



TRICK
RIDER

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHORS
SHAW HART & CAMERON HART

TRICK RIDER

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It happened by chance...

Pia:

A lot of things in my life seem to happen that way.

My parents' death, me joining the circus, and finally, meeting him.

Gavin Thompson is everything that I want, but I could never have him. He's a billionaire who rules his world and I'm just a performer who doesn't have control over anything.

We could never be a couple, but that doesn't stop me from wanting him.

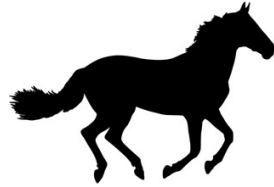
Gavin:

She's magnificent.

I've never seen anyone so graceful or beautiful in my life, and suddenly, I'm glad that I got dragged down to the circus with my sister and nephew. I may have never met her otherwise, and that would have been a tragedy because she's meant to be mine.

Now I just need to show her that and I need to work fast if I want my little trick rider to stick around.

ONE



Gavin

I TRY NOT to grimace as the attendant in the ticket booth wraps a wristband around my wrist. The highlighter yellow clashes with the dark jeans and black shirt I'm wearing, and even though I know I shouldn't care, it annoys me.

I shouldn't be spending my evening at the circus. Not when I have to vet a new client for my investment firm, organize resumes for my next hire, and get through the quarterly reports for my current clients.

Time is money, and money is—

“Stop thinking about work,” my sister, Georgia, orders.

“I'm not—”

My sister narrows her eyes at me, pursing her lips as she gives me her signature *bullshit* look.

“It's Friday night. You're with your coolest sister and favorite nephew, and the billions in your bank account can wait until morning. I'd say they can wait until Monday, but I know I won't get you to stop working on the weekends. Just take a breath and be here with us tonight.”

“I'm here,” I tell her, giving her my best smile.

She's right. I know she's right. I left my hectic life back in LA for a few weeks to hang out with my sister and nephew, so work will have to wait.

Georgia raises an eyebrow at me, and I hold my hands up in mock surrender. “I can feel you overthinking everything. Please, just try to relax. You need a break and this will be fun. I promise,” she says as she bumps her arm against mine.

“Right,” I say under my breath. “Fun.”

My nephew, Steven, runs ahead, mesmerized by the bright lights and sounds. Georgia runs after him, trying to corral her energetic son.

Steven is a big part of why I’m here. His dad is deployed overseas right now, and I came to spend some time with my sister and him and check that they were doing okay. They live on Hanscom Air Force Base, a little over half an hour away from Salem, where the circus is being held.

I’ve been here a week, and I love my family, but it’s been a struggle to trust others with my company while I’m away. It’s the first real break I’ve had since graduating from college and starting my own firm. It’s grown over the last few years to be one of the biggest in the country and now, at twenty-six, I’m one of the youngest self-made billionaires ever. I wouldn’t say I’m controlling. I just... I know what I like and how I like it done. My multi-billion dollar investment firm speaks for itself, so clearly, I know what I’m doing.

And yet, here I am, weaving my way through screaming children, peanut shells crunching underfoot as we make our way to the games. I can’t remember the last time I went to a circus or carnival, and I try to push thoughts of work and my latest investments from my mind as I watch my nephew have fun.

His first stop is a classic—get the ball in the milk jug. It’s rigged as hell, but Steven doesn’t care. I smile as he scrunches up his nose in concentration, closing one eye as if he’s focusing on his mark. My nephew winds up his arm dramatically, then tosses the ball, only to have it bounce off the rim.

He tries three more times, to no avail, but Steven doesn’t let that get him down. He’s already focused on the next game, which just so happens to be the sledgehammer bell. Georgia

laughs as he chatters away, telling us how much stronger he's getting and how he can definitely lift the hammer.

I stand behind Steven while he wraps his hands around the handle, pulling up with all his might. The sledgehammer doesn't budge. Leaning over, I grip the handle right above Steven's clasped hands, helping him lift it. My nephew peers up at me, giving me a toothy grin.

"Thanks, Uncle Gavin," he says.

I give him a wink, then count to three before we drop the hammer down on the platform. The bell dings, signaling we won.

Steven cheers and takes the stuffed monkey the attendant hands him, a satisfied grin plastered on his face. Georgia takes his hand, and the two practically skip over to the next booth.

I can't remember the last time I was that happy, that carefree, though not for lack of trying on my sister's part.

She's always trying to get me to take a vacation. She doesn't understand that my work is fulfilling. I find doing other things to be exponentially boring. Georgia thinks I'm crazy. She's constantly urging me to date or find someone to spend my life with. I love my sister, but I only agreed to come visit if she promised not to try to set me up with anyone while I was here.

I know she just wants me to be happy, which is why I tolerate her matchmaking schemes. She's my older sister, and ever since our mom passed, she's been trying to look after me more.

Georgia seems to think I'm too busy or not interested, but that's not entirely true. Sure, I'm a workaholic who can definitely lose track of time when I'm in the middle of a project. But I would make room in my life for the right person. I just haven't found her yet.

No one I've met or interacted with has ever seemed worth it. That makes me sound awful, but I'm a realist. I don't want to half-ass a relationship and risk my company if the woman in question doesn't have staying potential. Harsh, but that's the

way it is. I've yet to find that spark, that irresistible *something* that seems to make men stupid around the women they love.

I want the real thing, and I won't settle for anything less.

"Want to go see the show?" Georgia asks Steven.

He nods enthusiastically and grabs my hand. I smile as I let him drag me over to the big tent. It looks like the show has already started as we duck inside the tent, and I try to get into it as we listen to the crowd cheering.

"Up next, we have the amazing Pia and her horse, Penny!" the announcer cheers over the loudspeaker. I glance up at the sound of thundering hooves just in time to see a copper-colored horse gallop past.

A tiny blonde woman runs along the side of the horse, and I watch, completely mesmerized as she reaches up and swings herself onto the back of the animal.

She waves to the crowd, a wide smile on her beautiful face before she leaps nimbly to her feet on the back of the galloping horse. My chest grows tight, my heart lurching in my chest the longer I stare at her. Sweat beads my upper lip and forehead, and my hands are shaking.

What the hell is wrong with me?

Long blonde hair floats behind the ethereal trick rider, her graceful movements hypnotizing me. I can't look away. Everything about this woman has me on edge, all sorts of unfamiliar, ludicrous thoughts and feelings bubbling up from somewhere deep inside.

Perfect. Gorgeous. Goddess. Wife. Mother of my children. Mine, mine, mine.

She's incredible, her lithe little body moving like a dancer as she balances and moves on top of her horse. My woman is young, no more than twenty or so, and that makes me all the more protective of her.

Swallowing thickly, I try to get myself under control. I close my eyes, take a deep breath, and open them again. Of

course, they land right on my girl, tracking her every movement.

My gaze slides down her body, pausing to appreciate the lean muscles in her arms and legs, her delicate little feet, and the swell of her breasts. She's so much more than beautiful, she's... precious. Can't say I've ever thought that about another human being, but there it is.

I want to taste her ruby-red lips, swallow down her cries of pleasure as I drag my tongue down her body, and make her mine in every goddamn way. I also want to wrap my little trick rider up in a blanket and massage her aching muscles while she sips hot chocolate. I have the insane urge to draw her a bath and wash every inch of her before tucking her into bed and crawling in next to her.

My new obsession goes around the circle once more, and our eyes meet for one perfect second. Brilliant blue eyes hit me square in the chest, ripping me apart and replacing my soul with hers. It's mine now, and I plan to treasure it, as well as my trick rider, forever.

The beauty blinks a few times, her cheeks glowing bright pink. It's probably from the routine she just finished, but I secretly hope she's blushing for me. She's blushing because she knows this is the beginning of everything.

Wasn't I just saying that no one ever sparked my interest? No one seemed worth risking my career and company for?

Yeah, well, fuck that.

I've found my new purpose for breathing, and it has nothing to do with investments or building a financial empire.

I can feel the intensity of this moment deep in my gut, and I suck in a sharp breath.

"Are you okay?" Georgia asks.

I CAN'T TEAR my gaze away from my girl as she canters around the arena.

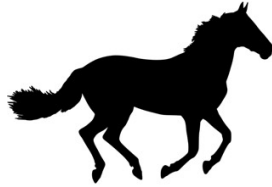
“I’m... perfect,” I tell her.

How could I be anything else when I just found the woman of my dreams?

Most people would think that it was crazy to fall in love with someone that I’ve never even talked to, someone that I’ve looked in the eye once, but I always trust my gut and my gut is telling me that Pia is meant to be mine.

Now I just need to convince her of that.

TWO



Pia

“LET’S give Pia and Penny a big hand!”

I scan the crowd for the tenth time since my routine ended, hoping to catch another glimpse of *him*. I have no idea who he is, only that when his dark blue eyes met mine, I felt seen, truly seen, for the first time since my parents passed away. Not only that, but something about the fierce yet tender way he held my gaze made me feel... safe. Protected. Cared for.

Crazy, I know. It was just a look from some random guy in the crowd. It shouldn’t mean anything.

And yet, my heart is still rattling around in my chest, my cheeks still flushed from the memory alone. A dull, throbbing ache starts somewhere deep in my core, radiating outward and making my thighs squeeze together.

I push those strange feelings and sensations to the back of my mind, focusing back on the crowd. I smile wider, waving as I nudge Penny with my heels to trot out of the arena and out of the rear door of the big tent.

“Good job, girl,” I whisper, rubbing her neck.

She nods her head, and I grin.

“Yeah, you know you were incredible out there,” I praise her.

She nods her head again as we come to a stop outside of the big tent.

“So humble,” I tease her.

One of the other workers gives me a weird look for talking to my horse, but I try my best to ignore them. I know it’s weird to be so attached to Penny, but she’s truly my best friend, as lame as that sounds. She’s the only thing I have left of my old life and the only thing keeping me going in this new one.

I dismount Penny, giving her one last pet as I grab the halter and lead rope and slip it over her head. I need to take her over to the stables and brush her out and feed her before I can turn in for the night.

We do two shows a day, and this was the last one. I’m looking forward to heading back to my bunk and grabbing something to eat for myself as well. Every muscle aches, from the soles of my feet to the crick in my neck. I thought I’d eventually get used to the extensive training schedule, as well as the numerous rehearsals we all have to do whenever we add or take away an act. That’s not even including the two shows Penny and I perform most nights.

However, after a year of working here, my body still feels broken at the end of the day. I’m sure the hot, heavy costumes and flashy jewelry don’t help.

