

# Dark Nights Boxed Set: The Complete Series

Pages: 396  
Format: pdf, epub  
Language: English

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Dark Nights Boxed Set

Skye Warren

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Keep Me Safe

Skye Warren

Praise for Keep Me Safe

*"KEEP ME SAFE is a very intense, well-written story. Very hot. But, just when I think I've got it figured out, the story takes an even darker and twisted path. Ms. Warren does not play it safe in her writing and has no remorse about it!"*

—The Forbidden Bookshelf

*"I couldn't help but put everything I was working on aside and read all 125 amazing pages of it. It's dark, gritty, disturbing, and amazingly fantastic!"*

—Day Dreaming

*"This is erotic fiction for a very specific reader who likes a darker story, a story that takes you to those disturbing places in your mind where emotional discomfort lingers."*

—S. Richards, Amazon Reviewer

*"This is a very dark, gritty, violent, and emotional story that is conveyed in an unapologetically raw, candid voice."*

—Shawna, Goodreads reviewer

*"Zachary and Rachel find some kind of love through all of this but what a horrible journey. Very good, disturbing book."*

—Carolyn F, Goodreads reviewer

*"It's well written, and I was riveted from the very first line until the very end and read it in one sitting."*

—Romance in Review  
Warning

This book contains explicit sex and graphic violence. Not intended for anyone uncomfortable with these situations or anyone under the age of eighteen.

Author's Foreword

Dear Reader,

In medieval times dragons and sea serpents were drawn onto maps to warn travelers about dangerous places. Well, this is my drawing. This is my warning. What follows is a dark tale that only grows darker.

Keep Me Safe is the prequel to the Dark Nights series, where each book follows a different couple. Both Keep Me Safe and the next book, Trust in Me, contain a particular man. A very bad man. He's the villain of these first two stories...but the "hero" of the last. Of course, only you can decide what you'll call him. Hero? Anti-hero? Sociopath?

I hope you'll stay for the ending, but now you've been warned. *Here be monsters*. Only in this tale, they are in human form.

Yours,

Skye Warren  
Chapter One

Let me tell you how all this started—with a tray of cold beer bottles so heavy they threatened to topple me over. With shoes pinching my feet and a football game on the television.

An innocuous beginning to a nightmare.

The bar was packed for a Friday night. At least that meant I'd have money for groceries this week. Assuming the frat boys watching the game actually tipped me.

"What time do you get off, sweetheart?" one of them slurred.

His friend snorted. "He wants to get you off, all right."

Charming. "I have a boyfriend."

It was a lie, and they clearly knew it. Or they didn't care. The first one reached for my ass, and I slapped his hand away. My tray of drinks wobbled but didn't fall. Thank God, because that would come out of my check. And I seriously doubted Dumb and Dumber would chip in even though it would be their fault.

"Your tab," I said, slapping down the bill.

They both groaned. Soon enough they were arguing over who drank how many, and I slipped away to deliver the rest of my drinks.

I weaved through the busy barroom with an agility born of practice. Waiting tables in a too-tight tank top was not a career anyone aspired to, but after watching my grandmother deteriorate and the money dwindle, it was all I could manage. The last of my student loan money had gone to pay her funeral arrangements. I didn't regret doing it, but six months later I had a mountain of debt and no college degree.

"Rachel," someone called.

My coworker waved me over, a worried expression on her face. Shit. I knew her kid's fever had been spiking when she'd dropped him off at the sitter's.

After sliding the last few drinks onto the correct tables, I met her with any empty tray. "You okay?"

"I am, but Dylan's not," she said, her forehead creased. "I got a call. His fever went to 104."

I knew nothing about kids but that had to be bad. "Did she give him medicine?"

"It's not working. I...I need to be there."

"Of course." I understand that, and Krissy had supported me when Gram was sick. Still, we'd been understaffed all night, just me and her. If she left... "Of course you have to be with him. I'll handle things."

She made a face. "Vincent picked up some tail and left an hour ago. I seriously doubt he's coming back tonight."

Vincent was the owner and used the bar as his own personal breeding pool. "Then I'll close up. It's not like I haven't done it before."

But I hadn't done it alone. This wasn't a safe neighborhood.

Krissy frowned and glanced toward the back. "And you'd have to take over my tables."

Case in point—the group of scary guys occupying the corner table. I'd counted myself lucky when they'd sat in Krissy's section, but it looked like fate had other plans. "Then I'll take over your tables. Look, it isn't ideal, but we don't have any other choice. You can't just work here if your kid needs you."

I wasn't kidding about that, she was vibrating with worry and already inching toward the other end of the counter.

"I'll owe you," she promised. "Big time."

"You're just collecting on a favor," I told her. "I'm sure I racked up more than one from when Gram... well, from before."

Her smile was sympathetic. "Call me when you get home, or I'll worry."

I rolled my eyes. "Seriously?"

"Someone has to," she said with one last wave. And then she was gone, grabbing her purse from behind the bar and practically running out the door. I sent a little prayer up that she and Dylan wouldn't have too rough of a time.

A whistle came from behind me. So much for break time. I'd be running to keep up with the place.

My heart began to pound when I realized just who had been calling me. One of the rough-as-hell characters from the back. I'd hoped they would leave soon.

Luck was not on my side tonight.

I forced a pleasant but bland smile on my face. Something agreeable but that wouldn't invite them to feel me up. "Evening. I'll be your new server."

A hush came over the group, and I swallowed hard. Six men stared at me, all of them hard and intimidating. Some had tats and others had beards. The one furthest back, in the shadows, caught my attention. Maybe it was his green eyes.

Or maybe it was the way he'd been watching me all night.

"What happened to Miss Krissy?" one of the men near me asked.

Worry whispered down my spine. It wasn't a good sign that he knew her name. That means they'd been trying to get close. "She had to leave. Family emergency."

In other words, back the fuck off.

He smiled slowly, though it was really more of a leer. "Then what's your name, sweetheart?"

I wished I could tell him where to put his *sweetheart* but direct engagement tended to make things worse. I knew that from experience, so I gritted my teeth. "I'm Rachel. And I'm taken."

The men exchanged looks. "I've heard that before," one said in a low voice. "Funny enough, it doesn't always matter."

Gross. I wanted to brush it off but the twist in my gut was actual fear. I took a deep breath, smelling the stale alcohol and sweat that infused the place. I couldn't do this. "Look, do you want me to you anything else before we close the bar?"

The man in the back leaned forward, his eyes even greener in the faint light. "You're closing?"

Midnight was way too soon to close. Vincent would be pissed when he saw the receipts were short, but I didn't care. Really, I couldn't serve this many people. We needed three waitresses to start with, not two. And definitely not one. But most of all, these guys had spooked me. I couldn't sit around and watch them leer at me, a strange sort of promise in their eyes.

"Yeah, we're closing early," I said. If it got taken out of my check, I'd skip a few lunches.

The man with green eyes nodded, as if... relieved?

I wondered what his name was. Except, what did it matter? I shook my head. What a crazy idea. Wanting to know the customer's names was as dangerous as them wanting to know mine.

"Good," he said. "We'll take the bill."

Thank God.

I dropped off their check on the way from one table to another, not even stopping, even though I felt their eyes on me. All their eyes, from the creepy ones to the compelling green ones.

It was a relief when they were gone. I closed up most of the tables pretty fast. Even with people leaving I had to run around, getting sweaty and exhausted fulfilling last call and collecting payment. And yeah, the frat boys had shorted their bill by five bucks.

So much for a tip.

