clothes as yesterday—we really needed to find her some more clothes—and her beautiful hair was tied back into a loose braid. I wasn't sure what bedroom she slept in last night, and in all honesty, I wasn't sure I wanted to know. She was so focused on her task, she didn't notice me trailing behind her, one step at a time.

From what I had seen of her, Savannah was bright, and knew what she wanted. These were two incompatible ideals—she knew there was no way out, but she wanted her freedom. She stopped first at the front door, jiggling the handle.

Useless, I could've told her. Once the door closed behind you, it didn't open again from the inside. That door was a one-way street. I could only see her profile, barely illuminated in the early morning gloom, but her disappointment was palpable even from where I stood.

“Who buys a fucking cursed house?” she muttered, turning around and moving on to the living room.

Sweetheart, why did we do anything we do? If she solved the answer to that mystery, I'd love to hear it.

I took one step at a time, until I had her in my sights again. Most of the windows in the living room were stained glass, but the one overlooking the porch wasn't. Savannah stood at the window, trying to lift the sash I knew from personal experience wouldn't budge. Then she paused,

thinking for a minute. She took a step back, and then placed both of her hands against the glass.

She's testing it. Seeing how much pressure it would take to break. Something I'd also like to test. She pushed harder, and I could practically hear the glass straining.

I spoke up. "Stop before you hurt yourself, sweetheart. Theo nearly broke his arm trying to get out when he was first trapped. Didn't Felix warn you about the pushback?"

Savannah spun around, a wild look in her eyes. "Are the three of you really so content in this house you won't even try to escape?"

I sighed, tugging at my ear. She wouldn't like what I had to say. "There is no escape, Savannah. Not unless the curse is broken. I've been scouring books for decades, looking for the solution."

"You have?" She perked up, cocking her head to the side.

I wanted to hug her. But we barely knew each other. Maybe she wouldn't be comfortable with that. Fuck it. I pulled her into a hug. At first, she resisted, then she almost crumpled against me, letting me support the entirety of her weight. I knew the feeling of complete despair. I knew it all too well, and it broke my heart. "Do you want a cup of tea?"

"Tea?" She pushed away from me, wrinkling her nose.

"Do you not like tea?"

"I do, but..." She frowned. "I thought we didn't need to eat or drink. And how old is this tea you want me to drink?"

I burst out laughing, and then slapped my hand over my mouth. I didn't want to face the wrath of Felix if I woke him too early. And Theo wasn't human before ten. Savannah glared at me until I continued. "I'm sorry. I forgot all of this was new to you. We don't need food. But sometimes a cup of tea is nice all the same, just like Theo's hooch." I led her into the kitchen, sitting her down at a small wooden chair and table. "As for the age of stuff, it's the age it was when it was brought into the house. The simplest way to explain it is, as Felix said, the house exists outside of time. Just like we don't age, the food doesn't either."

"But..."

"Yes, the goods we have will eventually run out." I responded to the question before she asked it, turning to the heavy iron stove. I had never been so grateful for Felix as when I found out he had electricity and running water installed in the house. "Luckily Felix had the house stocked before he was set to move in. Theo uses the canned fruit for his hooch, but he'll run out soon enough. And I make the tea stretch."

We waited in companionable silence for the water to boil. I considered telling her what I knew about tea, and then thought better of it.

It takes around two thousand tea leaves to make a pound of tea. China drinks the most tea out of any country, or at least they used to. Tea could last for hundreds of years if it

was stored properly. These facts kept me focused on the boiling water, instead of obsessing over Savannah. Barely.

Digging into my resources a bit further than normal, I made two strong cups of tea, and sat down across from her. The teacup's delicate lavender pattern always made me smile because it was definitely not Felix's style. "Don't let the two of them scare you. They can be intense sometimes—for completely different reasons."

She laughed, turning her teacup around in her hands. "They don't scare me. They're pussycats, really. You just need to figure out where they like to be petted."

I grimaced into my cup, not wanting to think too hard about what she meant. "What makes you so scared you're trying to break out, then?"

"Nothing." Her face grew tight, and she gulped her tea. "Being trapped isn't exactly my idea of a fun time."

"I don't think it's anyone's idea of a good time. Believe me when I say, if there were a way out, we would've found it by now. We've tried to break windows. For the record, it doesn't work."

When Savannah spoke again, her voice was little more than a whisper. "I'm scared to be stuck with myself for so long."

In this instance, I knew exactly what she meant. When you were faced with eternity, all you considered was everything wrong with yourself. "Hey, listen here. I've been trapped for nearly fifty years. And if I can put up with Felix for fifty

years, you can put up with yourself.” I smiled, but she was still looking down at her cup. “You don’t need to be afraid, sweetheart. We all have skeletons in our closets. We’re just bored enough to let them out from time to time.”

She nodded slowly, finally raising her eyes to look at me. “You mentioned books. Where are they?”

I smiled, her enthusiasm unmarred by her nerves. “There’s a library on the second floor. I think it used to be Felix’s office. I take it he didn’t give you the grand tour last night.”

“We were...occupied.” She blushed, and I had no problem understanding what she meant. Felix too?

“Finish your drink and I’ll show you around.” I drained the last little dregs in my cup, trying to ignore the images of Savannah on top of Felix, or Felix kneeling between her lush legs.

What was wrong with me? I was growing hard, imagining her writhing in pleasure, the perfect “o” her lips would form when she came.

Savannah set her cup down with a tiny clank and rose to her feet. “Let’s go.” She was practically bouncing on the balls of her feet, and for the first time I realized how much she genuinely loved this house—haunted or not.

I started at the small hallway off the back of the kitchen, pointing out the water closet. It was basic, but functional. A tub, sink, and a toilet with a pull cord. We were connected to

the town's water but again, thanks to the house's curse, no one ever came to check it out. Same with the electricity.

She frowned. "So no showers?"

I shook my head. "Nope. We're just lucky Felix decided to have running water installed at all, otherwise we'd be shit out of luck."

"Good thing I like baths," she murmured.

And just like that, I was hard again, imagining Savannah in the metal tub, scrubbing her legs with the rough lye soap bars Felix stockpiled by the hundreds.

"Alright, next!" My voice was a bit too forceful, and even Savannah gave me a strange look. The pantry was next, stocked to the brim with wood for the stove, toiletries, and the waning food stores.

The dining room we never ate in was next, still laid out for supper. Then came the foyer, stunning enough to make you forget where you were for a minute.

Savannah pointed to the door behind the stairs, the one that was always locked. "What's in there?"

"Don't know. Never been inside. Felix keeps it locked up tight." It was a lie to say I had never wondered what was inside the mystery room, but I had resigned myself to never knowing.

She didn't look pleased with my answer, but I had nothing else to offer. After I showed her where we kept the fireplace wood and the matches in the living room, we climbed the staircase.

“The bedrooms are that way,” I mentioned pointlessly, and then turned in the other direction. “And down here is the library.”

I opened the first door, showing us into the large office. Savannah gasped as she walked in. Floor-to-ceiling shelves lined the walls, filled with every kind of book imaginable for 1907. A leaning ladder allowed you to reach the top shelf. “How many of these have you read?” She dragged her finger along the spines, stopping to read a few of the titles.

“All of them,” I replied, sinking down into the overstuffed chair I had claimed as my own. The back wall of shelves was cut by two large windows. You could almost pretend you were outside, if you tried hard enough.

Savannah stopped, turning back to me with her mouth open. “All of them?”

I laughed. “I’ve had a lot of free time, sweetheart.” I knew the average person could read 200 to 300 words a minute. By my estimation, I had probably read about 200 million words. And those words had kept me from losing my mind.

“Can I read them?”

“Of course. They aren’t mine. They’re ours. You’re just as much a part of this house as I am.” I immediately realized my thoughtlessness as soon as I saw her frown. “Fuck, I’m an idiot. Ignore me.”

She offered me a small smile. “You’re right, though. I am a part of this house now. I might as well get used to it.” She paused, looking around the room. “For now anyways. Where

are those occult books you were talking about? Two sets of eyes are better than one.”

I showed her the small section of books about witchcraft—most readers in 1907 would’ve rather ignored them, but Felix seemed to be pretty open-minded in his choice of books. Ironical, considering how closed off he was now.

As Savannah stepped around me, I didn’t pull away when our shoulders brushed, enjoying the feeling of her body touching mine. We picked out a book, flipping through it as I actively tried to touch her fingers with mine, both of us pouring over the same page. I felt sparks, and wondered if she felt the same. Or maybe those feelings were reserved just for the under-thirty crowd.

Funny how my age had never bothered me before, I thought, as I watched Savannah tuck a stray lock of hair behind her ear. Before, my age had just been a number. Something to explain how many laps around the sun I’d completed. But now—with Savannah—I wanted it to be more. I wanted her to see me as more than just a father figure, someone watching over the three of them. I wanted to bring her pleasure, to make her gasp with excitement, and sigh in ecstasy.

I wanted to do those things. Not stand by and watch them happen. For the first time in my life, I might actually have to go after what I wanted.

I wanted Savannah, and I wanted her to be mine.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER II

Savannah

It didn't take long for my days to blur. It was hard to differentiate between one day and the next when you had an eternity spreading out before you. Eventually I stumbled into some semblance of a routine, and before I knew it a month had passed in the old Victorian house I now called home.

Mornings were spent with Luther in the library, scouring the books for anything that would help us escape. So far, we found absolutely nothing except for manuscripts on how to spot a witch, and what to do with said witch. Their methods usually included drowning them. The manuscripts were entirely unhelpful, since they said nothing about how to break a spell or lift a curse. Although, we did joke about how some days, drowning Felix wasn't entirely out of the question. We'd break for tea, and talk some more. I still hadn't mustered the courage to tell Luther his tea was weak to the point of drinking hot water. He seemed to really enjoy

the time we spent together, and I didn't want to sour his experience.

I was beginning to doubt Luther regarded me in any sort of romantic way. Whenever I made a move towards him, to sit closer, or to "accidentally" brush up against him, he seemed to retreat into himself. I figured that was just the way it was going to be. Luther was a fair bit older than I was, and probably wasn't interested in me as anything other than a platonic acquaintance. And even if he saw me as more than a daughter, or a friend, would he be interested in someone who was building relationships with other people? It was an awkward, novel situation I was afraid to push too far. I didn't want to fuck up my friendship with Luther, even if I did find him crazy hot.

He would probably know exactly how to touch me...His mustache would tickle the sensitive skin of my thighs as he sprawled between them. I could grip his broad shoulders as he bent those lips to my throbbing clit and...

Fuck, Savannah. Straighten yourself out. I needed to get a hold of myself. Luther obviously thought of me as just a friend, and seeing how we were stuck together for eternity, I needed to respect his decision.

I wasn't sure where Felix disappeared during the day. I had a feeling it had something to do with the locked room, but both Luther and Theo refused to share any information.

Luther stopped me from knocking on its door once. "Let it be, Savannah. Felix has his secrets. We don't get many in

here. You have to let it go,” he warned me.

Theo would pass me a drink, his crooked smile spelling out all kinds of trouble. “Don’t worry about it, sweet girl. What he does has no bearing on us.” These conversations usually ended with me taking my clothes off, and Theo stripping out of his jeans. The hooch probably helped.

Even though I couldn’t find Felix in the daytime, nights were a different story altogether. Sometimes, Felix would drag me willingly into his room. And sometimes, Theo would join us. These nights always left me longing for more. Even though I had Felix at night, I wanted to see the real him. The person he became in the daylight.

Some nights I spent alone, in the last bedroom in the hall I had claimed as my own. The room was completely green when I first took up residence. Green walls, green bedding, and green curtains framed the window looking out over the green garden. Luckily, I had found piles of fabric while pillaging the storeroom—silky pinks and purples, whites in the lightest of muslin, blood red velvets that matched the chairs. Amongst the fabric was an old sewing kit, and after I opened it, I danced the entire way upstairs.

I wasn’t an expert seamstress by any means, but one wasn’t a pro thrifter if they didn’t know how to sew a fair bit. It took longer than I expected it to, but eventually I finished sewing new drapes to hang, lightening the windows with the whitest of whites. Pink bed sheets replaced the avocado green, along with matching pillowcases. I sat on the floor

sewing the last pillowcase when the needle slipped, stabbing my finger in the process. Blood welled up, staining the edges of the pale fabric.

“Fucking hell,” I cursed.

I nearly jumped out of my skin when Felix poked his head into the room.

“Sorry,” I mumbled, shoving the injured finger in my mouth before the blood could soak any more of the fabric.

“Workplace hazard.”

I smiled, and asked him why he was in my room, but Felix only shook his head in response. Then he held up a finger. “One second.” He hurried out the door, and I waited on the floor, nursing my wound. Figures, Felix finally joined me in the middle of the day, only to run away the moment I said anything.

Outside in the hall, doors opened and slammed, and I was truly surprised when, a few minutes later, Felix rushed back into the room. He stuffed a massive ball of a rich black material into my arms. “Here. Maybe you can use this for some clothes for yourself.”

I unfolded what he had given me, realizing it was a stunning ball gown, trimmed with black lace. Mother of pearl buttons dotted the front, and a silk bow tied it all together at the waist. I knew a treasure when I saw one, and this dress was an absolute diamond, in impeccable condition. He must have had it made for Hannah, before the curse.

“Felix...I can’t destroy this. It’s too beautiful. It should be cherished.”

“It’s been gathering dust in my closet for over a hundred years.” His face clouded over. “The only way it could be treasured now is for you to make good use of it. I didn’t realize you could sew, and you must be sick of wearing our clothes all the time.”

Seeing as I had come into the house with only the clothes on my back, and my box of useless, random kitchen utensils, I had been borrowing clothes from the guys to make my jeans and shirt last longer. Felix obviously had a whole wardrobe when he moved in, and Theo had a backpack filled with clothes. I wasn’t sure what Luther had arrived with, and he still hadn’t told me his story, but he always seemed put together, especially compared to the perpetually shirtless Theo. I sat on the floor currently wearing my jeans and an oversized band T-shirt from the 90s. There was a hole in the armpit I was 99% sure had been there before Theo entered the house.

“I don’t mind your clothes.” All the same, I clutched the gown to my chest. I wasn’t sure I could cut this piece of history. It belonged in a museum, not on my body as shirts and pants.

Felix shook his head. “Use the dress, Savannah. It hasn’t meant anything to me in a really long time.”

“Okay.” I sighed, pulling the dress apart to examine all the bits and pieces. “But I can’t promise they’re going to look

good.”

For the first time, I heard Felix laugh—genuinely laugh. It was such a shock, my mouth hung open as I looked up at him. “I don’t give a shit what they look like, darling, as long as you don’t wear Theo’s godawful clothing anymore.”

I plucked at the offending shirt. “What’s wrong with Nirvana?”

“I don’t know what Nirvana is, but it smells like him.” He wrinkled his nose. “And then you come to my bed and smell like him.”

This time it was my turn to laugh. “You don’t like it when I smell like Theo?”

“Absolutely not,” he snapped. “I’ll share you with him, if I have to. But I’d rather you didn’t come to my bed smelling like drugs and booze. You’re not a heathen.”

I rolled my eyes. “Felix, you know I drink said booze with him.”

He crossed the room in two steps, kneeling down before me and taking my face into his hands. “What you do with him is none of my business. But when you’re with me, whether Theo is there or not, I have expectations I want to be met.”

I slapped his hands away from my face, and glared at him. “And I have certain expectations, too. Like, don’t tell me what to do. I’m sure you remember that conversation.”

“I remember it ending with you moaning my name as I held you up against the wall.” Felix smirked, leaning into my

face. He smelled like pine, and the soap we all used, mixed with something I couldn't put my finger on. I hated that I was looking forward to breathing it in for eternity.

"Funny, I'm recalling it differently."

"Don't push me, darling. If there's one thing I have less of after a hundred years, it's patience."

I frowned. "Shouldn't you have more of it? You know, after pining and waiting for all that time?" God, Felix was annoying. He thought so fucking highly of himself, it was honestly a wonder I slept with him at all. But the dick...oh, so good. I held my hand up to stop him from snapping back. "Look, thanks for the dress. I'm sure I can get some good use out of it. Let's leave it at that."

"Fine," his dark eyes darted to mine, unspoken words hanging between us. I expected him to say more, instead he gripped my face in his hands again, bringing my lips to his in a bruising kiss.

I didn't pretend I didn't want him anymore when he came to me. Pretending was futile, and a waste of both our time—even though we had endless amounts of it. Instead I kissed him back, channeling every emotion I had into our embrace. Anger, annoyance, and hopelessness tangled with longing and need. A moan slipped out of my mouth when his tongue skated along the seam of my lips. Eventually he pulled away, his fingers leaving my body last as he turned away and left my room without another word.

I carefully folded the dress and laid it on my bed, before I left my room to find Theo. Whenever I had a rough day, I sought Theo's gentle nature, the soothing pattern of his voice. I needed it now. As I took the stairs, I worked through what I knew about my time in the house, and what I knew about Felix in particular.

Sometimes it felt like Felix and I just used each other to get it all out of our systems. Sometimes it felt like more. Usually the nights when it was just us two, when we lay in his bed, tangled in the sheets, moonlight would drift in through the window, unfiltered by the curtains he never seemed to close. Felix would run his fingers through my hair, letting them trail down my bare back. My body reacted to him in ways I never expected, ways I don't think he anticipated. But these stolen moments in Felix's moonlight-dappled bed always felt different. Like we weren't ourselves, but someone else. People who weren't trapped in a cursed house, at each other's throats.

Felix would whisper secrets to me in these moments, and I would respond with stories of my own.

"My father taught me money was everything in this life," he murmured to me one night. "Any problem in the world could be solved with enough money." He picked his hand off my shoulder and gestured around us. "Now look where I am. I had more than enough money to do whatever I wanted. And I'm still here. Still trapped in these four walls. All the money in the world couldn't, can't, free me."

I tiptoed my fingers along his toned arm, enjoying the way the muscles tensed beneath the skin as I traveled down his body. "I grew up with no money. Dirt poor. We used to scour the couch cushions for loose change to buy a loaf of bread. I thought having money would change everything. Fix all of my problems, and set me up for life. And somehow, once I was lucky enough to fall into some money, I chose to buy this place. I'm not sure money has anything to do with luck anymore."

"Oh yeah?" Felix whispered, turning on his side. He watched me carefully, tracing my lips with a gentle touch.

"Yeah," I sighed, leaning into his hand. "I think money is just a means to an end. And luck is something we create. The rest of it...it's something we can choose to either embrace, or we can mourn. And maybe that's something we all need to learn. To embrace the house, and everything that comes with it."

He smirked. "I can think of something else I would rather embrace." His lips replaced his fingers, and his hands found their way to my waist. I don't think we spoke any more that night.

I was at the top of the basement stairs by now, knowing I'd find Theo with his makeshift distillery in the cool cellar. It was funny, the way my relationship had developed differently with each of the guys. I was closest to Theo, but I wasn't entirely convinced the alcohol didn't play a massive part. He was always ready with a cheerful smile and a warm

embrace. Even now as I joined him downstairs, he grinned and handed me a mason jar filled with the hooch I had come to enjoy. It had taken some time to get used to not being hungry. Eventually, like everything else, it had come to feel normal.

“Something on your mind, sweet girl?” He tugged on my hand, pulling me to his side to sit on the old carpet with him. His small setup of glass jars and basins lined the table in front of us.

I took a sip from my glass and nuzzled into his arm. “I was just thinking how different all my relationships with you are. And maybe I shouldn’t be sleeping with Felix anymore.”

In a different situation, I would never talk to my boyfriend about another man I was having sex with. But we had all gotten to know each other sexually, and Theo knew Felix for far longer than I had. I had to use the resources in front of me, and right now that was Theo.

Theo laughed, tossing his blond hair in his typical easy way. “Why do you say that? I’m never going to complain about sharing you, but I’ve seen your eyes when Felix is fucking you, Savannah. You love it. Those moans you make...goddamn.”

I covered my face to hide my embarrassment. I wasn’t sure I would ever get used to the fact one guy I was having sex with had seen me have sex with his roommate. But nothing was normal in this house, least of all the relationships. I took another swallow to hide my

awkwardness. “I do love having sex with him. With both of you. But Felix and I don’t have a relationship like you and I do. With Felix, our relationship seems to be purely when the sun sets.”

“Is that a problem for you?”

This is why I loved Theo, alcoholic or not. There was never any judgment from him. I knew a lot of it came from his childhood, and the life he lived after his parents’ death, but he never blinked an eye at anything I told him. I shrugged. “I guess not. But, like, today for example. He just came to my room and offered me a dress so I could make myself new clothes. Super nice gesture. Then we ended up fighting because he made a comment about how I was wearing your shirts.” I sighed. “It would be nice to know where I stand with him.”

“Listen here, sweet girl. Felix plays his cards close to his chest.” Theo pulled me tighter. “He’s been like that since I arrived. To him, just because we’re sharing a house doesn’t mean we need to share a life.”

I nodded, burrowing into his chest harder but saying nothing.

“If you want to have sex with Felix, have sex with Felix. If you want me to be there, I’ll be there with bells on. If you’re upset you’re not getting more from him, let me be the first to tell you that you get more than anyone else. And if you want to have sex with just Felix...well, you’ll find me

drowning my sorrows down here in the basement.” Theo offered me a playful smirk. I swatted at his shoulder.

I studied him. “You joke, but there’s some truth in that statement.”

Before he could respond, the steps creaked above us. We both turned our heads to see who was coming down. For the second time today, I was surprised to see Felix in the doorway.

“Am I interrupting something or can we talk?” he asked. Felix looked horribly uncomfortable.

Theo gave me a quick kiss on my forehead and got to his feet. “Should I leave?”

Felix shook his head, and took the rest of the stairs down. “No, stay. What I have to say involves you, too.”

I looked at Theo, concern written all over his face which I was sure was reflected on mine. Felix never came down to the basement, so the first thing we thought was something’s wrong. Horribly, awfully, terribly wrong. And when you were stuck in a house with no escape, anything wrong was the last thing you wanted to hear.

CHAPTER 12 *Felix*

I didn't like how the basement smelled, and I wanted to turn and run back upstairs. The sickly cloying odor of the alcohol Theo was always brewing turned my stomach, and I had never been one for sweets. Knowing what he was doing down here made it all the worse. But sober Theo was something I never wanted to see again if I could help it. The day he ran out of weed was an awful day for everyone. Theo lay in the washroom for most of the day, stinking up the kitchen with his sickness and filth. He cried and wailed, screaming for people I had never heard him speak of before. Luther would check in on him from time to time, bringing him wet cloths and glasses of water. He would come back into the kitchen shaking his head, feeling sorry for the poison Theo had put into his body himself. I kept my distance. The awful smell reminded me of bad memories, and choices I would rather put to rest.

Theo had told me weed wasn't addicting the day he convinced me to try it. And maybe it wasn't, on the outside. Maybe it was. All I knew was the rules were different inside the house. Here, everything became a liability. Even the things that weren't addictive became vices eventually. This house would discover everything that made your life worth living on the outside, and strip them from you-one by one.

Being under the influence was Theo's vice, and being sober was something his brain just couldn't handle. So when he discovered the stores of canned fruit in the pantry, and began carting it to the basement, I didn't say anything. When he stumbled up the stairs, drunk out of his mind the first time he successfully fermented it, I kept my mouth shut. I never spoke up, but I avoided the basement at all costs.

I had my vices necessary for survival, too. And I didn't want to think about if they were taken away from me.

Unfortunately, Savannah was quickly becoming one of them. Unfortunately, because I wasn't the only person in this house she wanted. And I was 99.9% sure I wasn't the only person she needed, either.

My addiction is what brought my heavy feet to the basement after our argument. I couldn't leave things unresolved, as much as I wanted her to come to me, begging for forgiveness and my attention. I was well aware she wouldn't, but the hope was nice. I had fucked up, and if

she ran into Theo's arms and never returned to me because of my judgment, I'd never forgive myself.