A group of little kids runs by, giggling as their parents chase after them. I smile, watching the crowd for a minute. The sun slips farther and farther into the horizon, the circus lights slowly replacing the natural sunlight. Young couples walk by, hand in hand, smiling at each other with adoration. One little girl bounces up to her mother, a huge stick of pink cotton candy in hand. The woman laughs, telling her it’s nearly as big as her head.

It’s a sweet moment, and try as I might to ignore it, jealousy eats away at me.

I’m never going to have that. My family is gone, and I can’t imagine finding a partner while working long, draining days at the circus.

Loneliness threatens to swallow me whole, and I close my eyes, trying to get my emotions under control. Breathing in through my nose, I focus on the present, trying to pull my thoughts away from the dark path they're straying down.

It's no use.

My happy family was ripped away from me, and I don't know that I'll ever recover. An image of my parents and I at my graduation hits me, and I swallow hard, forcing the tears back before they fall.

That was the last memory that I have with them. I went out with friends after we had dinner together, and they headed home. Only, they never made it. A drunk driver blew through a red light and hit them. How many times have I replayed that evening in my head? Each time, I invite them out for drinks with my friends or offer to go home with them. Anything that keeps them off the road for a little longer.

Of course, those thoughts only serve to torture me.

The doctors told me their death was instant, and they didn't suffer. At least I have that to hang on to, but I'd rather have my parents here with me.

It's hard to believe all of that was a year ago. I lost my family and my future all in one night. I had to sell my childhood home to pay for their funerals and for stable fees for Penny. She's the only family I have left. She's also the only thing that's been getting me through life now.

I was supposed to go to college, but that went out the window when I started to have trouble paying bills. I tried to find a job, something that would allow me to afford Penny and stable fees while also putting a roof over my head and food on the table.

Turns out that was impossible. No one was hiring. No one except the circus.

I thought that the circus was a blessing at first. It was a job that provided free lodging and would cover Penny's costs. Now that I've been doing my act for a year though, I'm starting to grow tired of it.

The other people in the circus are friendly, but I'm not particularly close to any of them. They've all known each other for a while and since I'm the newest member, I feel like the odd man out.

Part of that is on me. I'm not exactly outgoing, despite my chosen profession of trick riding. When it's just Penny and me out there in the ring, nothing else matters. Once I dismount, however, it's back to reality. And in reality, I'm awkward and shy and terrified of rejection.

Alone. Always so alone.

I swallow, blinking the tears from my eyes as I turn to head to the stables with Penny.

I don't make it very far.

"Oof!" I grunt as I run into a brick wall.

"Sorry about that," says a deep voice.

I look up into a pair of deep blue eyes, a shiver running down my spine as they lock on to mine.

It's him.

The stranger with the haunting gaze from the crowd.

Dark blue eyes capture mine and don't let go, holding me hostage in this moment, surrounded by his minty, earthy cologne and solid strength. Once again, I find it hard to breathe the longer he stares at me. It's like he's picking me apart, piece by piece, examining each one as if I'm some treasure to be marveled over.

How is this man so much more potent up close? I thought seeing him in a sea of other people was devastating enough, but when he's here, only a few inches from me... my mind short circuits as heat dances along my nerves.

He's tall, at least a foot taller than me, and I have to crane my neck back to stare up at him. He's handsome, god-like, really, and my breath stalls in my lungs the longer I look at him.

My eyes catch on his mouth for a moment, getting lost in the perfect shape of it, before my gaze follows the stubble on his chin, up to his high cheekbones and a perfectly straight nose. His dark hair hangs over his forehead a bit, and I squint, trying to make out if it's black or dark brown. It's too hard to tell in the dim lights.

He looks like a Roman gladiator, and my mouth dries as I take in his toned body. His expansive chest pulls at the fabric of his dark shirt, letting me see the contours of his muscles. Thick biceps lead to strong forearms, both covered in swirls of black ink that pop against his skin.

I wonder if he's tattooed everywhere...

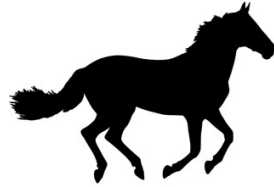
It's then that I realize that I've been openly ogling him for a solid minute, and I clear my throat.

"Um," I stutter out. "It's my fault. I wasn't looking where I was going," I say, the fake jewels on my costume clanking together as I take a step away from the man. I can't explain the painful twinge in my chest when I'm no longer pressed up against him, but hopefully it goes away soon. Maybe some dinner will help.

His eyes track my movements, and for one brief second, I feel like prey being stalked. That should bother me, right? I don't know a single thing about this man other than he's hella tall and tatted up. The thought of him chasing me should be terrifying.

Instead of fear, all I feel is a flutter of excitement.

THREE



Gavin

I'VE NEVER BEEN this nervous before in my life. Not even when I was starting Thompson Investing. But standing in front of this little pixie? My heart is racing out of control, my palms are growing sweaty the longer I look at her.

Queen. Goddess. Angel. All inadequate names for her, but I have nothing else to compare her to. She's magical. Ethereal. Somehow more entrancing up close.

Golden hair floats around her shoulders, a little tangled from her and Penny's routine, but I love it like this. It makes her look wild, despite the wariness rolling off her in waves.

Bright blue eyes flit around my face, and I take her in as she looks me over.

That's right, princess. Everything you see belongs to you now.

I need to chill the hell out before I scare my woman away with my intensity. I can't seem to stop these intrusive thoughts of whisking her away, putting a ring on her finger, and a baby in her belly, and giving us both the happily ever after we've been searching for.

I don't know how I know that about her, but it's true. This woman is searching for something, and she finally found it. Me. I'll give her anything and everything.

“I’m Gavin,” I finally manage to say, holding my hand out to her.

“Pia,” she says as her hand slides into mine.

I never want to let her go. Desire slices through me at that one simple touch, the feeling of her smooth skin rubbing against my palm almost too much to take. I wonder what her hands would feel like sliding up my bare chest, or perhaps clawing down my back.

Fuck, I need to get myself under control. I’m nothing if not disciplined in every area of my life, but apparently this little pixie princess is undoing everything about me.

“It’s nice to meet you,” I finally say after clearing my throat. “You were great in there,” I say, pointing back toward the tent behind us.

“Oh, thanks.” She smiles sweetly at me before she turns and strokes her horse’s mane. Her cheeks flush that pretty pink once more, and I get the sense my girl doesn’t know how to handle compliments very well. “Penny does most of the work.”

“You two make a good team,” I counter, meeting her halfway.

My sweet girl rewards me with another precious smile. I want to take a picture and set it as my phone background. That’s how obsessed I already am with this woman.

“Thanks,” she murmurs.

“How long have you been trick riding?” I ask her.

I’m desperate to know everything about her, but I don’t want to come on too strong and scare her away. I wonder if she gets hit on a lot after her show, and my hands curl into fists at the thought. She’s too young, too innocent to be fighting off unwanted attention from sleazy assholes.

“About a year,” she replies, her voice soft and sweet like the rest of her.

Her words are pleasant, but the look in her big blue eyes tells me there’s more to her story. So much more. I want every

secret pain, every hidden tear. I want to collect her smiles and figure out what makes her happy. But for now, I'll settle on a date.

"I should get to the stables," Pia says after a few moments of silence.

Damn, I suck at making small talk.

"I need to put Penny back in her stall."

"I'll walk with you. If you don't mind," I hurry to add.

"Um, sure. You aren't allowed into the tent for liability reasons."

She gives me a stern look, resting a hand on her hip. Goddamn, she's adorable and feisty and so fucking *mine*. It pains me not to have my hands on her right this second.

I nod, and Pia starts to lead Penny over toward a tent nearby. This side of the circus is so different from the front side. There are no flashy lights or loud sounds. It's mostly deserted, with just a few tents for animals and the other acts.

It seems a little lonely, especially when it's deserted and the rest of the carnival is going on in the background. I can't picture someone so young and bright living here.

"Do you like working here?" I ask her.

Pia looks away from me, her eyes wandering over to Penny. It's obvious that she loves her horse and would do anything for her.

I will not be jealous of a horse, I tell myself sternly. It's not working.

"It's a job," my girl finally says. Her small voice speaks volumes. She's far too young to feel trapped in her own life.

"There are other jobs," I tell her softly. I watch her face closely, taking in her wide, doll-like eyes, delicate cheekbones, and tiny nose, turned up slightly at the end. Pia's brow furrows, but then she forces a smile to her lips. It's hollow.

"Not ones that cover a stable and all of the other costs that come with owning a horse. I only have a high school diploma,

and I can't find anywhere else that pays well enough to let me keep Penny and also feed myself." Round eyes blink up at me, a hint of panic swimming in their crystal depths. "I don't know why I told you all of that," she murmurs, looking like she wants to hide behind the nearest beanbag toss game.

"Because I asked," I say gently, giving her a smile. My girl is skittish, but she needs to know she can trust me. I want all of her words. Every last one. She'll soon find out I'm greedy like that.

It's on the tip of my tongue to tell her that she never has to worry about money or working again, that I'll take care of her and Penny. I know that it would only freak her out. We just met, and she has no reason to believe or trust me. Not yet anyway.

"And you bring up a good point," I continue, not wanting Pia to feel awkward or embarrassed. "I didn't think about the costs of horse maintenance."

Pia hums in the back of her throat, nodding along. "It's not so bad. I don't have to worry about bills or food. The circus takes care of all of that."

"Are your parents here too? Do they have an act?"

Pia's face drains of color, her shoulders sagging as she breaks eye contact. I never want to see her like this. I have no idea what I said.

"Uh, no," she whispers. "They, um..." Pia takes a deep breath before blowing it all out in a rush. "They died in a car accident last year."

My chest caves in at her confession. "Pia, I'm so sorry."

She nods, but I can see the tears in her eyes. Jesus, it hurts seeing her in so much turmoil. I react without thinking and pull her into my arms. She tenses for a second but then wraps her arms around me too, sniffing into my chest.

"I'm so sorry, baby," I murmur as I rub her back.

She clings to me, her little body trembling against mine. I want to lift her up and carry her back to my hotel room so I

can kiss away each and every one of her tears.

Pia whimpers and nods, falling apart in my arms. “It still hurts,” she squeaks out.

“I know,” I whisper.

My girl tips her head back, searing me with her baby-blue eyes. “Do you?” she asks.

I hum in confirmation. “My dad died when I was young. He was in the military and overseas. My mom passed away a few years ago from cancer.”

“Oh, Gavin, I’m so sorry,” she whispers, the sincerity in her eyes making her look that much more innocent and vulnerable.