When I glanced at the corner table, it was empty. I breathed a sigh of relief. At least they were gone. It took a full hour and a half by the time last people paid and left. Then another hour while I wiped down all the surfaces of the spilled alcohol and bodily fluids. By the end, I was exhausted and thoroughly disgusted.

At the sink I turned the hot tap to full and let the scalding water flow over my hands and forearms. Hopefully it would burn away all the grossness. I wouldn't feel totally clean until I went home and repeated this under the shower in my apartment. Not that it ever got that hot.

Although if I were honest, I never really felt clean.

I was constantly struggling, always fighting to pay the bills, to buy food, to keep the landlord off my back. Every day was a little cut, wearing me down until there'd be nothing left but broken skin.

Behind the bar was a faded, murky mirror, and I stared at myself. A girl with dark hair and dark eyes stared back at me, obscured and distorted by the mirror. It seemed somehow more accurate this way, my edges blurry, my expression indistinct.

I knew I should have better than this. Should find some way to go back to college or at least find a better job than fighting off frat boys and gangbangs. But I didn't know how, with all this debt weighing me down.

Most nights I was too exhausted to try.

As I left the building and shut the door, I spared a thought for Krissy. Hopefully she'd managed to settle Dylan down and maybe even get some rest herself. I should probably call her like she'd said, but that might wake one of them up.

I was still thinking about that when I locked the door. Maybe that was why I didn't hear footsteps behind me. Maybe that was why I didn't know I was prey until I was already captured. Whatever the reason, I knew I wouldn't be calling Krissy tonight. Maybe not ever again.

## Chapter Two

So that was how I got here. A tray of cold beer bottles and a football game on television had somehow led to me in some kind of warehouse—on my back, legs spread wide with a man about to hurt me. About to *use* me.

At least now I knew his name. They called him Zachary, the man with the green eyes.

He was beautiful. My first thought when I saw him there was that he didn't belong, but he did. He dressed like them in grungy but expensive jeans and a leather jacket. He looked like them with unkempt hair and a bad boy goatee. He talked like them, gruff and coarse and lewd, except when he spoke to me and no one else could hear.

"You have...you have done this before, right?" he asked, pushing two fingers inside me.

"Been hurt?" I asked, and his hand paused a beat before thrusting in again.

"Had sex," he said in a low tone.

"Yes to both." I hadn't been kidding about the shitty neighborhood, and I'd been defenseless for too long. Something he knew. Something he'd taken advantage of, along with his friends. I didn't know if he'd been the one to clap his heavy hand across my mouth until I passed out, but it didn't really matter, did it?

He shut his eyes and bowed his head. "I'm sorry," he said hoarsely.

His thumb found my clit and circled. A twinge of pleasure shot through my body.

"Don't," I said. "Don't make me enjoy this."

He stilled for a moment, looking at me. His eyes were dark and unfathomable. For someone getting what he wanted, he didn't look happy about it.

"Okay," he said. "I'm going to make you ready."

He continued fucking me with his fingers, loosening my body and drawing out the wetness, but he didn't touch my clit again. I knew it would help me, make this hurt less, but I almost wanted the pain. That was what a girl wants when she's being forced into this. It was only right.

"Hurry up and fuck her," one of the other men called from across the room. My breath quickened.

"I won't let them hurt you," he told me, quietly enough that they couldn't hear.

"No?" I didn't believe him. "But you'll do this."

"Yes," he said grimly.

With his other hand he reached down to unzip his jeans and pull out his already half-erect cock. It surprised me, actually. The other men leering and groping at me had noticeable bulges, just from slapping me around and tearing my clothes off. Even though he appeared to have a good-sized cock, hefty in his palm, it wasn't fully erect. Was he not attracted to me?

Then why had he insisted on having me over the other men's objections?

Maybe it was a problem for him, this almost-public performance of ours. I wouldn't have expected shyness from a hardened criminal and gangbanger. That was my role here. The naive one, the innocent. The fearful one, though I'd found that even my fear had deserted me.

He stroked his growing erection in time with his fingers inside me, creating a rhythmic link between us, a live wire formed by his hands, end to end. His gaze narrowed on my breasts, exposed, so vulgar, and his lips parted. He seemed to notice the bruise that had already formed, from where the other man had grabbed me. His eyes darkened before he looked away.

He glanced down at me, where his fingers were pressing into a place that should have been private, even scared. No longer. His cock thickened in his fist, lengthened, preparing to replace his fingers. His breathing grew labored as his arousal increased.

Finally he removed his hand and pressed the head of his cock to my folds. He paused, breathing hard. *God, this is really going to happen.*

"Christ, I'm sorry," he muttered.

He pressed inside me, the tip, and froze.

"I don't think I can," he said. "You have to tell me it's okay."

Oh God. Of course I'd get stuck with the rapist with morals. That wouldn't be such a bad thing, except that there were ten other guys lined up to take his place.

*I should fight.* No, I'd only get hurt. I was locked in with a bunch of armed, ruthless men; I had no chance of getting away. They looked a hell of a lot rougher than this one, who'd claimed me.

He said he'd protect me. *If* I pleased him—that part was assumed.

I just wanted this to be over. I'd be a fool to pass up the possession he offered in a place like this. He was the thin rope while I tumbled down raging rapids. It might not be enough to hold me, but it was all I had.

"It's okay," I said.

As if I'd released him, he slammed all the way inside, held himself deep and let out a low groan. The breath whooshed out of me in shock and sudden sensation. I'd given him permission. I'd consented to this farce of a coupling, so what did that make me?

I braved a look down to see his dark, almost black pubic hair mingled with my light brown hairs. It didn't hurt, having him inside me. It must have been because he had prepared me, like he said,

but this was worse. I was being violated, but he was so gentle—it felt like sex with a lover.

He loomed over me with his cock inside me. He put most of his weight on his arms, which rested beside my shoulders. He thrust slowly first, maybe to enjoy it more, I wasn't sure.

I watched his face, with his glazed green eyes and silky dark brown hair, mesmerized. His lips were tense as he focused on his pleasure. He looked like an angel.

A fallen angel.

I tried to think rationally. The fact that he said sorry was a good thing. I had read somewhere that sociopaths never felt empathy, never felt sorry, and couldn't restrain themselves from violence. The fact that he'd been willing to stop was even better.

This man seemed to not want to hurt me. He said he wouldn't let anyone hurt me. He wanted to fuck me, and I could live through that. I had before.

He pulled his hand up to cup my breast lightly. Catching himself, he pulled his hand back, almost guiltily, as if caught doing something inappropriate, which was ludicrous considering he was already fucking me. His cock was inside my cunt, but he wouldn't touch my breast with his hand. What a strange dichotomy he presented, a gentle lover and cruel abuser.

He sped up. He looked down to where his cock slid wetly in and out of me. His eyes slid upward, up my stomach and to my breasts. Then further up, his eyes locked on mine.

"You're fucking gorgeous," he said thickly.

And how sick was it that a compliment from him brought me pleasure? I should have been revolted, not pleased.

That wasn't my only problem. His quickened thrusts started hitting a spot inside me that felt good. So good, actually. I had to consciously glue my hips to the ground to avoid rocking into his thrusts.

I wasn't sure why he'd stopped trying to arouse me when I'd asked him earlier—because it made his life easier, I supposed. That had to be a perk of being a bad guy, of abducting a woman instead of seducing her, not having to bother with making a woman climax. Still, there was no way to get out of this one. *Excuse me, sir, but I'm finding this inconveniently pleasurable, could we perhaps stop now?*

Pleasure raced through my body in urgent warning. Oh God, I was going to come. I was actually going to come. I could feel it getting closer. My body wanted to move toward it, to seek it by riding his cock, but even if I stayed still it would find me.