Savannah was sweet as sugar on the outside, laced with a steel that hurt your teeth if you bit too hard. I had made the mistake more than once in the beginning, expecting her to back down, and now I was afraid I had messed up my chances with her altogether. Maybe sex would be all it was, and I would have to be grateful for that. After all, it was better than spending night after night alone. But I needed to see if there was something I could do to fix our moonlight relationship first.

So there I stood in front of Theo and Savannah, nervously stuffing my hands into my pockets. The last time I had willed a woman to love me, I ended up cursed while she walked away, never to be seen again.

Savannah's eyes were wary, but she smiled up at me in the most beautiful way. I wanted to kiss her right then and there, but would she push me away if we didn't have the passion that came with our arguments and fights?

"What's up, Felix?" she asked, not an ounce of anger in her voice. I expected her to be furious from our earlier conversation, but she only sounded curious. I wondered what she had spoken to Theo about before I had come down. I wouldn't have been surprised if they were talking about me-maybe Theo was bad-mouthing me, trying to keep Savannah's beauty to himself.

I tried to smile back, my lips stiff from years of disuse. I was sure I either looked pissed or deranged. "I wanted to talk to you about what happened earlier. I uh...I wanted to apologize."

Her mouth dropped open so wide, I wanted to shove something inside it to see if she'd notice. My dick, for starters.

Bad fucking idea to imagine that standing in front of her. Now I was hard as a rock, picturing her on her knees in front of me, tongue and hand working together to draw moans from my mouth. Damn it all...

"You don't have to apologize, Felix. It was as much my fault as it was yours. I poke buttons I shouldn't." She shrugged, tossing her long blonde hair over her shoulder. It was loose today, cascading in a mess of honey gold waves. I didn't think it was possible for her to get any prettier than she was on her first day here.

"No, I do." I ran my thumb over my lip, wondering how to word what I needed to say next. Finally I just took a deep breath and spit it out as one long sentence. "I-just-wanted-to-say-that-you-can-fuck-whomever-you-want-and-I'll-still-want-to-be-with-you."

I breathed out, and looked down to find her staring at me in complete confusion. "I'm sorry, but I didn't catch one word of that. Slow down, and try again." She shuffled closer, and held my hand with an encouraging smile, like I was a nervous child in the school play.

“I wanted to tell you I don’t mind you and Theo spending time together. I don’t mind that we all have sex together. I don’t mind any of it. I still want to be with you, just the same.” Her hazel eyes were boring holes into my soul, and I had to glance away. I looked to the side, locking onto Theo’s amused expression, and immediately looked the other way.

“You want to be with me?” she whispered.

I snapped my head back towards her. “Of course I do, you silly girl. Whatever gave you the impression otherwise?”

“Ummm....basically everything you do?” Savannah laughed, and I glared at her until she stopped. She didn’t stop smiling though. “Seriously, Felix, most of the time if we’re talking, we’re fighting. And if we aren’t fighting, we’re fucking. Where is there room to realize you want to be with me when hot and cold are the only extremes we share?”

I sighed, squeezing her hand. “I guess I thought I showed you enough at night, when we were alone. I assumed you’d know.” I closed my eyes, a quick burst of pain shooting over my heart, an unwanted reminder of the last time I tried to show someone I cared. But Savannah wasn’t Hannah. “It’s been a while since I had to woo someone.”

She rolled her eyes. “You don’t have to woo me, Felix. We’re trapped in a house together. Pretty sure we’re going to see things no normal relationships see. No wooing is necessary.”

“Maybe not.” I shrugged. “But I have a lot to make-up for. I’m not exactly the easiest person to get along with.”

“No shit,” Theo muttered with a toss of his hair.

“Fuck off,” I spat, shooting daggers in his direction. Maybe this house would be better off with only three people again. I quickly fantasized about eliminating Theo, then Luther. Decisions, decisions...I came back to reality, sobering up as I looked at Savannah’s unimpressed face. “I’m sorry, darling. Give me time. I promise I can play nice.”

She gave me a smirk, eyes dancing with a playful glint. “Show me.”

“Show you what?” I laughed, wondering where she was going with this.

“Prove you can play nice.” Savannah pulled Theo’s hand, bringing him closer to both of us. “I want to see you enjoy fucking both of us, not just putting up with it.”

Theo scoffed, and I glared at him. I’d fucking show him I wasn’t just putting up with it. Just because not all of us had been wild and crazy in our pre-house life didn’t mean we didn’t know how to have a good time. Savannah tugged at my hand, directing my attention back to her freckled face, already flushed with whatever ideas were running through her mind. “What will convince you that I’ll do whatever it takes for you to be mine?” I trailed my hand down her face, tickling the soft skin of her neck. “Even putting up with the blond boozehound you seem so infatuated with.”

“Yeah?” Her ruby lips curled into a perfect smile. I bet they matched the rose bushes that climbed the walls of the

house, stretching without restraint while I remained trapped inside. “Then I want you to take control.”

I knew what she meant. Every time the three of us were together, I was a willing participant, but I always let Theo take the reins. He seemed to know what he was doing, and to be completely honest, I had never cared about his pleasure enough to take over. But if this was what she wanted, I would do it.

I didn’t look anywhere except into Savannah’s eyes when I dipped my head to hers for a kiss, accepting the challenge. She moaned as I moved my hands down her waist, sliding them to her hip.

“You want me to take control?” I tugged her shirt over her head, baring her perfect skin to both Theo and myself. I chased my fingers with my lips, outlining each one of her freckles with a kiss before I returned to whisper in her ear once more. “You want us to both take you, stretching you like the good girl you are?”

“Mmhmm...” She nodded, and her breath quickened. The smile was gone, nothing but seriousness reflected in her pretty eyes. She knew I meant business, but it was business she craved.

I looked over her, cocking my head to Theo. “Lie on your back.” He did so without question, a hungry smile growing. I stroked Savannah’s golden hair away from her face. She was so goddamn perfect. My perfect little whore who would do anything I asked, and she wanted me to take control. I

wasn't sure she knew what she was getting into. "You're going to straddle Theo now, darling. Ride his cock and show me how much you need both of us. If you beg really sweetly, maybe I'll help out."

"Gladly." She turned away from me, until I stopped her with a quick tug of her wrist. With my knuckle, I lifted her chin up towards me, and kissed her until she moaned beneath my lips. My free hand found her breast, and I dragged my nails across her nipple until it hardened beneath my touch. I slipped my hand lower, pushing her pants down over her hips. She kicked them off the rest of the way, and a quiet groan escaped me as my hand inched beneath her panties, and discovered how wet she was. I wanted to finger her until she screamed, lick her clit until she shook, but she had orders, and I wasn't going to get in the way of those.

I smirked, and gently pushed her towards Theo. "Go on."

Theo was already undressed, his impressive dick hard and waiting for Savannah's sweet pussy. I had never thought it to be much of a turn-on watching my woman fuck another man before, but I was drooling at the idea of watching Savannah slide down his thick cock, watching her eyes roll back in pleasure. Fuck, I wanted it more than I realized. I sat down on the chair next to Theo's distillery, so I was facing Savannah, looking right into her eyes.

Savannah straddled Theo as I had instructed, never losing eye contact. Then she moved, slowly lowering herself down

onto his cock. I was quite certain I had never seen anything half as erotic. Her mouth opened in a silent gasp, her eyes closed halfway as she sunk lower and lower. I was captivated, my erection straining against my pants as I watched this beautiful woman fucking the other man she wanted. Beneath her, Theo held her hips, steadying her as he moaned. Erotic as hell.

Her eyes fluttered shut as she rested, neither of them moving. But she wanted me to control the situation, so I would. "Show me how you ride him, darling."

She looked at me with a heavy-lidded stare, and then began rocking her hips against Theo. I couldn't stop myself from undoing my pants, fisting my cock and pumping it slowly as I watched the scene unfold. "Oh, fuck," she cursed, and leaned forward to rest her hands on Theo's shoulders as she continued to ride him. Theo pumped his hips underneath her, his fingers digging into her skin.

I was going to come in my hands like a virgin if I didn't stop myself. Thankfully for me, Savannah lifted herself back up again, rolling herself against Theo's cock, and leveling me with another heavy stare. "Fuck me, Felix. I want both of you."

Yes. Fuck, yes. I would never deny this woman anything she wanted, if it meant she would say my name like that. "Say it again."

She nodded, clutching at Theo as he moved beneath her. She moaned. "Please fuck me. I want to feel both of you

when I come.”

I stripped off the rest of my clothes and kneeled behind her. They both stopped moving as I situated myself, all of us breathing heavily. I slipped my hand beneath her legs, hissing my pleasure when I felt where Theo was still inside her. Why had I never realized sharing was so hot? I ran my finger through her wetness, dragging some of it back to lubricate her ass. I lined up my cock, easing my way in through the tight muscle. When she tensed, I worried that I was hurting her, but then she pushed back against me with a moan. She really wanted it. I sank inside her as slowly as I could, a groan tearing through my chest.

Savannah was the single most amazing woman I had ever met. I began pumping, slowly, so Theo could keep time with me. It didn't take long before Savannah's cries of pleasure filled the room. Delicious, but I couldn't wait for the moment she screamed my name when she came. I wrapped my hand around her chest, toying with her nipple. “Do you like that, darling? Do you like feeling both of us fuck you?”

“Fuck, yes,” she muttered, trying to lean forward, but I held her upright with my hand. “Fuck, Felix, I'm going to come.”

I fucked her harder, using her noises as my template. Soon the words turned into moans, and her hands grabbed at Theo's shoulders for all they were worth. Her body shook, and she went limp beneath my hands. Theo followed suit soon after, crying out Savannah's name as he chased his

release. I was last, seeing them both panting, moaning messes from following my instructions. I couldn't control myself anymore, and I came, filling Savannah's lush ass with my own release.

Goddamn. I pulled out of Savannah, and waited for her to lift off Theo before I tugged her against my chest. "You're amazing," I murmured. "Absolutely amazing." Now the sex was over I wanted to pretend it was just us, lying in my bed enjoying each other.

She smiled, about to say something, but she was cut off by heavy footsteps at the top of the basement stairs. Luther. He took one look at all of us, a tangle of bodies on the floor, and immediately ran back up the stairs.

Savannah looked horrified. She pushed herself off me, stumbling to her feet. "Luther, wait! It's not what it looks like."

"I'm pretty sure it's exactly what it looks like, darling." I ran my thumb over my lip, remembering the way she threw her shoulders back as she lost control. Delicious...

"Not now, Felix." If looks could kill, Savannah's would've already buried me six feet under. She tossed her panties and shirt back on-the awful black one I hated so much-and ran up the stairs.

I closed my eyes, her footsteps carrying her further and further away from me and closer to Luther. Goddammit. Next to me, Theo laughed. My eyes flew open. "Pray tell, what the hell is so funny about this situation?"

Theo got to his feet, unabashed in his nudity. His pants were located and pulled up before he bothered to look at me, still smiling. “I just can’t wait to see you share your precious darling with Daddy Luther, that’s all.”

I scowled, and if it wasn’t for my promise to Savannah to play nice, I would’ve knocked his perfect teeth out. “You have to share her, too,” I pointed out.

“True.” He nodded, still not seeming bothered. “But I’m okay with sharing. I’ve come to terms with the fact that a girl as special as her,-” he jerked his thumb in the direction of the stairs,-“probably needs more than I alone can give her. And I’m comfortable in knowing I please her enough to only have a part of her. Are you?”

He walked up the stairs, leaving me on the floor alone. I was pissed off, and wanted to break something. Preferably a 40-something-year-old with a mustache. Because Theo was right. Sharing Savannah with him was one thing.

Sharing her with Luther was on a whole other level.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 13 *Savannah*

I ran up the stairs as fast as my feet would carry me. I didn't need to see where Luther had gone to know where he would be.

The library.

As soon as our eyes had connected across the sprawl of naked bodies, a flush spread across my cheeks. It wasn't that I didn't want him to watch—because I did. Very much so, in fact. I had long dreamed about Luther's hands gliding over my body, slipping between my legs, finding the sweet spot that would make me cry his name.

Of course, I was well aware this was wishful thinking at best. Luther was older than the rest of us, and I couldn't help but feel he was more set in his ways than we were. Felix had been too, but we had worked through it. But the way Luther's face reddened when we locked gazes, and how fast he hurried up the stairs eliminated any lingering doubt from my mind. Luther was not comfortable with whatever

Felix, Theo, and I had going on. Disappointment weighed on my chest, knowing my dreams would remain just that—dreams.

I still didn't want what he had seen to impact our friendship. I cherished our quiet moments in the library, attempting to find any way out of this curse. I loved our talks in the kitchen over the weak tea he enjoyed so much. I didn't want to lose any of our special connection.

"Luther, wait!" I called, out of breath from the lack of regular physical exercise since I'd arrived at the house. "Luther, please."

I put my hands on my knees, catching my breath, and convincing myself I would do a better job of staying in shape from now on. Ahead of me, the door to the library clicked closed. I knew that man too damn well. All the men, really.

Everyone had developed their safe spaces, sacred to them. We all respected each other's spaces, too. I still wasn't sure what Felix's was, but I was determined to peel back the layer of his secret room one day—especially as he now claimed to want to be with me.

Luther's sacred space was the library. The weight of the world evaporated off his shoulders when he was surrounded by his books. He loved pointing out his favorites, leaving classics by my bedside table. He'd recite his favorite facts to me while we worked, his rough timbre cascading over me like a warm blanket. Because this was his safe space, I felt

like I was ruining something holy by barging in, fueled by my emotions.

Not for the first time, I wondered if the house had been this dramatic before I arrived. Surely tensions existed when you were stuck with people you wouldn't necessarily give the time of day to on the outside. But I couldn't avoid the elephant in the room—I had changed the all-male dynamic. I took a deep breath, and turned the handle.

I called out softly, so as not to disturb the peace. "Luther? Are you in here?"

Silence was my only response. Then, from the corner of the room where we had pulled two of the overstuffed wing chairs together, I heard him. "Over here." We had pulled them next to the window overlooking the garden while we did our useless research, as if the sunshine could inspire some helpful information that hadn't yet come to light.

I sighed, more in relief that he was talking to me than anything else. As I made my way over, I didn't bother waiting until I was in front of him to start my apology. "Luther, I am so damn sorry. It was rude of me to do private things in a common room. I should've kept it to the bedrooms. And I'm sorry you had to find out like that. I'm sure you're absolutely disgusted with me." I cringed at the memory as I rounded the chair to face him. I wasn't ashamed of what we had done, but for someone who wasn't used to it, it would be a shock. I didn't want to hurt his feelings, or make him feel left out.

Luther sat in his chair, looking me over like he had never seen me before. His brown eyes roved over my face, my messed-up hair. They ran down my arms, and across Theo's shirt. He reached my legs, and something unexpected happened. He laughed.

"What the hell is so funny?" I asked.

He pointed to my legs. "You seem to have forgotten your pants."

I followed his finger to my bare legs and immediately blushed. It was difficult to make a serious apology about sex when I was standing in front of him with just my shirt and panties on. "I'm sorry. And I'm sorry about what you saw downstairs."

"Why?" Luther ran his fingers through his curls, cocking his head at me. "Why are you sorry?"

"Um...well..." I took a deep breath, collecting myself as best I could while missing half of my clothes. "I'm sorry you had to see us all together like that. I'm sure it wasn't what you wanted to see. I promise to keep sex in the bedroom from now on."

He patted his knee. "Come here."

Daddy Luther, popped into my head, because his tone didn't leave any room for argument. But I couldn't think of him as a father figure anymore, not after his reaction. In the same breath, why was he asking me to sit on his lap? I tugged my shirt down as far as it would go, barely covering my ass, and sat gingerly on the edge of his knee. He put his

hand on my leg, his palm large enough to warm a good portion of my bare skin. His touch on my body, when I was still turned on from the events in the basement, was enough to send a new rush of warmth to my pussy. I was certain he could feel it, and I was too embarrassed to look him in the eye.

“Why do you think I didn’t want to see you?” he whispered.

“You just seemed weirded out. I felt horrible.” I sighed, looking down at my knees.

“Oh, sweetheart,” he murmured. “Is that what you thought?”

His hand gripped my thigh reassuringly, and I nodded. “I guess I just...” For some reason, I felt the need to explain myself, to make sure he understood why I was doing what I did. “I needed something real to cling on to, you know? Everything I had taken for truth was snatched away the moment I stepped foot in here. But sex, sex is still real. Pleasure is still the same. It keeps me grounded.”

“What even is reality? Do you need something tangible for it to be real?” Luther’s hand released my thigh, and instead began stroking my skin in a hypnotic pattern. I leaned into his touch, only half listening when he continued. “I imagine just the thought of my hands on your skin while you dream at night feels pretty damn real to you.”

I sat up straight, but he clung to my legs. There was no way he was saying what I thought he was saying. Did Luther

want me the way I wanted him? Had I misread the entire situation? There was only one way to find out.

I finally turned to face him, my knees resting against his taut stomach. "I was worried you didn't want to be my friend anymore," I murmured, watching his lips.

Luther's mouth curled into a smile. "I don't want to be your friend anymore."

He trailed his fingers up my leg, brushing against the edge of my T-shirt. My body was dynamite with a short fuse, and Luther held the match. I couldn't breathe as his fingers inched higher. Maybe he was still just toying with me, all of this a big joke to him. He would laugh as I crumbled beneath his touch, and I'd never be able to look him in the eyes again.

He leaned into my space, lips pressing against my ear. "I want to be your lover, sweetheart. I've wanted to fuck you since the day you walked into this godforsaken house."

My heart stopped along with my breath. I'd died and gone to heaven.

His hand brushed against the edge of my panties, where not only my desire, but also a combination of Theo and Felix soaked through. "I've wanted to take you into my bedroom and hear you scream my name loud enough for the others to hear. I wanted you to beg for me. I wanted to feel every inch of this tight little pussy." His finger pushed my panties to the side, stroking my slick folds.

Holy shit. Was this actually happening, or was I dreaming? There was no way all three guys wanted me the way I wanted them, let alone were okay with me wanting all of them. That was insane. Right?

But Luther was removing my panties, slipping them down one leg and then the other. His hand resumed stroking, the tip of his finger sliding inside my still-wet pussy with every slow push. Each time it slid in, I would gasp, and my legs would open a bit more, inviting him closer.

“Fuck, Luther. I didn’t think you wanted me like this.” My breath caught as his finger dipped deeper, teasing my g-spot. Yeah. He knew what he was doing.

“Oh, quite the opposite. I’ve spent every night dreaming about what you would feel like wrapped around my cock.” A second finger joined the first, stroking me slow and hard. If he touched my pulsing clit, I would come apart in his hands. From the expression on his face, he knew it, too. “Open your legs for me, sweetheart.”

I was going to orgasm before he even put his cock in me. I widened my stance, resting my knees against either side of the chair. Luther shuffled his pants down, freeing his impressive dick. Fuck, I wanted him. I wanted him to use me hard with his cock, reducing me to nothing before I begged for release.

He looked up at me with a small smile, teasing me now with the tip of his cock. I couldn’t control my breathing, or the needy moans I made. “You ready?”

I nodded. I shouldn't have been ready for sex again, not after the basement. But this was Luther, and his cock was edging inside me, stretching me in the most wonderful way. I threw my head back and moaned as he sank deeper. Theo and Felix weren't small by any means, but I was going to struggle taking Luther. "Holy fuck, Luther, where have you been hiding this?"

Luther leaned forward, resting his head against me as he continued to lower me down. "Relax, sweetheart. I promise it'll feel so fucking good."

I was already well aware. Getting there was the problem. I pressed down another inch, slowly feeling the pressure shift into pleasure. I closed my eyes. "Fuck me," I whispered.

"That's the idea." I opened my eyes to see Luther's goofy grin. I shook my head at him, and he laughed. "What? I'm not allowed to make a joke while I'm fucking you?"

"Not if it's going to distract you from the task at hand."

He smirked, his eyes glossy with need. "Believe me. I can do both." He pushed his hips up to meet me, the last bit of his cock sinking inside. I cried out as his tip reached places I didn't know existed. "I've made you laugh. Now I'm going to make you come."

Luther placed a hand on either side of my waist, lifting me up and down on him. Each time he pulled me up, I'd groan with the loss of friction, and every time he'd pull me down, I'd cry his name. I was still sensitive from the crazy basement sex, so it wasn't long before I felt the familiar

pleasure build. I locked eyes with him, and I knew he knew. He picked up speed.

I could feel him everywhere, stretching, fucking, hurting in such a good way. The pressure was becoming unbearable. He watched me, his eyes growing darker as he controlled his own release. And then my name slipped out between his lips, a combination sigh of relief and moan of pleasure.

That single word was my undoing. I gripped his shoulders as I shuddered and came, my body riding the waves of my orgasm. Beneath me, Luther gripped my skin as he pistoned his hips into me, his cock driving impossibly deeper. He cried my name again, this time more of a growl than a prayer, and he clung to me as he came.

Holy hell. We had been missing out.

I rested my head against his shoulder, enjoying the way it moved with his breath. Luther's touch had been soothing since day one, and sex with him had made it even better. I turned to look at him, his hand still stroking my calf.

"Luther?" I asked, a thought occurring to me.

"Yeah, sweetheart?" He looked at me, those big brown eyes reflecting nothing except love and devotion. How had I missed those emotions all this time?

I snuggled deeper into his embrace. "If you weren't weirded out, why did you run?"

He sighed, and tapped his fingers on my leg for a minute while he thought. "Have you ever had a dream so big you thought it would never come true?"

“Yeah, of course.”

Luther’s hand paused on my skin. “Seeing you downstairs with both of them was one of those dreams for me. And having it come to fruition...that was just too much for me to handle all at once.”

I pulled away, wide eyed. “You never thought you would see a woman with more than one man?”

“I grew up in a different time, Sav. Differences were shunned, not embraced.” His face tightened, and I ached to take those bad feelings away, one by one. “By the time I reached my forties, free love was a thing. But growing up, it was hidden away.”

I rested my hand against his cheek, feeling his jaw working and then softening beneath my touch. “Will you tell me about your dream?”

He leaned into my hand, giving me a soft smile. “Will you listen?”

I smiled back, leaning down to kiss him. “Every day for the rest of our cursed lives.”

OceanofPDF.com



CHAPTER 14

Luther

I think I had always been looking for more, since the very beginning. Maybe it was why I was always so desperate for love. Something tangible to cling to. Something that would never leave me. Because love was unconditional, right? True love didn't judge, or however the phrase went. So true love was what I was searching for, from the youngest age I could remember. Something bigger than I was, bigger than life. Love had to be more.

And so I set off on my young life, searching for love in every nook and cranny possible. I was seven the first time I kissed a girl. I expected it to set off fireworks and emotions like never before. But it didn't really feel all that different from when I had practiced on my arms in the bathroom at home. It was missing something. That more factor. Lightning and sparks, fuel to keep me alive.

Something had to be wrong with her. Maybe even at seven years old, Suzy from down the street was destined to

be a terrible kisser. Despite my lackluster first attempt, I kept kissing girls. I figured it would get better eventually.

I don't remember how old I was when I realized maybe the girls weren't the problem. I was.

The first time I fell in love was 1946 and I was sixteen. A clerk at the grocery store, with the most dazzling smile. Your first love is something else, isn't it? I had kissed dozens of girls by this point, but this was different. This was more. This was love. Of course, there was no possible way for us to be together forever, but I still dreamed about it at night. What our life would be like. For an entire summer, I kept offering to go back to the grocery store whenever my mom forgot something. My hand was on the door before she could even get money from her purse, laughing before she'd send me out for milk or eggs or whatever she needed that day.

James. He was the checkout clerk at the Piggy Wiggly, and he was twenty years old.

I didn't consider myself to be different, as I heard my mom speaking about other kids in the neighborhood she heard rumors about.

I liked girls. I liked kissing them. Dating them.

I just also happened to like boys. Boys like James, with clean-cut looks, and smiles that stopped my heart. Unlike my mother, I didn't think anything about me was off.

Eventually the summer ended, and James went back to college, and the memories of my first love faded away. But the feelings of what it would be like to have more never

changed. They never left. As I took my first serious girlfriend to the movie, scenarios played in the back of my mind.

What if she sat on my left, and my boyfriend sat on my right?