I tuck a few strands of her silky blonde hair behind her ear, letting my fingers slide across her cheek before I drop my hand to my side. I want to touch her every-fucking-where, both to give her pleasure as well as comfort her.

“Thanks,” I murmur.

“Is it just you now then?” she asks and I shake my head.

“No, I have an older sister. I’m actually here with her and my nephew tonight.”

Pia gives me a small smile and steps away from me. I hate to let her go but I suppose that I don’t have much of a choice.

“You should get back to them. I need to take care of Penny,” she says as we reach the stable tent.

I glance at it, and I know that now is my chance.

“Have dinner with me,” I say. Pia blinks, clearly startled.

But I can see it. The longing on her face. She wants to say yes. She wants me just like I want her, and I wonder if she can feel this invisible connection between us too.

Maybe I should have told her that I fell in love with her the second that I saw her. Maybe she wouldn’t have been freaked out at all.

Visions of our life together start to float inside my head. Us at our wedding, our wedding night, decorating a nursery. I want all of it, and it's so close that I can taste it.

Georgia would be so happy. She's been pestering me to settle down for years now, and it's finally going to happen. I've finally met the woman that I was meant to spend my life with.

"I can't," Pia says.

It feels like a metal door slamming shut on my hopes and dreams. I blink, all of those plans for our future disappearing before my eyes.

"What?" I mutter, in shock.

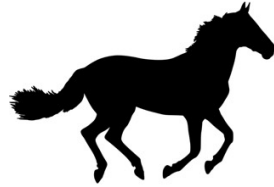
Doesn't she feel this between us? I saw that she was interested in me. She has to want me too.

"I'm sorry," she murmurs, looking down at her feet and then over at Penny. Anywhere but meeting my gaze. "I just... I can't."

Pia wrings her hands in front of her nervously, then turns on her heel in a jerky movement, pushing the canvas door aside and disappearing inside the tent with Penny.

I'm left staring after her, wondering where I went wrong.

FOUR



Pia

I PEEK through the tent flap one last time, taking in Gavin. He's still standing there, staring at the opening in the flap, but I'm off to the side and hidden behind Penny so he can't see me.

He looks surprised that I said no and disappeared, maybe even a little disappointed, though I'm sure he could find someone else to take out on a date in a heartbeat. I hate the thought of Gavin with another woman, which is ridiculous, seeing as I just turned him down.

My whole being is urging me to go back out there and say yes, but I push that craziness back down, trying to temper my lust. I'm lightheaded from crying and confused by the large, too-sweet, far too-sexy stranger with the captivating blue eyes.

What's his endgame? Maybe he felt obligated to ask me out after I cried in his arms. That must be it. There's no way someone like him would look twice at someone like me.

Not only is he a twenty on a scale of one to ten, but he's several years older and clearly wealthy if his designer shoes, tight jeans, and sparkling watch say anything about him. We'd never work in the long run, and I'm in no position to be starting anything with anyone anyway.

I take one last look at Gavin in his jeans and black T-shirt before I turn Penny and head farther into the stable tent.

My mind is at war with my heart, the loneliness I've carried around for months battling with the rational part of me that's trying to protect myself from more pain. I try convincing myself things would never work out between us. He oozes power and control, and I'm not in charge of anything in my life. We couldn't be more opposite if we tried.

Besides, I've seen enough wealthy people visit us here at the circus to know what they think of us—good enough for entertainment, but us circus folks will never be their equals. Gavin doesn't seem like that at all, but I can't think about that. I need this to be simple. I need to be able to forget him.

We never would have been anything more than a one-night stand, and that's not my style.

I've seen other people in the circus hooking up with the visitors. There are a few who have a new guy or girl every night. I never wanted to be like that. I don't want a one-night stand or a fling. I want something real. Something that will last. I want a love like my parents had.

Stupid tears prick my eyes once more, but I wipe them away. I've already cried enough for one night. I'm just a hormonal mess after encountering someone like Gavin. That must be it. He's riling me up and making me feel things I don't know what to do with.

Which is why it's a good thing I turned him down. Right? Right.

I lead Penny into her stall area and hook her to one of the poles. She sniffs at the empty hay bag and I laugh, focusing back on my sassy horse.

“Let me brush you out first. Then I'll get you something to eat.”

She neighs, and I smile softly as I grab a curry brush and start to work it over Penny's body.

People think it's weird how much I talk to Penny, but I've always done it. She's my best friend, the only friend that I have left. Besides, I could swear that she understands me most of the time.

“He was handsome. Don’t you think?” I ask quietly.

She snorts.

I smile, moving down her body more with the brush.

“He seemed nice too.”

That earns me another snort and a head nod, making me sigh.

“I know, I know. I said I was going to forget about him,” I mutter.

A few moments of silence pass between us. A very judgy silence, might I add. Penny definitely doesn’t approve of me turning Gavin down.

“Do you think I made a mistake by saying no?” I ask. “I mean, we just agreed that he was nice and handsome, and it’s been so long since I’ve talked with someone. Besides you,” I add.

She shifts on her feet as I move to her other side.

“It’s been so long since I’ve had fun. You know that I love hanging out with you every day, but sometimes I just need a different kind of fun. He looked like he might be.”

Penny is silent to that, and I sigh again as I grab the next brush.

I need a freaking break. I’ve been performing twice a day for the last year with barely a day off. I’m tired, so tired, but what’s worse is that I’ve lost hope for the future. I can’t see a way out of this, and I’ve just been closing myself off more and more. I’m nineteen, not ninety.

Maybe it’s time for me to try letting someone in for a change. I’ll never meet anyone if I don’t try.

Could I find Gavin in the crowd?

I doubt it. The place was packed tonight, and I’m too short to see over anyone.

“How’s this?” I ask Penny.

She cocks her ears back as I grab the comb and start to work through her mane.

“If I can find him in that big crowd, I’ll take it as a sign and go out to dinner with him. If he still wants to.”

She flicks her tail, and I smile, taking that as a yes.

I hurry through the rest of her grooming and then fill her bucket with fresh water before I grab a flake of hay and some oats for her.

“I’ll see you in a little bit,” I whisper to her, but she’s too busy munching on her snacks to pay me much mind.

I hurry out of the tent, intending to change into my regular clothes and then going to see if I can find Gavin. I jog out of the tent and straight into something hard. I know before I look up that it’s Gavin, and a blush stains my cheeks as I breathe in his now familiar scent.

How is it possible that I missed him in the short time we’ve been apart? I don’t even know him, yet my confused heart thinks we already belong to each other.

“We have to stop meeting like this,” he jokes, resting his hands on my shoulders to steady me.

I wince. “I really need to start looking where I’m going. Sorry about that.”

“It’s not a bother,” he says with a warm smile.

I can’t help but return it, his blue eyes sparkling the longer he looks at me.

“I was hoping to catch you actually. I thought maybe you would want to join me for something to eat at the concession stand?”

My stomach growls, and I blush harder as Gavin grins down at me. He knows he has me right where he wants me. Good thing it’s right where I want to be, too.

“Alright. Just let me change really quick?”

“Sure thing.”

“I’ll be right back.”

He nods, giving my shoulders one last squeeze before dropping his hands. I ignore the coldness sweeping through me and turn, weaving between trunks and other tents until I reach mine. I rush inside and grab a shirt and a pair of jeans, quickly changing into them. It isn’t until I’m headed back to meet Gavin that I realize maybe I should have dressed up a little bit more.

You don’t have anything fancier, I remind myself, and I round the corner. Shame tries to bring down my good mood, but I don’t let it. Not today. Not when I have a sexy, kind stranger wanting to make a good impression for some reason.

Gavin’s eyes light up when he sees me, and my body relaxes. He likes me just fine in my old jeans and shirt.

I take a deep breath as I get closer to him, reminding myself one last time that this isn’t forever. It can’t be. He’s just a handsome, tempting distraction from my miserable life for a few hours. That’s all.

You’re just going to have some fun tonight. Nothing more, nothing less.

I smile as I reach Gavin’s side, and he holds out his hand.

“Ready?” he asks.

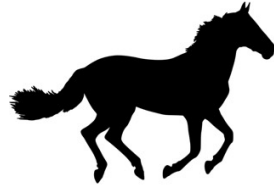
I give him my brightest smile, wishing with all my heart for the best night of my life. It won’t last forever, but I can hold on to the memory when I have to go back to the real world.

“Ready.”

I place my hand in Gavin’s, and he surprises me by lifting it to his lips, pressing a kiss to each one of my knuckles. Oh, lord, this man. He’s ruining me already, and we’ve barely spent five minutes together.

What did I get myself into?

FIVE



Gavin

Pia and I make our way to one of the concession stands, and I smile as I watch her bite her lip and peruse the menu.

Everything about her draws me in, from her long lashes brushing against her freckle-dusted cheeks to the graceful curve of her hips. She has no idea how beautiful she is, how intoxicating her mere presence is to me.

Pia looks so small, her body silhouetted by the flashing lights of the circus in the background. Chaos surrounds her, yet she manages to carry a quiet, steady peace with her wherever she goes. My newfound protective urge rises once again, winding itself around my spine and weaving in and out of my cells.

I need to protect her peace. I need to protect everything about this girl.

I manage to tear my eyes away from her, looking over the menu as well.

“You don’t know what you want? I figured that you ate here every day,” I tease. She shakes her head, her golden locks swaying back and forth. I resist the urge to comb my fingers through them to feel their softness. Barely.

“No way. This stuff is way too unhealthy and expensive to eat every single day,” she says, twisting her lips in the most adorable way.

I smile softly. “A special treat then.”

Her eyes flash to mine, a playful smile spreading across her lips. “Exactly.”

We turn back to the menu, and I decide to order a bit of everything. I want to spoil her, to show her that I can take care of her, that I *want* to take care of her in every single way.

Pia shifts her weight from one foot to the other, nibbling on her bottom lip again. I’m not sure if she’s nervous or excited. Perhaps a bit of both. When my girl rocks back on her heels and clasps her hands in front of her, I get the insane urge once again to scoop her up in my arms and cradle her against my chest.

She seems unsure of herself, a little lost, but still eager for what’s next. I know my sweet girl has been through a lot in her short life, but there’s a glimmer of pure hope buried in her heart. How Pia manages to be both innocent and seductive is beyond me, but I can’t wait to show her how special she is. How good I can be for her, my precious little girl.

Something deep in my gut shifts as my heart thrashes around in my chest. *Little girl.*

I want her to be my little girl, whatever the fuck that means. Does that make me her...

No, I can’t think the word. It’s too taboo. Too forbidden. I’ve never had these urges before, never wanted this kind of relationship with anyone.