His thick muscles glistened with sweat, his handsome face stark with pleasure. He was undoubtedly the sexiest man I'd ever had sex with—if that's what you could call this. He was the sexiest man who had ever *fucked* me, dangerous situation or not.

Why would a handsome man like this, one who could clearly have any woman want, resort to this? For the power trip? Maybe I wasn't fighting it enough for his tastes. Well, all the better then. No need to make these men happy.

Except for the fact that they had the guns. And knives. And fists.

Scary men, though what I felt when this one touched me wasn't fear.

I fought my orgasm. I tried to lay there like some dispassionate observer, physically connected to that cunt that was being fucked but unaffected by it. It was so hard. My hips bucked up slightly to let him in deeper. I wasn't sure if he noticed while he was so deep in his lust, but I was mortified at myself. No, not me, my body—it betrayed me.

Then he came, groaning. All his muscles tensed, straining with his cock deep inside me, his face a mask of pleasure and maybe pain.

I sighed in relief. I hadn't come. It would have been the ultimate shame. That I had felt pleasure, that I had sought my orgasm was bad enough, but at least it hadn't happened.

He collapsed on me, breathing hard. With his soft cock slipping out of me and his body pressed down on me in a parody of an embrace, the moment felt too intimate. We were in that moment right after sex where our bodies had communed, where we could share anything and say anything because we were together, except—*no!* That shouldn't happen here. I should hate him. I should fight him. Instead he lay on me, sated. I dimly heard lewd laughter and applause from the other side of the room.

Finally he pushed off of me and looked straight into my eyes. God, what I saw there. There was gratitude first, which I'd never seen before after sex, not even from completely consensual lovers. Then guilt and pain, but also promise. Of what?

He blinked, and his face resumed that stern, slightly angry look that all the other men wore. Had I imagined it? Was the vulnerability I'd seen only the result of my own post-sexual haze imaginings? Maybe so.

The other man came up, the one who'd brought me here.

"My turn," he said, sneering lewdly at my naked body.

"No. She's mine." Zachary placed a proprietary hand on my naked belly.

"Fuck that," the other man said. "I found her, I fuck her."

"That's not what the boss said," Zachary replied evenly. I wanted to shrink into him. We'd had sex and he was protecting me, just like he said.

Suddenly we were on the same side. Or maybe we had always been.

"He said you could fuck her *first*. What do you care what happens to her later?"

"You don't just fuck women," Zachary said. "You fuck them *up*. I still want to use her later, so *fuck off*." He assumed a stance around me like that of a pit bull guarding a bone.

The other man turned conciliatory, "Come on, man. I'll go soft on her. You'll still be able to fuck her later. No permanent damage."

Zachary looked at him, his lip curling up slightly. His answer was clear.

"I'm going to tell the boss about this, *amigo*," snarled the other man.

“Go ahead.”

When the other man stalked off, Zachary turned back to me. He didn't even look at my body now that he'd had his orgasm. At least the “later” when he'd use me again wasn't now. He looked at a point on the ground next to my face.

“Get your clothes on,” he said.

I scrambled off the ratty sofa and picked up my clothes from the floor, where the other men had ripped them off of me. They were torn, but still wearable, especially considering the alternative.

His voice was so cold. I missed the old way he'd spoken to me, when he'd been inside me—tender. I stood uncertainly, holding the tattered clothing to my body as best I could. The warehouse was large, but I remained where I was.

Despite what he'd done—or maybe because of it—I felt safer with him and had no desire to wander off. He had already closed up his jeans and was checking something on his phone. He looked tenser now that the effects of his orgasm were fading. Or maybe he'd read some bad news on his phone. His semen trickled down my leg.

He looked up and seemed almost surprised to see me standing there, dressed. Well, he hadn't seen me dressed before. Still, I thought: *how unbalanced*. I would always remember him and maybe even every moment about this. This experience would occupy my thoughts during sex, assuming I had any sex, and my nightmares. But him, would he even remember me in a few years—or even tomorrow? I was just a body, a warm body to fuck and then dispose of in a hopefully not-too-gruesome way.

Why did I feel *hurt* that he wouldn't remember me? Was it good for him? I'd thought it was. Why did I even care? I told myself it was because then he would be more sympathetic to me.

“Come along,” he said, and he led me into an office. The warehouse we were in had once been some sort of factory. We'd been in the wide open storage space, filled with shelves and loading vehicles. The office was suffocatingly small and packed with brown furniture that had seen better days a few decades ago.

He turned to face me. “Listen carefully,” he said. “Things are going to be happening here, dangerous things, and I need you to stay inside here until I come to get you. Do you understand?”

I nodded.

“I'm serious. Do not try to get away. If someone else finds you, I won't be able to protect you.”

I nodded again. I didn't bring up the irony that he wanted to protect me but also wanted to fuck me. I was honest enough to realize that it could be worse with the other men, a lot worse. I could think of this like a bargain: my body in exchange for his protection. It seemed like a worthy trade to me, if he could hold up his end.

“I—” My voice was rusty from when they had choked me in the van. “I understand.”

His eyes flashed. I drew back, frightened. How had I said the wrong thing? Maybe he didn't want me to speak.

But all he said was, “Good,” tersely, before turning around and leaving. I heard a key turn in the door, locking me in. It was easy for me to find things to be grateful for—that I wasn’t at the mercy of those other men, that I had clothes and relative privacy, that he hadn’t tied me up or handcuffed me.

I sat down and coldness seeped into my skin, like I was slowly being dipped in ice water. My throat felt dry. What was happening to me?

I huddled in the corner furthest from the door. I slid down to the ground in kneeling position. I could tell that I had started to shake, at first in small vibrations and then in jerky motions. I tried to hold still, but the tremors were uncontrollable, like I was possessed.

I didn’t know how much time passed, but Zachary came back in. When he saw me in the corner, he strode over and crouched in front of me.

“Fuck,” I heard him mutter. “She’s going into shock.”

### Chapter Three

Zachary pulled me away from the corner and lay me on my back with my knees up. Oh God, this was *later*. The later when he’d want to fuck me again.

“No, please,” I whimpered. “Not again. Not yet.” Scalding tears fill my eyes. Some distant part of me was surprised it had taken me this long to cry.

“It’s okay,” he soothed. “I’m not going to hurt you.”

“No,” my throat felt so hoarse, “Not hurting, but—not that, either. Please.”

“No,” he said. “I’m not going to do that either. Nothing like that. We need to get you warmed up.” As he said that I felt something heavy cover my upper body. It smelled musky—what was it? My fingers groped the edge. It was leather, his leather jacket. God, the warmth of it was amazing. It was almost too much, like hot pins pressing into my skin.

He pushed the hair away from my face and was saying something to me, something I couldn’t make out, when I heard shouting from outside the office. He looked up sharply.

“Stay here,” he said to me. “No matter what you hear, stay in here until I come for you.”

Then he left. I lay there, listening to the sounds of shouting and then gunfire. I had no desire to leave the room. Maybe not ever.

I heard footsteps and the doorknob turning. Thank God he was back. No, the door was locked, he couldn’t get in. Rattling. It must not be Zachary because otherwise he’d use his key. I stayed quiet. The shaking on the door only got more violent. Then it crashed open and a man ran in.

He looked like a bad guy, too—not in the suave way of Zachary, but in the grimy way of a man who’d gone far too long without a bath. Like a man who would be homeless if he wasn’t willing to kill. His eyes said that he was willing, though.