I should've been drafted for the war, but being legally blind in my left eye meant I couldn't serve my country. Another flaw in the eyes of "normal" society. Instead, I started college, and found myself checking out the football team--and their cheerleader girlfriends.

Who would be better kissers?

College ended, and I began to attend the weddings of my classmates and friends who had found love while at university. As usual, I was still alone, unable to hold down a girlfriend for longer than a few months. I was still looking for more, longing for something I was beginning to feel was impossible.

In 1952, fresh out of school, I moved back to my hometown, and landed a job as an accountant. It wasn't a special job by any means, but I had long given up on special. It paid the bills, and that was the important part. Special was a dream, nothing more. I began dating a girl, a "nice" girl by my mother's standards--Carol. And if I couldn't be happy, at least she could be. There was absolutely no chemistry between us, and we had gone no further than a chaste kiss on the lips in the movies. But it was safe, and it would be a practical, reliable marriage. A proposal was imminent, a house in the suburbs with a white picket fence,

and 1.5 perfect children. My future spread out before me, successful, bland, and absolutely nothing I wanted.

My father took me out for drinks one evening, “man to man.” He passed me my pint of beer, grinning at me like he had never done so before. I thought he was going to talk to me about my job, about how proud he was of me for my recent promotion. Instead he started talking about Carol.

“I’m so damn proud of you, son. At first, I wasn’t sure about you. But you’re a real man now, about to settle down with a real woman.” He took a long sip of his beer, still smiling. “Your mother and I would be honored to help you with whatever you need—an engagement ring, the wedding. You name it.”

I took a more reasonable sip of my own beer, mulling over what he had said. Something wasn’t sitting right with me, but I wasn’t sure I wanted to hear the answer. “What do you mean by ‘real man’?”

He rolled his eyes, like he couldn’t believe that was what I was focusing on. “You always hear those stories about people who realize their kids are...different. That their romantic afflictions aren’t normal.”

By this point in my life, I understood what ‘those people’ were called, having attended a university far more open-minded than my hometown. “You mean gay?”

I knew what I was doing. I was goading him. My father and I had never had a solid relationship, but the moment it

seemed like I was going to get married all of a sudden we were best friends? No thanks.

“Don’t start, Luther. Your mother and I are just happy you’ll have a nice, successful, normal life. That’s all.” He gave me a look that spoke more than his words, and I knew what he was saying.

Don’t ruin this for me. Act normal. Pretend to be happy.

I shook my head, draining my pint as fast as I could. My father watched in silence. I said nothing, and rose to my feet. “Thanks, Dad. I’ll let you know when the wedding is.”

How had it taken me so long to realize my parents weren’t the good people I had always thought they were? My mom went to church every Sunday and made freezer meals for those who weren’t able to cook for themselves. My dad was always ready to give the shirt off his back to people in need. Except that night at the bar, I realized something. They were always willing to help, as long as the person was normal. Respectable. Abided by their moral code.

I went home and got drunk, figuring out ways to break things off with both Carol and my parents. I wasn’t sure I wanted to be normal anymore. I wanted to be myself.

Turns out, I didn’t have to make the decision, because fate had other plans. When I showed up at work the next day, we were called into a meeting to welcome the new transfer from the sister company. I shouldn’t have been surprised when James walked into the room, smiling at my bosses. He was older than he had been at the Piggy Wiggly, dressed

like a man now, not a college kid in an apron, but even more handsome. When our eyes locked across the room, I realized I hadn't been dreaming when I had thought we shared a connection.

He approached my desk and asked me to show him the ropes at lunch. I readily agreed, my heart already thumping. James was here, in front of me. I couldn't believe my eyes.

Things started out the same way all things do—slowly. We would share stories and jokes over lunch, always ready to team up for the more difficult jobs. I began to invite him over for dinner with me and Carol, our marriage proposal put on hold with my newfound friendship. Except it wasn't a friendship, and never had been. It was an infatuation. James was the something more I never thought I could have. And now here he was, leaning over my shoulder more closely than he needed to, brushing my fingers when he passed me spreadsheets. And Carol was nothing more than a blip on my radar, something I needed to take care of from time to time.

One night we were working late at the office with another colleague, who had run out to pick up dinner. James sat next to me, our fingers stained with ink from the numbers that no longer made any sense. He stretched back, the chair creaking. I looked up from my work to see a curious expression on his face. I put down my pen as he opened his mouth. "If I'm being completely honest with you, Luther, I was surprised to see you with Carol."

I smiled, looking down at my hands. "Why's that?"

He shrugged, a broad shoulder stretching the limits of his dress shirt, our suit coats long since tossed over the chairs. "I guess I never really saw you settling down."

I had played this game before. I knew how to read between the lines. The unspoken words hung between us. I never really saw you settling down with a woman.

I met his gaze, suddenly tired of games. I wanted more. I wanted James. "I wanted to kiss you the first time I saw you at the Piggy Wiggly."

James's expression didn't change. "I know."

With those two simple words, he leaned the creaky office chair forward and pressed his lips against mine.

Emotions struggled for dominance in my brain. Shock. Pleasure. Worry. Love. Eventually I tossed them all to the side and kissed him back, throwing my arms around his neck as he did the same. I had kissed men before—stolen embraces in storerooms and closets, away from prying eyes. But this was different. This was James.

Of course, it was the same moment our colleague decided to return, the paper bag of sandwiches he held hitting the floor with a splat. I don't know what I was expecting when he saw us together, but I guess you could say I was full of a foolish hope he wouldn't care.

My boss called us both into his office the next day—separately. We were both let go. I had only a moment to lock glances with James as he was escorted out of the building.

We both knew this was the end. It was too dangerous to try and find ways to be together now that we were caught. Our town was too small to let something like this go. It was the last time I saw him, offering me a sad smile as he walked away from me forever.

Our town was also too small for Carol to not find out. She threw a vase at my head as she screamed and ranted, telling me how I had ruined her. I was stupid to think she would've ever been okay with more.

My parents called me next, telling me not to bother coming home now that I couldn't afford my apartment. I wasn't their child anymore. They didn't care to hear my explanation, or let me tell them how I felt, the emotions churning within me.

In the space of a few days, I had lost everything. My job, my future with the white picket fence and 1.5 perfect children. My family. My more. I couldn't find work in my town, not with everyone talking about me, and knowing exactly why I was let go. I packed everything that would fit in my small suitcase, and jumped on the next bus leaving town. I didn't care where it was going as long as it was away.

I stopped when I ran out of money, praying I was far enough away to make a new life. About the same time I found the only job that would hire me without a single reference or connection-the post office.

I found a sense of comfort in being a postman. It was oddly satisfying to be connected to people in a way they couldn't fathom. I had control over the information they received or didn't receive. I could do what I wanted with it. I always delivered it unscathed though, as tempting as it was to see what was hidden in the unassuming brown paper envelope, or written in the thin white letter sealed with a red lipsticked kiss.

Unfortunately, I couldn't outrun my past. I was an unmarried man with no connections to the town, and no interest in any of the women who threw themselves in my path. Of course, I couldn't tell them I was looking for more than they could offer, so the rumors would start. And once the rumors started, I would leave.

A new town, a new post office, and a new life. This was the pattern my life took for the next two decades, until I ended up in the town outside of the woods. Forty-something with no family. No wife. No kids. No white picket fence. Just me, and a sack of letters and parcels. The only difference was this time, I liked this town. I liked the people. And the butcher reminded me of James. His wife would shoot me looks suggesting they both might be looking for more, too.

Before I could dig deeper, the rumors began again. The kids began their pranks, having heard their parents talk about me, trying to run me out of town themselves. This time, though, I wasn't ready to leave. So when the mayor's bratty son handed me a package addressed to the house

everyone declared was haunted, I merely smiled. Later I would find out that the house wasn't on the postal routes anymore. But then, all I wanted was to know more about the handsome butcher and his pretty wife. I wanted to dig my feet into the earth, and settle down. A silly haunted house wasn't going to stop me.

So maybe this was where I made my stand. With a package, and a dare. I'd set out to deliver the parcel, and bring a souvenir back for the kid. Something creepy from the decrepit house, something to show him I wasn't afraid. I slid the box into my sack and waited until the rest of the mail for the day was delivered. The sun was still high in the sky when I set out on the small path out of town.

I knew where the house was—everyone did. Kids dared each other to enter the gated courtyard, closing their eyes for ten seconds while their friends ran and hid, leaving them alone in the silent woods. My footsteps kept me company as I walked, the package banging against my thigh in my nearly empty bag. I thought about what I would bring back for the asshole kid. A candlestick maybe, or a creepy portrait. I thought about his face when I handed him my trophy. I thought about my newfound life, and what the butcher and his wife were like behind closed doors.

I never once thought that I'd never leave the house again.

CHAPTER 15 *Savannah*

Luther's story sat with me for weeks.

I wondered how similar his story was to mine, or to Theo's or even to Felix's. Because hadn't we all been looking for more? Wasn't the search for more what brought us all to this fucking house in the first place?

Theo was looking for luck. Felix was looking for love. Luther was looking for acceptance. And me? I wasn't sure what I was looking for anymore. Maybe I had been looking for more just the same.

It was true, sex had never been great for me before the house, but I had just assumed I was one of those people who didn't love sex. My time in the house had made me realize just how wrong I was. It was entirely possible I had been like Luther my entire life, and just never realized it, craving the attention of more than one person. Desperate for the love of more than one soul.

Now I had three of them. Although none of us had spoken the “L” word yet, I was certain it wasn’t far off. If they were anything like me, they were worried about fucking up the dynamics of the house more than we already had. Because if things went sour, it wasn’t like we never had to see one another again. We were stuck with each other for the rest of eternity. The house itself didn’t scare me, but the thought of living with people I didn’t get along with did.

Fall turned into winter, heavy clouds teasing us with snow. By the time Christmas came around, I would’ve been in the house for almost four months. Four months down, a lifetime to go. Already my skin was feeling itchy, leaving me ready to claw at the walls.

I lay on Felix’s bed as he stroked my hair. On this day, a few weeks after Luther’s story, I had found my way there. Eventually Luther or Theo would come looking for me, and find me in here, but for right now it was just the two of us. Felix and I were growing more comfortable with each other, with less arguing when we tried to speak outside of sex, or on our own. Not that it didn’t happen. It just happened less.

I turned over in his lap, meeting his eyes. “How do you do it?”

“Do what exactly?” He continued to stroke my hair back with a light touch. “That could refer to a whole host of things.”

“How do you not lose your mind in here?” My body felt like it was filled with an energy that had nowhere to go. Sex

helped expel some of it, but the constant influx of renewed energy left me jittery. My research in the library with Luther was turning up dead end after dead end, and I was growing more anxious to find some kind of solution to get us the hell out of here. We had explored every option from exorcism to sacrifices and back again. None of it made sense, and none of it added up. There had to be something. Every curse had a remedy.

Felix stilled his hand, his eyes growing soft. "I've been in this house for a long time, darling."

I sighed. "I know. And that's why I want to know how you've done it. How have you remained sane?"

"I didn't have a choice." He shifted under me, pulling me up to sit on his lap. "When you don't have a choice, you learn to survive. But you want to know my best advice?"

"Absolutely." I nodded, eager to learn his secret. I didn't want fifty years to go by and for me to have nothing solid to cling to anymore, my sanity nothing but shattered glass beneath my skin. "Tell me."

"I think the moment you try to figure out how not to lose your mind is when you go crazy." Felix took my chin in his fingers, tugging my face close. "Take it day by day, darling. Today, I love spending time with you. Tonight, I'm going to fuck you until you scream my name."

There was a knock at the door. Still held by Felix's tight grip, I couldn't turn my head to see who was there.

“Am I interrupting?” At the sound of Luther’s voice Felix tore his stare away from me.

“Not at all. I’m just telling Savannah how I’m going to make her pretty little mouth scream my name tonight. Care to help?”

I knew Luther and Felix’s relationship was more strained than Theo’s with either of them, but they attempted to put it aside when we were together. They knew I didn’t want to choose between them, and neither of them wanted to lose me. So a strange sort of stalemate was formed between the two, an agreement to not discuss the troubles beneath the surface. I was certain it would eventually come to a head, but for now, it worked. And fuck if the two of them weren’t hot as hell when they worked together. Their energy was something else altogether, passion and regret pushing all of us towards epic climaxes.

“Do you even need to ask?” I turned my head to see a smile spread across Luther’s face and a devilish glint shining in his eyes. He leaned against the doorframe, crossing his arms across his broad chest. By now, I knew that look all too well.

Felix turned my head to face him, kissing me hard until I gasped. His tongue slipped inside, exploring my mouth. He dragged his hand down my side, tickling my ribs and waist, before he teased between my legs. A finger pulled my panties to the side, allowing him to slide along my pussy. Back and forth, never long enough to give me any release,

but enough to make me pant and soaked in moments. The contrast of his hard kisses and delicate fingers were the perfect definition of Felix, and I would never have enough. I tangled my fingers in his hair, forgetting anyone else was in the room until he pulled back and smirked. "Lie back on the bed for me, darling. Head at the end." He was definitely getting better at taking the lead.

Now I understood what made each of them tick, and by some strange series of events, Felix had begun to enjoy taking control of our...group activities. It usually ended well for me, so you wouldn't catch me complaining.

"Good girl," he murmured, pressing a quick kiss to my lips. As I separated myself from him, he pulled my panties down and off-my one remaining article of clothing tossed to the side of the bed.

I lay on my back, exposed and vulnerable. I never felt afraid though. Not with these men, as hard as their exteriors might be.

Felix moved between my legs, stroking the tender skin of my inner thighs with a moan of pleasure. "You're so goddamn delicious. I could eat every part of you, you know that?"

My hips raised of their own accord when his hands got too close. Felix only laughed.

"Make her beg, Felix," Luther demanded from the corner of the room. I was excited to see what Felix was going to make him do, where he was going to be. Would I get to suck

him off, his thick cock filling my mouth, making me drool and gag? Or would Felix flip me, letting them both use me the way they did best.

I caught Felix's eye, and he grinned. "I plan to."

Felix was so beautiful when he was nude. The lines of his long, lean body were something carved from marble, and I couldn't help but stare when the moonlight caught his skin. Half in the dark, half in the light-kind of like us.

He called to Luther, instructing him to stand at the edge of the bed. Luther stripped off his clothes, and I opened my mouth in anticipation, ready to take as much of him as I could. "No, darling. I meant it when I said I wanted you to scream my name. And as pretty as you look with a dick in your mouth, I won't be able to hear you."

Felix leaned over my body, his mouth hovering over my aching clit, his breath teasing me with every pant. Fuck, I needed someone to touch me-now. The waiting was torture, and the teasing was driving me insane.

"Use your hand. Then I can hear you scream my name when I make you come, and I get the added bonus of seeing your beautiful body covered with Luther when you make him come."

"Mmm..." I wished I could be a fly on the wall watching the entire scene. This couldn't be my real life, being used by two of the most delicious men in the world. Luther stepped closer, and I wrapped my hand around his cock. He groaned immediately, thrusting on instinct. At the same second, I slid

my hand up and down his hard shaft, Felix dropped his head to my pussy, and pressed his lips to my clit.

“Holy fuck. Please, God, fuck.” I was unable to tear my eyes away from the sight as Felix teased my swollen clit with his tongue.

He backed away for a moment, looking up at me with those big dark eyes. “Not bad. But nowhere near a scream.”

I chewed on my lip, swirling my hand up and down Luther’s cock as he rocked his hips and moaned my name. Between my legs, Felix was sucking my clit into his mouth, and I cried out, arching my back. “Fuck’s sake, Felix!”

“Almost there,” he whispered, before pressing his mouth against me again. The things that man could do with his tongue should’ve been illegal. My hand sped up, and Luther bent over slightly, taking a handful of my hair into his hands.

He grunted, pushing his cock harder into my hand. “I’m going to come, Sav.”

I was ready for it, my body building in pleasure, too. If I timed it right, we could come together. I thought I had everything under control, even as my body spiraled towards release. Then Felix slipped two fingers inside my pussy, curling them up. I screamed out his name as I came on his hand and his tongue. “Oh, fuck, Felix!”

“You’re so perfect, darling. So fucking perfect,” Felix cooed, pulsing his fingers as he rocked me through my release.

I was so disoriented with my orgasm I didn't realize Luther was moaning my name as he came, hot strands of cum shooting across my face. Holy fuck, that shouldn't have been as hot as it was. But knowing Luther was coming in my hand to the sight of Felix getting me off was a damn heady feeling.

I lay there, my breathing returning to normal. Before I could open my eyes, I was pulled up to my knees, thrust on all fours. "I'm not done with you yet," Felix muttered.

I was still riding my high, and even the gentle touch of his hands between my legs turned me into a moaning mess all over again. Then his hand was gone, replaced by the head of his cock. He pushed his way inside my pussy.

"Do you like this, Savannah?" Felix whispered as he fucked me from behind. "Do you like knowing I'm going to fill your sweet pussy with my cum, as Luther's covers your face?"

"Mmm..." I groaned and rocked back against his thrusts. I was so sensitive and his hard pace was going to send me over the edge again.

A hand around my neck forced me to open my eyes, and I found myself staring at Luther. His gaze was clouded with lust and desire, and when he kissed me, I cursed into his mouth.

The sensations were everywhere, and I was going to explode. Felix was thrusting into me, his own noises telling me he was close to release. Luther kissed me so sweetly,

and the pleasure from my previous orgasm still flooded my veins. Behind me, Felix smacked my ass. “Come one more time for me.”

He slapped my ass again, and my body shattered into a second orgasm around his cock. If Luther hadn’t been in front of me, holding my chin, I would’ve fallen face-first into the bed. It was only another moment or two before Felix was shaking, clutching onto my hips as he came.

Felix was the first to pull away, then Luther pulled me on top of him. I was exhausted, body and mind. Felix returned with a damp cloth, gently cleaning my face and between my legs. Once he was done, he collapsed into bed next to us. I half expected him to kick Luther out, but he must have been so sated with pleasure the thought never occurred to him.

I rested my head on Luther’s chest, letting him wrap his arms around my body. My brain wasn’t ready to turn off just yet—a hazard of having endless time—and I still had more questions for Felix. He had distracted me with sex before I was ready.

“Felix?” I asked.

He didn’t raise his head off his pillow, but reached back and patted my arm. “Yes?” His voice betrayed his exhaustion, and I felt bad for keeping him up. Not bad enough to sate my curiosity, though.

“What were the exact words the old woman told you when she cursed you?”

I could practically hear his eyes roll. “You’re asking me this now?”

I nodded. “I wanted to earlier, but your tongue distracted me. I feel like it could really help narrow down our research. Luther and I have just been going in circles for weeks on end, but if we knew the exact words, it might help us know what we’re looking for.”

“You’re not going to break the spell, Savannah,” he muttered.

I scooted away from Luther and wrapped my arm around Felix’s back. “Please. Just let me try. I have to do something.”

Felix sighed. “She said a lot of things, but if I remember correctly,” he scrunched up his face, “the last thing she said was ‘You will forever share a lifeforce, each of you keeping the other alive.’ Happy now? Can I sleep?”

“Yes.” I pressed a kiss to his back, rolling over between them. Eventually his breathing evened out, and so did Luther’s. I stayed awake for most of the night, watching the moonlight cross from one side of the room to the other. Only one thought circled around and around in my mind.

How could a person keep a house alive?



CHAPTER 16

Then

To me, the most terrifying idea in the entire world was being sober. Being sober in general was horrible. Being sober while being trapped in a cursed house with only my thoughts was downright horrifying.

Unfortunately, it was looking more and more like a reality. When I first arrived in the house, I had stretched my stash of weed as far as it would go, desperate to cling to the smallest of highs. I tore through my backpack when it ran out, sobbing as I tossed empty prescription bottle after empty bottle, knowing I had gone through my supply of pills before I had even entered the house. There had to be bleach or some other kind of household cleaner somewhere in the house. Huffing it would probably kill me, but at least I'd die high.

I soon decided against it, not knowing how said cleaner would kill me. There were pleasant deaths and not so

pleasant deaths, and I didn't want to go out begging for mercy.

I knew Felix and Luther thought I was going through withdrawal when I spent days in the bathroom, throwing up and shaking. But it was less a detox of my body, and more of a detox of my mind-knowing I was going to have to return to sobriety. The thought made me physically ill.

The first few days after that were rough. I was in a terrible mood, and avoided them both at all costs. I was angry and miserable, craving an escape I knew I couldn't have. During my explorations of new hiding places, I discovered the stash of canned fruit.

I had made toilet wine before-hooch, to the posh-as a dare when I was a teenager. We heard rumors it would make you go blind, and being the stupid kids we were, we wanted to see how true it was.

It was a simple enough process. So I collected bits and pieces, creating my distillery in the basement. First you made your must, a mixture of pulped up fruit or whatever else you could find. Luckily, Felix had plenty of canned fruit. He also had lots of the other important ingredient, yeast. Put the two of those together in some glass jars where the yeast can ferment the fruit, and wham bam thank you ma'am, you have hooch. Just don't ask me to explain the science behind it. I didn't realize I had to add sugar to make it more palatable, but I didn't care much at first. All I knew was it got me drunk.

My setup had served me well for nearly two decades. But my high was about to come to a complete stop, because my stash of fruit was nearly gone. I counted the jars of preserves, knowing I had barely enough for another week, maybe two if I stretched it. And this time, I had more than just my high to lose. Would Savannah still love me if I wasn't the easy-going, loveable dude she had come to know me as?

We hadn't said I love you yet, but who were we kidding? It was only a matter of time. But she loved the me she thought I was. Happy. Unbothered. Easy. Just like everyone else had before the house. They never loved the real me. The unlucky Theo. They only wanted a piece of the lucky Theo, the one who passed out hooch before home room, and never turned down a dare.

I counted my jars again, praying for another one to miraculously appear. A ridiculous idea, really. Curses were the only thing that happened out of thin air. Blessings you had to work for.

I stretched my last few jars as far as I could, thinning down the hooch until it was more water than alcohol. It was enough to keep me going. But the day still came, the day of the first snowfall of the season. I ran my tongue around my mason jar, desperately trying to lick up any remaining high I could. But it was useless. It was gone. Dried up, like my hope, my good luck, and any chance I had with Savannah.

The pain of reality was already stalking me, taking over control of my body now that the alcohol was no longer king.

“For fuck’s sake,” I cursed, kicking over the dining room chair that held my small workshop. The leg was ancient, and shattered beneath my foot, splinters spraying every which way. The bowls and cups that served as my distillery fell to the floor, smashing on impact. “Fuck it all. Fuck this fucking shit. Fuck!”

I slammed my fist into the concrete wall, and swore as nothing but a bit of dust crumbled away. My knuckles swelled immediately, blood dripping from the torn skin. I hated this house. I hated everything in it.

I licked the blood off, cradled my injured hand to my chest and trudged up the stairs. Thankfully, I had come down to the basement early. Nobody witnessed my meltdown and I was able to escape to my room with no interventions, or questions about what had happened to my hand.

I lay on my bed, staring up at the textured ceiling. This was it then. This was the beginning of the end.

I didn’t know if I wanted to cry or rage. Sleeping was also a good option. Destroying everything in my room was tempting, but not as easy to hide if Savannah showed up. I didn’t want her to see my downfall. She didn’t deserve the trauma.

Savannah was the first good thing to come into my life since before my parents had died. The first pure good thing. Because her goodness was real, and it made me want to be

good, too—a lost fucking cause now. She smiled at me like I was the only person who mattered on this planet, even if the room was filled with other people. Even though she fucked like nobody I had ever met before. If I could spend the rest of my life making Savannah moan and come, I'd die a happy man.

In spite of everything, Savannah never gave up hope. Not even when the situation looked impossible to overcome, dark in all aspects. We had spent how long in this house with no way out, and had long given up the chance of escape. But not Savannah. That woman spent every waking moment pouring over Felix's old books, searching for something to help us. When Felix tried to talk her out of it, she would merely snap at him and leave the room.

