

Chapter 4

I clocked out of work after making a decent amount from tips alone. It would definitely help replenish what I had spent on clothes and necessities. While I was happy to be free from work, going home was another situation entirely.

When Kat dropped me off, Lauren was still at work for another hour. That left me alone with Darren. The moment I walked through the front door, I knew he was completely drunk. He sat in the recliner, watching a fuzzy football match on TV, his face contorted in anger.

"Where the f*ck have you been?" he spat, struggling to lift himself off the recliner.

"Working, Darren," I repeated for the hundredth time, trying not to roll my eyes, knowing it would only anger him more. I turned to head upstairs, hoping to escape his drunken tirade, but something he said made me stop.

"Working?" he scoffed, wobbling as he stood. "You were out whoring around like your f*ck*ng mother."

This time, I did roll my eyes. If he wasn't drunk all the time, he'd remember that Lauren made me pay for everything myself. I didn't have time to "wh*r*" around" when I was busy supporting myself and going to high school.

"Lauren isn't my mother," I snapped, turning to walk up the stairs. His hand wrapped around my wrist and yanked me back. I didn't fall, but I stumbled a few steps.

"Get off me, Darren," I mumbled, my body tensing in fear. The few times he had gotten this close weren't pretty. Darren was always handsy when he was drunk, whether it be abusive or sexual.

"F*ck*ng wh*r*," he spat, his alcohol-tinged breath invading my nose. He yanked me closer, and I nearly gagged at the sight of his sweat-stained shirt. My entire body felt cold with fear. He was much too close for comfort.

I grimaced at the disgusting smell of stale beer and body odor. His grip tightened around my wrist, and I gritted my teeth against the pain.

"I said get off!" I screeched, bringing my knee up between his legs. Darren let out a hiss of pain, releasing my wrist. I could hear his drunken yelling as I ran to my bedroom and slammed the door behind me. I fumbled with the lock through the tears that had sprung up in my eyes.

Once the door was locked, I flopped down on my bed and let a few tears trail down my face. Some days were harder than others, but it would all be worth it when I left this place. Over the years, I had lost hope that Lauren would treat me like her own daughter and instead looked forward to escaping the moment I turned 18.

I stayed on the bed for hours, not daring to move until I heard the front door open and Lauren come inside. Only then did I pull myself off the bed and trudge into the shower. The steaming water hid my tears as they fell freely.

Living with Darren required constant vigilance, always being on guard around him. It was exhausting and left me in a perpetual state of paranoia. I hopped out of the shower feeling completely drained and fell into bed.

Morning came much too quickly. After a few hours of restless sleep, I woke up and changed for school. I put on one of the outfits I had recently bought—a pair of skinny jeans and an off-shoulder long-sleeve shirt. I grimaced at the handprint bruise on my skin and yanked my sleeve down over it.

As usual, my first and second classes of the day were with Kat. We chatted while working on our assignments. My next class, however, was the one I worried about. Kieran's comment about cologne at the restaurant had me confused, but I let it slip from my mind shortly after. Apparently, the twins had not.

Kieran and Ethan both looked irresistible, their hair tousled in that perfect, messy way. Kieran wore a dark blue button-down shirt, while Ethan sported a simple black t-shirt. They sat at our usual table, only this time Ethan was across from Kieran. I grimaced, realizing I'd have to sit next to one of them. Kieran seemed more serious and sometimes scarier, so I plopped down beside Ethan.

Ethan smirked at Kieran, as if he had won a bet. I averted my eyes from the sinfully attractive twins and pretended to be interested in the teacher.

"Did the little doll finish our group project?" Ethan teased, his hot breath curling around my ear. A shudder wracked through my body, and Ethan snickered. I clamped my lips shut and ignored him. Of course, I finished the project. I couldn't let the troublesome twins ruin my grade.

When I didn't answer, Ethan's fingers danced over my shoulder and tickled my collarbone. I s*ck*d in a sharp breath at the tingles that bubbled against my skin under his touch.

"Stop," I hissed, keeping my gaze on the teacher.

I could hear a weird rumbling sound coming from Ethan, and the urge to look became overwhelming. My eyes flickered over to him, noticing a strange glint in his dark orbs.

I couldn't understand these insanely gorgeous twins. First, they chose me to pick on. Second, they wanted a reaction from me. Third, when they finally got a reaction, they seemed p*ss*d.

"Why don't you make me stop, doll?" Ethan grinned, his thick fingers running along my exposed collarbone.

Just then, the teacher walked around, collecting the group projects. Ethan's wandering hand retreated, and I rifled through my binder to find our project. After handing it to the teacher, I nearly jumped from my seat as a large hand grasped my thigh.

Ethan smirked down at me, and I felt my body stiffen. "Where's that feisty little attitude, doll?" he whispered, his voice gruff and too close to my ear.

I bit my cheek, determined not to feed into their nonsense. Whether they got off on acting this way or not, I wasn't planning on encouraging it.

And that's how I spent the rest of the class—sucking in sharp breaths as Ethan's hand traveled where it shouldn't. At one point, he tugged playfully on a strand of my hair. I turned my head to hide the aggressive blush on my cheeks.

I quickly noticed that Kieran was the quiet one. His eyes were glued to me the entire class. When he wasn't staring at me, he was glaring at his brother. I swore I could see jealousy burning in his eyes. It was a shame they wanted to take turns tormenting me.