He rushed in the room and slammed the door shut, flipping off the light. I froze. Dim light streamed through the blinds on the office window. His eyes scanned the room frantically, almost missing me in his panic. When he noticed me, his eyes widened for a moment in shock, then narrowed. He looked around the small office again.

“Qué haces?” he asked.

I whimpered and pushed back against the wall. It was the wrong thing to do. He smiled, showing dirty yellow teeth. He came towards me.

“Qué haces, mamá?” he said, taunting this time. *Where was Zachary?*

I eyed the door and considered making a run for it, but the man would only catch me. I would have to fight this time, though. I’d consented before, just on the threat of danger, just to get it over with.

There was something about Zachary—he was different. I gave myself a pass for that, but not again and not with this guy. I didn’t want him.

I knew it as a certainty: I would run and he would catch me. I had to try it anyway.

I bolted up, unsure how my arms and legs arranged themselves into standing so quickly. I was almost to the door when I was yanked back. Through the wrenching pain in my head, I registered that I was farther away from the door.

Then my back slammed into the desk, and I realized why—he was yanking me by my hair. Everything was in slow motion, but my limbs were too sluggish to be of any help. How obliging, I thought inanely, of women to provide a handle for rapists.

He shoved me down onto the desk and easily pulled my already torn clothes from my body. He squeezed my breasts and then pinched my nipples hard. I cried out and fought him, hitting him ineffectually on his arms, his shoulders, his head.

This was rape. This was how it was supposed to go. There were rules about these things, but I don’t know where I ever learned them. Rape was supposed to be dirty and painful. I was supposed to fight it, even though we both knew he’d win. These are the rules. I didn’t know who these rules are made for—rapists, I guessed, because they sure weren’t doing shit for me.

Then he grabbed both my wrists in one hand and slammed them into the table above my head. Pain shot down my arms. I jerked but his grip was painful and immovable. He reached down with his other hand to take out his cock. I struggled, trying to get some leverage with my legs, but they dangled uselessly off the edge of the desk like a little girl on a too-tall chair.

I think I was crying for him to stop. “No, please, stop, I’ll do anything, just stop, please.” How stupid is that?

He put his fingers inside me. It didn’t feel like sex this time. Not like Zachary, like a lover. It felt like burning, like stabbing, not thrusting. It felt like his fingers were enormous, thicker than even a cock, and covered in sandpaper or jagged glass instead of average sized and soft skinned like I knew his cock must be.

Calm down, calm down. You can’t stop this, let it happen.

But I couldn’t, because I’d already done this once tonight and I hadn’t fought it then. Maybe that’s a rule too. One free consent before I have to fight back. I should write a book: *How To Get Fucked*—I was an expert.

Oh God, Zachary.

Then, he was there, pulling the other man off of me. Wait, had I thought him up? Reality was out of reach.

I wiped my eyes, struggling to see what was happening. Why couldn't I see clearly?

*BAM!* A gunshot in the room. You hear guns on TV but you never realize how loud they are until it happens in real life. It resounded in the room, ringing my ears. The man had a bloody circle on his chest as he staggered back. Zachary—where was he? Was he shot too?

I couldn't see anymore—everything was blurry.

"Shhh," I heard, nearby. I felt a light touch in my hair.

"Everything's okay," came in a soft murmur.

"Can you hear me?" Zachary said.

Yes, don't leave me.

"I'm sorry I let you down," he whispered. "You're going to be okay."

But that was a lie.

\* \* \*

Beep. Beep. Beep.

I was cold. Again? Jesus, I was always cold.

Beep. Beep. Beep.

Where was I home? It could be the alarm. Or maybe the smoke detector out of battery. Or an extremely annoying person at the doorbell. The dog next door would be barking. He acted as my guard dog, too, from the other side of the wall.

I opened my eyes. Motion to the side caught my attention and I watched a woman in blue scrubs press buttons on a machine.

And then it hit me. Shit. Fights breaking out in the bar. Walking to the bus stop after my shift. The van, the men pulling me inside. Being rough, hurting me.

Zachary. He had been at the bar earlier, checking me out, too. He'd left hours before me. He'd fucked me. He told me that he wouldn't let anyone hurt me, but that had been a lie, hadn't it?

I closed my eyes again. More. There was more. Another man. Then Zachary again, telling me I would be okay—more lies. I wouldn't be okay.

"Oh, hello. You're up," said the woman in blue.

I opened my mouth, but only a croak came out.

"Shh," she soothed. "Here. Try to drink some water. It will help your throat."

She held up a cup of water with a straw and I took a sip. The water was cool as it slid down my throat. I took several more pulls until the paper cup was empty.

She smiled at me, "Very good. We'll see how that settles before we try anymore."

"Where am I?" I asked, because it was the first thing that came to me, even though I knew.

"You're at St. Joseph's Hospital," she told me. "You came in last night. I'm going to bring the doctor in to talk to you."

She came back in with the doctor and stayed while he gave me a run-down of my injuries. Of course, she stayed. That was probably normal for a victim, especially of a sexual nature. Or maybe that was standard operating procedure in our lawsuit-happy society.

My list of injuries sounded unimpressive. External bruising and scrapes, internal bruising—yes, I knew, I could feel it—and a hairline wrist fracture. I felt worse than all that. It seemed unfair to go through all that and feel this bad when my injuries made it sound like I fell off my bike. Maybe they should smash my leg or something so I could be the cool kid with the cast. I knew I couldn't feel worse even if they did, although I'd been wrong about that before, hadn't I?

When the doctor had finished explaining my treatment plan, to which I hardly listened, he left, and more men came in. More goddamned men. Was everyone in the world a man? Except nurses. Nurses were women and nurses were nice, but otherwise you had to deal with *men*.

Policemen, specifically. Fucking fantastic.

First they took my statement. The temptation to lie was strong. To say: "Nothing happened." And then walk away and pretend that it was true.

But no, they already knew. They'd probably spoken to other people that were there already. They'd probably spoken to my doctor already, too. This was just—what?—procedure. I was a formality. A paper that had to be filed.

So I told them. Everything. It didn't matter because I didn't know them and they wouldn't care. I only got stuck a couple of times, but they waited. They even had the grace not to appear impatient.

"Thank you, ma'am. I understand that was hard for you. As a courtesy, we can fill you in on what happened last night. You may have heard about the Hard Z's and the Locos?"

I nodded. They liked to hang out at the bar where I worked. Best to get their orders correct and fast, then stay out of their way.

"Well, they are both gangs in the area and involved in illegal activities: drugs, smuggling, prostitution and the like. The police department received information that a conflict was brewing between the two gangs and we put agents into place. The sting went on for six months, but it came to a head last night. We found out that a bomb was set in a school for retaliation for another act. Our operators worked out a deal late last night to identify the location of the school and then bust both gangs."

Why bomb a school? They were just kids, but gang members were filled with high school students, even middle school kids. It didn't even have to be about that specifically. Bombing an elementary school on another gang's turf would be an act of war. It was all so senseless. I felt numb, unable to

process the horror of what he described.

He looked at me expectantly. I looked back. What did he want from me, a high-five?

“One of the men who attacked you last night, the second one, a Mr. José Fernandez, was identified as a member of the Locos. He was found dead on arrival.”

He paused, looking uncomfortable now. That was interesting.

“The other man who ... well, he...”

“Zachary,” I said. I wouldn’t ask if he was okay.

“Yes, he... his name is Zachary Kant. He was one of the agents working under cover in the sting operation.”