"Theo?" Savannah poked her head into my room. I thanked my lucky stars I wasn't in the process of throwing up, or destroying every piece of furniture in sight. She looked beautiful today, her hair piled up on top of her head, wearing an outfit she had fashioned out of the old dress Felix had given her. It felt like a lifetime ago. "Who are you talking to?"

Shit. I hadn't realized I was talking out loud. "No one, sweet girl. Just thinking to myself." I waved her off and gave her a smile. "Go back to your work with Luther."

She frowned. I hated it when she frowned. A girl as beautiful as Savannah deserved to smile every second of

her entire life. I especially didn't like it when she frowned at me. "Theo. What the fuck did you do to your hand?"

Double shit. "I, um. Well you see. I..."

My stomach was already churning, rejecting the absence of liquor, and my brain felt like mush. I couldn't even come up with a halfway decent lie before Savannah flew across the room, taking my bloody knuckle into her hand. "What the hell?"

I sighed. Might as well come out with the truth before she realized it for herself. "I ran out of hooch this morning. I got a little...angry."

"A little?" Savannah raised her brow at me, reaching for one of the towels I'd tossed on the floor. She tore it into strips. "That looks more than a little angry."

"I destroyed my setup, but it didn't feel like enough. So I punched the wall." I wasn't sure why I was being so honest with her, except she had never been anything except honest with me. Did it still scare me? Absolutely. But I was more afraid of losing Savannah than anything else in my little world.

She turned around from my dresser, where she had been pouring water on the makeshift bandage. "The cement wall? Theo, what were you thinking?"

"I wasn't."

She sat back down next to me, reaching for my injured hand again. "Are you in withdrawal right now?"

I flinched as she touched the cool rag to my knuckles, relaxing once I realized she had a gentle touch. “Not yet. There’s still a bit of alcohol in my system, I think. But it’s coming.” I chewed on my lips, unsure how to broach the next thing. “It won’t be the first time I’ve gone through withdrawal.”

“From alcohol?” She was done removing the excess blood off my flayed skin, so she started wrapping the clean towel strip around my hand. There was still no judgment in her voice. We could’ve been discussing the weather, our favorite color, or any number of things. Not my alcohol addiction.

I shook my head. “No. Never alcohol.”

Savannah gave me a bemused smile. “You’re in for a treat then. My dad detoxed off alcohol when I was 12. I still remember it to this day. It was not pretty.”

“You’re...you’re not disgusted by me?” I pulled slightly away from her, even though I wanted to keep touching her. Her hand was soothing to my battered soul, reassuring me everything would be okay, even when it wasn’t.

“Why would I be?” She gave my hip a shove, climbing onto the bed the rest of the way. “Scooch over.”

I slid across the bed, making room for her, and she lay down on her side next to me. Not for the first time, I realized she was the most beautiful woman alive, and I was the luckiest man considering she was here in my bed. “Because I’m an addict who can’t remember the last time I was sober.

And I'm about to go through an absolutely disgusting withdrawal."

"Oh, Theo." She sighed. "We all have flaws. Some of us wear them on our heart, and some of us wear them on our skin."

In that moment, I fell completely and utterly in love with her. I would've leaned forward to tell her so, and kiss her like I had never kissed her before, if a wave of nausea hadn't overpowered me. "I'm going to be sick." I slapped my hand over my mouth, and Savannah leapt out of bed.

"Hold on, let me find a bucket!" She grabbed the metal basin I used for dirty clothes, and stuck it in front of my face.

I heaved until there was nothing left in my stomach—not that there had been much to start with. The nice thing about not eating was how quickly I got drunk. The bad thing about not eating was going to be the lack of toast. I could really go for a piece of toast right now. Savannah sat on the edge of the bed next to me, rubbing my back and pushing my hair away from my face. The last time someone had taken such good care of me, I was a child, being cared for by my mom. I didn't realize until now how much I'd hated taking care of myself for so long.

"I'm so sorry," I muttered, wiping my mouth with the back of my hand. I felt shaky and sweaty, and ready to take a year-long nap. I also knew this was only the beginning. "This isn't something you need to see."

She rolled her eyes, taking the disgusting bucket away from me, and handing me a wet towel in its place. "Don't apologize. This is what you do for the people you love."

We both froze, her clutching the basin, and me with the cloth halfway to my face. "You love me?"

Savannah's freckled face flushed with the sweetest blush I had ever seen. "This isn't really the time for heavy things, is it?"

Without another word, she walked out the door. I lay on the bed, the cool cloth covering my eyes and as much as I felt like death, I didn't wish for it. Because Savannah loved me, unlucky Theo. She had told me as much right after she watched me throw up.

Footsteps roused me moments later, and I whipped off the washcloth to see a still sheepish Savannah, carrying a clean bucket.

"Come here," I demanded, holding out my hand.

She shook her head. "I don't think so. I'll just give you your bucket and go. I'll check in on you though."

"I am about to feel like I'm dying for God knows how long. Please do this one thing for me, and come hold my hand." I attempted to smile, but my face felt too weak to move correctly.

All the same, she came over, rolling her eyes. "You're going through withdrawal, Theo. It's not exactly like you have an incurable illness."

I ignored her, holding her hand and looking up into eyes I could stare at for the rest of my life. "I love you, too," I murmured.

Her cheeks went red again, and she covered her face with her free hand. "God, I am such an idiot. It just slipped out. I have the worst fucking timing."

"Stop." I pulled her hand away from her face, forcing her to look at me. "You told me when I needed to hear it most. It was perfect timing."

"Really?" she asked, a small smile curving her lips.

I nodded. "Absolutely. Now say it again."

"I love you," she whispered.

"I love you, too. Always and forever." I squeezed her hand tightly. "Now hand me the goddamn bucket. I'm going to be sick again."

Savannah didn't leave my side for a week. She was next to me the entire time I shook and trembled, when I cried for my parents, and when I soaked the bed with sweat. She didn't leave when I cursed the house, cursed her, cursed everything that had led to my being in that bed, getting sober. Every night she slept next to me, whispering words of encouragement into my ear. Every day she wet cool cloths and rested them on my head, and when things got really bad, she held me close and told me she loved me. I clung to those moments for all they were worth, small moments of absolute joy amongst the pain.

Somehow the worst week of my life also turned out to be the best.

OceanofPDF.com



CHAPTER 17

Luther

The Victorians used to take photos of their loved ones after their deaths.

They also had an invention known widely as the “safety coffin,” where one could ring a bell if they were accidentally buried alive.

The human head remains conscious several seconds after decapitation.

The average human life is about 2.5 billion seconds long.

And if Savannah hadn’t been in the house when Theo ran out of alcohol, he would’ve died.

She was with him every moment, making sure he didn’t give up—even when he wanted to. I was more grateful for her than ever, because (all kidding aside) what would we have done if Theo had died? We would’ve missed his annoying ass, that’s for sure. And it’s not like we could’ve disposed of the body. And a dead body would not have been good for the house morale.

But she was here, and Theo survived. After a week of being sequestered in his bedroom, he finally made his way downstairs to the bathroom, leaning on Savannah's shoulder the entire time. He was paler than normal, his blond hair greasy, and his pants seemed to hang off his hips. But when he and Savannah reached the bottom step, and Theo looked up at me, his smile was brighter than I'd ever seen it.

I knew what he was feeling, because I had experienced it in the library not too long ago. Savannah had seen every part of him—good and bad—and embraced it all the same. Knowing someone loved you for you, no matter what, was a heady feeling. I wanted to say the words so badly, and tell her how I really felt. I was terrified. I couldn't get past the worry she wouldn't feel the same way about me. Then with Theo needing her, the timing just hadn't been right. I needed to speak up before I swallowed the words forever.

"Hey, Luther," Theo greeted me, his voice raspy and worn. "Like what you see?"

I rolled my eyes, and grinned at him. "Maybe the look of the lovely lady acting as your cane. But you, my friend, look like warmed over garbage."

"I fucking feel it, man," he groaned. "So many times I asked Sav to just put me out of my misery."

Savannah shook her head, shifting her weight from side to side. "Like I was ever going to!" She turned her attention towards me, and even though I could feel the relief radiating

off her, the skin under her eyes resembled a dark purple bruise. “I’m going to get Mr. Dramatic here into the tub, then I’m going to strip his bed.”

I stuck my arm around Theo’s other side, taking some of his weight off Savannah. She had to be absolutely exhausted, but she hung in there for Theo’s sake. She’d never admit it, though. “Let me help you get him to the bathroom, and then I can get the sheets with you.”

She peeked at me over Theo’s shoulder. “You sure?”

“Absolutely, sweetheart.”

“You know, I could probably get into the tub myself,” Theo protested. His weak grasp on our shoulders said otherwise, and neither of us dropped our grip.

None of us had come into the house relying on other people, but somewhere along the way we had learned to work together. Savannah just made us realize it was okay sometimes. Being alone didn’t have to be the only way.

Once in the bathroom, Savannah sat Theo down in the corner and started the water. Not for the first time, I thanked my lucky stars we had running water. She turned around, satisfied with the temperature, and slapped her hands on her hips. “Right. Clothes off. I’d burn them if I could, but we’ll have to make do with washing them a thousand times instead.”

“I’ll, uh...wait outside.” I stepped through the door, closing it softly. Seeing Theo naked in the throes of passion was one

thing. Seeing him nude at his most vulnerable was another situation altogether.

It was only a minute or two before Savannah emerged, a bundle of Theo's clothes in her arms. "I've left him in there with strict instructions to use an entire bar of soap if necessary."

I laughed. "Is it safe to leave him alone?"

"Yeah." She nodded, chewing on her bottom lip. "He's through the worst of it. I'm not worried about him falling asleep in the tub. He needs some time by himself to process everything, which he can't do if I'm on top of him every moment of every day." She tossed the clothes into the corner of the kitchen and we made our way upstairs.

"You seem to know a lot about this." My hand rested on the top of the banister, and Savannah was a step behind me.

"My dad was an alcoholic," she said simply. "The only thing I ever felt when he was going through withdrawal was pride. I was so damn proud he was willing to make that change for me. So many just accept their addiction as their fate, but my dad loved me enough to give it up. He took his last drink when I was twelve." She smiled softly, lost in a memory.

My hand perched on Theo's doorknob, feeling just as proud for this wondrous, non-judgmental woman. How lucky we were that she was in our lives. "You must miss him a lot, being stuck here."

Savannah shook her head, her loose hair sprawling every which way. “He died a few years ago. It’s just me now. Well, me and Brynn. But she’s in Korea until Christmas break.”

“Brynn? Korea?”

“Brynn is my best friend. She’s teaching in Korea, otherwise she’d be here guns a-blazing.”

I was distracted by her response as soon as I stepped into Theo’s room, immediately wanting to retch at the smell. I plugged my nose. “How the hell have you been sleeping in here?”

“I stopped noticing the smell after the second day,” she shrugged, pulling at the sheets.

“Absolutely not.” I snatched her hands away from the bed. “You go to bed and get some rest. You’ve done your part. I’ll get this room cleaned up.” My proclamation of love could wait until she got some sleep. I wanted her to be in the best mindset possible when I finally confessed my feelings.

Savannah froze, looking uncertain. “But Theo...”

“Will be fine.” I spun her around, pushing her towards the door. “I’ll get him out of the tub when I’m done up here. But you’re no good to any of us if you’re dead on your feet. Go. Sleep.”

She opened her mouth to protest. I shook my head and pointed down the hallway. “Sleep. I’m not hearing another word.”

Savannah frowned, but didn’t fight me on it. I was certain she would be asleep before her head hit the pillow. I waited

until I saw her door close before I turned back to Theo's room. It was an absolute disaster. The bedding was everywhere, covered in stains I didn't want to think about. Towels and clothes lay heaped in the corners, and teacups rested on every surface possible.

It smelled worse than it looked. But this wasn't Savannah's mess to clean up, and Theo was in no shape to do so. Heaven only knew where Felix was hiding, so I would have to take one for the team. Time flew by as I imagined what I would say to Savannah, how I would tell her my true feelings. Dreaming of how she'd respond kept me focused on anything other than the room.

Three hours later, the room was spotless, and a clean Theo lay in bed, dressed in a clean pair of pajama bottoms I had snatched from Felix's room. In typical Theo fashion, he had refused the shirt.

"Thanks, Luther," he murmured, rolling onto his side. He looked shattered, ready to pass out any minute. "I don't know how to repay you."

I smiled, ready to close the door behind me. "Stay sober. I can't do this a third time." Despite everything we'd gone through together, I loved the kid. But right now wasn't the time to think about the reasoning behind that, because all that mattered was him staying healthy. I wanted to see him thrive.

"I won't do this to Savannah ever again." He was snoring before the door closed.

I sighed, leaning back against the door. The laundry was piled in the kitchen, but it could wait. I needed to go check on Savannah. I tiptoed down the hall, opening her door as silently as I could. The work she had managed to do on her room with so little resources amazed me. She amazed me. Stretched out on her side, her golden hair sprawled out over her pillow, her cheek rested on her hand. She looked like an angel. And after seeing what she had dealt with the last week, I wasn't sure she wasn't a legitimate angel on earth. I took a step backward, ready to leave her to her sleep before I stopped myself.

I just wanted to be near her, touch her. Tell her what I needed to. So as quietly as I could, I slipped into bed behind her, curling against her back.

She stirred slightly. "Luther?"

"Shhh..." I whispered, stroking her hair. "Sleep, sweetheart. I'm here."

She turned into me, snuggling into my chest, and was asleep again.

I closed my eyes, intending on just resting them for a moment. But when I opened them again, the room was streaked with moonlight, and Savannah was missing.

I sat up, looking around the room. The bed was barely messed up, like she was trying not to wake me up. I swung my feet off to the side, ready to find her and drag her back to force her to rest. Before I had a chance, the door opened.

Savannah stepped inside, her hair haloed around her face in a messy bun, wearing only an oversized T-shirt of mine. She caught my eye, and smiled. "Sorry," she whispered. "I tried not to wake you."

"What are you doing up?" I asked. "You should be sleeping."

She shrugged, padding back to the bed and holding up a glass of water. "I needed something to make me feel normal. A glass of water seemed like the right call."

I held my arms open. "Come back to bed."

"Gladly," she whispered. Savannah took a sip and set her water down on the end table, and slid into bed next to me. She brushed my curls back, and I smiled at her sweet touch. I loved her. I loved her so damn much, and I needed to tell her before it cracked my heart in two. She paused, frowning at my face. "What's wrong?"

I grabbed her hand, bringing it to my lips and kissing it softly. "I don't know what fucked up bit of fate led me here, but I am eternally grateful for it. Because all those flaws brought you to me."

"Oh, Luther," she murmured, looking like she wanted to say more. But I wasn't done yet.

"Shh...let me talk. I didn't think more existed. Not after what happened with James. But here you are, and here we are, and I've never felt more at peace with myself. You give me so much peace, sweetheart. You let me be myself for the first time in my life." I took a deep breath. "I love you,

Savannah. I don't care if it's 1975 or 2022. You're it for me. You're the more I've been looking for."

She pulled away from me, framing my face with both of her hands. "You stubborn man. If you would've just let me speak first, I would've told you-I love you, too."

I closed the gap between us, kissing her deeply. I smiled against her lips. "I think I've been waiting for you my entire life."

Savannah slipped her tongue between my lips, and I caught it gently between my teeth. She moaned with the light pressure, and wrapped her arms around my bare shoulders. I snaked my leg around hers, taking my time so I could memorize every square inch of her soft skin.

It was funny. You'd think being trapped with endless time, things would become less special. In fact, the opposite happened. Special moments became rarer, more spread out across the minutes. My time with Savannah was sweet, and I wanted to savor it all. If I was lucky, it would never end.

She wrapped her leg around my hip, and I grabbed her thigh, pulling her tight. Her skin felt amazing, her entire body was my personal oasis in this prison-like house. I pushed my hand between us, feeling where thigh met pussy, enjoying her sharp intake of breath as I trailed my fingertips through the slickness I found there.

"I love you," I whispered, as I slipped one finger inside her.

"Oh, Luther," she moaned, thrusting her hips up and against my hand. "I love you more."

I pushed my finger in deeper, pulling it out slowly. She moaned and arched into me. I was hard as a rock. My only goal in the world now was to hear her say she loved me as I made her come.

I flipped Savannah on her back. She looked up at me, her eyes heavy, half closed as I maneuvered above her. I bent and kissed her. "I love you."

Her answering smile told me all I needed to know.

I tore her shirt over her head, tossing it somewhere we could worry about later. Then I fitted myself between her legs, the head of my cock pressing against her opening. I slid in an inch, her pussy stretching to accommodate me as she moaned. "I love you," I murmured again, just to hear myself say it once more.

I slipped in another inch, and then another. Our sounds of pleasure mixed together now, a song woven in the night. We had fucked before, sure. But this was different. This was making love.

Fully inside her, her pussy clenched tight around me. She was perfect in every way, made for me. Made for us. Savannah wrapped her hands around my shoulders, and I braced myself on either side of her head. She smiled up at me as I rocked in and out, keeping a steady rhythm.

Savannah gasped as I drove my cock inside her, my name coming as a stutter on her lips. I dropped one of my hands to her perfect breast, squeezing it as she arched up against

me. Soon, her pussy began to pulse, and I wasn't far from release myself.

I rolled my hips harder, never losing her eye contact. I wanted to look at her as she shattered around me, filled with the knowledge that I loved her.

"Oh, fuck," she whispered, her eyes widening ever so slightly. "Fuck, Luther, I love you, too."

I caressed her breast as I drove her to her orgasm. "Let go, sweetheart. I'm here."

Another pulse, another tease of her nipple and she came apart with my touch. Her body shook around me, her legs trembling on my back.

Seeing her face in the throes of passion, pleasure I had brought to her, had me roaring out my own release.

Stroking her face, I watched her until she came back to reality. She looked up at me with such an expression of happiness that it shook me to my core. I rolled off and rested next to her, trying to catch my own breath, and processing exactly what had happened.

The two of us were alone, the air between us filled with the sexual tension that never seemed to leave, and the knowledge of two people who had just professed their deepest affection for each other. Savannah trailed her fingers down my chest, avoiding my eyes.

"What's up, sweetheart?"

She looked up at me, eyes wide in the moonlight.
"Nothing."

I rolled my eyes. “Don’t nothing me. What’s on your mind?”

“It’s just...” Savannah sighed, chewing on her lip. “Does it bother you that I love more than just you?”

“Not in a million years.” I laughed, and her face fell. I pulled her to me in a tight hug. “I’m not laughing at you, Sav. Just the situation. I’m the last person to ever judge someone for loving more than one soul. I’m happy for you, happy you’ve been lucky enough to find more than one love.”

Eyes brimming with emotion, she leaned forward and kissed me.

I was happy. Because she wasn’t the only lucky one. Somehow, in this nightmare I found myself in, I had discovered what I had been searching for my entire life.

I had unearthed something special in myself when I kissed James for the first time, and I had found special again in Savannah. I liked women, and I liked men. I liked people for who they were underneath the skin, finding their brains more of a turn-on than anything else. I wasn’t sure if that made me gay, or bisexual, or some other term I had yet to discover. I wasn’t sure if it mattered. Because at the end of the day I was happy. I was in love. I was a part of something bigger than myself. I was a part of something more.

The graphic features the text 'CHAPTER 18' in a large, white, distressed, all-caps font. Below it, the word 'Savannah' is written in a white, elegant cursive script. The background is a dark green field with a repeating white damask or floral pattern. The entire graphic has a torn, irregular edge effect.

CHAPTER 18

Savannah

The longer I was trapped in the house, the more desperate I grew for a couple of things.

First, I wanted to find a way out. I was confident we were missing something. Some kind of loophole that just wasn't standing out to us, or some obscure piece of the puzzle we still hadn't figured out. Maybe we were looking too hard in the wrong places. A part of me wondered if I was sabotaging myself, wanting to stay locked in my bubble away from reality forever. Could it really be that bad? My three guys and myself, and no real life to get in the way. Couldn't that be the dream? Besides, the house was less viscerally scary and more mentally intimidating. A lifetime with the same people, the same room, and the same thoughts was enough to drive anyone insane.

I knew I was only fooling myself though. I wanted to get out. I needed to get out. Extreme isolation had taken a toll on each man, and threatened to rob me of parts of myself

as well. I had already lost enough. Most importantly? I craved a goddamn cheeseburger like nobody's business. My stomach longed to be stuffed full of the thickest, greasiest burgers I could think of. Sometimes I pined away in bed, dreaming about how the patty would barely fit between the buns, cheese melting over the top of it. The smell would waft through the air, and the crunch of the lightly toasted bread as I bit into it. Hunger pangs didn't exist for us here, but the cheeseburger dreams threatened my sanity.

Every morning, I met Luther in the library, and we scoured the books. It felt futile, going over the same words every day without fail, but it was better than nothing, until I found a different course of action.

And if I never got out, what would Brynn think? The snow had been falling for several weeks by now, and according to Luther's makeshift calendar, it was early December. Brynn would be back from Korea soon, and wondering why I had dropped off the face of the earth. I needed to get out for her.

The second thing I was desperate to figure out was how the hell Felix spent his days. The where wasn't a mystery, because I knew he locked himself behind the door under the stairs. What was behind the door, I had no idea, and the possibilities were slowly driving me insane. There were so many, I literally didn't even know where to begin. Was he a superhero with a lair built into the old house? He seemed more like a sexy villain than a hero. Was he a secret

alcoholic, with his own distillery? Doubtful. Felix was so offended by Theo's addictions I couldn't imagine he had any of his own, or even knew how to make it.

On and on my brain would circle, going from possible escape routes to Felix's secrets and back again. It hadn't escaped me he and I were the only ones to not say "I love you" yet. But while Theo, Luther and I operated under pure honesty, Felix and I still held back from each other. The only time we didn't was when we were fucking, still finding transparency easier in the dark.

Maybe I just needed to accept that was as far as our relationship would go. We were happy. Did we need complete honesty and sappy words?

Convincing myself never seemed to work, because I always found myself following him down the stairs. I tried to peek, but he was always too stealthy. By the time I made it to the bottom step, the door had already closed securely behind him, the knob locked.

I tried picking the lock, not that it had ever gotten me anywhere. Whatever was in his secret room, Felix was determined to guard it with his life.

I was sitting on the bottom step one morning after following him, debating whether I should go back and curl into bed with Theo or join Luther for another useless prowling of the library when a noise caught my attention. It was a sound I hadn't heard in months, and I swung my head around to the window.

A car was making its way up the long gravel driveway, crunching rocks as it proceeded. What the hell? I got to my feet, trying to make out who was headed towards the house. Footsteps padded down the stairs.

"I heard a car," Theo mumbled, still half asleep. "Or did I dream it?"

I shook my head, walking closer to the large bay window. "No. Someone's coming." A light blanket of snow covered the driveway, so the car was crawling along. I still couldn't make out what kind of car it was. Behind me, a door opened and closed, and I looked away from my post for a moment. I wasn't quick enough, and Felix was already locking the door behind him. 0/2 today.

"Is it the realtor?" he asked, stuffing the key into his pocket. I made a point to remember he kept it on his body. The only thing that made sense really, because where else in the house would be safe from prying eyes?

"I can't see what kind of car it is yet." I turned back to the window, but all I could make out was headlights.

"Well, we need to stop them before they get too close. Any ideas?"

Theo groaned. "Not this again. Don't make me pretend to be a ghost upstairs. It was so embarrassing."

I turned around to smile at him. "I'm sure you made an absolutely adorable ghost."

He rolled his eyes. "Thanks but no thanks, sweet girl."

Luther joined us, stepping out of the library to look down at us from the top of the stairs. "It isn't the realtor. It's a black car, not silver."

"So who the hell would be coming here in the middle of fucking winter?" Felix frowned, joining me at the window.

I shrugged. "I guess we'll have to wait and see."

We all held our breaths in a collective silence, until the car rounded the last curve. A black sedan, unremarkable in every way except...

"Brynn," I breathed.

"I'm sorry, Brynn, as in your best friend teaching in Korea, Brynn?" Luther asked.

I whirled around. "That's Brynn's car. She must be back for Christmas, and wondered why the fuck she hasn't heard from me." As soon as I realized what her intentions were, dread flooded my veins. "She can't come in here! She'll be trapped like we are. How the fuck do I make her stay outside?"