“Tell me about yourself,” I rasp as we move up in line. Clearing my throat, I turn to Pia, trying to focus on her instead of my wayward thoughts.

She wraps her hoodie sleeves around her fingers so that they form mittens as she looks around at the people. It’s adorable, but I don’t like that she seems anxious. I want to plop her on my knee and demand she tell me every detail about her day because I’m just that obsessed with her, but again, that would be far too aggressive for my girl. I’ll settle for getting her to open up a little more.

“There’s not much to tell. I’ve lived a pretty boring life,” she finally says.

I frown. “I very much doubt that. You have one of the most unique jobs I’ve ever heard of,” I counter.

She shrugs.

“Well, aside from that, there’s not a whole lot else going on. I’ve been riding horses since I was like five or so. I fell in love with that *Saddle Club* show and watched every episode.” Her eyes shine with pure joy, and I make a note to purchase every episode of her favorite show on whichever streaming service it’s on. “I begged my parents for a pony, and they signed me up for lessons. When I was fourteen and wasn’t showing any signs of getting bored with horses or riding, they bought me Penny.”

“How old was she when you got her?” I ask.

Pia smiles, relaxing more into our conversation.

“Young. Only two, and she was so calm, even back then.”

We move up another spot in line, and I turn back to Pia, giving her all my attention.

“I did a few horse shows with her. We were pretty good, but I always loved vaulting and trick riding. I felt more connected to her then. She had to trust me, and I had to trust her. We had to be in perfect sync to get the moves right.”

“She’s your best friend,” I finish.

Pia tilts her head to the side, then looks down at her feet. “Yeah. I know it’s kind of lame, but—”

“Nothing about you is lame,” I tell her sternly.

Blue eyes latch on to mine, and I soften my gaze, letting her know I’m not mad. I just hate the way she’s talking about herself right now.

“It makes sense that you have a strong connection with Penny. I’ve always heard horses are very smart and intuitive, as well as good judges of character. I think you picked a very good best friend.”

Pia nods, giving me a shy smile. More protective, possessive thoughts flood my brain before I can stop them. I want her to always be proud of who she is. My little girl needs someone to bring out her confidence. She needs a daddy who sees her for who she is and encourages her to go after what she wants in life.

Fuck. There it is. I want to be her daddy.

“Thanks,” Pia whispers.

I can tell she wants to look away from me, but my brave girl holds eye contact, letting me see how much my validation meant to her. My heart breaks even more for this woman, but I vow to support her in every single way from now on.

We’re next in line, and I wait for Pia to order before I place my own order. She only gets a slice of pizza, and I smile when I see her eyes widen as I list off my order.

“That’s too much food,” she whispers to me.

I laugh. “Whatever we don’t eat, I can give to my sister and nephew.”

She relaxes at my words, and I pass the cashier my card. We move to the other window to wait for our food, and Pia moves closer to my side as if she doesn’t really like being in crowds. I tuck her into my side, loving the way we fit together.

“What about you?” she asks.

I tip my head down, peering into those clear blue eyes. “What do you want to know?”

“Where do you live now?”

“Los Angeles. I own an investment firm there. We have another office in New York and Boston.”

“But you’re based mostly in Los Angeles?”

Is that disappointment in her voice? Does she think for a second I’d go back there without her?

“That’s just where I live when I’m not traveling to check on the other offices. Have you ever been to Los Angeles?” I ask her as our bottles of water are passed to us.

“Yeah, the circus stops just outside of the city.”

“Did you like it?”

She winces, her cute little nose scrunching up before she schools over her face. I instantly start making plans to move somewhere else. Perhaps a remote cabin in the woods? Away from crowds and the oppressive heat? Something with an incredible view, of course. I can picture the two of us sipping coffee on the back porch every morning.

“No, not really,” Pia sighs, pulling me back into the moment. “It was just so busy, and we were stuck in traffic forever. I couldn’t stand to have to sit in that every day anytime that I wanted to go to the grocery store or something. Plus, there’s not really any room for Penny.”

She nods, and the rest of our food appears at the window. We each take as many of the plates as we can and head over to the nearest picnic table to sit down.

She looks so young as she looks around at all of the treats, and that same instinctual feeling as earlier takes hold. My girl needs someone to watch over her, to guide her, to encourage her to live her best life. I want to be that someone more than I’ve ever wanted anything in my life.

“What should we try first?” I ask.

Her eyes light up as she reaches for the funnel cake. She tears off a small piece, getting powdered sugar all over her fingers, and I watch as she brings the cake to her mouth. When she smiles at me and licks the remaining powdered sugar from her fingers, I can’t help but moan.

Is she teasing me? Does she really not realize just how beautiful and tempting she is?

“There you are!” Georgia says as Steven scrambles onto the picnic bench next to me.

“You disappeared before the tigers,” Steven tells me, making me smile.

“Were they cool?”

He nods, and I pass him a corn dog, which he happily takes.

“Pia, this is my sister Georgia and my nephew Steven. Guys, this is Pia,” I introduce them as Georgia climbs onto the picnic bench next to Pia.

“It’s nice to meet you,” Georgia says and then she blinks. “Oh, you’re the trick rider!”

“Yep,” Pia says, ducking her head slightly.

“You were awesome,” Georgia says.

Steven nods, agreeing.

“Thank you,” she murmurs, clearly thrilled with the compliment but unsure how to handle all the attention.

My nephew has an excited sparkle in his eyes, and I know before he opens his mouth that he’s about to ask her a million questions. I also know that there’s no stopping him, so I just smile and study my girl as he starts to rattle off questions.

“Where did you learn to do all of that? Have you ever fallen off? How old is your horse? What kind is she?” Steven asks, his eyes wide in wonder.

“I did vaulting as a kid, and I learned the moves there. My horse, Penny, is eight, and she is a palomino.”

“That’s so cool,” he says. Pia just grins at him.

“Thanks. As for injuries...”

I cover her hand with mine, giving it a squeeze. “I don’t think my heart can take any stories about you getting hurt.”

Georgia nearly chokes on her drink but catches herself before spitting it out all over me. I know she has a million thoughts about my obsessive statement, but I don’t have time to answer any questions.

Pia giggles, her laughter rolling through me and filling me up with joy. “Fine, then. I guess I’ll save those for later.” She winks at Steven, who gives her a mischievous grin.

“Can you show us around the circus?” Steven asks.

“Of course,” Pia says with a smile.

We finish eating and throw away the trash before Pia starts to lead us around. She’s busy talking with Steven when Georgia sidles up next to me. I glance down at her, knowing what she’s going to say before she opens her mouth.

“So?” my sister pries.

I smile. “She’s the one,” I say quietly.

Georgia grins at me. I can see her internally squealing, and I roll my eyes but grin.

“She seems really sweet,” Georgia whispers, and I nod.

“She is.”

“We’ll leave and give you two some time alone,” she says, and I give her a grateful smile.

“Thanks.”

She nods, nudging my arm with hers, and then she’s calling for Steven and saying goodbye to Pia.

“It was nice to meet you. I’m sure we’ll talk to you soon,” Georgia says.

“It was nice to meet you too.”

Georgia gives Pia a quick hug, and Steven does the same. Then they’re waving and disappearing into the crowd.

“What now?” Pia asks when we’re finally alone.

A slow smile spreads across my lips. “Let me take you back to my hotel room. It’s not too far from here. We can get to know each other a little bit better without all of this noise.”

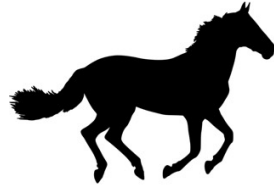
She pauses for the briefest second, and I worry that I was too forward. I can’t help the fact that I want everything with her right this goddamn second, but I can pull back if I need to. I think.

Thankfully, my girl smiles at me, a blush staining her pale cheeks.

“Alright.”

With that one word, I'm in motion. I grab her hand in mine, marveling at how perfect it fits. Pia giggles behind me as I drag her toward the exit. I can't wait to get this precious woman all to myself, so I can show her how much she already means to me.

SIX



Pia

GAVIN PLACES his hand on the small of my back as he leads me into his hotel room. I try not to gape at the ten-foot high ceiling, the incredible view from the huge windows, or the fireplace in the center of the living area. There's a door off to the side, which I assume is a separate suite for the bed.

A pit forms in my stomach at the sight of so much wealth on display, and this is only the hotel he's renting for a few weeks. I can't imagine what his mansion in LA looks like.

"Hey, where did you just go?" Gavin asks, pulling me over to the couch.

"I'm right here," I say with a cheeky smile.

Gavin plops down on the couch, then tugs me down on his lap. I laugh at his eagerness, steadying myself with my hands on his shoulders as I straddle him.

He slides his hands up my hips, caressing me so gently, like he can't believe I'm here. I have no idea what I did to earn this man's affection, but I want to soak it all up before this dream is over. Because it has to end at some point, right? This can't be my life.

Gavin grips my chin between his thumb and forefinger, gently tipping my head so we're eye to eye. Deep blue irises swirl with so much energy, so many emotions, I'm shocked at the intensity of it all.

“The truth this time, little girl,” he says, his voice deeper and darker than I’ve heard before now.

Sharp desire cuts through my core at his words, leaving behind a throbbing ache between my thighs. *Little girl*. God, I don’t know why that title makes me so... wet.

Gavin growls, the low tone vibrating through me and making me tighten my thighs around his hips.

“I was just thinking that this is all too good to be true,” I murmur, darting my eyes away from his all-consuming stare.

Gavin cups my cheek, smoothing the pad of his thumb over my lips.

“Look at me, my precious girl.”

I have no choice but to obey his whispered command. Dark blue eyes bore into mine, begging me to trust him.

“I know this is all happening so fast, but I feel you deep in my bones, baby girl. Knew you belonged to me with just one look. I can’t believe my good fortune that the woman of my dreams fell into my lap.”

“If I remember correctly, you pulled me into your lap,” I say with a saucy smirk.

The muscular, tatted-up giant gives me a sexy grin, tugging me even closer so our chests are pressed together. His lips brush over mine in the barest hint of a touch.

“And with any luck, I can keep you here forever.”

I hardly have time to register his words before his lips are on mine, more firmly this time. I melt into his kiss, following his lead as he pries my lips open and slips his tongue inside my mouth. Gavin breathes me in as he consumes me, his desire evident as I grind down on his lap.

“That’s it,” he groans, sliding his hands down my body until he palms my ass. Squeezing my soft flesh, Gavin helps me find my rhythm, angling his hips just right.

I gasp when his hard length bumps up against my most sensitive little button, my entire body tensing as a flood of

pleasure breaks over my body.