What. The. Fuck.

“Excuse me?” I asked.

He cleared his throat, “Zachary Kant is an officer with the FBI who, working in conjunction with the local police department, infiltrated the Locos gang. His participation was vital in determining the location of the bomb, which was found and removed from an elementary school early this morning. No one was hurt.”

I paused to try to take that in. Zachary was one of the good guys. A fucking *cop*.

*No one was hurt*. Well, that wasn’t quite true, was it?

“So, I was ... I was *fucked* by an FBI agent last night.”

“Ah, yes. I believe that the reasoning was to keep cover and also to—” He cleared his throat again “—to protect you. It was his belief that you would be ... you would be violently gang-raped and possibly killed had he left you to the other men. He attempted to claim you in a manner that is common among that group of people.”

“I ... I see.”

“Yes, well, undercover officers are given immunity for certain crimes that they commit as part of their role, but that particular one ... well, ma’am, the precedents are ... unclear. It will be up to you as to whether or not you want to press charges.”

“Ah.” That was why he was nervous.

“Even if you do, it is possible that the DA or judge will pardon him ... considering the circumstances. Still, that won’t come into play unless you decide to pursue this.”

“I see. Well, this is a lot to take in. I guess I don’t want to press charges.”

“Ah. Okay. Good,” he said, sounding relieved.

He wrapped up by giving me information about victim’s counseling and his business card. I threw them both in the trash.

So. Zachary was an undercover agent. Zachary Kant. He was okay, I presumed, since the detective was concerned about pressing charges.

And it made sense, though, his reasoning for doing what he did. He was probably right about what would have happened to me. So in a way he did save me, even if he had to fuck me to do it. He didn't protect me from that man, Mr. José Fernandez, but he was a little busy—what with being in the middle of a gang war and saving a school full of children and everything. In the end, he had saved me.

But Zachary hadn't come. This detective had come and taken my statement and explained about the undercover operation, but Zachary hadn't come to see me.

#### Chapter Four

I transferred all the grocery bags to my left hand. They were too heavy that way, but my right hand still couldn't handle much weight, even with the wrist brace. I rushed up the stairs, hoping to make it at least to my apartment door before all the bags slipped out of my grip.

At the top of the landing, the bags dropped to the ground. Bread and oranges and yogurt containers tumbled across the concrete. For once I hadn't held back at the grocery store, thanks to the thick envelope of cash that had somehow ended up in my apartment mailbox. I suspected I knew who had left it there, but why? To keep me quiet about it? Or out of guilt?

Movement beyond the spill caught my eye.

I tensed, ready to run.

A man turned from my apartment door to face me. *Zachary.*

My breath caught. He looked like shit. Well, he was still beautiful. He would always be beautiful, but now he was also a wreck. If he was here to give me more money, he shouldn't have bothered. I could live on that much for months. Which was convenient, because I'd lost my job at the bar after being gone for that long.

"Rachel," he said, "I'm sorry." *For startling me or fucking me?* It was the first time he'd said my name.

He had a few days' worth of stubble. I remembered his goatee, but the stubble spread evenly across his face, as if he'd shaved first before letting it grow out again. He was dressed in grungy clothes like before, but now they were rumpled and ... ordinary. Not dirty designer jeans, just dirty torn jeans. Not a leather jacket, just a thin, worn, gray t-shirt. His eyes were bloodshot and had thick, dark circles underneath. When was the last time he slept?

"I'm sorry," he repeated. "Here. Let me help you with that."

He took a step toward me and reached his hand out. Without thinking, I took a step backwards before my mind could register what he'd said. He froze. His body remained still, but emotions flashed across his face like beacons. I didn't even recognize them all, but I knew one for sure—pain. It had hurt him that I was afraid of him.

"I'm not going to hurt you," he said hoarsely. That was what he'd said to me at the time. The words must have brought back the same memories for him, because he grimaced and said, "I'm not going to touch you."

I still hadn't spoken. I wasn't sure I could. I didn't know what to say, anyways. Thoughts flitted through my mind. I struggled to grab hold of one.

Why are you here?

Why didn't you come sooner?

"I... It's okay. You startled me, that's all. I'll pick these up." I knelt down and began gathering up the groceries into the bags, carefully keeping my body facing him. I was so flustered by his arrival that I used my right hand to pick up a carton of milk. My injured hand. I gasped and dropped the milk. The carton broke open, and white milk spilled onto the dirty concrete floor. Then he was beside me, cradling my arm in his hands.

He was *touching* me, and I was letting him.

"Your wrist," he said, "it hasn't healed yet."

"Yeah, well, not all the way."

His face was turned down towards my wrist that he still held, so I couldn't see his expression. "Can I bring in the groceries? Please." He looked up at me—his eyes dark, murky.

"Uh, sure. Okay. That would be helpful. Thanks." I stood and backed out of the way. He swiftly re-packed the grocery bags and carried them to my door.

I unlocked the door and stood aside to let him in. As he passed me, the situation hit me. I had tacitly invited my attacker, my kidnapper into my apartment. I felt like the stupid girl in a vampire horror movie. Like he couldn't have come in on his own but once I invited him...

But this wasn't like that, because he wasn't evil. He was one of the good guys, despite what had happened. He hadn't raped me. I'd agreed to it. He'd only done it to protect me. He'd fucked me to save me, rather than leave me to the others, if I wanted to believe. I did want to believe. It was not that easy to shift someone in my mind from being bad to good.

Zachary found the kitchen and began putting things away. It was simple enough with such a tiny fridge and pantry, but I was still impressed with his resourcefulness. Where I came from, men didn't help. There weren't too many bags or too much space in the kitchen, so I leaned against the bar and watched him.

I'd thought about him and dreamed about him, but I'd wondered if I'd forgotten what he'd looked like. I'd only seen him for such a short time period, and during that time I'd been traumatized and in shock.

He did look different. Not just the goatee or the stubble or the haunted look in his bloodshot green eyes. He looked more gaunt and stood less tall. Even so, he dominated my tiny apartment. I soaked him in—his face, his body, his presence—not knowing if I'd ever have the chance again.

He put everything away, quickly and without complaint, and then stood awkwardly in the kitchen. Questions came to my mind, and I wanted to ask him what he wanted, but that would just put an end to this sooner. It was suddenly imperative that he stayed. I couldn't look too deeply into my feelings about him yet, but I knew this much: whatever he wanted, I would give him. Then he would leave.

He cleared his throat, "You didn't press charges."

My eyebrows rose. I hadn't expected him to say *that*. "No. I didn't."

"Why?"

"Well, they explained it. Why you ... did what you did. So, it didn't really make sense to press charges."

He looked away, "I think you should. You should press charges."

"I don't understand." He hadn't done anything wrong, even if it was questionably legal. The cop had pretty much told me the case would get thrown out. Besides, even if he had done something wrong, why would anyone want to have charges pressed against them?

"I don't know what the officer told you," he said. "Maybe he wasn't clear on your options or maybe he pressured you or something, but I... what I did to you, you should press charges."

Okay, I was getting that he wanted me to press charges. This didn't make sense. "Listen," I shook my head bemusedly, "maybe there has been some mistake. Is your name Zachary Kant?"

"Yes."

"And are you an FBI agent?"

"Yes."

"And you were working undercover in a sting operation with the Locos?"

"Yes."

Now the hard part, "And when you...when you fucked me, you were doing so to keep cover. And because you thought it would help me. That if you claimed me, then the others couldn't hurt me."