Felix grabbed my shoulders, giving me a quick shake. "Take a breath, Sav. It's going to be okay. People outside can still see and hear us through the windows. How do you think the haunted house rumor started?"

I nodded, trying to steady my breathing as my best friend pulled her car up behind my truck, still loaded with boxes. By now they were soggy, filled with crap that seemed so essential. Months in the house had made me realize just how unimportant everything I had packed for my new life

was. My single box I had brought in still sat untouched in the dining room. Brynn got out of her car, examining my truck as if it held all the answers to why the hell I hadn't texted her for three months. It didn't take long for me to stop checking my phone, realizing how useless it really was, but it probably took Brynn a hell of a lot longer.

She looked up to the house, her red hair standing out against the fresh snow. When she began to climb the steps, I flew into action. Whatever the cost, Brynn could not enter this house. I slammed my hands against the glass, screaming her name. "Brynn! Brynn, over here!"

She froze, turning her head to look around in each window before she spotted me. Her expression of concern swapped to one of anger. "Savannah fucking Miles, what the fuck do you think you're doing not texting me back? You think you can just ghost your best fucking friend? Do you know how long it took me to find your ass?"

Felix was right. Brynn's words were a little muffled through the glass, but she could still hold a conversation with me. And as she was chewing me out-rightfully so-she began storming to the front door.

At the top of my lungs, I screamed, "Stop! Don't open the door!" She paused, still glaring at me, no doubt wondering why I was freaking out. "Brynn, you're allowed to hate me for the rest of your life, but do not open that door."

"Why? Are you hiding a new best friend inside? Maybe you got married while I was gone and just didn't give a shit

enough to tell me.” She slammed her hands on her hips, tossing her hair over her shoulders. But she had taken her hand away from the doorknob, and I breathed a sigh of relief.

“You can’t come in here.” I wasn’t sure how to even begin the conversation, because how did you explain to your best friend you were trapped in a cursed house, and if she came in she’d be stuck, too? I rested my head against the cool glass, wondering what the hell I was going to say. I was well aware the guys were remaining silent, letting me broach the topic as I saw fit. “This is going to sound insane.”

Her face softened, and I saw my friend again, the one who had stood by my side through thick and thin. The one who had let me cry on her shoulder, and cheered me on when I thought I couldn’t last another day. “Try me, Sav. Whatever you tell me isn’t going to be any crazier than you not responding to my texts for three months.”

I laughed, a bitter sound. “You’d be surprised.”

“Are you safe?” I should’ve known Brynn would only stay mad for so long. She knew me well enough to know something else had to be going on—whether she understood it or not. Her hair was blowing every which way, and she was trying to tame it in a ponytail. I was immediately nostalgic for the wind, remembering how it felt when it rushed against my face. The smells it brought with it. All these little things I had taken for granted, I missed terribly, remembering how precious they really were.

I didn't respond. I turned back to look at the guys, all of them watching me carefully. Theo nodded at me, smiling.

"Sav, you have two point five seconds to tell me you're safe or I'm busting the door down." Brynn's eyes narrowed, and I knew she meant business.

She couldn't open the door. She couldn't. I whipped back around to her. "The house is cursed."

She burst out laughing, bending over at the waist to catch her breath. Then she looked back up at me, and started laughing all over again. When she looked back at my face once more though, she stopped. "Jesus, Sav, you're serious? You think this house is cursed?"

I nodded slowly. "Once you step inside, you can't leave. I've been trapped in here since the day I moved in."

"Okay, look." Brynn met my gaze, showing me her phone. "If you're okay, blink once. If you need help, blink twice."

"Brynn." I closed my eyes, taking a deep breath. "I'm being completely serious. The house has been cursed since 1907." I turned towards Felix, waving him over to the window.

He offered her a small wave, glaring at me out of the corner of his eye. But I knew he could explain it better than I could.

Brynn took a step closer to the window, and thankfully a step further away from the door. "What have you done to her? Are you keeping her in there against her will? My boyfriend is a cop, and I'll have this place swarmed so

fucking quick you won't know what hit you and whatever drug operation you're running out of your basement."

Good fucking lord. Felix looked at me like he had absolutely no idea what was going on. I held up my hands, addressing Felix first. "She doesn't have a boyfriend, and she hates the cops more than anyone. It's a family thing." Then I turned to Brynn, flattening my hand against the glass. On the other side, she pressed her hand—a reflection of mine. "This is Felix. He hasn't kidnapped me. The house really is cursed, and he's been trapped in here since 1907."

Brynn closed her eyes, counting under her breath. I knew what she was doing. She was trying to calm herself down before she said something she regretted, or flew off the handle. She had been counting like that since we were younger, and there was a 50/50 chance of it working. Sometimes it just made her louder and angrier. "So you're telling me, you're stuck inside a house you're claiming is cursed with a man older than my Great-Grandpapi?"

I smirked. "Yeah. But he's a hell of a lot hotter."

"Why should I believe you?" She crossed her arms, still glaring at Felix.

"You don't have to believe him," I interrupted. "But you can believe me. I've never lied to you, have I?"

"No." All at once the fight left her body. "You know you sound absolutely mental, right? I have half a mind to come in there anyways, and drag you out by your toes."

“I know how crazy it sounds, believe me. But why would a kidnapper let me talk to you at all? Why would my truck still be out front, loaded with moving boxes? And if I could get out, why would I be talking to you from behind a fucking window?” I ran my hands through my hair. “It’s ludicrous, I know. But it’s real. And I need your help. We need your help.”

She nodded. “I’m not sure what to believe yet. But I’ll do what I can to help you and Grandpa Felix get out.”

“It’s not just us.” I jerked my thumb over my shoulder. “Two other guys are trapped in here with us. Luther and Theo.”

“Wait.” She held up a finger. I waited for everything to click into place for her. “You’re trapped in a house with three guys who haven’t seen a woman in God knows how long?”

“Yes.” I waved my hands in the air, trying to get her to focus on the task at hand. “Look, I need you to help us get out.”

Brynn turned her attention back to me, but I knew she was still thinking about the living arrangements, and how exactly it all worked. “What can I do? Name it.”

“I need to figure out how to break the curse. The books we have inside here are limited, and I can’t find the information I need.” Even if Brynn couldn’t come in the house, maybe having a link to the outside would be helpful in gathering the information we seemed to be lacking.

She sighed. "Okay. I can only imagine the crazy looks I'll get at the library, but I'll do it. Can you tell me anything about the curse? Who did it, why they did it, what they said..."

I looked towards Felix. "Well?"

I didn't want to tell his story for him, not when he was right here.

Felix nodded and turned to Brynn. Bit by bit he explained exactly how he had gotten trapped in the house, leaving out big chunks about how he was chasing love. I knew it was easier for him to put the blame on himself than to admit why he did what he did. He could atone for his own actions, but he couldn't do anything about someone else's. While Felix talked, Luther made his way down the stairs, coming to rest with his arm wrapped around my shoulders. I watched Brynn's face as her lips pressed together, and her forehead creased in a frown. By the time Felix was done, her face was a mixture of resolve and disbelief.

"I don't know what to say," she murmured, rubbing the back of her neck. "I shouldn't believe a word of what you're saying, but..."

I heaved out a sigh of relief, except something wasn't quite right. She stared past me, chewing on the inside of her cheek. I was about to ask her what was wrong when her face paled, and her eyes widened.

"What? Brynn, what is it?"

She met my eyes. “Don’t you remember those stories Granny would tell us growing up? There was that one her Great-Granny told her, when she was young. About how our family had powers people couldn’t understand, but we had lost our privileges. Great-great Granny had cursed a man, a powerful, influential man who had run her and her family off land they had lived on for years. No remorse, so she cursed him and the house he built on the land. Since she had used her powers for evil, instead of for good, the magic had slowly disappeared, generation by generation. I thought it was just a fucking story Granny made up to go along with the haunted rumors.”

Felix’s eyes snapped to hers, an expression I had never seen before flashing across his face. “You’re telling me... your family did this to me?” His body flushed hot with anger, and I wanted to touch him, calm him down. But before I could reach out, he spun around to face me. “Did you know?”

My heart stopped beating for a few seconds. “Felix, how could I have possibly known? We were kids, and thought her granny just made up those stories to scare us.” I shook my head, not understanding his fury. “Why would I be trapped in here with you if I had known?”

“You knew!” he bellowed. “You damn well had to have known. You just said her grandmother used to tell you stories. How could you not have known?”

I glared at him, watching his dark eyes flash with anger. “I. Didn’t. Know.”

He stalked over to me, standing a breath away, looking like he wanted to shake me or strangle me. Luther pulled me back against him, and Felix shook his head, storming off to his secret room without a second look back.

We all watched as he slammed the door behind him, the lock clicking with a finality. I looked back at Brynn through the cloudy window. “I’m sorry,” she said, her lips trembling.

“It’s not your fault. None of this is.” I pressed my hand against the glass again, and waited for her to press her hand against the other side. I needed to reassure myself as much as her.

“I’m going to fix this, Sav. I’m going to go right to my granny and see what the hell we can do.” Her eyes were clear, serious with their intent. “I’m going to get you out here.”

“I love you,” I whispered, tears clouding my eyes. What had I done without her for all these months? “Thank you.”

“Don’t thank me yet.” Brynn pulled away from the window, brushing her wet hands off on her jeans. “I’m going to see Granny the minute I leave here. I need you to do something for me though.”

I nodded. “Anything.”

“Don’t give up. Not yet. Not ever.” And with those parting words, she blew me a kiss and got into her car. It took far

less time for her to escape the driveway than it had for her to find her way towards us.

When her taillights disappeared, I sank to the floor, cradling my head in my hands, and sobbed. Luther joined me on the cold floor, tucking me against his chest.

“Shh...” he reassured. “Come on, sweetheart. Don’t be sad. It’ll be okay.”

I let him hold me. But I didn’t respond, because I didn’t know how to explain to him I wasn’t crying because I was sad. I was crying because for the first time since I had stepped foot inside the house, I had hope.

OceanofPDF.com



CHAPTER 19

Felix

All I saw was red.

Everything I came in contact with, I wanted to break. I wanted to hurt someone. I wanted to do a thousand things I couldn't do, and knowing I couldn't do any of it made me even more angry.

I couldn't remember the last time I had been this furious. Anger had been a close friend of mine after a few years trapped in the house. I spent my time in the basement, tearing those paintings that reminded me of Hannah to tiny shreds, tearing them some more, and then lighting them on fire.

I had given up everything I had ever known for a woman who never loved me to begin with, and I had never forgiven myself for it. So instead of trying to forgive, I got mad. Eventually, though, my fury subsided. Lucky for Luther, since it was long before he ever showed up. My anger had hardened into cool detachment. Emotions had only fucked

with me before, and I wouldn't give them the chance to do so again. Luther didn't appreciate my "attitude" and was constantly trying to parent me, but eventually we found a rhythm that involved little interaction with each other.

And then Theo showed up on my doorstep. Numb, drunk, Theo, who couldn't process a feeling to save his life. Seeing the pain he tried so hard to avoid only made me more emotionless, because I didn't want to turn into him. I didn't want to feel all those hurts again, the wounds I had long since stitched up.

But when Savannah arrived, fuck me if I didn't throw all my hard work out the window. My feelings for her crept up on me, even though I had told myself they weren't real. I had lain with her in bed at night, wondering how I had gotten so lucky, even in this hellhole. Only for me to find out her best friend's family was involved in cursing me in the first place. There was no way she didn't know, I thought, but she swore she didn't. Now I was only confusing myself further. But I'd almost crossed the line by shaking her.

It's why I had to leave the room, remove myself from the situation before the fury returned. As angry as I was, I didn't want to hurt Savannah. Now I was away from it all, in my safe place, my heartbeat settling, my breathing returning to normal. I could almost think clearly again.

She banged on the door, calling for me, begging for me to open up. But my emotions were still raw, and I didn't want to snap at her, or make the situation worse. Eventually I

heard her slide down the door, coming to rest on the floor just outside. A few minutes later, Luther's voice called her away, and for the first time I breathed a sigh of relief that she had more than just me to rely on.

I needed time to get my head on straight if I didn't want to lose her.

What Savannah said made sense. Why would she have even bought the house if she had known about the curse all along? No one would choose this life for themselves. Maybe I had flown off the handle, just a bit.

Okay, more than a bit. I groaned, running a hand through my hair. Her perfect features shattered when I accused her, all because of my harsh words. What were the chances of her forgiving me? She probably hated me now. It was my own damn fault. I had given her all I had to give, and maybe it wasn't enough.

Except, there was one part of me I hadn't given her yet. And maybe, just maybe, if I offered it to her, she would forget all of my flaws. Or at least ignore them for long enough to realize there were some good parts to me, too. Parts of me I shared with the house, and never dared show Hannah. But Savannah...Savannah, I trusted.

I sprang to my feet, feeling better than I had all day. I wasn't even worried about the what ifs when she discovered where I spent my days. All I was worried about was darling Savannah, and making sure I didn't lose her. With my shirt

straightened and my hair pushed off my face, I set out to find her.

Savannah was in her bedroom, sitting up against her headboard, watching the snow fall. Her hair was in a loose braid, secured with a tidy ribbon I'd found in the same closet as the dress I had given her. She had been so upset when her last hair tie had snapped. Seeing her wearing it now, even when I had been so horrid to her, made my heart beat like crazy. I knocked on her open door, and she turned to face me. Even with absolute hurt in her eyes, she was still stunning.

But I was here for a reason, and I needed to make amends. "Hi. Can we talk?"

She nodded, patting the space on the bed next to her. As much as I wanted to crawl into bed with her, I knew I'd be tempted, and sex was not going to help us solve our problems. I shook my head. "Actually, I was hoping you'd come with me for a minute."

Savannah's eyes widened. "Where are we going? I thought you didn't trust me."

"I do trust you. I trust you with my whole heart, darling." I took a step forward, and then another, until I was sitting on the edge of the bed. I rested my hand on her shin, resisting the urge to slide higher. "I have a lot of things I'm still working through, even a hundred years later. None of them have anything to do with you, and I shouldn't be taking

them out on you. Please, give me a chance to make things right.”

Her curiosity was too strong to resist my offer, and we both knew it. “How?”

“Well...” I paused, loving the way she leaned forward. Her body language gave her away every single time. “How would you like to see where I spend my days?”

She pushed me off the bed in her rush to get to her feet. “What are we waiting for? Let’s go.” She flashed me a winning smile, and pulled my hand to the door.

I knew she wanted to know where I went. I had seen her following me, trying to sneak peeks. But I hadn’t been ready to share. Until now.

Hand in hand we walked to my private room, my sanctuary. I stood back when we reached the door, unlocking it and gesturing to her she should be the one to open it. The excitement radiating off her was palpable, and I wanted to bottle it so I could forever remember this moment.

Savannah opened the door and gasped. She took a step deeper inside, spinning around to take it all in.

I crossed my arms and rested against the doorframe, watching her surprise.

She turned back to me, eyes wide. “How the hell have you been hiding a greenhouse filled with orchids this whole time?”

“A conservatory,” I corrected, but I couldn’t help my smile. I gestured around to the ivy-covered glass walls. Even in the winter, the small amount of light filtering through the glass roof kept the room warm. “It’s a kind of courtyard protected by the house. Unless you know what you’re looking for, you won’t see it from the outside.”

“I just...” She walked up to the first wide potting bench, holding out her hand but not touching them. “They’re all so different from each other.”

I joined her, pointing out some of my favorites. “I have over fifty varieties here. It was supposed to be more, but obviously I couldn’t pay for the next delivery so they never arrived.”

Savannah bounced from bench to bench, examining all the different colors and shapes I had growing. Seeing her joy made me wonder why I had waited so long to share my secret. She had dozens of questions, and I happily answered all of them.

Finally she turned back to me, wrapping her arms around my neck. “Why didn’t you tell me before, Felix?”

I shrugged, stroking the small of her back. “When I first showed Hannah my original conservatory, at the old house, she laughed. She told me gardening-gardening orchids, no less-was a job for poor women. Not men of status like myself. So I hid it from her.” I gestured around the room. “But thank God I didn’t give up on it completely. This room

saved me when I thought I was past redemption. It kept me going in the darkest of times.”

She kissed me softly on my lips. “Thank you for trusting me with this part of you.”

“You’re welcome.” I kissed her back. “I don’t think I’m going to lock the door anymore. You can come and spend time here whenever you’d like.”

“Can I show the others?” She grabbed at my hands, an eager excitement making me smile.

I wanted to say no, imagining Luther’s amusement and Theo’s mockery. But I couldn’t disappoint her, and somehow, the risk seemed worth it. “Give me one last night by myself in here, and then, yes, you can.”

“And will you bring one of the big chairs in here for me to read?”

I rolled my eyes. “Don’t push your luck.” Then I smiled. “Of course I will.” I loved the idea of her sitting in here, curled up in a chair with one of the old books sprawled in her lap while I watered and repotted. It almost felt... domestic. And the idea was nicer than I ever thought it would be.

She laughed, tossing her hair back over her shoulders. I couldn’t stop the words from leaving my mouth.

“I love you,” I whispered.

Savannah paused, pursing her lips. “Really?”

“I just showed you my secret greenhouse filled with orchids and you’re questioning my love for you?” I smirked.

“Conservatory. Your secret conservatory, filled with orchids.” She leaned forward, pressing her lips against my ear. “I love you, too.”

I pulled back, looking deep into those stunning hazel eyes. “Say it again.”

“I love you, Felix. Every damn part of you. The good, the bad, and the hidden orchids.”

Savannah was just so fucking pretty. I couldn’t believe my luck. How did she love me? Even after I had fucked up and accused her of horrible things. Fuck, I was fortunate. I walked towards her, forcing her to step backwards until her ass bumped up against one of the empty benches. I wrapped my arms around her waist, lifting her to sit while I stood between her legs. “I don’t deserve you. But I’m not one to be ungrateful.”

I kissed her hard and deep, converting every single emotion I had felt since she first walked into this house. The anger that she was going to step inside no matter what I did, and the discomfort of knowing she would be so close forever. The frustration of her personality, and the intense lust of just being close to her. It was a rollercoaster I never wanted to get off of. I squeezed her tight, until she sighed into my open mouth. My cock grew hard. With the way she moaned and rubbed against me, I knew she could feel it, too. I pushed closer, until nothing was separating us except for a few pieces of fabric.

She pulled away, to smile at me, and I knew I was done. She was it for me, forever-however long that ended up being. She pushed my jacket over my shoulders, and I undid my shirt buttons as quickly as my fingers would allow. Her shirt was next to come off, carelessly tossed over my shoulder. I couldn't stop myself from dipping my head forward, taking one of her luscious nipples into my mouth.

"Fuck," Savannah cursed, and I smiled against her breast. I knew all of her sensitive spots by now, how to kiss and lick different parts of her skin to make her moan and scream. I dragged my teeth over her raised nipple, enjoying the way her body arched into me, filling my mouth with her even more. "Are you going to fuck me, Felix, or just tease me?"

I laughed. "Hadn't thought that far ahead yet. I was just taking my girl on an innocent tour of my conservatory, only to find out she's an insatiable animal." My hands traced down her bare skin, dipping beneath the waistband of her pants.

"You probably did this with all the girls," she muttered, curling her hands around my shoulders.

"Just one, actually." I lifted her hips up so I could shuffle her pants down. "The only one that ever mattered."

Her pants fell to the floor. She watched me with love and curiosity as I slid my fingers between her legs, making sure she was ready for me. Lucky for us, the benches put her at the perfect height. I took my fingers away, slipping them in

my mouth to taste her sweetness. Perfect, I thought. She was fucking perfect.

My cock replaced my fingers, nudging against her slick opening. "Lean back, darling. Let me take control."

Savannah rested her back against the glass, leaving her body fully exposed to me. I grabbed the soft flesh on her hips and pushed my way in. She moaned, her legs flexing to grip my thighs. I grabbed her closer. Nothing had ever felt as good as being inside of Savannah.

I rocked my hips, thrusting into her with a slow ferocity. I wanted to be deeper, close enough that we were one person. She sighed my name as I fucked her harder, desperate to show her exactly what she meant to me. My hands dug into her tender skin, and I hoped they would leave marks for her to remember later. I wanted this memory to be seared into her mind, me fucking her in a conservatory filled with one of my greatest secrets.

"Oh fuck," she muttered. Her legs pulled me closer, her hips rising up to meet every thrust. She had to be getting close to release, which was good because I wasn't sure how much longer I could hold back.

I leaned forward, my body rubbing against her clit as I drove my cock into her. Her pussy pulsed, her sounds incoherent. I kept my rhythm, staring at her. I wanted to watch her as she came, wanted to see her pretty face when she broke. She cursed, and all the tension left her body as she cried my name. Her face softened, a gentleness that

wasn't there all the time taking over. Her hair sprawled around her head, her body leaving a steamy mark on the glass.

The sheer perfection of the image, of this beautiful woman caving to my every demand and rule, had me rocking my hips harder, until her name was a growl on my lips, and my release spilled inside her pussy.

I wasn't sure I would ever get used to how good it felt to make Savannah come-maybe even better than when I came myself. I wanted to stay like this forever, cocooned up in our secret that existed inside our forgotten world.

Savannah wrapped her arms around my shoulder, resting her head on my chest. For the first time in over a hundred years of living in this house, it felt like home. And it was all thanks to her.

I tucked a loose piece of hair behind her ear. "We should get you up to bed."

She rolled her eyes. "I'm not a kid, Felix."

"Believe me, I know," I whispered into her ear, enjoying the way she shivered against the words. I pulled back with a smile. "So, if you don't want to go to sleep, tell me about Brynn."

"You really want to know?" She squinted up at me, looking for a trick that wasn't there.

I nodded. "Tell me everything." I sank down to the floor, pulling Savannah to sit on my lap.

“Well, first of all, she saved my life.” Savannah took a deep breath. “My dad was all I had growing up, because my mom took off. When he died, I was alone. The day we buried him, Brynn invited me over for pizza and wine, but really she just wanted to keep me company.”

“Loneliness is scary,” I agreed, stroking the back of her hand with my thumb.

“So scary. But Brynn made me feel like I had someone to share my life with after all.” She sighed.

My heart ached for a Savannah I’d never known before. She wasn’t alone now, and I wanted to reassure her of that. I would. After. Right now, I needed to listen.

She curled against me. “I didn’t take much time off work when my dad died. I needed to get back to normalcy. I could afford one night of drinking though. We started talking, and she asked me if I could do anything in the world, what I would do?”

“And you said?” I was curious to this side of Savannah, and I wanted to eat up every bit of information she allowed me. I needed to consume her vulnerability, and help make her whole once more.

“At first I didn’t really have an answer.” She sat on my lap, quiet for a moment. “Brynn had this crazy idea she would live in a shack on the beach and own an ice cream stand. But the thing is, she would do it. Not much held her back. Next to her, I felt stuck. All I’d known was my dad, the diner,

and dreams that never came to fruition. And sadness. I was really good at being sad.”

I was quiet, waiting for her to continue. I didn’t want to break the spell that transpired between us.

“Finally, I thought, if I could do anything in the world, I would be free. Not tied down to bills and a job I hated. Not stuck in an apartment I couldn’t afford. I would love every moment of my life, not constantly be looking for a way to escape.”

“Oh, my darling girl,” I murmured.

She shook her head. “Let me finish. Brynn pointed out all the things I did have. Her friendship. Drive. Determination. And the law of conservation of energy.”

Sometimes modern words were too much for me. Most of the time I just pretended I knew what they meant, but this felt important. “Excuse me?”

“Scientifically, it means energy can’t be created or destroyed. Only transferred. She meant just because my dad wasn’t here physically in his body anymore, he could still be with me in spirit.”

“Credence,” I offered. “She meant it as credence. Accepting something as true, on faith.”

Savannah spun around in my arms, looking up at me with wide eyes. “Exactly. I’d never thought of it like that before. So I started actively pursuing my dreams of owning a thrift shop. Every penny I had went into a coffee tin, savings that might take me years to accumulate, but I was determined.