“Fuck,” he groans, sounding almost in pain. Gavin presses kisses along my jaw and down my neck, nipping at my pulse point before licking away the sting. “Need me to prove my devotion to you, little girl?”

I moan as my new favorite title falls from his lips, my thighs trembling with the need for more, more, *more*.

“Want my tongue between your thighs? My fingers slipping in and out of your tight little pussy?”

I nod my head, my entire body flushed from head to toe with pent-up desire. I just had my first kiss, and I’m already starving for more of Gavin. He can have all my firsts if he wants them.

“Need your words, baby.”

“Yes,” I whimper, clawing at his chest. I’m desperate, I know. I’d be embarrassed about that, but Gavin looks even more crazed than I feel.

“Yes, what?” he rasps into the shell of my ear before licking a stripe up my throat. Holy hell, that feels good. Like he’s marking me. Like he can’t wait to taste every inch.

“I w-want...” My voice falters for a second, and I swallow past the doubts clogging my throat. “I want you to be my first,” I whisper, nibbling on my bottom lip as my confession hangs in the air.

Gavin’s blue eyes turn nearly black, his nostrils flaring as he clenches his jaw.

“First?” he growls.

For a moment, I think he’s angry. But then I see him flex every muscle like he’s holding himself back. From me? *Does he really want me that much?*

“Fuck yes, I want you that much,” Gavin grits out.

I didn’t mean to say that out loud, but I don’t regret it. Seeing his need, his almost painful restraint, has me ready to

throw caution to the wind. This man *wants* me in a way I've never been wanted before. It's intoxicating.

"Prove it," I whisper, giving him what I hope is a seductive smile.

I grip his shoulders as he abruptly stands with me in his arms, then kneels on the plush carpet in front of the fireplace. He lays my body down, then leans back on his knees, taking in every inch of me.

The fire casts a flickering orange glow over half of his face, highlighting his strong jaw, angled cheekbones, and full lips. The light catches in his deep blue eyes, making them glow brighter than the fire in front of us.

Gavin crawls over me, devouring me with one look. I think he's going to kiss me, but instead, he rubs his nose against mine before trailing his lips and nose down my neck, over my collarbone, between my breasts, and lower, lower, lower...

Pausing, the sexy beast looks up from between my thighs, a ravenous look covering his face. Raising an eyebrow, he silently asks permission to keep going. How can I turn down the single hottest, sweetest man I've ever met?

I bite my bottom lip, loving the way he stares at the motion, then nod my head. Gavin lets out a low, satisfied growl that I feel in every cell in my body before he slips his fingers into my jeans and panties. Slowly, he peels the fabric off my body, revealing everything to his greedy eyes.

I've never been this exposed before, but I don't have time to doubt myself before the man dives in. Gavin nips at the soft flesh of my belly, sending a jolt of electricity to my throbbing clit, followed by a warm rush of wetness dripping out of my core. He takes a deep breath, sliding the rest of the way down my body so he can focus on my pussy.

"I fucking *smell* how much you want me, little girl," he growls, spreading my thighs apart and running his nose up and down my slit.

I close my eyes, drowning in need and desire. Some animalistic sound rumbles out of Gavin. I can feel his need as

it vibrates through me, making my nipples and clit ache. I feel my channel clench as more of my arousal leaks out.

Gavin slides his tongue up and down my pussy, parting my folds. I force my eyes open and look down at his muscular body, rippling and flexing as he devours me. His tongue is everywhere at once—in my entrance, traveling through my folds, swirling around my clit. It's everywhere, and it's consuming me completely. It's all I can focus on. The intense feeling. The wet, smacking sounds. The pressure and heat.

It makes me even hotter knowing he's loving this. The greedy way he's grabbing my ass, the hungry, desperate moans, the eagerness for more. It's all showing me how much pleasure he gets from this. His rough palms slide to the back of my knees and he shoves my legs open wider, pinning them to the floor so he can sit back and stare at me. Gavin growls and dives back in, licking me with fury, pushing deeper, harder, faster.

I reach down and tangle my fingers in his hair, pulling and pushing him away in equal measure. I can't decide if it's too much or not enough. Not that Gavin gives me a choice in the matter. I gave up control, and now I have to trust him to take care of me.

Gavin lifts his head briefly, locking his gaze on mine. God, he looks possessed. Feral, even. He dips his head back down, this time sinking his teeth into my inner thigh, first one and then the other, before licking away the sting.

“Oh shit...” I breathe out, spreading my legs wider for him.

“You like that? Like when I mark you, little girl? Like knowing you belong to daddy and no one else?”

Fuck. daddy. That's what I want. That's the feeling I couldn't quite place. I'm his little girl, and he's my daddy.

I whimper and nod my head, unable to form words at the moment. I want to be his little girl. I want his patient, kind smiles as well as his heated touch and growly demands. I want him as my own, my one and only.

Without warning, Gavin throws one of my legs over his shoulder, and then the other, before flattening his tongue and licking every part of me. My back bows off the ground as I shove more of my dripping, needy cunt into his face. I can't help it. The way his warm, soft tongue laps at my wetness and then circles my clit has me practically fucking his face.

"Gavin, please..." I gasp, clawing at the carpet and snapping my thighs around his head.

He grunts and focuses his attention on my clit, rubbing tight circles around my swollen button with his tongue. I can't stop the breathy moans falling from my lips repeatedly, each one louder than the last as my muscles lock up and my pussy quivers around his tongue.

I teeter on the sharp edge of ecstasy, wanting to savor the aching pressure as it builds. When Gavin scrapes his teeth against my clit, pleasure slices through me, unleashing my pent-up need in one vicious explosion.

I cry out and lift up off the floor, unable to contain the painful bliss rippling through every cell in my body. Wave after wave crashes into me in such rapid succession I don't have time to catch my breath before I'm drawn under once again.

Finally, fucking *finally*, I start to come back down. I'm a shaking, sweating puddle of satisfaction. The sex god of a man leans over me, caging me in with an arm on either side of my head. His lips are on mine, giving me a taste of my own release.

We finally break apart for air, and a shiver works its way down my spine. Gavin doesn't waste a single second in scooping me up and carrying me through his suite, presumably to his bedroom. I don't fight him at all. I just curl up in his arms, resting my head on his shoulder.

Carefully, he sets me down in front of his king-size bed, then Gavin begins stripping me out of my remaining clothes. He takes his time pressing kisses all over my skin as he peels off my shirt, followed by my bra.

“So beautiful,” he murmurs, his voice full of awe. It’s hard not to believe him when he’s looking at me like this. Somehow, this perfect specimen of a man finds me irresistible.

“You’re pretty okay, too,” I say with a cheeky grin. Gavin darts his eyes up to meet mine, then he freaking winks, which is far more charming than it should be, and gives me a peck on the lips.

I watch as my daddy tugs off his shirt, revealing his defined chest and rock-hard abs to me for the first time. I’m so focused on the taut muscles swirling with black ink that I almost don’t notice him dropping his pants.

Holy. Freaking. Hell.

This might be my first time, but even I know he’s *huge*. Without thinking, I reach out and trail my fingers over his thick muscles, gasping when he tenses and flexes beneath my touch.

“You feel so good, little girl,” he groans, tipping his head back. He lets me stroke him a few more times before he gathers up my hands, kissing my palms before gently laying me out on the bed.

His massive frame falls down on top of me, but he catches himself with a hand on either side of my head. I wrap my legs around his hips, moaning when I feel his thick, heavy cock lay across my slit.

“I need you, Gavin,” I murmur, leaning up for a kiss.

“Need you with every cell in my goddamn body.”

I whimper and nod my head, spreading my legs wider. I’m bracing myself for his monster cock, but Gavin surprises me by flipping our positions. He grips my hips in his large hands, steadying me and getting me into position.

I look down at his dark blue eyes, so deep and full of emotions that are new to both of us. I can’t believe he wants me. The look of awe on his face lets me know he thinks the same about me.

“I know, Pia. I feel it. I feel you.”

He lifts me up, guiding me over his hard length. I sink down just a little bit, gasping when the head of his cock spreads me wide open. My pussy spasms at just that small contact, a wave of wetness coating his dick, which helps me slide down a little more. Gavin hisses and groans in pleasure, giving me the confidence to take all of him. I gasp as he fills me up, stretches me out, and finally hits the very end of me.

“God, princess,” he half whispers, half groans. “You feel so damn good. Take it slow.”

Gavin cups the back of my neck and draws me down for a kiss. It starts out sweetly, almost reverently. I rock against him, making him growl into my mouth and pull my bottom lip through his teeth. His hands slide up my bare back, his fingertips leaving a burning trail as they roam back down. Gavin grips my ass, spreading me wider and helping me circle my hips.

“Yes,” I moan when the base of his shaft rubs against my clit. I feel my pussy contract as pleasure rockets through my body.

Sitting up, I steady myself with two hands on his chest, clawing down his chiseled muscles as I lift up on my knees. I circle my hips again and rub the head of his dick through my folds, using it to massage my clit.

“Pia...” Gavin grunts, tipping his head back as he slides his hands up my torso, cupping my breasts and pinching my nipples.

I drop back down, needing more of him, more of this connection. Gavin continues kneading one breast with his hand while his other hand trails down my torso. He slips one finger into my folds, rubbing my clit as I continue to grind against him.

“Oh god,” I gasp, throwing my head back.

“That’s it, little girl. Jesus, that’s so fucking it. Such a good girl for daddy.”

His words pull a moan from my lips as I lift my hands from his chest to tangle in my hair. Gavin grunts in approval,

rubbing furious circles around my clit while I ride him, taking him as deep as possible. Each time he hits the end of me, the breath is stolen from my lungs.

My thighs tremble and my muscles lock, bracing myself for what's to come. My entire body is strung tight, teetering on the sharp edge of ecstasy. Gavin anchors me in place and fucks up into me in powerful strokes, taking control.

I inhale sharply and hold my breath, the intense pressure in my core throbbing and consuming me, nearly choking me as my orgasm slams into me all at once.

I freeze and then spasm violently, collapsing on top of Gavin as my climax tears through me. He growls and cups my ass, holding me in place while he fucks up into me, shoving his cock so damn deep, forcing me to feel every ounce of pleasure he's offering.

I'm a sweaty, shaky mess by the time I come back down, but Gavin gives me no reprieve. He flips me onto my back and hammers into me, hooking his hand under my left knee and spreading me wide open.

It's impossible, but I feel an orgasm fighting its way to the surface, threatening to swallow me whole. I cry out, twisting the sheets in my fists and bowing my back.

"I-I can't... can't come again..." I moan breathlessly.