"So that's it," he said flatly. "You feel gratitude towards me. Well, don't. I didn't *protect* you, I *raped* you, and I—God help me, but I *enjoyed* it. Even if I wanted to claim you, to protect you, it didn't work. You were attacked and raped again while under my protection."

"I said yes. It wasn't rape."

"Don't give me that," he said fiercely, and I flinched back.

Damn, I hated being a scaredy-cat. I sighed at myself and at him. "I know what happened. I think that you did the right thing. You did the best you could."

He gave me a look that let me know what he thought of his best. "Did you hear what I said?" he demanded. "I enjoyed raping you. I got off on it. That's not all. I want to do it again. I've wanted to do it again since the moment I came inside you."

My eyes widened and my breath stuttered. He noticed. He narrowed his eyes and stepped towards me in the tiny kitchen. "That's right," he said. "I want to have sex with you. I dream about it. I imagine you under me with your beautiful eyes looking up at me, needy, and those lips and hair

spilling everywhere your—”

He waved his hand towards my breasts, but his eyes never left mine.

“So don’t try to make excuses for what I did,” he said.

I was breathing harder now, but not out of fear.

Does he really want me? Or is this a ploy to scare me? He wouldn’t force me. I was almost certain of that.

“What happened before,” I said breathlessly, “was it the ultimate pity fuck? You had to do it or I would get hurt or die?”

“What? Fuck, no. I don’t know.” He looked away, breathing hard. “I saw you before, at the club, and I wanted you then. I was working, but I had planned on going back some other night to meet you. Then I saw that they had kidnapped a woman to rape, and that it was you. Sometimes it’s part of the job, to stand by while something like that happens, but I couldn’t let them touch you. I couldn’t let them hurt you. But I hurt you, and then I let them hurt you anyways. I let you down.”

He paused.

“This is what I do...I protect people.” His eyes pleaded with me, to understand, to condemn him. “And then when it mattered, when it really mattered to me, I failed you.”

The words hung in the air.

“Oh,” I said softly. I reached up my hand and rubbed my knuckles against the scratchy stubble on his jaw. “No, Zachary. You saved me.”

“No,” he protested, but he held his head still. “No.”

“Yes, you did,” I said. I trailed my fingertips up his cheek to his eyes. As I traced his eyebrows lightly, he shut his eyes and groaned. I wanted to hear him groan again, but inside me, like he did when he raped me. This time I wanted him to make me come. I wasn’t sure I could go through with it, but I wanted to try.

“Tell me you want me,” I said. “Tell me you want to have sex with me.”

“What?” he opened his eyes, looking alarmed. “No.”

“You don’t want to have sex with me?”

“No, I do. I’m sorry I said that before, that I scared you,” he laughed humorlessly. “I’m not going to rape you, or hurt you. I’d like to say I’d never do that to you, but we both know I would. But I won’t, not again.”

“I’m not asking you to rape me. I’m asking you to have sex with me.”

“Oh God,” he groaned. He hung his head, “Listen to me,” he said hoarsely. “I don’t know what this is. You feel so ashamed about it that you think this is what you deserve? It’s not. Or is this some kind of alternative therapy treatment?”

"It's not any of that. Not totally," I said. "I don't know if I can even have sex. Maybe I'll freak out. I know that I want you, physically, and I think you want me, too."

I took a deep breath.

"And," I said. "You will be gentle with me... won't you?"

He paused with his eyes locked on mine, though I couldn't get a read on his thoughts. "It's too soon. Your body isn't even fully healed."

It made me angry. He knew nothing about my body or my pain. This was my choice. "How long should I wait? Six months, six years? How about this? You come back when I can be normal again and we'll pick this back up."

But he didn't leave. He stood there in front of me. I could feel the tension in his body, vibrating in the small space. His shoulders were slumped and his head was down as if he was dejected, defeated. That wasn't the energy he was giving off. It felt like he was restraining something massive, something that might break free.

"You can have anyone," he said. "You don't have to pick me because I'm here or because I was the one who raped you. You can find someone else who will be gentle and be ... worthy of you. You are beautiful. And so precious. You know that, don't you?"

"I know that you think that," I said softly. "That's why I want it to be you."

"I want you so badly," he said. "I shouldn't have tried to scare you with that, but it's still true. I want to make you come. Will you let me do that?"

Could I? I wasn't sure. My throat felt tight. I nodded.

He stepped closer to me, almost touching. His hand reached up again to my breast, still covered in my bra and shirt. Then he paused, his hand curved but not touching. He looked up into my face, searching.

"Can I touch you?" he asked.

"Yes. Please."

He touched his hand to my breast, molding it. His hand curved along the side and underneath, testing its weight. His thumb reached up to swipe my nipple lightly. I shivered. I didn't want him to stop.

"I don't want to scare you. I don't want to hurt you," he said. He hung his head, his hand still on my breast. "Rachel. Tell me what to do."

Wait, what?

"I'm afraid that I'll be too rough, that I'll do something to scare you. If you tell me what to do, I'll do it and not anything else."

Jesus, did I even want that? Was it a responsibility or a freedom he offered?

He looked up at me, supplicating. "You can tie me up...if you want."

"I don't want to tie you up, but I will tell you what to do."

"Okay," he said, as if agreeing to a pact, "Okay. I'll do what you tell me." He lowered his hand to his side.

"No," I said. "Touch me again."

He lifted both hands up to my breasts and fondled them tentatively. *Too light.*

"Yes. Like that but harder."

He used more pressure. *Yes.*

A strange feeling came over me. We stood face-to-face as we had before, but I felt taller, stronger. He seemed—well, he was still large—but he seemed almost worshipping. All he was doing was touching me, in ways I had been touched before, but I was more turned on than ever. He was touching me now at my command: how I wanted, for as long as I wanted.

My cunt tingled, aching for him to touch me there too, for him to bring me to completion. I was enjoying this too much to end it quickly.

"Stop," I said, and he froze.

"Take off your shirt."

He pulled his hands back to tear off his shirt. I held my hand out. He put his shirt in it. Then he stood straight, hands by his side. His eyes were intense and dark, fixed on my face, waiting for my next command. His arousal was an obvious bulge in his jeans. I could feel his body straining for more, to touch me and to take his pleasure, but I knew that he wouldn't. Not until I told him to.

I didn't want to tie him down, to take his choice away, because I never wanted to make someone feel what I felt, the helplessness and the shame. If he wanted to give this to me, that was something different. Every act of obedience, every moment of sweet restraint he showed, was a gift.

I reveled in my power. I stepped up to him and put my fingertips on his chest. I trailed them down and in circles, tracing the contours of his muscles. Those muscles contracted and rippled with unfulfilled pleasure. His breathing quickened and his bulge grew more obvious.

"Your pants. Remove them," I said.

He reached up and carefully undid his jeans, and they dropped to the floor. He hooked his thumbs in his underwear and hesitated.

"Yes," I told him, "Those too."

He pushed them down to the floor with his jeans and stepped out of them. I hadn't seen much of his body the last time. He'd remained fully clothed except for his cock, which he'd taken out to fuck me. I hadn't really gotten to see that—only feel it.

I examined it now, taking my time. It was average thickness, but it seemed longer than average. I was surprised I had taken it without any pain. Although maybe he hadn't put it in all the way, deep inside me. Maybe he'd held back.

He was already so hard that his cock pointed straight out and upwards. The skin was dark, and a glistening drop sat on the tip. I wondered at his self-control to stand there for my perusal.

“Do you like this?” I asked.

He looked at me.