For the first time in my life, I had a goal. When the lawyer informed me my dad's favorite uncle had passed away and left me an inheritance, I didn't think twice. In my mind, it was the good energy I was putting out in the world finally coming back to me. Dad was looking out for me from beyond."

I gave her a sad smile. "Except you ended up here."

"Mmhmm." Her full lips twisted into a wry grin. "At first, the curse felt like a horrible mistake. But the longer I'm here and get to know you three, I realize it's the furthest thing from a mistake. It's just the conservation of energy. My energy towards my dream wasn't destroyed. It just turned into a different dream. One of love. Passion. Everything good this house had to offer. When you look at it like that, it doesn't seem like such a mistake after all, does it?"

I kissed her on the head. "It makes perfect sense."

And it did. Because for the first time since I had come into the house, I had a new viewpoint on why I was in here. A purpose for my entrapment.

I had credence. Savannah was both my truth and my faith.

OceanofPDF.com



CHAPTER 20

They

It was weird how quickly things became natural.

From Savannah coming into the house, to falling in love with her, to watching her fall in love with the other two... none of it felt strange. It all seemed like it was meant to be. She had quite literally saved my life when I ran out of hooch. Probably more than once, because there had been hard days since then. But with Savannah by my side, they were getting a lot easier.

When she came upstairs, hand in hand with Felix, a grin stretching from ear to ear, I knew she had done the impossible. Not only had they made up, but she had discovered what was behind Felix's secret door. When he left her at my bedroom, pressing a kiss to her jaw and telling her he loved her, I just about fell over. If that wasn't proof everything was right in our little world, I don't know what was. The earlier drama in the front room had shaken

our foundation for a moment or two, and left me seeking shelter in my bedroom, but now all was well again.

She grinned at me as she danced into my room. “You told me to give up, Theo, and guess what? I didn’t. Do you want to know what’s behind the door? Can you guess?”

I smiled, leaning back on my headboard. She was in a fantastic mood, and I just wanted to watch her shine. “Let’s see...a nuclear warhead?”

Savannah laughed. I fucking loved making her laugh. It was the closest I came to a high since I got sober. “Close, but no cigar.”

“An entire harem of women he hasn’t been sharing with us for the last decade?”

She shook her head. “He wishes. You wish...”

I crossed my arms behind my head. “I give up, sweet girl. Tell me.”

Savannah sat on the end of my bed, biting her lip and raising her eyebrow like she had the juiciest secret to share. “Orchids.”

I burst out laughing. I wasn’t sure what I had been expecting her to say, but it wasn’t orchids. “You’re kidding. Felix’s big bad secret behind locked doors is a bunch of flowers?”

She nodded. “Dozens of them. They’re so pretty. I have no idea why he kept them a secret from you two this whole time.”

“Probably because he knew we would make fun of him.” I threw my hands up in the air when Savannah glared at me. “I’m kidding! Just kidding!”

“You will not make fun of him for it,” she decreed. “I’ll take you to see them tomorrow. It’s so nice and warm in there, too. There’s a sunroof! And now the door is unlocked, maybe we can all get a bit more Vitamin D.”

I reached down and pulled her closer to me. “Speaking of Vitamin D...”

“Oh my god, Theo. You’re so fucking cheesy.” Savannah rolled her eyes, but she was laughing, dragging her hand down my pants.

“Yeah, but you love it,” I murmured.

“I do.” She groaned. “I want to fuck you so badly, but on the way up here I told Luther I would meet him in the library. I just couldn’t sit on my bit of gossip any longer.”

“Any longer than the five seconds between Felix dropping you off at my door, and you blabbing your big mouth?” I winked, laughing at her indignant face. “Go and get Daddy Luther, Sav. We can all have fun, and then you can go and do your research on witches and ghosts.”

She grinned, hand still trailing down my hard cock. “You sure?”

I rolled my eyes. “I want to fuck you, and you want to fuck both of us. You really think I’m going to say no? Now hurry and go get him before I change my mind.”

“You wouldn’t.” Savannah jumped off the bed.

“No, I wouldn’t. But don’t tell him about the damn orchids or he’ll want to see them right now and I have other plans for you tonight.” I winked at her.

She rolled her eyes and ran out the door to leave me shaking my head. God, I loved her. How boring this house would have been for another three decades if not for her electric energy.

Soon, she was back, pulling Luther by the hand. He might have been acting less than thrilled, but I could see the excitement lighting up his eyes. Sex was better than books any day, hands down. Savannah turned and gave Luther a deep kiss, standing up on her tiptoes to reach his lips. In return, he wrapped his arms around her, sliding his hands down to grip her ass. My cock grew impossibly harder, watching someone else touching my girl the way I knew she loved. I needed her on me, now. “Get over here, sweet girl.”

She spun around and smiled at me, her lips swollen from their hard kiss, cheeks flushed with excitement and desire. Luther still had his arms wrapped around her waist, clinging tightly to her from behind. “Ask nicely.”

Such a brat. I smirked, cocking my finger to motion her closer. “Get over here and suck my cock, please.”

If I had my hand in her panties, I was certain I would’ve felt how wet my request made her. She crossed the room, Luther trailing behind her. I unbuttoned my pants, pushing them over my hips to free my aching cock, and smiled when I caught Savannah licking her lips. She climbed up on the

bed, crawling between my legs, never losing eye contact. Still looking me dead in the eye, she gripped my cock in one hand, and wrapped her lips around it.

I was the first to break our staring contest, my eyes rolling back in my head as she took more of my cock into her mouth, her tongue swirling over the sensitive tip. Her hand pumped up and down in time with her lips, and I twisted my hands into her hair. I couldn't stop my hips from arching upwards, trying to take more of her mouth. My deviant side loved the way she choked and gagged every time I slammed deeper, her muscles contracting around my cock. She felt too damn good, and if I wasn't careful I was going to spill down her throat before we even had a chance to have our fun.

"Fuck, okay, okay, hold up, sweet girl." With a groan, I pulled out. Savannah raised her head, satisfaction clear in her eyes. There was nothing sexier than watching Savannah wipe her lips after my dick made her drool. My cock pulsed, and I regretted my decision to leave the warmth of her mouth. "I don't want to come before Luther even gets a chance to play."

I pushed her up, and helped her shuffle out of her clothes. If I could've had my way, Savannah would've been naked all the time. I loved looking at the curves of her body, the lines that drew my eye no matter what she was wearing—from my grungy old band shirts, to Felix's button downs. But

Savannah naked...damn. I was a lucky fucking man. We all were. And now I wanted to take my girl from below.

Luther must have realized what I'd wanted, because he moved in behind her on the bed, wrapping his hand around her neck to pull her face towards the ceiling. Her breasts arched forward as he positioned her, her slickness dripping out as she straddled my lap from her submissive posture. I watched his other hand trail down her breasts, tickling her nipples as it moved along the smooth curve of her belly. Lower, towards where her pussy met my thighs. I was captivated by the sight of how turned on Savannah was from being obedient, held in place by Luther's large hand. The only sounds coming out of her were quiet pants, her eyes unfocused. From what I could see, his hand found her clit, tracing it in small circles.

I held her hips, and she rocked into Luther's hand, a low moan escaping her restricted throat. How was this real life? I caught Luther's eye as I began to lift her up. He understood what I was trying to do, and together, we moved her so she was above my cock. Luther was still rubbing her clit, and her eyes were closed now, so when I began to lower her down onto my cock, her eyes flew open with a look of sheer pleasure.

"Fuck me," Savannah whispered. She spread her legs, allowing herself to fully take me.

The way her pussy stretched and grasped me was all kinds of delicious. She rocked back and forth, lost in

pleasure as she adjusted to the new sensation. I caught her rhythm, and began fucking her in sync with Luther's fingers. This was the stuff of dreams. Her heavy-lidded gaze was fixed on me, her throat wrapped in another man's hand, and my cock was fucking her to no tomorrow.

I watched her mouth, bewitched by the way she could only just barely moan. "More," she whispered.

I grinned, and looked at Luther again. "Hear that, Daddy Luther? Our sweet girl wants more. Won't you oblige her?"

Luther dropped his hand from her throat, luscious fingerprints lingering from where he had pressed into her pale skin. I stopped thrusting to give him time. He pushed her forward, and she nearly fell on top of me, propping herself up on my shoulders.

Luther's hand was between us now, and Savannah tensed as he eased himself inside her tight asshole. I leaned forward, pressing a sweet kiss to her mouth, even as the two of us fucked her dirty. "You're so fucking beautiful with two cocks in you, you know that?"

She moaned into my mouth as Luther grunted and pushed his way inside. My sweet tainted girl was filled now, stuffed with both of us, and I knew she loved it. Once I felt her relax into the good pressure instead of pain, I began to move.

Savannah rocked into me, and Luther kept pace. By now, we knew how to work with each other. I couldn't tell one sound of pleasure from the other, focused on making Savannah come all over both of us. I picked up my slow

pace, watching her chest rise and fall a bit quicker. I wanted her to come so fucking hard she collapsed against me, letting me carry her weight as she orgasmed.

It didn't take much. Her hands dug into my shoulders, her mouth caught in a silent scream, and her eyes begged for release. I drove my cock deeper into her, harder, until I felt her shatter.

"Oh, fucking hell," Luther cried, gripping her waist as he shook and shot into her ass. God, what a fucking sight knowing she was filled with his cum, had been filled with Felix's earlier, and now was about to be filled with mine. They were both gasping and clinging for purchase as I continued to fuck her pulsing pussy, shaking both of them through their orgasms. Finally I lost control, spilling out inside of her.

She collapsed on me, all of us sandwiched together, too tired to move an inch. Every time I fucked Savannah felt like the best time ever, and I wasn't sure how I could keep topping these experiences. But still it happened, every single time.

Eventually, Luther pulled out of her with a groan, and I followed suit. He left the bed, and I took the opportunity to stare at Savannah, even prettier in the moonlight than the daylight. She rolled over, yawning as Luther returned with a cloth to clean her up. We took turns doing this, all of us finding it a reward rather than a chore, an excuse to touch her more, to show her love and affection.

“Are you going to go do your research?” I whispered, brushing the hair away from her face.

She shook her head, not bothering to open her eyes, and curled against me. “No, I’m too tired. Let me sleep.”

Luther pressed a kiss to her forehead, already dressed again. “It’s okay, sweetheart. I can handle the research tonight.”

She smiled and he left, closing the door quietly behind him. Within seconds her breathing evened out, her body relaxing against mine, sound asleep.

There was nothing more I loved than falling asleep with Savannah in my arms. If I could fall asleep like that every night for the rest of my life, I would die a happy man indeed. And if I could spend the rest of eternity in this house with her, I’d be pretty okay with that as well.

When I opened my eyes again, the morning sun was streaming in through the window, Savannah still resting in my arms. She was snoring softly. I smiled to myself. It was unlike her to sleep later than I did, so she really must have needed the extra rest. I tried to move as little as possible, watching her sleep peacefully. I wished I could see what she was dreaming about. I hoped it was something good. I hoped it was something about me.

Eventually she shifted, blinking her eyes open. She smiled when she saw me. “Good morning. How long have you been awake?”

I smiled back and lied through my teeth. “Not long. But you need to get out of bed now. It’s sunny for the first time in days, and someone promised me a tour of a secret room.”

Savannah’s grin grew wider. “I did, didn’t I?” She rolled to her side, and got out of bed. She didn’t bother finding her clothes from the day before, grabbing whatever looked clean of mine off the floor. “Come on, get your lazy ass out of bed.”

“Says the woman who only woke up five seconds ago.” I got out of bed all the same, excited to see a space of the house I hadn’t yet explored.

Luther met us at the top of the stairs, yawning. “I don’t think I slept at all last night, not that I have anything to show for it from my research.” He peered at us curiously. “What’s all the fuss? You two look like you’re up to something.”

Savannah sent me a secret wink before answering him. “We were so busy last night I forgot to tell you! Felix’s secret room. It’s an orchid conservatory,” she gleefully whispered. “You coming?”

He nodded, smiling. “A chance to see something different than the same five rooms I’ve seen? Absolutely I’m coming.”

The three of us trekked down the stairs, excited for something new. We got to the door, and Savannah turned the knob—no longer locked.

We stepped inside a different world. The sun streamed through the glass roof, making the room at least ten degrees warmer than the rest of the house. And after only feeling one temperature for so long, it felt like I was on a fucking vacation. “Holy shit,” I whispered. Everywhere I looked there were orchids. They covered every surface possible, in every color and size imaginable. I couldn’t connect the dots between cold, mild-mannered Felix, and the gardener who must have so much passion to keep all of these delicate plants alive.

“I think I’m in shock,” Luther murmured.

“Right?” Savannah spun around, face to the sun. “Isn’t it amazing?”

“Glad to see everyone’s found my secret spot.” Felix snuck up behind us, shaking his head. “I’m going to have to put visiting hours on the door.” But he smiled as he gave Savannah a quick hug, pressing a kiss to the top of her head.

Seeing how comfortable he was with her made me happier than I ever thought it would. I didn’t realize how much happiness could change a person. And knowing he had found peace in Savannah...Felix was an entirely different person.

“Shush,” Savannah scolded, but she smiled. “Give us the tour.”

Felix led us from bench to bench, in what was probably the longest time we had ever spent together without

fighting. He explained which orchids were native to our area, and which he had transported—which in 1907 I didn't even want to think of how expensive that would be.

Savannah pointed out which colors were her favorite, and went around smelling each and every one, even the ones that made her grimace.

I had to admit. This was probably my favorite day the entire time I had been in the house.

Luther was explaining to Felix how different species of orchids got their names, when Savannah waved me over. "Theo! Come look, quickly!"

I hurried over, following her finger where she pointed at the soil of one of the larger orchids. There, in the specially created orchid soil Felix had been so proud of, was a large spider. "What the hell?" I didn't need to get closer to see what it was. The spider was not small in the slightest, and I was sure it was eyeing me up to be its next meal.

She looked fascinated by it. "I thought you said animals and bugs don't come near the house."

"They don't normally." I shrugged, trying to ignore the long legs. "But that isn't to say never. Remember our pet beetle?"

Savannah rolled her eyes. "How could I possibly forget the pet beetle?" She reached down as if to let the spider crawl on her hand. I swatted at her arm.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?"

“Picking up the spider?” She looked at me as if that was the dumbest question she had ever heard. “Or would you rather I just leave it in the plant to escape in the house and hide somewhere?”

“What the hell is going on over here?” Felix asked, coming to join us with Luther.

I pointed at Savannah, still bent over. “Your girlfriend found a spider and was going to pick it up.”

Luther smirked. “Technically she’s your girlfriend too, you know.”

“It’s just a fucking spider,” Savannah protested. “I was just going to take it somewhere safe.”

“Where, like, outside? Oh, wait...” No one laughed at my joke.

Felix frowned at me. “Are you afraid of spiders or something?”

“Me? Of tiny little spiders? Absolutely not.”

Luther bent his head toward the plant pot now, examining it. “I think it’s a black widow, so you probably should be afraid of it.” He spoke with authority. “We should kill it. You don’t want one of those to bite you in the night. Nasty buggers. They survive on other insects. I wouldn’t be surprised if Felix’s orchid soil harbored a few different species that got trapped inside with us, and have been contained to this room with how cautious he was with the door.”

“Thanks, Daddy Luther. Can you kill it now?” I took a step back. Bite, nasty, and spider did not belong together in my vocabulary.

“You are afraid of them!” Felix grinned, and without another word, scooped up the large spider and thrust it in my general direction. “Unless you want a closer look?”

I jumped back. “Get that fucking thing away from me!”

“Seriously?” Savannah snapped. “Felix, do not torment Theo. He’s obviously terrified.”

“Thanks, sweet girl, but I’m not terrified.” I couldn’t stop the shriek that escaped my mouth when Felix took another step towards me, a wicked grin on his face. I knew I hated the fuckhead for a reason. “What the fuck has gotten into you, bro? Has too much sex gone to your head or something?”

I was all for a new, playful Felix. But not when spiders were involved.

“Come on, Theo. Man up,” Felix taunted.

“Let’s not be foolish. Black widows are dangerous.” Luther slapped Felix’s hand, and the spider fell to the floor. His large brown boot fell on top of it, smashing it. He made sure the spider was dead, and then looked around at all of us. “There. It’s over. The scary spider is gone. Can we move on now?”

Felix rolled his eyes, Savannah punched him, and I slowly moved back towards the group. Eventually the spider was forgotten.

But nothing in the house ever stayed forgotten for long.

OceanofPDF.com

CHAPTER 21 *Savannah*

The conservatory was an escape away from the house. Knowing there was a room I could go to that felt like I was outside, even while I was still trapped, was absolute heaven. And true to his word, Felix brought in one of the overstuffed chairs the afternoon after the spider incident. I would sit and pretend to read, watching him putter over his plants.

We were all waiting for Brynn to return, hopeful she would come back with good news. None of us spoke about it, but the energy in the house had shifted. I knew for the guys, this was the first time they had ever felt like they had a true shot at getting out of the house, and I wanted to make sure they held on to that feeling as tight as they could. I had only dealt with confinement for a few months, so for them—I couldn't even imagine.

It was a week after Brynn had come, I was sitting in the conservatory. I would've loved to ask her what was taking so

damn long, but I had no way to talk to her unless she was standing on the front porch. Waiting was my only option. Luther and I were taking an unspoken research break, so on my lap sat an ancient copy of *Wuthering Heights*. I wasn't making any progress with the book though, because I was watching Felix stake one of his massive orchids. He turned and smiled at me, his fingers deftly tying the stem to its new support.

"You're not wearing your gloves," I pointed out. Felix was always wearing his gloves, a habit I assumed he hadn't broken in over a hundred years.

He shook his head. "I was careful about wearing them before, because I didn't want you all to know what I was doing. But now that the secret is out, I want to feel the soil under my hands."

I smiled, watching him quietly until eventually he turned to me.

"Do you ever read anything Luther gives you, or do you just bring it in here for a few days and then give it back to him?" Felix smirked.

"Hey!" I protested. "I do read the stuff he gives me. Just not all the time. And besides, I read *Wuthering Heights* in college. I know the lowdown. Unrequited love and all that jazz. Leopards can't change their spots."

Felix laughed. "Sounds like you hold a high regard for the book."

“I do. Right now I just have a high regard for something else.” I raised an eyebrow, giving him a smirk.

“Oh, yeah?” He started walking towards me, intent written all over his handsome face. “And what would that be?”

“I’ll give you three guesses.” I sat up straight in the chair, tucking the book behind me.

“Hmm...me?” I loved playful Felix. I loved the energy he embodied, and the way his smile made my stomach knot. I loved how much more often I got to see it, now we weren’t hiding things from each other. Now we got to love each other in the daylight.

“Right in one. Come and claim your prize.” I held out my hand to him, but he stopped short. A peculiar expression flashed over his face, like he wasn’t sure what was happening. “Felix? Are you okay?”

He shook his head, trying to smile. But I could read the pain behind his dark eyes, clear as day. “I just had the oddest chill come over my body. Like I’m sweating and cold at the same time.”

“Well that doesn’t make sense. I’m boiling in here today, so why the hell would you be cold? Are you getting sick?” I frowned, and gestured to him as I rose to my feet. “Sit down. Let me feel your forehead.”

Felix didn’t protest, sinking into the chair right away. His face relaxed immediately, and I realized he must have been a lot worse off than he thought. Illnesses scared all of us. We couldn’t age, but we could still get sick. Our health care was

limited to whatever Felix had brought in with him in 1907, which consisted of a few bandages and whatever else was in the pantry. A fever, like the one Theo developed while he was going through withdrawal, could really only be treated with cool cloths, and a shit ton of hope.

I pressed my wrist to his forehead, and then my lips.
“You’re burning up. Are you sure you feel okay?”

He rolled his eyes. “I feel fine. Just that odd chill. Can we go back to what we were doing before now?” He tried to pull me closer, but I stood my ground.

“No way. You’re going to bed immediately.” I pulled him up to his feet and pointed towards the door. “March.”

“You’re as bad as Luther sometimes, you know that?” But Felix didn’t protest, walking out the door with only one small glance back at the orchid he had been staking.

“I’ll finish staking her. You worry about getting yourself upstairs to bed.” I shooed him on.

“Okay, but gentle hands. Give her a good water when you’re done. None of that one tablespoon bullshit you tried to tell me. She likes to be soaked.” He was still talking to me from the stairs, calling out directions I ignored.

Ten minutes later, Felix’s orchid was situated, and I followed him up the stairs, a stack of fresh washcloths in my hand. Luther and Theo’s bedrooms were both empty, which meant we had the rare opportunity of privacy for the time being. Not that we could do anything with it, as sick as Felix seemed to be. He was completely undressed by the time I

reached his bedroom, curled up on his side under the blanket. "How are you doing?" I asked quietly, trying not to disturb him if he was sleeping.

His teeth chattered in response. "I'm fine, really."

"You do *not* sound fine. At all." I pressed my wrist to his forehead again, pulling it away when I realized how sweaty he was. His fever must have been crazy high, but without a thermometer I had no way of knowing. "Felix, I need you to tell me the truth. What exactly are you feeling?"

If I was going to treat him right, I needed to know the symptoms he had to narrow down the causes. I wasn't an expert by any means, but I had been pretty handy with an internet search and a bottle of painkillers growing up. Dad didn't trust doctors, so he would only take me to get checked out if it was something he couldn't cure himself, like a broken wrist or infected cut.

Felix sighed, flipping over onto his back. His eyes didn't look good, already glossing over from the fever. How long had he been feeling like shit and just hadn't said anything? Fucking stubborn men were going to be the death of me. "I have chills. And my bones ache. That sounds like a fever doesn't it? Like yellow fever?"

I shook my head. "Not really a thing in these parts any more. But you might have the flu. What else?"

"I just want to sleep." I could see his eyes drifting shut, but I needed him to stay awake until I figured out a course of action.

“Anything else?” I repeated, leaning him forward so I could rest a cool cloth behind his neck. Hopefully the direct location would help bring the fever down.

“Nothing else,” he murmured. “Except my wrist is ridiculously itchy. Does that have anything to do with the flu?”

“Not usually, but let me take a closer look.” I grabbed his wrist out from under the blanket, and gasped when I realized what was making his skin so itchy. Where his wrist met his hand was a red and purple welt. It was already looking infected, pus and blood seeping out freely from the three dots in the middle. Definitely a spider bite, and definitely an infected spider bite. *Shit*. What was I going to do without antibiotics?

Think old school, Savannah. “Alright, this is what we’re going to do,” I announced. “I’m going to go downstairs and boil some water. We’re going to clean that bite with boiling water, and whatever hydrogen peroxide I can find in the house.”

“Okay, darling,” he whispered. “Whatever you think is best.” His eyes were fluttering closed again, and I wasn’t sure if I should keep him awake or not. Fucking hell. I wasn’t a nurse. I didn’t have any first aid training. I was a waitress with a community college business degree, and I was in over my head. *Fuck*.

I pressed my wrist to Felix’s forehead again, and if anything he felt warmer than he had only moments before.

The infection must have been running wild since the moment the spider bit him. "I'm going to send Luther in to sit with you while I boil water."

The only response I got was a mumbled acknowledgement. I darted out of the room, hammering at the library door until Luther poked his head out. "Hey, sweetheart. What can I do for you?" He was smiling, but with one look at my face, his expression fell. "What's wrong?"

I was trying to keep my emotions under control. Feelings wouldn't help Felix get better. Logic would. I collected my breath, and met his sharp gaze. "It's Felix. There must be another spider in the conservatory. He's always used gloves before, but today...."

"Oh, shit." Luther's eyes widened, even less able to hide his emotions than I was. "What do you need me to do?"

Thank God for Luther's steadiness, and willingness to help. He was such a rock when I needed it most, and I was clinging to him for all he was worth. "I need you to sit with him while I boil some water. It might be too late to stop the infection from spreading, but I have to try." I paused, frowning. "I just don't understand how he didn't notice. We could've treated this so easily if we had caught it right away."

"Hydrogen peroxide is in the pantry." Luther was already walking towards Felix's bedroom.