"You can, princess. Take what daddy gives you, understand?"

"Yes..." I breathe out, loving the way he takes control.

"Yes, who? Say it, Pia."

"Daddy," I moan, my entire body trembling as the word echoes around the room.

Gavin takes my lips in a searing kiss, licking into my mouth and taking control. I'm completely at his mercy as he fucks me with his tongue and huge cock. I love being taken by him, filled by him, ruined by him.

He growls into my mouth, the sound almost painful. "Fucking hell, I'm gonna come. I'm gonna come so damn hard

—”

I cut him off with a scream as I splinter apart. I wrap my legs around his torso, locking my ankles behind his back. I cling to him as every nerve ending vibrates with deliciously sharp pleasure.

I feel him swell up inside of me, stretching me impossibly wider. He roars his release, his bulging muscles tensing and releasing as he fills me up with his cum. Our combined orgasm stretches on for long moments as we hold each other close.

Eventually, Gavin rolls over, draping me across his chest. “What are you thinking?” he whispers, kissing the top of my head. “Are you okay?”

The panicked edge to his voice has me popping my head up from his chest. I kiss his chin and give him a dazed smile.

“I’m amazing,” I tell him, the words coming out slightly slurred.

Gavin chuckles, his deep, rich timbre settling in my bones and relaxing every muscle in my body. “Yes, you truly are,” he murmurs, stroking a hand up and down my back.

After a few blissful moments, Gavin pulls the blankets over us before tucking me back into his side. He whispers sweet words to me as we drift in and out of sleep.

I’m not sure how long we’ve been wrapped up in each other’s arms, but Gavin’s steady breaths let me know he’s sound asleep. I want to stay curled up with this sexy, cuddly teddy bear for the rest of my life, but I need to face reality sooner rather than later.

Gavin lives in LA. I’m a nomad. He’s clearly wealthy, whereas I perform shows twice a day just so I can have a place to sleep and food in my stomach. Expendable income? What’s that?

Then there’s the fact that he’s freaking perfect. Seriously, he’s kind, understanding, hot as hell, and incredible in bed. I’m... me. How long will it take for him to realize he’s way out of my league and could do so much better?

I turn onto my side, facing away from Gavin. My heart thuds heavily in my chest as tears threaten to break free. This was just supposed to be one night of fun. I didn't plan on losing my v-card, but I don't regret it. Gavin was perfect, gentle when I needed it, and ravenous when I needed that, too.

But that's all this can be. He told me he wanted to keep me last night, but how much of that was just said in the heat of the moment? And then there's the whole daddy thing...

A shiver runs down my spine at our taboo play, though it wasn't really a game for me. I long for his protective hold, the way he takes control and yet empowers me to speak my truth. I don't just want to call him daddy. I want everything that comes with that title, even if I don't know what that means yet.

But it'd be crazy to think he wants that too. It was probably just fun for him, and I'd be making a fool out of myself for trying to drag this out any longer.

I know what I need to do, but my body protests every step of the way. Carefully sliding out of bed, I locate my shirt and bra, gathering them up before looking at Gavin over my shoulder. He rolls over, reaching to my side of the bed. I panic, shoving the pillow I was using into his arms.

Gavin holds it against his chest and my heart twinges with pain. He's so freaking sweet, wanting to cuddle in the middle of the night. Too bad I'll be long gone before he realizes he's clinging to a pillow. It has to be this way, however.

It has to, I tell myself more sternly.

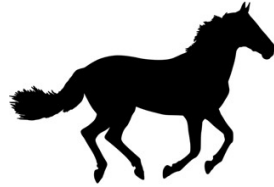
Before I can second-guess myself and crawl back into bed, I turn toward the door and tiptoe out. With a heavy heart, I find my pants and panties, stopping in the bathroom to do a quick clean-up and throw my clothes on.

I see a pad of paper and a pen on the side table and consider leaving a note. What would I say to the man who changed my life forever? What words could possibly sum up everything I feel for him?

Shoving my feet into my shoes, I silently open the door and step out into the hallway, slumping against the wall once the door is closed. I take a few deep breaths, then push off the wall, heading to the lobby of the hotel where I wait for the Uber I just ordered.

Climbing into the back of the car, I give the hotel one last look before turning away. I already miss Gavin with every cell in my body.

SEVEN



Gavin

I WAKE up surrounded by Pia's scent, and I smile before I even open my eyes to check on her. God, last night was everything. Tasting her sweetness, lapping up her release, then sinking inside her tight little pussy... Jesus, if I wasn't already obsessed with her, that would have done it.

Images of her smooth skin and supple body flash across my mind, and I focus on the curve of her waist, her hips as she rocks up and down, writhing on top of me like the goddess she is. Fuck, I'm hard as a goddamn fence post just thinking about it.

I'm already looking forward to waking up like this every day for the rest of my life as I roll onto my side and blink my eyes open.

My stomach lurches as I see that Pia's side of the bed is empty. There's a pillow wedged into my side right where my little girl should be. I reach my hand out to touch the sheets, like that might suddenly make her reappear. The sheets are cold, and I know that Pia has been gone for a long time.

Cursing under my breath, I throw the covers off and climb out of the bed. I can't believe she left without waking me. I can't believe I slept through her sneaking out. What was she thinking? Why would she leave?

Thoughts fly around my head like stray bullets, each one more painful than the last. I sit up, swinging my legs over the side of the bed and resting my elbows on my knees. Holding my head in my hands, I try to get myself under control enough to come up with a plan.

My girl is skittish, I know that much. She's gone through a lot of loss in her life recently, and it shouldn't surprise me that she freaked out after our intense encounter. Should I have told her I love her? It's true, but I didn't know if Pia was ready to hear it. Damned if I do, damned if I don't, apparently.

I thought I made it clear we were forever, but I guess I'll have to prove it to her over and over until she believes me. Or, I can just keep her weak with pleasure so she doesn't have the strength to walk out on me ever again. We'll have to discuss her disappearing act soon, but right now, I need to find my little trick rider.

Good thing I know exactly where she went. Pia doesn't have a home or a family, so there's only one place that she could have gone to.

That means that I'm headed back to the circus.

I tug on my clothes and grab my car keys. It's a short ride across town to the grounds that the circus is being held on, and I park in the empty parking lot. It's only a little after nine, and the circus won't be open for another hour and a half.

Taking a deep breath, I try to get my heavy breathing under control. I can't scare off my girl with my intensity, but fuck, I *hated* waking up to an empty bed.

I make it up to the ticket booth, but there's no one there and the gates are closed. I could try to scale it, but I doubt that I could find Pia before security was called.

I pace outside the gates, letting my mind go wild as I stalk back and forth like a caged tiger.

Why would she just leave like that? Why didn't she say goodbye? Did I hurt her last night? Did she not feel this connection between us?

I don't have answers to any of my questions and I won't until I talk to her. I lean against the fence until a pretty girl enters the ticket booth. She seems shocked to see someone waiting to come inside already, but she sells me a ticket and lets me in the gates.

I make a beeline for the stable tent. I know that that's where Pia will be. Penny is the only family she has left, and she obviously spends a lot of time with her. I have a feeling she's talking things out with her best friend.

Ducking under the tent flap, I make sure no one is looking before I enter the tent and head down the aisle toward the horses.

"Ready for another show?" Pia whispers to Penny.

I smile as I hear her melodic voice. A memory of the way she screamed my name last night hits me, and my balls tighten at the memory of everything I did to her body.

"Me too," Pia continues. "It'll be a good distraction from..."

She trails off, and Penny huffs before stomping a hoof on the ground.

Pia sighs. "Yes, from Gavin," she murmurs.

My ears perk up, and I feel slightly guilty for eavesdropping, but I need all the help I can get at this point.

"It's just that he was... amazing. Like... too good to be true, you know?"

Penny nods as if she really understands.

"And he's well established, with a booming business in LA and New York and some other fancy city. I wouldn't fit into his life."

My heart sinks at her words. Does she really think that? I'd give up all the "fancy cities" in the world and move to a remote ranch if that's what she wanted. In fact, that sounds pretty great. No distractions, and I can have my little girl all to myself.

“I’ll always have the memory of our night though,” Pia says wistfully.

Yeah, fuck that. One night will never be enough, and she knows it.

I clear my throat, announcing my presence so as not to startle her.

Pia turns, her eyes widening in shock when she sees me standing just outside the stall.

“Gavin,” she gasps.

I give her a tight smile. “Baby girl,” I say quietly. I see her shiver at my words, which gives me hope.

“What are you doing here?” she asks, genuine confusion painted on her face.

I give her a disapproving look.

“You snuck out,” I say flatly, crossing my arms over my chest. “You should have told me you wanted to leave. It’s not safe for you to be walking around, especially not at night.”

“I didn’t want to wake you,” she says.

Bullshit. Plus, that’s not the point.

“Are you lying to me, little girl?” I ask in warning. She looks away from me, unable to meet my gaze.

“I had to get back here.”

“Pia,” I say more harshly. She stares at her feet for a second before her eyes meet mine.

“It was just a one-night stand.”

“Says who?” I snap angrily. I know I need to calm down, but hearing her say those words has me losing my shit.

“We don’t belong together,” she says, her eyes pleading with me to accept that we’re over and stop torturing her. I can’t give her what she wants.

“Yes, we do. I’ve never been more positive about anything in my life, baby girl. You’re meant to be mine and you’ve owned me since the moment I saw you.”

I can see that she wants to believe me, but she's been hurt too much. Life hasn't been kind to Pia in the last year, and she's not sure who to trust.

"Pia," I say more softly. "I've never shared myself like that with anyone. What we did last night? That was so much more than sex."

Her cheeks turn rosy at the mention of us together, and I know she's remembering the way her body responded to mine.

"It was everything. You're my heart. My whole damn world."

My girl snuffles, dropping her gaze as she wraps her arms around her torso. She looks so small, so vulnerable and defeated. My hands twitch with the need to hold her, to soothe the wrinkle in her brow.

"Where do you really see this going?" she whispers. "How can we be anything more than a one-night stand? We just met. We don't live anywhere close to each other, and we're both so busy. We'll never see each other."

She blinks away tears, and the sight breaks my heart. I know she's not going to believe me if I say that I love her, that I've been absolutely obsessed since I laid eyes on her, and that I'm never going to get over her. She's trying to push me away right now, but I'm not going to let her. Not without a fight.

"What can I do?" I murmur, taking a step closer to her. "What can I do to prove to you that I want you?" Taking a chance, I reach out, playing with a few strands of her golden hair before tucking them behind her ear. Pia gives me a heartbreaking look, full of such sorrow and loneliness.