“Answer me,” I said. “Do you like standing there, waiting for me to tell you what to do?”

“Yes,” he said, his voice thick. “There’s nowhere I’d rather be.”

“Good. Because I like this, too. I like telling you what to do. I like watching you stand there, having to wait. And I like this.” I touched my fingertip to the tip of his cock. His cock jerked, and my cunt clenched in response.

I wanted to explore him. To learn everything about him. His mind, yes, but that was for later. For now, I wanted to know what he smelled like, what he tasted like, the shade of his skin underneath his cock and his balls. Still fully dressed, I stepped over to a kitchen chair and sat down.

He remained where he was, facing the wall.

“Come here,” I told him.

#### Chapter Five

He stepped between my legs. Even sitting down in front of him, with his cock standing proudly in my face, power coursed through me. I gripped his cock in my hand and squeezed lightly, savoring the catch in his breath. I pumped up and down, not too fast and not too hard, teasing him.

Holding the base of his cock in my fist, I touched my tongue to the tip of his cock—not licking him, just pressing down my tongue into his slit. He groaned softly. I slipped my lips around him and pushed forward to take him into my mouth a few times. He caught my rhythm and his hips thrust forward. I reached up my other hand and tapped his hip. *No, no moving allowed.* His hips stilled.

I continued sucking him in a steady rhythm to see if he would move. His breathing grew ragged, but he stayed mostly still. I pulled my mouth off of him and trailed tiny licks and pressed kisses and light touches of my teeth down the underside of his cock. When I reached his balls, I cleaned them with my tongue and sucked on them. His entire body jerked at that, but I assumed it was involuntary and didn’t chastise him again.

Lower I went, down the underside of his balls. I couldn’t reach, his legs were too close. I tapped again, this time on the inside of his thighs. *Wider.* He widened his stance. I used my fist on his cock like a handle, lifting it up and out of the way. I resumed licking his balls, reaching underneath until I hit the seam where they met his body. My face was buried in his groin, and his musk was overpowering, intoxicating. I licked with my tongue, anywhere I could, not quite reaching his asshole.

He started to shake and pump his hips erratically, and I thought he might be close to coming. His long, tormented groan confirmed it. I tapped his hip again, but then figured nonverbal cues may not be enough.

I lifted my head and said, “Don’t come. I’ll tell you when you can come.” His eyes were glazed over and I knew my suspicions were correct. He seemed to focus on me and calm himself. He nodded.

I had felt more powerful with my clothes on, but now they felt like a hindrance. I pulled off my shirt abruptly, enjoying his sharp intake of breath. Then I pulled my bra off and watched his eyes glaze over while looking at my breasts.

"You wanted to touch me here. *Before*," I said with emphasis—when he was fucking me. "Well? Tell me. Did you want to touch them when I was lying there, helpless?"

"Yes," he gasped. "I'm sorry."

"Why?"

"They are so beautiful. I knew they would be, even when I'd only seen you at the bar. And then seeing them bare and in front of me, I'm sorry."

"Don't be sorry for finding them beautiful, for wanting to touch them. Do it."

He reached his hand up, but I stopped him. The power was amazing. It wasn't a role, in that moment, but just me. Doing what I wanted, telling him what I wanted him to do. Sex had only ever been a compromise, and sometimes a reluctant one, but this was all me.

"No," I said. "With your cock."

He paused and his eyes flew to me, but I didn't help him out. It had come to me as an idea, as I watched his beautiful cock bob in close proximity to my naked breasts. I wasn't even sure what I wanted him to do, but I was content to let him figure it out.

He gripped his cock in his fist, holding it more like a weapon than something tender. He moved his hips forward until the tip of his cock bumped my nipple. When he pulled back slightly, a bead of pre-cum glistened on my nipple.

I felt entranced by my arousal and my power. I had never realized how many thoughts would flicker through my brain, ideas and requests that I had never voiced. Now I was given a free pass for anything I wanted. He wouldn't judge and he wouldn't say no.

"Suck me there. Taste yourself on me."

He immediately knelt before me—he, the errant knight, and me the benevolent queen—and latched his mouth onto my breast, sucking me greedily. I felt the pulls through my breast and down in my cunt.

"The other side," I gasped.

He started to lean over, but I put my fingers on his arm to stop him. I pointed down to his cock. He stood up, and, more hurriedly this time, more crudely, he coated my nipple with his pre-cum. Then he knelt down and suckled me, cleaning all of his cum off of my breast and then sucking more.

"Stand back up."

I pulled his body up again, using his cock as a gentle lead. He leaned into me, following my physical commands. I trailed his cock down along my breast, from the inner edge to the underside and down along my ribs.

When I released him, he knelt down again and licked along the trail I had drawn.

“Enough.” I wasn’t sure how much more of this I could take. I doubted I could come from nipple stimulation alone, but I thought a tiny rock against the seam of my jeans might finish me.

He stood up. I gripped his cock and pulled it into my mouth again. He gasped. I almost smiled, but I couldn’t with my mouth full of cock.

He was too long for me to really take into my mouth. I could take the tip, and then halfway in, which would be plenty enough on most guys. I wanted more, all of him. Maybe most women wouldn’t do this for him, wouldn’t even try, not all the way. He was too long and too hard. I wanted to do it, and then forever I would have that part of him.

I began working him deeper on every suck, until I could feel him hitting the back of my throat. I forced myself to even breaths and a steady rhythm, and got him deeper still. My gag reflex kicked in, but I continued my thrusts. I felt him tense, and I knew that he wanted to tell me not to, that I didn’t have to do that. That wasn’t the game we were playing, and he knew it. He stayed quiet. Well, except for his ragged moans.

I gagged again and paused. I took a deep breath and focused on relaxing my throat, relaxing my entire body. Opening my throat for his cock, opening my mind to the sensations. I began to suck him in a steady rhythm again. Deeper, deeper. He cried out. I felt him push back into my throat. It burned a little, stretching, but I ignored it. His pubic hair tickled my nose. There was a little more there, but I wouldn’t be able to take it. That was the deepest anyone had probably taken him.

“Wait,” he gasped, barely understandable, “I can’t ... Oh Christ ... *Rachel* ...”

I pulled out until his tip was in my mouth and paused. I didn’t want him to come like this because I wanted him to fuck me—but if it was too late, I would let him ride it out here anyways. He took deep gulps of air, and his body vibrated with tension, but he didn’t come.

I stood up and he stepped back, his body coated in a shiny sheen of sweat. I took off my jeans and sat at the edge of the kitchen table, legs open and feet resting on the chairs. With anyone else, I hated this position, so open, so exposed. I didn’t have to worry about what he would do to me or what he would think of me.

“Kneel,” I said.

He knelt centered in front of me because he knew what he would do next.

I waited, letting him look at me and gathering up my courage for this. Some of it had slipped away when it came to turning the tables.

“Lick me,” I said.

He leaned forward. His breath touched me before his tongue did. Slowly, softly, he licked me from bottom to top, wide but not deep.

“More,” I said, unable to provide more detailed instructions. “Make me come.”

He moaned and licked me again and again. He used his tongue to delve between my lips. He swirled up around my clit, pressing me and pleasuring me until I was pumping my hips up off the table.

I couldn’t think, couldn’t breathe. “Ahhhh, more, do it, more, yes, that’s right, so good.”

I came hard, pushing mindlessly into his face. I collapsed back onto the table, spread out on my back with my arms open and my legs spread wide.

Sated, I looked up at him. "Do you want to fuck me?"

His expression, tense with longing, was a sharp contrast to my contentment. "Yes."