At Felix's door, Luther paused. His eyes widened, and his face paled. He swallowed hard, and then shifted his face before he turned back to me, trying to put on a calm face for my benefit. But it was too late, because I had seen his true reaction. "If that spider really was a black widow, you often don't feel the bites, but you would react to the venom. Or maybe he got a secondary infection from the soil. Let's hope not both, and that it doesn't turn necrotic."

I tried to ignore the last words he said, because they weren't going to be a reality for Felix. We could ride out the venom, and I'd stop the infection before it got any worse. He was going to be absolutely fine. Except I couldn't stop the thoughts from cycling as I made my way downstairs. Because while I knew how to handle Theo's withdrawal, having experienced it before, I had no idea about venom or how to treat an infection without medication. Dad knew his limits, so any bites or scrapes I had gotten as a child were treated with antibiotics as soon as they began to turn red. A quick trip to the doctor usually sorted it all out in a matter of days. But we didn't have access to a doctor. We were trapped in this godforsaken house with supplies from 1907.

I filled the kettle with water, and set it on the old stovetop. Then I sat down in the old kitchen chair. While I waited for it to boil, I started to cry. For the first time in the house, I let myself cave to everything I felt—bad and good. I felt utterly and completely stuck. We didn't have doctors. We didn't

have medical supplies. We couldn't leave the house. And Felix was either poisoned or infected. Two very bad words.

Luther's face said it all. There was a chance I wouldn't be able to do anything for Felix, and he would succumb to his spider bite one way or another. It was such a small fucking thing that now had the biggest consequences. Over one hundred fucking years, they'd lasted. Since I came, we were all living in a fantasy world of sex and love, focusing on the good instead of what we lacked. What made the whole situation a thousand times heavier was the fact we were so fucking close to getting out of here.

There had been a different atmosphere in the house since Brynn's visit. For the first time in a long time, the guys shared my hopeful attitude. Never before had they had help on the outside—and definitely not help that might know about our situation specifically. All we had to do was keep going and wait it out. We were so close.

And one fucking spider bite was going to ruin it all. "Fuck." I slammed my hand down on the table and sobbed harder. I was pissed. Pissed at the world, pissed at the situation, pissed that Felix might not have a chance for what was such a stupid fucking thing. None of this was fair. Felix getting an infection we had no way to treat while we were waiting for help was the cherry on top of so many things that had gone wrong in all of our lives, and I cried for all four of us. I grieved for what we had lost, before we ever found it.

For Theo losing his parents. For finding hope in a snowstorm, only to end up here.

For Felix, being used for what he thought would protect him.

For Luther, finding love and losing it just as quickly. For learning to stand on his own feet, and then having them knocked out from under him.

For never giving myself a chance to change. For relying on others so heavily I forgot the beauty of being alone.

I cried so hard I didn't notice Theo appearing at the top of the basement stairs. "Sav? Are you okay?"

"Shit," I cursed. "Theo, you scared the hell out of me."

He smiled, used to sneaking up on me when I wasn't expecting it. "What's wrong?"

I sniffled, wiping my eyes on the hem of my shirt. "I'm just being dramatic. Felix has an infected spider bite from the other day, and obviously I can't just send him out to the doctor."

Theo's mouth dropped open. "Oh, shit."

I laughed bitterly. "You and Luther had the exact same response." The kettle whistled, and scrubbed my hands over my face, pretending the situation wasn't as dire as it seemed. "I'm just boiling some water to try and stop it from spreading any further. Maybe we can still catch it in time."

"Maybe," Theo agreed, but his voice didn't sound so sure. "Can I help?"

I nodded as I grabbed the knitted tea towel. "Can you either bring this upstairs, or find the hydrogen peroxide."

He took the tea towel from my hands, giving me a kiss on the forehead. "I've got the kettle. I'll do whatever you need, sweet girl. Felix is going to be fine."

"Thank you," I whispered. I clung to his hand, squeezing it tightly as if I could transfer all of my fear and pain that way. He smiled at me, but it didn't meet his eyes. "I'll just grab the peroxide and I'll be right up."

I ran off to the pantry, stuffing my emotions as far down as they would go. I needed to stay focused if I was going to heal Felix. I indulged my pity party, and now it was time to get to work. As I stood in the pantry filled with glass jars and unknown labels, I realized my first problem. None of the weird bottled medicines looked like peroxide. I ran my fingers over each one. Headache tonics, vitamin mixtures... it had to be here somewhere. I searched for a brown bottle, then realized, hydrogen peroxide was called something different in 1907. I snatched the brown bottle labeled with "Dioxogen."

I ran upstairs. In the doorway, I froze, taking in the scene before me. Felix lay in his bed, tossing uncomfortably. If anything, he seemed worse than when I left. Theo stood awkwardly to one side, still holding the kettle, staring in shock at the man who had always seemed so powerful. Luther stood beside his bed, a solemn look on his face. He

was holding Felix's arm in his grasp. *Fuck*. I had been hoping for something reassuring. This wasn't it.

I cocked my head to the side, trying to ask what he was seeing without freaking out an already scared Theo further.

Luther gave me a subtle shake of his head, and lifted Felix's arm off the bed to show me. I nearly dropped the precious bottle of Dioxogen when I saw the angry red streaks shooting up his forearm. This wasn't just a mild infection we were going to be able to kill with some hot water. I wanted to curl up next to Felix and cry. I wanted Luther and Theo to hold me and tell me it was all going to be okay. I wanted Brynn, and my dad. But none of that was possible right now. The next 48 hours were going to be make or break for Felix, and sitting around moping wasn't going to be much use to anyone. I pursed my lips together and nodded, grabbing from the stack of washcloths. "Let's get to work."



CHAPTER 22

Luther

Before antibiotics, people used to treat illnesses with herbal remedies.

In South America, cinchona bark was dried, ground into powder, and mixed with water to reduce fevers.

The Sumerians were thought to have used honey to treat wounds as far back as 2000 B.C.

Even during Felix's time, different infections were combated with mercury treatment—not to mention the more visceral treatments, like bloodletting or leeches to remove the poison. Savannah told me they still used leeches in 2022. I wasn't sure I believed her.

Regardless, none of this knowledge helped, because we had nothing to help fight off Felix's fever except boiling water, a small bottle of ancient hydrogen peroxide, and sheer willpower. I didn't tell Savannah the peroxide might be pure water at this point, because I didn't want to upset her more. At least it was sterile—mostly—from being sealed. After

three years in the real world though, it turned into water, even in a sealed bottle. I hoped like hell the house magic had preserved its efficacy.

For the next two days, Savannah and I took shifts watching and changing Felix's bandages. The bite was steadily becoming worse. The welt spread across most of his palm now, and was hot to the touch. His arm was entirely streaked with angry red slashes. Most of the time he was sleeping. When he was awake, he wasn't coherent enough to understand. We also couldn't be certain if the infection stemmed from the spider or the soil, so we were fighting blind.

We only made Theo stay with him if we were both needed elsewhere. Theo being sober was great for so many things, but caring for a deathly-ill Felix was not one of them. Being around someone so near death was triggering for him, and the poor kid literally shook when he had to be alone with Felix. Neither Savannah nor I acknowledged this to each other though, because mentioning it would mean we were accepting how close Felix was to the end.

When I was alone in my bed, trying to scrape together a couple hours of sleep to do it all again the next day, I would think about it. I tried to rationalize what we would do with his body afterwards. How it would mentally and emotionally affect all of us, and what we could do to carry on. We'd have to rely on each other, more so than ever before. Because

one thing was slowly becoming a very real possibility, and that was that Felix was unlikely to survive.

A knock at my door jolted me awake, already knowing who it was before my eyes adjusted to see her curves in the shadows. "Luther?" Savannah called in a quiet voice. "Are you still awake?"

"Yeah." My eyes had become used to the dark, and I could see her twisting the bottom of her shirt in her hands. She was supposed to be with Felix while I slept, and my heart sank, fearing the worst, but hoping for good news. "Is Brynn back?" I held my breathing, waiting for the blow. "Is Felix okay?"

"No Brynn yet. I don't know where the hell she is. And Felix is sleeping. Theo is with him." She sighed. "I just...I had to get out of there, you know? I felt like I couldn't breathe."

"I know." Felix's room was physically suffocating with no window to open while he burned from the fever within. It was also emotionally stifling as well. You sat there doing very little, knowing you were doing fuck all, basically waiting for Felix to take a turn for the worse. It was killer on your psyche to know we were all helpless. "Come here, sweetheart."

Savannah padded over to my bed, sitting on the edge and curling against my chest. She fit so damn perfectly, like her curves were molded specifically to the lines of my body. I held her tight, wanting to take away all her pain and fear. I

wanted to carry her burdens, the weight she bore, and let her live her life without a care in the world. She turned her face into my chest, muffling her words as she spoke. "Tell me it's going to be okay."

I pressed my lips together. Would it be thought a lie if I considered "being okay" outside of Felix's sickness? Because that was a yes. In the end, I walked the line of reassurance and truth. "It's going to be okay, no matter what. I promise you that with my whole heart."

It didn't feel like a lie, and when she lay down next to me, clinging to my neck, I knew I had chosen the right words. They were a comfort to her, like she was to me. My chest grew wet. She was crying, sobbing silently against me. I didn't want to make a big deal out of it and make her uncomfortable, so I just held her close until the shaking stopped. She sniffled once or twice, pulling back from me to dry her eyes on the back of her hand. "I love you, Luther."

I smiled, stroking her hair. "I love you more. We'll get through this. I promise."

Savannah sat up on the edge of the bed. "I hope you're right. I'm not sure any of us can take another tragedy. We've already lost so much."

I reached for her hand. We sat in silence for a moment. Her words sliced through my heart in one seamless motion. We had lost a lot. We had lost our freedom, our lives. Our opportunities and our potential. But hadn't we gained a lot, too? We had found each other. And maybe, just maybe, we

had found parts of ourselves hidden away to the rest of the world. Our close proximity had forced our secrets to the surface, exposing them one by one. I couldn't speak for the others, but I felt lighter. My soul didn't feel stuck to the ground anymore, collecting dust as it dragged behind me. There was a chance this was the cleanest my soul had been in decades, scrubbed free of all its stains.

Of course, I didn't say any of this to Savannah. If I spoke those words aloud, she would stare at me and nod, those same thoughts already echoing in her brain. So we sat quietly, feeding each other's souls with our presence. Solidifying our spines for another day, another battle against an army we faced with no weapons. No armor. Just our love.

I thought back to the first time I saw Savannah, the first time she snapped back at Felix. This girl, I thought. This woman will turn my world upside down, as small as it was trapped inside this lonely house. And she had, with her sunshine smiles and her quiet presence in the library. She had made me realize we had a chance, while we scoured the books for any kind of escape, never giving up hope. She had shown me love, and lord almighty had she taught me how to fuck. She gave me so much comfort, and right now I wanted nothing more than to wrap my arms around her and watch her fall apart in my hands, building her back up with pleasure in the next moment. It would certainly help with

the tension building inside us. But now wasn't the time or place, so it would have to wait.

Eventually she patted my hand, bending down to press a kiss to my forehead. She didn't say a word, but I knew she was telling me she was going back to Felix. As she should. I needed sleep, since being tired would make me no help to her the next day.

I squeezed her hand. I love you, I tried to say with my touch. I didn't want to ruin the moment with words, like our strength would dissipate if we said the wrong thing.

Savannah squeezed back. I love you, too. And then she was gone, my bed slightly cooler without her warm body. I turned to my side, the conflicting emotions fighting each other for dominance before I finally caved to sleep.

I woke up to a commotion down the hall, raised voices that had to be Theo and Savannah because Felix was effectively incoherent. I jumped out of bed, pulling my pants on as quickly as I could. I didn't run down the hall, but jogging was a pretty damn close definition. It felt like all of our lives depended on what was going down in Felix's room. I turned into the doorway, but Felix wasn't sitting up in bed. I had half expected to see him scowling at all of us for making a big deal out of nothing. Instead, Savannah knelt next to his face, holding a basin as he retched, his stomach long empty. Theo was silent, in the midst of a panic attack, his chest rising and falling, his skin whiter than Felix's.

“Luther, thank fuck.” Savannah’s shoulders visibly relaxed at my presence. “He woke up about ten minutes ago and won’t stop dry heaving. I can’t leave him like this, but we need more water. And well...” She tipped her head towards Theo, who still stood frozen on the other side of the room. I knew she didn’t want to draw unnecessary attention to his state of mind, but worry was clearly scrawled across her face.

I nodded and walked over to Theo, placing both of my hands on his shoulders. “Theo,” I murmured, keeping my voice level and calm. “Theo, look at me.”

His eyes darted to mine, but his body still trembled under my hands. He was newly sober, and all his old reasons for getting high were smacking him in the face. Death was a bastard that way.

“Theo. Take a breath with me, come on now.” I exaggerated my breathing, keeping our gazes locked, until he finally began mimicking me. After a minute or two, his face regained its color, and he could focus on me. “It’s okay. We’re okay. I’m going to take you to your room, and you can rest. If we need you, we’ll come get you.” I reassured him the whole way out the door, meeting Savannah’s grateful gaze as we walked. Once I had Theo in bed, calmer and clear-headed, I returned to Felix’s room.

Savannah looked up at me again, rubbing Felix’s back as he continued to retch. He didn’t seem to be aware of what was happening, which sent a stab of panic running through

me. “Thanks,” she said. “I didn’t know what to do. They both needed me, and I couldn’t split myself in two. Poor fucking Theo. I don’t even want to think about his mental state right now.” She shook her head, falling silent.

“I’m here for you. And Theo wants to be, too. His brain is just stopping him right now. But he’s safe in bed.” I stepped over to her side, avoiding the piles of dirty laundry and basins we had collected over the last few days. “What can I do to help?”

Savannah held the basin under Felix’s chin with one hand, and thrust the kettle my way with the other. “More water. Please. Quickly.”

I nodded and rushed out the door, not wanting to leave her for any longer than I had to. We needed to be a team. Theo tried, he really, really did. But we couldn’t control our scars and past hurts. Maybe one day these things wouldn’t send him into a panic, but for now, it was just a fact of life.

For a second, I thought of moving Felix to the humidity of the conservatory, thinking it might help break the fever. But there was also a chance there were more spiders, and I wasn’t sure that was worth the risk.

There were over 43,000 species of spiders in the world. It was thought over thirty of them could kill a human. Africa has the most variety of arachnids, but every continent has them except for Antarctica. A natural spider defense was citrus scents, like lemon or orange. Spiders didn’t normally come near the house, and we thought it was because

animals and insects could sense the curse. Maybe this spider's ancestors had been in the house before the curse, and weren't affected, breeding quietly through the decades. None of these explanations stopped Felix from being bitten by what I thought was a black widow, and none of them stopped him from being a stubborn jerk and noticing the bite sooner so we could have had a damn chance.

I thought about Savannah, crying in my bed last night, and Theo, wide-eyed and worried. Would I be enough for either of them? Could I keep us all together? I couldn't stop the thoughts from swirling as I boiled more water, wishing for faster electricity, faster water, faster everything. I had no idea how everyone hadn't died in 1907 if it took this long to do anything. We needed Brynn, wherever the hell she was. We needed an icebox, which was just wishful thinking. We needed a lot of things. Eventually the water boiled, and I snatched the pot up with a tea towel, hurrying back to Savannah and Felix's side. I'd take over basin duty when I got upstairs, and let Savannah have a bit of a break. Hopefully Felix would nap soon, since his body needed sleep to heal.

A knock at the door startled me so hard I nearly jumped out of my skin. The kettle hit the floor with a bang, spilling water everywhere. I jumped back to avoid the splash, watching the boiling water spread out on the hardwood floor. It would leave a mark, perhaps permanent, forever changing the wood. I didn't care much at this point.

More banging. "Sav! Savannah! Come to the window!"

Brynn was back. Maybe with good news. Please, please be good news. We desperately needed it. I turned back towards the stairs to call up to Savannah but she was already at the top of the stairs. She must have heard the knocking, too.

"Brynn is back." I waved her down, expecting a smile or something to break the solemn look on her face. Some kind of relief, at the very least. "Come down and talk to her and I'll sit with Felix. I'll have to reboil the water..."

Her expression didn't change, and I wasn't even sure if she heard what I said.

"Felix won't wake up."

OceanofPDF.com



CHAPTER 23 *Savannah*

Felix wasn't dead.

I could see his chest rise and fall, and could count the heartbeats stuttering beneath the thin skin of his wrist. I knew he wasn't dead. Every logical sign and symptom pointed towards him still being alive. But when he had fallen into bed after twenty minutes of dry heaving, his eyes fell shut and stayed shut. Now I couldn't get him to open them again. Panic shredded my heart to pieces.

I tried everything I could to get him to wake up. I shook his shoulders, pinching tender skin to get any kind of reaction. But it only stuck together, dehydrated and lifeless. I sat him upright, only for his bodyweight to nearly bowl me over. I got in his face, holding his cheeks within my hands. "Listen here, fuckhead. You're going to wake the hell up, and you're going to wake up now. You are not going to leave me in this house without you. Do you hear me? I'm not doing

any of this without you. I can't. I fucking can't, Felix. So you need to wake the fuck up."

Still he lay prone beneath my touch, breathing but not moving. Alive but not living. I wanted to collapse on his chest and cry until he woke up. But that wouldn't help. I couldn't get Theo, because he was busy battling his own demons. What I needed was Luther, and his brain filled with information that was only useful half the time. Thankfully, right now was that time. I gave Felix a quick look. Still breathing. I would be gone for all of two seconds to get Luther. I sprinted to the top of the stairs, only to see Luther standing in the foyer, steaming water around his feet, turning up to smile at me. He was talking, but I couldn't make out a word he said over my thundering heart.

Finally I spit out the words that were rotting my mouth. "Felix won't wake up."

Luther jumped into action, passing me on the stairs. "Brynn is at the door. I'll take over for Felix—you go talk to her."

Of course Brynn would show up now of all times. I took the last few steps two at a time, racing for the dining room window that looked out onto the porch. My best friend stood outside, red hair a mess in that same breeze I couldn't feel. "Brynn!"

"Sav! Oh thank God. I was worried when you didn't come down right away." Her smile was exactly what I needed right now. My heartbeat steadied as I took in her calm demeanor.

But then my anger surfaced, my blood boiling under my skin. “Where the hell have you been? We have an emergency going on here, and you’ve been nowhere. Didn’t you even think about coming to check on me?”

I had no idea where my fury had come from, but I felt horrible when Brynn held her hands up to stop me. “I’m so sorry. My car broke down, and Granny’s been in the hospital, and I—”

I cut her off. “No. I’m sorry. I’m just running on fumes. I shouldn’t take it out on you. But we are having a bit of an emergency right now.”

“Hey, what’s going on?”

I was about to respond to Brynn, but from behind me, I heard footsteps. Theo appearance at the top of the stairs. He looked much calmer, and his face was its normal color, not the awful white it had been in Felix’s room. “I heard Brynn was back?”

“Yeah. How are you feeling?”

“Better.” He hung over the railing, a mixture of relief and concern warring in his face.

My heart sang when he smiled down at me. “Thank God. I can’t lose two of you.”

We both froze when we realized what I had said. But Theo smiled again, bigger than before. “You’re not going to lose either of us.”

God, I wished that was true, more than anything else in life. I would happily stay in this house for a thousand years

without an escape if we all could live happily and healthily together.

Wait, what?

“Theo, can you please look in on Felix and let me know if he’s okay?”

He nodded and turned down the hallway while I looked at Brynn. She wasn’t too happy I hadn’t yet answered her question, too focused on Theo. A frown creased her forehead, and she had her arms crossed in front of her chest. “What the hell is going on?”

I sighed, pressing my hand against the window. “Felix was bitten by a spider. It got infected, and he isn’t doing well.”

“Oh, Sav.” She put her palm against mine on the glass. “Have you slept at all?”

I shrugged. “A bit.” Then I locked eyes with her, begging her in a way I could never do with words alone. “Please tell me you have good news for me.”

Her face fell.

“No, Brynn. No, don’t give me that look. You have to have good news for me. You have to.” Those tiny knives shredding my heart were back, tearing into bone and muscle, ripping me to pieces. Brynn was our only hope. Our only chance.

“I’m sorry, Sav. I really am. I explained the situation to Granny. She knew exactly who I was talking about, and what house I meant. She also said there was no way for her to break the spell. Felix has to break it. He’s the only one who

can.” She took a deep breath, her green eyes pooling with tears. “She wanted to help. You know her. Of course she’d do anything to help you. But she couldn’t. Said it was completely something that had to happen on the inside.”

I pressed my head to the glass, tears threatening to stream down my face. I could hear Theo call to me as he ran down the stairs. As soon as he grabbed my hand, he kissed it. I didn’t dare look at his sweet face, knowing whatever expression I found there would be my downfall in keeping myself together. I tried to focus on the cool glass against my skin, even as I wanted nothing more than to punch the glass out and feel the wind blowing through Brynn’s hair. I wanted to take Felix to a doctor, to give him the antibiotics he so badly needed. I wanted to show my men the real world that had been stolen from them before their time. You will forever share a lifeforce, each of you keeping the other alive. If he shared a life with the house, shouldn’t it be keeping him alive right now? I sighed, the weight of the world pressing on my back, breaking me down vertebrae by vertebrae. “Thanks for trying, Brynn. We’ll keep trying here.”

She shook her head. “I’m not giving up on you yet, girl. I’ll keep pushing Granny. There has to be something she isn’t telling me. Something that doesn’t involve...”

“Don’t.” I knew what she wanted to say. It wasn’t an option. Not now, not ever. “He’s going to be okay. We’ll just have to figure it out.”

A silent but powerful understanding passed between us. Her eyes flashed with a determination I hadn't seen since the night after my dad's funeral, when she dragged me out of my depression, kicking and screaming. "What can I do to help Felix in the meantime?"

We needed to think positive. Plan. "Actually, could you find medicine? Antibiotics? Leave them in my truck, so when we do figure out a way out of here, we can dose Felix before we even take him to the hospital."

Brynn nodded, happy to have a job. And honestly, thinking logically about things and making a plan helped me feel a thousand times better. It gave me some control over the situation. "I'll do anything for you, Sav. I mean it."

I gave her a smile, feeling a bit more hopeful than I had in the last two days. Maybe we would be okay. Maybe. I pressed my hand to the glass, and she mirrored the motion. In silence, I willed her and myself to have faith. Credence.

"Savannah!" Luther's strained voice cut through the silence. Even Brynn craned her head to see what was going on. "Savannah!"

I dropped Theo's hand and turned towards the stairs. My heart sank as I realized Luther was racing down the stairs with a boneless Felix in his arms. He wasn't moving, and his face was paler than I'd ever seen.

Luther sprinted over to the window, laid Felix on the floor, and immediately turned Felix's head back to listen for

breathing. I realized at once what he was doing. “What the fuck happened?”

He puffed breath into Felix’s lungs, then began pumping on his chest. “I was holding his wrist and his heart just stopped. It just fucking stopped, Sav.”

I sank to my knees in front of Felix’s chest, ready to take over for Luther when he tired. I wasn’t going to give up on him. Not fucking yet. He looked so empty, sprawled across the floor. Just Felix, stripped down to nothing. Lifeless.

Was he...

No. No.

I wasn’t ready to lose Felix to a stupid fucking curse. “Brynn, call a fucking ambulance!”

Luther met my gaze, realizing how deadly serious I was. “Sweetheart...”

I knew what he was thinking. That they couldn’t come in without getting stuck. That once they burst through the door, more paramedics would follow, not realizing it was a trap. Everyone would find out about the house. The police, the fire department, the whole damn town would know. More people’s lives would be ruined. And our little bubble would burst. The worst thing was, despite any medicine they brought in, they still might not be able to save Felix.

I didn’t fucking care. We had to try. All I cared about in this world were the four people surrounding me, three of them inside with me, and one of them looking in. I would do whatever it took to protect them, even if that was at the

detriment of other people. I needed them. “Call. The. Fucking. Ambulance!”

“Okay,” Luther whispered. He looked over my shoulder, towards the window. “Do it.”