"I don't know," she admits quietly. "I just—"

"Hey, Pia!" someone calls from further down the tent. I glare in that direction as my girl turns away from me.

"I have to go," she tells me, spinning out of reach. I try to grab her hand, but it's too late, and she slips away once again.

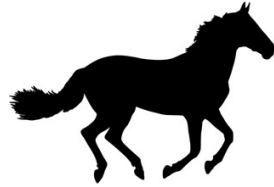
If Pia thinks this is the last she'll see of me, she's up for a rude awakening. I'm not giving up on my dream girl, on us,

and our perfect future that easily. Anything in life worth having is worth fighting for. And Pia? Fuck, I'd bring the whole damn world to its knees for another chance to show her we belong together.

I head out of the tent before anyone can yell at me to leave and make my way toward the big tent. I'm going to talk to Pia again. I'm going to convince her that we're forever.

I can't live without her.

EIGHT



Pia

THIS IS our last full day in Salem, Massachusetts, and I'm not sure if I'm relieved to be leaving tomorrow or dreading it. My tender heart is still confused about everything that happened this morning, from sneaking out to running into Gavin again.

He seemed genuinely upset, maybe even a little hurt that he woke up without me. But that's what people do after one-night stands. Or so I've heard.

Gavin wasn't so convinced that it was a one-and-done situation, and while everything in me wanted to jump in his arms when he said that, the lingering doubt in the back of my mind kept me from believing him.

I've had my life uprooted in the blink of an eye before, and I barely recovered. What would I do if I quit the circus and followed Gavin back to LA? I wouldn't have a job, and no way of paying for Penny's expenses, so I'd be completely at his mercy. And when he inevitably gets tired of me, because why wouldn't he, I'll be homeless, jobless, and broke.

Penny neighs, the sound almost disapproving, like she doesn't want to be my excuse for bailing on Gavin. I give her a look, then take out her brush and begin the calming, familiar routine of getting her ready for the first show of the day.

I talk to Penny about my jumbled thoughts as I continue brushing her shiny coat. She stands patiently, nodding every

once in a while as I chatter on.

“I want to believe him, Penny, but how can I? We barely know each other.”

Penny snorts, then shifts on her hooves, letting me pick up her right front one to clean.

“Fine, we do know each other,” I concede.

Truthfully, I feel like I know him better than anyone in my life. It’s crazy though, right? The memory of meeting his eyes in the crowd that very first night rises to the surface, reminding me how Gavin has made me feel safe and seen from the moment he saw me. He pretty much told me as much before I ran away earlier today.

“He seemed sincere in his declaration,” I say, testing the waters with Penny.

I don’t get an answer to that, and I sigh as I move on to the next hoof.

“Do you think I made a mistake by pushing him away?”

She nods her head, making me roll my eyes.

“Seriously, Penny. Can I trust him?”

Another nod, this one accompanied by a tail swat and snort.

“Gavin did say horses are good judges of character,” I muse, chewing on the inside of my cheek.

Penny nuzzles against my outstretched hand, comforting me with the sweet gesture. I pause, wondering if I should really take her advice. Am I that far gone that I not only talk to my horse but go to her for life’s big questions? Apparently so.

“Are you ready, Pia?” my boss, H.T. Knight, asks.

I turn to nod at him. “We’re ready,” I tell him.

He grunts in approval before ducking out of the tent.

He’s already in his ringmaster outfit, and I hurry to finish my makeup. I’m already wearing my leotard for my routine, and I try not to wince as I stretch a bit. My body is sore in

places I didn't even know existed after everything Gavin did to me last night.

My body flushes, warming with the memories, and I bite my bottom lip as I try to get my body under control. His firm, owning grip as he sank into me over and over, his soft lips on every inch of my body, his ragged breath in my ear as he succumbed to his pleasure...

You're about to go perform in front of people! You can't be getting turned on before that!

I look down at my hardened nipples and wonder if people will just assume that it's from the slight chill in the air today.

My name is called, and I grab Penny, leading her into the big tent. I paste a smile onto my face as I lead Penny into the center of the ring. I signal to her and she starts to trot around the edge of the circle.

I raise my hands in the air, posing on the little stand in the center of the ring as the crowd cheers. I scan the faces blankly, not paying too much attention to the crowd until I land on his face.

My eyes widen slightly as I see Gavin in the stands. His eyes are locked on me, and my heart falters in my chest at the hungry look that I see in his eyes.

Why is he still here?

I blink a few times, trying to focus, but I can't seem to look away. Gavin's gaze turns from ravenous to something more tender. Something close to love, as insane as that sounds. Blue eyes tear me apart, begging me to listen to him, to believe that he wants me for good.

The music changes, signaling the start of my act. Gavin gives me a small nod, releasing his hold on me so I can get through the next twenty minutes. The stern, determined look is still etched on his face, and I know we'll be talking after the show.

Some part of me is swooning that he's not giving up. He's here, silently watching over me and protecting me, even when I'm giving him every reason to walk away.

I signal Penny to start cantering as I run down the circle and swing up onto her back. The crowd claps and I start my routine. I've done this twice a day for the last year, so I could do it in my sleep. My mind races as I picture Gavin watching me from the crowd.

Did I make a mistake leaving last night and turning him down this morning? It's obvious he's not going to give up on me that easily. Could we really make it work? Is he craving me the way I'm craving him?

I vault off of Penny, tucking my head in and doing a little flip before landing on my feet. Penny circles around me, and I can't help but search for those deep blue eyes.

It takes less than a second to find my Gavin. He looks awestruck, his eyes roaming up and down my body as I do a few dance moves to the beat of the song. We never break eye contact, even when Penny comes up behind me, dipping low so I can do a cartwheel and then haul myself onto her back.

Should I trust him? Can I?

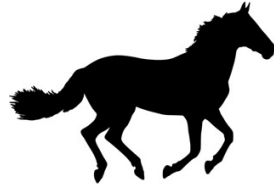
Yes, my mind screams at me. A rush of adrenaline courses through my body as I stand up on Penny's back, opening my arms wide as we go around the circle. My eyes are drawn to Gavin's, my heart stuttering in my chest when I see the mix of worry, lust, and adoration in his eyes. This man genuinely cares for me, maybe even loves me. Why am I fighting this so hard?

I know that we weren't together long. I know there's still so much I need to learn about him, but he's right. There's something here. Call it chemistry, fate, serendipity, or some other invisible connection, but I get it now. I didn't allow myself to feel it before, but now it's all I can see.

I didn't think it was possible to fall in love at first sight, but I guess I was wrong.

Now how do I tell Gavin that?

NINE



Gavin

I KNOW Pia saw me at the midday performance. I was hoping she would come see me after she was done, but she didn't. That's okay though. If she needs time to think or to realize I'm not going anywhere, then that's fine. I can wait for her. I've been waiting my whole life to find a woman who makes me feel like Pia does. Now that I've found her, I'm not letting her get away.

The night performance is starting now, and I settle in my seat in the stands. I'm front and center. I want Pia to see me, to know that I'll wait forever for her.

"Ladies and gentlemen! Please welcome Pia and Penny to the big tent!" the announcer says over the loudspeaker.

My heart takes off like a shot.

The crowd cheers as Pia and Penny come into the center of the ring, and I smile when Pia's eyes come right to mine. She seems surprised to still find me here, and I give her a small nod, trying to tell her silently that I'm always going to be here for her.

She gives me the smallest smile, filling my chest up with hope. Maybe I won't have to wait forever. Maybe, just maybe, she's finally on board.

My girl tears her eyes away from me and smiles at the rest of the crowd as she goes into her routine. Penny starts to

gallop around the outside of the ring, but I keep my gaze locked on Pia. Her focus shifts as she gets into the music. Even though she's nailing every move, I can tell her heart isn't in it. She's just going through the motions.

Most of the other performers love to be in front of the crowd. You can see it, feel it in their energy. They thrive off of the crowd's energy and cheers. They want the attention, but not Pia. She's happiest when she's alone with her horse. She doesn't want the spotlight. She just wants a simple life, one filled with family and love, and I aim to give that to her.

Pia jumps off of Penny, landing with her arms overhead and a wide smile on her face. I stand, cheering for her along with the rest of the crowd. Her eyes find mine again and something has changed.

She's ready to talk. I can see it in her eyes, and relief fills me.

Penny and my girl turn to leave the tent, and I slip past the rest of the crowd and head outside too. The fairgrounds are packed tonight, and I make my way through the crowd and over to the animal tent. Pia is with Penny right outside of the flaps, and I make a beeline right for her.

"Hey," I say once I'm closer.

Her eyes meet mine, her cheeks flushing my favorite color of pink. "Hey."

"Can I take you out to dinner?" I blurt out.

She frowns, and I want to kick myself for coming on too strong.

"Why?"

I run my hand through my hair, rubbing the back of my neck as I think of a way to recover. "I thought you might be hungry after your performance."

She stares at me for a few moments, tilting her head to the side. "Why are you doing this?" she finally whispers.

"Doing what?" I ask in confusion.

“Why are you still here? I mean... you stayed for both shows,” she says softly. “And you want to take me out to dinner?”

I nod.

“Even after I sent you away?”

“I told you, baby girl. I’m not going anywhere.”

“But... you have a life to get back to,” she reminds me, scrambling for an excuse.

I give her a rueful smile, not having any of that shit. “*You* are my life, Pia.”

She shakes her head, looking over to Penny. I can’t stay away any longer, and I reach out to touch her arm. Pia shivers, leaning closer. I take that as a good sign.

“I’m the boss. I can do whatever I want,” I tell her easily. “For example, I can rework my entire schedule for the next year so that I don’t have to go into the office.”

“Why would you do that?” she gasps, her eyes guarded. Still, I can see a spark of hope in their depths. I can work with that.

“Well, I’ll be a little far away,” I answer. “See, I bought tickets for every single circus show for the rest of the year.”

Her mouth drops open and tears start to shimmer in her eyes as she stares at me.

“What?” she whispers.

I take a step closer, tugging on her arm until she’s pressed against me.

“I’m yours, little girl, and you’re mine.” I cradle her precious face in my hands, needing her to hear me, to really listen to my words. “I’ll follow you around for as long as it takes for you to understand my devotion to you. I’d follow you to the ends of the earth, princess. If you need more time, then that’s fine. I’ll wait for you, but I’m going to prove to you that this is real. That we’re meant to be.”

“I don’t need more time,” she says through her sniffles. I wipe her tears away with my thumbs, pressing my lips to her forehead.

“What are you telling me?” I whisper.

“I know it, too.”

“What do you know? Say it,” I demand, my heart roaring in my ears. “Tell me, sweet girl.”