"You fucked me before. I didn't really have a choice."

"I know," he said roughly.

"You are sorry," I said, a statement. I knew it was true.

"Yes," he said.

"I could leave you with that," I gestured at his erection, so hard and primed and poised right near my wet cunt. Just a few inches closer and he'd be inside me. "I could tell you to walk away with that. It would be fair."

"Yes," he growled.

"You would walk away if I told you to." I knew that was true also.

"Yes," he said. "Please." He did look desperate. I wanted him inside me.

"Okay," I said. "Fuck me."

He gripped my hips and slammed his cock inside me, sending shockwaves through my body. I cried out at the force of it.

"Condom," he said, breathing hard.

"Birth control," I managed to get out.

And protection beyond that seemed ludicrous considering we'd already done this.

He pulled back out and slammed into me again.

He was above me, fucking me, in the same position as last time, but this was totally different. Or maybe it wasn't so different—in both cases he was serving me, by providing his protection or his obedience.

"Can't be gentle. Tell me to stop," he panted.

"Don't stop," I commanded.

He continued thrusting into me, his flesh slapping mine, his body rocking mine against the table. He was ruthless. It was a reaction to all that restraint that he had showed, to be able to let loose now.

"Shit. Christ. I need you to come," he said.

"It's okay. I don't need to again."

He groaned in answer. He kept pummeling into me. I felt it building up again, and I tightened my legs around his waist. I thought about asking him to stop, but I wasn't sure he really had control anymore. I didn't want to set him up to fail me, to ask him to do something he physically couldn't.

He was hitting the right angle for me, and I could feel myself getting closer. So close.

He started coming, shuddering and groaning. I was too close. I ground my hips into his, setting off my orgasm. I used the weight of his body to ride the waves even after he had collapsed on top of me.

We both lay on the table, damp from sweat and other bodily fluids, as our breathing evened out. I felt the same connection as before, and I wondered if it really meant something this time.

I was a girl, and though I'd never considered myself one of the stupid ones, I knew I might be confusing physical completion with emotional fulfillment. Or, even if my feelings for him were real, he might not have any at all. This was the weirdest conceivable situation to me. An entirely inauspicious start to a relationship, but here we were.

As far as I was concerned, the game was over, the one where I was in charge. That had ended the moment the sex had ended. Or maybe before that.

He stood up and pulled out of me. I felt bereft. Would he leave now? He pulled on his clothes and handed me mine, and I dressed quickly.

"What happens now?" I asked.

"Whatever you want to happen," he answered.

I gave him a look.

"It's not a bullshit answer, it's the truth. I'm ... I'm whatever you want."

"Oh, great. My own personal guilt slave."

"No. It's not that. Not only that." He sighed. "I want you, but I know I can't have you. What I did doesn't go away. You may have let me be with you for this, for sex, but I know I can't keep you. For however long you want me here, I'll be here."

Was it possible? "What if I want you to stay?"

"Then I'll stay," he said.

"The night?" I asked, unsure what I wanted his answer to be.

"However long."

"Okay."

"Okay," he agreed. "You'll need to notify your patrol that you have company."

"My patrol?"

"Your protection," he said. "Surely it was a twenty-four hour watch?"

"Oh, that. I refused it."

His eyes widened, "What do you mean, you refused it?"

"Um, just what I said. I didn't need it. I didn't want more *men* hanging around my apartment."

"Those men would protect you!" He seemed really upset, like I wasn't making sense.

"Look," I said reasonably. "You'll be here tonight, right? So let's worry about this tomorrow."

"Dammit, that's not the point. Besides, I don't count as protection," he muttered the last words.

"An FBI agent doesn't count as protection?"

"No," he said harshly, "I'm not."

"Did you get fired?" I asked incredulously.

"No. I quit."

"What? *Why*? Because of this? Because of me?" I knew I sounded hysterical but the words were pouring out that way.

"Not because of you, because of me. If I couldn't protect you, then what good am I to anyone? Look, we don't need to discuss it. It doesn't matter." I didn't bother to explain that he *did* protect me. We both knew what happened, but knowing it didn't make the pain of it disappear.

"It does matter. It damn well *matters*."

"I didn't come here to tell you that. Or to fight with you. I wanted to ... well, I wanted to tell you to press charges, first of all. Since I expected you to but you didn't. But I never dared to think that I ... well, I guess I wanted to see if you needed anything. I *assumed* you had protection, at least. Fuck."

"I don't know why you're so bent out of shape about it. They said they had caught most of the guys."

"I'm sure they said that to you," he said. "But these gangs, they're not some well-defined group with an org chart. They have friends and enemies everywhere, making plays we can't anticipate. That night didn't put an end to the gang war, it only injured them, and they'll be coming back even stronger. If someone on the outside finds out that you were there that night, then they'll come after you, try to use you as leverage."

He looked away and blew out his breath. What was he thinking?

He looked back at me, his eyes in turmoil but his mouth set in a grim line. "Okay then. You want me to stay? I'm staying here. You've hired yourself a bodyguard."

Chapter Six

Ring. Ring. Ring.

My body jerked as I came awake. Looking over at the phone, I snaked my hand outside the blanket to pick it up. Dial tone. Beside me, Zachary was already getting out of bed. I didn't stop myself from checking out his bare, muscled ass as he bent to pick up his jeans off the floor. He pulled a cell phone out of the pocket.

"Kant, here."

A pause.

"Right now?"

Another pause.

"Okay. Be there in fifteen."

He turned back to me, his face blank.

"You're leaving," I said, trying not to let my disappointment come through.

"Have to," he said. His face was that emotionless mask I was coming to recognize, even if I still hated it. He used it only when he had bad news. "There's increased chatter regarding the gang activity, and I need to check in. Listen, you can come with me to the station."

I made a face. "I don't think so." I had no desire to be around a bunch of cops, who'd look at me with either suspicion or pity.

"You'll be safer with me. And you'll be safe at the station, even when I'm busy working there."

"I'll be safe here. I was, you know, before you came along." I meant that no one had ever messed with me at my apartment, that's all. Zachary's mouth tightened and I knew he was thinking of the first time we met, when I'd been abducted, when he'd fucked me.

"Fine," he said tightly. "Stay inside with the door locked until I get back. Don't open the door for anyone, understand?"

"Sure. Okay."

He dressed quickly and left, making sure I came to the door with him to lock it behind him.

I considered slipping back into bed, but without him there, the bed would feel cold. I showered and dressed in jeans and shirt, picking something green to match my eyes in anticipation of Zachary coming back. I even put on a little makeup, adding color to my pale complexion, and brushed my black hair to a shine. It had been a long time since I had someone to dress up for. Considering my recent experiences, I hadn't expected to find that for a while.

The situation with Zachary was far from permanent, I knew. If you looked up "fucked-up starts to a relationship," ours would be listed as the perfect case study. I wasn't entirely convinced that I wasn't just a guilt fuck to him, a passing focus of his lust. I'd take what I could get at this point.

My parents had passed away in my first year of college. I didn't have any other family. The money ran out soon, and I didn't make enough money doing part time work to pay for it myself, so I had to drop out. I'd been working at the bar ever since. I didn't have a great support system. That hadn't bothered me, or at least I thought it hadn't. Ever since I'd gotten back from the hospital, I

felt more alone than ever.

I puttered around my tiny kitchen, putting together a lasagna I could throw in the oven later for dinner. He'd only been there one day, and already I was planning meals for two.

A knock came at the door.

I looked through the peephole.

Two police officers stood there, distorted and looming.

"Yes?" \*

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