I pushed Luther out of the way, taking over the chest compressions. I knew enough about CPR to know what to do, listening for his breathing before I pushed air in myself. I counted my pumps on his chest, my entire world shrinking down to the man in front of me, and everything I could do to keep him alive. Outside, I could hear Brynn on the phone with emergency services, but I couldn’t make out what she was saying.

Thirty pushes on his chest. Listen for breathing. Two breaths in. Feel for a pulse. Repeat. Luther was talking to someone, probably reassuring Theo. He was probably freaking out again, but I couldn’t deal with him right now. He’d be fine. Felix needed me.

Pushing. Listening. Breathing. Feeling. Repeating. I had no idea how long I could keep going for. My arms were tiring, but I couldn’t ask Luther to do any more than he already had. In the distance, I could make out sirens. I had no idea what I would do when they got here, but I had to get to that point before I worried about it.

Knees dropped next to me, and I stole a look to see Theo pushing me out of the way. “Let me take over. Your arms are shaking.”

I nodded, not seeing any signs of panic in his face. We could do this. We could keep him alive as a team, all of us together. I got to my feet, my arms still trembling. Brynn was still on the phone, and the ambulance was pulling up into the driveway. Hopefully we weren't too late. His lifeforce was connected to the house, right? Maybe that was worth more than we were giving it credit for.

Luther put his hand on my shoulder. "Are you sure about this?"

I knew what he meant. Was I sure about bringing more people inside, for all intents and purposes trapping them with us? I nodded. "I'm not letting him die, Luther. I can't. We have to at least try."

I glanced down at the floor. Theo met my gaze as he was checking Felix's pulse, shaking his head. No pulse. My Felix, our Felix, was dying. Our last chance was the paramedics. Tears were streaming unbidden down my face. Would this have happened if I hadn't pushed him to show me his secret room, and share it with Theo and Luther? Was all of this my fault?

The paramedics raced up the stairs. Brynn gave me one last glance through the window as if to ask me if I was sure.

I was sure. The two burly men kicked open the door, rushing to where we huddled around Felix. One immediately began taking over compressions from Theo, while the other set up a portable defibrillator. "She said it was a spider bite."

I nodded, wrapping my arms around my body. When would the guilt set in, that I had traded these innocent men's lives for Felix's? "We think a black widow, but it's the infection that's..."

I couldn't say it. I couldn't say killing him.

Pads were placed on Felix's chest, and the machine charged up. One of the paramedics called, "Clear!"

The other felt Felix's wrist. "Got a pulse! It's there, but weak. Let's get some anti-venom in him, and get him loaded up." Weak was better than nothing. Weak was still alive. They stuck a large needle in his leg, and I crossed my fingers and toes.

"I think he's stable." The paramedic looked up at me. "Your boyfriend is very weak. We need to get him to the emergency room as quickly as possible. But you and your friends did the right thing, the CPR probably saved his life."

I smiled, tears still rushing down my face. I couldn't speak. Had they really saved him? Felix still looked pale as they lifted him onto the stretcher, but they had said he was weak. Weak, but not dead anymore. Because as much as I wanted to pretend otherwise, he had been dead, and the three of us had kept him alive artificially. But it had been enough, and for that I'd be eternally grateful.

Now we just had to deal with the fallout.

I caught Luther's eye. I knew what he was wondering. When would I tell the paramedics they couldn't leave? I opened my mouth to warn them, to say anything, but

nothing came out. They carried Felix towards the door, and still I was silent. I waited for the magic of the house to throw them back, to prevent them from leaving, but instead something crazy happened.

The three of them walked out the door, and Felix went with them.

The paramedic looked back at us, and found us all in shock. He frowned. "One of you can ride with us, but the rest will have to find another way."

Riding with them. In the ambulance. Or driving in a car. Outside of the house. I looked to Luther, whose mouth was wide open. Beside him, Theo was cursing under his breath.

In the driveway, they again took Felix's vitals before loading him up into the back of the ambulance.

Theo was the first to step outside, tiptoeing over the threshold, shirtless and shivering in the cold. Luther joined him, smiling and taking deep breaths of air in. He crossed back inside and grabbed my hand. I stepped out with him, wobbling on my feet like a newborn calf.

Brynn's eyes were wild, and she took a tentative step inside the doorway, and then another. She stepped back, out onto the porch, and then inside again. And again. "It's broken...holy fuck. It's broken!"

You will forever share a lifeforce, each of you keeping the other alive. It had never been about the goddamn house. It was about the curse. Felix had kept the curse alive. He was the curse. He just happened to be in the house when the

spell happened, and so the house became part of it. Now that he'd died, even for a second, the curse died along with him.

Except Felix was stronger than the curse. Life was stronger than death. And that goddamn credence was the strongest of all. I looked over at Theo and Luther, both standing on the porch with Brynn now.

"Go," shouted Theo, bringing me back down to the reality of the moment. "We'll come as soon as we can."

Felix still needed me. With everyone's blessing, I rushed to the ambulance and jumped in the back. While I was grateful for my other men to experience freedom, it didn't mean anything to me if I didn't have all three of them to enjoy it with.

They had brought him back to life. Now it was just a matter of if they could keep him amongst the living.



CHAPTER 24

Felix

I woke up in a room filled with more machines than I had ever seen in my life, making more noise than I had ever heard. It was loud, it was cold, and I wasn't entirely sure I hadn't woken up in Hell. It would serve me right for all the bullshit I had pulled—building a house on someone else's home. Wallowing in my self-pity. Not seeing people for who they really were. Relying on money. But then I turned my head, and she was there. Savannah. Hair a mess, pulled up into the ridiculous hairstyle she liked so much, eyes sleepy and bruised with exhaustion, and looking right at me with the biggest smile on her face.

“You're awake,” she breathed.

“And you're not in the house,” I pointed out. I looked around the stagnant room, assuming I was in a hospital of sorts. All I knew was that as much as I hated the loud room, it was a hell of a lot better than the four walls I had been forced to look at for the last hundred years.

She filled me in on what had happened over the last week, and then crept in next to me in the small, uncomfortable bed. She clung to me while I clutched her to my chest and cried until there were no more tears left in my body, and Savannah's shirt was soaked through. I mourned everything I had lost, and everything I had found. Everything seemed like a blur.

For two weeks, I stayed in the hospital, the doctors making sure everything was functioning as it should. They couldn't explain to me how I was still around after hearing as much of the story we were willing to share, and I didn't bother to explain. Some things in this world you just couldn't understand.

On New Years Eve, when I left the hospital, Brynn offered to let the four of us stay at her place. None of us wanted to leave Savannah's side, and she and Brynn had a lot of catching up to do. Between Brynn's granny being sick and our experience in the house, she'd had enough excitement—for right now at least—and she ended up staying home after the holidays.

We spent most of our time learning how to live in the modern world. Savannah took us to a bank, and to get new identification—making us an official part of this new world. I was surprised to see my bank account still intact, the interest offsetting the inactivity fees, and along with what was left of Savannah's inheritance, we had enough to be more than comfortable. She bought a laptop, and showed us

how to use computers. One day she came home with even smaller computers she called phones. I wasn't very good with mine. It made a lot of weird noises and annoyed me, so it was off more than it was on. Grocery stores, too, were something that overwhelmed us. There was so much choice at our fingertips, when we had been used to none.

We were lucky to have a place to stay, but Brynn's home was small, and we were quickly overstaying our welcome. A hotel would've been too costly, especially with none of us working quite yet. Savannah offered to go back to the diner, but I wouldn't let her, especially after I discussed it with Luther. Finally I addressed everyone as we sat in Brynn's living room, Savannah on Theo's lap while Luther and I shared the couch. "Why don't we go back to the house? It's big enough for all of us," I suggested.

Brynn, Savannah, and Theo stared back at me. Luther and I exchanged knowing glances.

"What?" I asked, frowning. "It makes the most logical sense."

"Yes, but..." Savannah cocked her head to the side. "Are you sure?"

The house was filled with bad memories, yes. Being trapped for so long. Being cursed. Dying. But it was also filled with good things. Meeting Savannah. Watching her moan my name. Finding a family, and a purpose. And the idea of taking back control over the house that held sway over me for so long was an absolutely delicious idea. "Yes.

I'm sure." My orchids needed me. And Luther and I had hatched a plan.

We moved back the next day. It was weird standing in front of it, knowing how much time I had spent hating the house, resenting everything it had taken away from me. Now, looking at it, I realized it was just a house. It wasn't anything special. The people inside made it a home, and looking around me now at the people I loved more than anything else in the world, I knew that was what had been missing from the beginning. A family. People who loved unconditionally. It was what we had all been missing.

So we got to work.

Most of the furniture was removed, donated to charity or antique stores. A new start was what we all needed. She did request her and Luther's library armchairs stay though—a request I was more than happy to oblige.

The walls got a new coat of paint, and the old electrical was updated to code, along with modern plumbing and top-notch appliances. New furniture arrived daily. The backyard garden was a labor of love between the four of us, something we were still working on today. But seeing the roses I had planted so long ago blooming so beautifully, and Savannah's face light up when she saw them made it all worthwhile.

Every goddamn second of it.

I couldn't wait to see her face.



It's funny how life works out sometimes. You think you've got everything figured out, down to the last little detail. You've planned every bit of your life, down to how your days will look. Marriage, traveling, kids, work, success...whatever it may be. You spend your time striving for these goals, ignoring everything else along the way, because to you, that isn't "success." It isn't quantitative, so it doesn't register. Instead, you keep your blinders on, still running towards your goal.

And then one day, something happens to shift your focus. Reality smacks you in the face, making you realize what was important all along. And the important parts? They're all those little moments you don't think will add up to much. But when you put them all together, the most amazing colors emerge in the tapestry of your life.

A hundred and twenty years ago, I wouldn't have bet anything, not one cent of my riches, this would be life today.

Fifty years ago, I wouldn't have believed I would ever be happy. Loved.

Ten years ago, I wouldn't have believed I would choose to ever remain in this house, of my own free will.

Yet, here I was. Savannah sprawled out on the blanket next to me, her golden head in my lap. I brushed the loose tendrils away from her face just for an excuse to touch her.

She said she was going to read a book Luther had brought home from the town library for her—a place I wished he never realized existed—but she was snoring softly. The book rested on her chest, still held open with her fingers. It looked like it was about to slip.

Trying not to wake her, I snuck the book from her hands, sliding her bookmark into place and placing it next to her. I smiled as I listened to the gentle sounds of her sleeping. It was an absolutely beautiful day, and we had come out to the garden to take advantage of the sunshine. Although, in all honesty, you would usually find us outside unless a snowstorm was rolling in. We had enough of the inside. Our souls wanted to breathe the fresh air, and feel the sun on our faces.

“Don’t tell me she fell asleep again.”

I grinned and turned to see Theo shaking his head. Even with access to barbers and hairdressers—among a thousand other things I had to get used to—he kept his hair long. He said it was because Savannah liked it, but I wasn’t sure that was the only factor. “You already know she did. Maybe if you didn’t keep her up all night, she wouldn’t need to nap in the middle of the day.”

Theo rolled his eyes. “I’m not the only one keeping her up. Besides, she spent last night in Luther’s bed, not mine.”

Luther looked up from the rosebush he was shaping. “What am I being blamed for now?”

“Keeping Savannah up,” Theo responded. “She’s passed out on Felix’s lap, and she said she’d come to my meeting with me today.”

His addiction meeting. One that came with sponsors and lots of steps and little badges. It was one of the new facets of modern life I found fascinating. In 1907, alcoholics just died. Apparently in 2022, they helped them recover.

Luther and Theo had told me things that had been invented since I had been trapped in the house, but being told and actually seeing them were two completely different things. Cars, for one. I had seen them driving up to the house. I knew how they worked. But being inside one, a moving thing that wasn’t alive...I wasn’t sure I would ever get used to that. Anytime I had to ride in one with Savannah or one of the men, I would cling to the side, keeping my eyes closed until I arrived.

Don’t even get me started on those damn smartphones...mine was still off, unless Savannah wasn’t with me. Just in case.

I’d learn everything about modern life, though. Learn it all to see Savannah every morning when I woke up, and kiss her goodnight every evening. The woman in question rolled over in my lap, looking up at me with a smile. “Hi,” she whispered, rubbing her eyes.

God, she made me feel alive like never before. Maybe it was just a fluke from being the first woman to step in the house. Maybe it was something more. I wasn’t about to

question it. "Hi," I murmured. I shuffled down so I was lying next to her, pressing a kiss to her perfect mouth.

She moaned, leaning into me. Savannah always woke up needing sex, and who was I to deny her? Not like any of us ever would. And here in our garden, we were as secluded as possible.

"Roll over, darling. Let me take care of you." I pushed her gently, and she rolled onto her back without complaint.

She was wearing a dress, one I had bought for her that I absolutely loved. Having access to new clothes, new anything, was a high like no other. Seeing Savannah in dresses brought out something primal in me, knowing her pussy was only a shred of fabric away from my touch. I pushed the bright red fabric over her hips, pulling the lacey panties she wore down and off. No more dark reds, not anymore. We lived in the light now, the four of us, and our clothing reflected that. I parted her legs, kissing up one thigh, and then the other. She tasted better than anything in the world. Her hands leading my head where she wanted it told me I was on exactly the right track.

"Do you want something?" I whispered, letting my breath tease her pussy.

"Felix, please," she complained, pushing her clit up towards my lips. I held her legs flat though, not letting her move.

I smiled. "Fine. One orgasm, and then you have to let all of us have fun."

Savannah leaned up on her elbows, looking around at the three of us. "Insatiable, all of you."

"You love it," Luther added.

She leaned back, putting her hands back on my head. "I do. Now make me come."

"With pleasure." I hummed, and pressed my lips against her swollen clit. She cried out, jerking her hips into my mouth. I pushed her thighs flat once more, and sucked her clit until she begged.

"Oh, fucking hell, Felix." Savannah cursing meant I was doing a good job. My hands held her hips down, and my tongue teased her slick folds. Eventually her curses gave way to incoherent cries of pleasure. I put more pressure onto the throbbing bundle of nerves. Normally I'd fuck her with my fingers while I licked her until she screamed, but I wanted to torture her just a bit, holding her in place with my hands.

Still she squirmed, desperately seeking the friction she needed. Her need turned me on, my cock painfully hard beneath my jeans. I wanted to be inside her so damn bad, but the tension made everything feel even better.

"Make her come, bro. We're dying over here," Theo muttered. I didn't even mind he called me bro, because I knew he wanted to fuck her as badly as I did. I could use his need as my excuse, already imagining sinking inside of her wet heat. So I shifted, widened my lips to scrape my teeth over her clit, and slid a finger inside her at the same time.

She cried out and came on my mouth, her pussy clenching around my finger as I licked and sucked her through her orgasm. Fucking decadent.

“Such a good girl for me,” I praised, pulling my clothes off. I rolled her limp body onto all fours. “Now you’re going to be an even better girl and take care of all of us.”

Savannah moaned, in pleasure rather than protest. She pushed her ass back, already eager to be filled with our cocks. I slid underneath her, keeping hold of her hips, and lowering her onto my waiting dick. I knew the other two would join us in whatever position they saw fit. Savannah’s mouth dropped open in a sigh of pleasure as her pussy slowly took me. She groaned as she sank flush against me. It was like she was made for me, still pulsing from her orgasm but molding perfectly to my cock. I rocked lazily, enjoying the look of pleasure on her face, and the way her still-sensitive body reacted to my touch. If I made her come again, I knew it would be explosive, rattling her to her core.

I would make her come again, of course. How could I not? Her golden hair dropped against me, tickling my chest. I looked up to see Theo pushing her back lower. “Give me your ass, sweet girl.”

Already nude, he smirked at me over her shoulder, already nude. He had probably stripped off his jeans the moment I started eating her out. She pressed her hands into my chest, and leaned up while Theo slipped his finger through her wetness between us. She arched into me. I

rested a hand on either cheek, forcing her eyes down to look at me. "Relax, and let us fill you. Don't fight the pleasure. Don't deny yourself."

Savannah nodded, looking into my eyes with such intensity, I could've pinpointed the exact moment Theo thrust inside her tight asshole even if I hadn't been inside her myself.

"Holy fuck," she moaned. I knew more curses would follow. "Fucking hell. Make me come already."

I laughed, and Theo rocked slowly into her ass. "Not yet, darling. You've still got one more cock to take."

I began thrusting in her pussy slowly, like I had all the time in the world. Like magic, Luther appeared overhead, sinking to his knees next to me. His pants were unzipped, his thick cock fisted in his hands as he stroked it. He nudged it towards Savannah's lips, and she looked up to meet his eyes. "Wrap your lips around me," he instructed. "I'm going to fuck your sweet little mouth until I come down your throat. Wouldn't you like that?"

She nodded eagerly, and her lips parted. Luther pushed his cock into her mouth, and she groaned, her hungry cries of pleasure muffled around him. I smirked. Once upon a time, I wouldn't have liked to share. Once, I would've been horrified knowing my girlfriend had another man's dick in her throat. Once, I had been naive to true pleasure. Now, though, it was fucking sexy knowing Savannah was filled to

the brim, about to make all of us come while we shattered her into pieces.

Luther was the first to move, thrusting into Savannah's mouth while she gagged and choked above me. I wasn't worried, because I knew how much my dirty girl loved it. Hearing those noises, and feeling her slick desire coat my dick had me rocking into her. I drove deeper, holding her waist, and then Theo joined in, moving with us.

Someone cursed, but I didn't know who. Savannah had closed her eyes, still moaning around Luther's cock. Pleasure was building, tightening in my core. My breathing quickened. I didn't want to be the first to finish, though. I looked over Savannah's shoulder and caught Theo's eye. "Cover her back with your cum."

Savannah looked down at me, her eyes slits as we fucked her senseless.

Theo grinned. "My fucking pleasure."

I let him take control of the speed, his grunts filling the air. Savannah's body rocked with his thrusts, forcing her mouth onto Luther's cock again and again. He wouldn't last much longer either, and I was just enjoying every moment.

"Oh, fuck," Theo cursed. He pulled out with a groan, and I could imagine how pretty Savannah's smooth back looked covered in his cum. He rolled over to his side, panting hard.

God, what a sight. I wasn't sure if I preferred Savannah filled with our cum or covered in it, but I would take either. She liked it, too. Already her pussy started to clench around

me again, her nails digging into my shoulders. I held onto her hips, rolling her into me so her clit rubbed every time I thrust. Her arms shook, her moans a bit louder around Luther's dick. "Come for me, Savannah," I murmured.

She came with a shudder and a cry, her lips latching harder onto Luther. That moment was enough to send him toppling over the edge with her, pumping into her mouth as he came. I watched from below as I fucked her through her orgasm, seeing her swallow every drop of Luther's cum like such a good fucking girl.

I was losing control, every sense occupied with Savannah. The way she felt, the way she smelled, the way she cried my name and rolled her hips against me was all too much. I gripped her flesh harder, driving deeper and slamming her down on top of me. She was going to be sore tomorrow, but if I knew Savannah, she'd say thank you and ask for more.

"You're doing such a good job, darling." I grabbed her as I came, my cock pulsing inside her as I spilled out. "Such a good girl," I whispered, closing my eyes as I came down from my high.

Above me, Savannah stilled, holding my shoulders as her breathing leveled out. She was just too fucking good. I still wasn't sure this wasn't all just a dream I would wake up from one day.

She flopped on her back next to me, Luther and Theo both breathing heavily on either side of us. I hoped it would stay

this good forever, the four of us enjoying and exploring until we grew old and died.

I rolled to my side, trailing my fingers down Savannah's face. Her skin was so smooth to the touch, more freckled from all the time we spent outside. "Where would you like to go, darling? The world is your oyster."

She smiled, because we both knew this was true. We could go anywhere in the world now, not a single curse or door to stop us. She rested her hand on top of mine, reaching behind her to grab Theo's hand, and smiling up at Luther. "I think I'd like to go home."

It was the best goddamn answer I could've ever heard leave her lips.

OceanofPDF.com



EPILOGUE

Savannah

If I had known what awaited me on the other side of the front door on that warm summer day, I would've paid a lot more attention to the warning.

I wouldn't have stepped foot inside.

If I had known this kind of love awaited me, along with the affections of three wonderfully different men, I would've leapt inside.

Sometimes what we think are our lowest points turn into our best memories. Curses become blessings, vices become accomplishments. Fear transforms into love, and wants morph into haves. So many small moments create a paint by number canvas you can only see when it's complete.

We all took things away from our time in the house. Felix might have been the one cursed, but we all changed. Last week, he came home with a document he handed to me without a word. It was blueprints for a new homeless shelter, one he was funding entirely himself. My mouth

dropped open. But for him, this was how he needed to atone. It was something he could manage, a job to keep him busy.

The next day, Theo and I took a road trip to his hometown, the first time he had ever visited his parents' graves. I held his hand as he wept and told his parents exactly what he had been up to since their passing. We didn't stay long, because he was starting college the next week, and we needed to prepare. The three of us motivating him was enough for him to take the leap and register.

And my sweet Luther. The first thing he did when I brought the computer home was search the internet for James. James was living in a nursing home now, and when Luther called to speak to him, a daughter answered. With tears in his eyes Luther gave his best to the first love of his life. When he hung up the phone, he smiled. "How can I be sad when he found true happiness? I never cared who he found it with, as long as he had it. And now, I have mine." He kissed me, and I fell easily into his safe arms.

I was content, knowing I wasn't alone. I thought my men were all I needed. Until Theo took me for a drive one day, and he stopped at a small shop in town.

"What are we doing here?" I asked, frowning.

"Just get out and see." He grinned, and I couldn't help but smile back.

At the front of the shop he stopped. I smiled at him, not understanding. "I don't think they're open."

“Luckily, I have a key.” Sure enough, Theo pulled a key out of his pocket and turned the lock. I stepped inside the dark store, waiting for my eyes to adjust, only for the light to flick on. Standing there were Brynn, Felix, and Luther, all with huge smiles on their faces.

“Wha...what is this?” My mouth dropped open, looking around at the small, tidy shop. It was old, but clean. The shelves were in great shape, and a soft grey coated the walls.

Felix took a step forward, tucking a stray piece of hair behind my ear. “Your shop, darling. A place for all of your treasures.” He pointed to a sign above the back wall. Lost and Found. He smiled. “It was Brynn’s idea.”

My eyes widened, taking more of the space in. “It’s... mine? Really?”

Luther’s grin was about to split his face in two. “You’ve done so much for us. It’s the least we could do. Now you just need to fill it.”

I could’ve cried. Instead I laughed. I spent a lot of time regretting my past while I sat trapped in the house, mourning the decisions that led me to that point. Now of my own free will, I’m sitting in the same dining room that used to haunt me. Except ghosts of regret weren’t here anymore. Instead, my men sat around me, serving dinner on the cornflower blue plates I had fallen in love with the first time I saw them.

They laughed and joked, poking fun at each other. The biggest plate of cheeseburgers sat in front of us, waiting for me to dig in. I looked around at the three of them, smiling. This was what it felt like to be loved. Happy.

No, walking wouldn't have been fast enough to get to the rest of my life. If I could've, I would've flown inside that door-jinx be damned.

OceanofPDF.com



Thank you, for enjoying Jinxed, I really hoped you liked it. If you want more of my brain and the books that fall out of it, come be apart of my Street Team or ARC Team.

xoxo Torri



OceanofPDF.com



Torri Heat has always loved control. Her mind was blown when she discovered she could control entire worlds through story writing. Throw some steamy romance in there, and it was pretty close to perfection. Torri loves dark heroes who ride off into the sunset on their motorcycles, fierce heroines who can fend for themselves, and a sprinkle of the paranormal to keep things interesting. When she's not creating alternate realities, you can find her managing her three-ring circus of kids and animals.

Find all of Torri's books and sign up for her newsletter at her website www.torriheat.com, or follow her on social media @torriheat!



OceanofPDF.com



Watcher Series

The Ruins
The Reckoning
The Remains

Darkling Series

Nyctophilia
Caligo
Nighted
Cimmerian
Umbra

Standalones

Nosedive
Screwed
Jinxed

Co-Authored

Blood Crown

OceanofPDF.com