“I’m meant to be yours, and you’re meant to be mine,” she chokes out.

I wrap her up in my arms, engulfing my precious girl in my embrace. She cries into my chest, and I bundle her up even tighter against me.

“I never thought I would have anyone,” she says into my shirt.

“I know, baby girl, but you do.”

She nods, and I hold her tighter as she struggles to get her tears to stop. When she finally looks up at me, I smile.

“I love you, Pia,” I tell her.

“I know. I love you too, Gavin.”

I tilt her face up, and my lips are almost on hers when Penny neighs, nudging Pia with her head. We both laugh, and I reach up, stroking Penny’s neck.

“I know. You want your treat,” Pia says to her.

I grin. “I’ll let you take care of Penny. I’ll be right here when you’re ready.”

She nods, and then a devilish smile takes over her face.

“Why don’t you come inside with us?”

“I thought that was against the rules,” I say.

She gives me a heated look, a sexy smirk curling up the corners of her lips. “Let’s be bad... daddy.”

Hearing that name coming from her lips has my cock hardening behind the zipper of my jeans, and I grin as I duck

under the tent flap behind her.

It takes all my willpower to stand off to the side while she feeds Penny and puts her back in her stall.

When she's done, Pia washes her hands at a little makeshift station on a bench on the other side of the tent. I can't wait another goddamn second to show her who she belongs to.

I eat up the distance between us in four long strides, needing her scent, her heat, her entire being wrapped around me.

Stepping up behind her, I smooth my hands over her round, juicy ass and grip her hips, pulling her back into me so she can feel how hard I am for her. Pia gasps, leaning into me. I groan and kiss up and down her neck while she grinds against me, teasing me, driving me fucking crazy with her body.

My hands slide underneath the hem of her shirt, spreading out over her flat stomach and then down to the waistband of her jeans. Quickly undoing the button, I slip my hand inside, cupping her hot little pussy. She moans and lifts one arm behind her head, her hand fisting my hair and drawing me closer to her while her other hand rests on top of mine, guiding me down past the waistline of her panties.

"This what you need, little girl?" I murmur before nipping at her pulse point and licking away the sting.

"God, yes," she moans.

"How do good girls ask?" I murmur again into the shell of her ear.

"Please, daddy," she chokes out, grinding against me, trying to get me to touch her where she needs.

I stroke her soaking wet slit, dragging our hands through her folds. Together, we rub her clit and then thrust our fingers into her tight little opening. A warm wave of her cream pools in my hand, making me growl.

"Fuck, you're my dirty fucking princess, aren't you?"

“Yes...” she whimpers, rocking her hips into our joined hands, fucking herself with our fingers.

“Jesus,” I grunt. I withdraw our hands and peel her pants and panties halfway down her thighs before unzipping my pants and pulling myself out. “Hands in front of you, little girl. Hold on to the bench while I fuck this pussy and show you who you belong to.”

She does as I say, bracing herself for my thickness. I grip her hips and slowly slide into her, feeling every inch of her silky heat squeeze around my cock. I pause when I’m fully seated inside of her, taking a moment to be with her like this, buried in her dripping cunt, connected to her in the most intimate of ways. I nuzzle into her shoulder, pressing light kisses there and breathing her in.

Then I pull out and slam back into her, fucking the air out of her lungs with deep, steady strokes. I slide my hands underneath her shirt, gripping her tits and using them as leverage to thrust into her deeper, pull her closer, and grind against her harder.

Moans fall from her lips as I fill her up over and over. She pushes back against me, giving as good as she’s getting.

I continue kneading her breast with one hand while sliding my other hand up her back, wrapping her long hair around my fist and yanking her head to the side. I crash my lips down on hers, prying her lips open for me so I can taste her while I fuck her.

She kisses me back with a wild frenzy that almost outmatches my own. I open my mouth wider, needing more, needing to somehow get deeper, taste more of her, consume her completely. I swear to fucking god I could drown in her.

Pia breaks our kiss, a jagged moan ripped from her core as she struggles to fill her lungs with oxygen. Her pussy tightens and flutters around me, letting me know she’s close. I back off, thrusting into her slowly, keeping her on the edge without pushing her over.

She whines and wiggles her ass, but I just laugh darkly and suck on her neck, leaving another mark on my woman.

“Gavin, please...”

“Please what, princess? Tell me what you want.”

“I want you.”

“You have me. All of me.”

“Prove it.”

“Is that a challenge, little girl?” I grunt.

“If I say yes, will you punish me?”

God fucking damn. I love this woman.

I slap her ass, *hard*, and ram my fat cock into her, slicing into her juicy little cunt. I scrape my shaft against her front wall until she cries out, letting me know I found her most sensitive spot. I pound into it, again and again, gripping her ass cheeks and spreading her apart so I can watch her pussy swallow all of me. I growl at the sight of us. A perfect fucking fit.

Pia gasps for air and starts shaking in my arms. Her pussy throbs around me, coating my cock with more of her cream. Her entire body freezes as she sucks in a huge breath of air and screams as her pussy snaps around me.

“Oh god, oh god, oh god,” she repeats over and over. “I-I can’t, ohmygod, I can’t... take... it...”

I smack her ass and pull her hair, tugging her head back as I lean forward, biting down on her shoulder. “You can, and you will. Take it. Fucking take what your daddy gives you.”

I slap her ass again, making her squirt all over me.

“Daddy! It hurts, it hurts so good, don’t stop, don’t ever stop.”

“Jesus Christ,” I grit out, riding her ass hard with everything I am.

Sloppy, wet, smacking sounds fill the empty space, adding to the soundtrack of Pia’s breathy moans and my feral grunts.

I wrap my arms around her hips right as her knees give out. Holding her up, I rut into her like a man possessed, driving both of us higher and higher, my muscles burning as I tense and flex and fuck her savagely.

The bench she's holding on to shakes with each thrust, but I can't stop. Sweat drips down my forehead, my balls draw up tight, and the sharp sting of ecstasy shoots through my body just as Pia fucking comes again. Her orgasm ignites my own, the white-hot flames traveling down my spine and shooting out of me right into Pia's ripe pussy. I come so hard my balls ache and my cock feels raw.

We stay connected for long moments, feeling the love between us. Eventually, I pull away from her, grabbing a few clean towels from the hand washing station to clean both of us up.

Pia sighs dreamily as I pull her pants up and get her all put back together. I love that she trusts me like this, trusts me to take care of the little details. Speaking of...

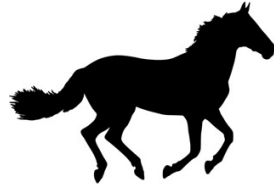
"Where are we going next?" I ask her as I scoop her up in my arms. Pia giggles, kicking her legs out as she curls up into my chest.

"Um... your hotel room?" she asks with the cutest smile on her face. "We both could use a shower..."

I grin, kissing the tip of her nose. "Perfect."

We have lots more to discuss about her job, Penny, where she wants to live, what her dream house is, and how many children she wants, but all of that will fall into place. I'm sure of it. The only thing that matters is having Pia in my life.

TEN



Pia

FIVE YEARS LATER...

“CAN I HELP, MOMMY?” Ciara asks as she peeks around the stall door.

“Sure, honey. Just watch your step,” I warn.

My daughter smiles happily as she grabs a brush and comes to stand by my side. I watch as she clumsily runs the brush against Penny’s lower side. She’s not very tall, so she can really only reach Penny’s legs and belly, but she’s happy to be helping and around the horses.

“I thought that I might find you two out here,” Gavin says, and I glance over my shoulder to see him leaning against the stall door.

He grins at me and bends down to scoop up Ciara as she runs toward him.

“Daddy!” Ciara yells excitedly.

He grins at our little girl, and I smile. Ciara looks just like Gavin, and she’s definitely a daddy’s girl. The two of them are inseparable.

The little one in my belly kicks, and I rest a hand against my large bump, rubbing circles there to try to soothe the kicks.

“Are you alright?” Gavin asks, moving to my side, and I smile.

Gavin is still just as attentive and caring as he was the day I met him. He’s always anticipating my needs and bringing me home little surprises whenever he has to leave.

“I’m fine,” I promise him. “He’s just active today.”

Gavin’s hand joins mine on my stomach, and he smiles as our son kicks again.

“Are you all done here?” Gavin asks me, and I nod.

“Yeah, I just finished up.”

“Good.”

He takes my hand and leads me out of the stall, he holds Ciara on his hip as we start to head back toward the house.

Gavin and I moved here right after we left the circus. He had bought a horse trailer and a truck, and we spent five days driving across the country and back to California. I don’t know how he did it, but he managed to list his penthouse apartment in the city and buy this beautiful ranch just outside of Los Angeles.

The house itself is huge but gorgeous. It’s all gleaming hardwood floors and windows so that you can look out over the sprawling ranch.

Gavin has an office on the first floor, but he’s cut down on his hours a lot since we had Ciara. He rarely goes into the office now and spends just a few hours a week in his home office.

He’s been helping me more down at the stables. We have a few horses now and even a few chickens. Ciara asked for chickens for her last birthday, and I knew before I saw the chicken coop that she was going to get them. Gavin would do anything to make us happy.

I know that my parents would have loved Gavin, and I wish that they could have met him. If they were still alive though, then I might have never met Gavin.

Meeting Gavin was the best thing to ever happen to me. He's given me so much. Thanks to him, I have an amazing family, an amazing house and stable, and I'm surrounded by so much love. None of that would be possible without Gavin.

"Can we play dolls, Daddy?" Ciara asks as we head into the house.

"Later tonight, we can. Right now, you need to get ready for your playdate with Megan," he tells her, and she takes off to go get some toys.

"I'll drive her over there," Gavin tells me as he tugs me into his arms.

I smile up at him, and he grins down at me, bringing his lips closer to my ear so that he can whisper to me.

"Once Ciara is at her playdate, it's time for ours."

I grin, leaning up on my tiptoes to press a kiss to his lips.

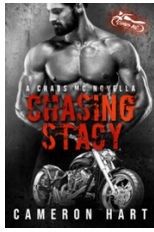
"I'll be ready, daddy," I whisper.

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River: One look at the stunning waitress carrying the weight of the world on her shoulders, and I'm a gonner. I wasn't looking for a sweet little thing with auburn hair and more baggage than I can fit on the back of my bike, but there's no going back now. She's mine. I'll prove to her I'm more than capable of handling her past and making her feel safe again.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cameron Hart is a USA Today bestselling author of contemporary romance. She writes books with lots of heat, plenty of sweet, and just enough drama to keep things interesting.

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