

Destiny Diess

A man with dark hair and two large, curved, black horns. He has striking green eyes and is looking directly at the viewer with a serious expression. His hands are clasped together in front of his chin. He is wearing a dark, possibly black, shirt. The background is a dark, textured red.

NEXT-DOOR
INCUBUS

BECOMING LUST TRILOGY 1

NEXT-DOOR
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DESTINY DIESS

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To my family who has always supported me. To Sean and Sheba who have pushed me to publish my writing. To my Wattpad and Patreon fans who continue to flood my inbox with sweet, lovely messages. This one's for you.

CHAPTER 1

I swayed my hips from side to side, humming to *Partition* as it played through my AirPods. Mom's necklace, a small rose-gold pendant in the shape of a v, glided across my chest and swung to the beat.

The morning sun flooded into my room through my sheer white curtains, and rays of light shined almost too conveniently on the pile of dirty clothes littered on my floor from last night. I stepped out of my shorts and tossed them into the hamper along with the rest of my clothes, then walked down the hall to the laundry room, eyes closed in utter bliss.

My housemate Maria was out with her friends today which meant that I had the whole apartment to myself. What was better than being able to walk around half-naked, stuff my face without being judged, and hold a concert for one in the living room on a Sunday morning? Nothing, absolutely nothing.

"Dani!"

My eyes snapped open. Maria, two of her friends, and three insanely attractive guys sat on our leather couches in the living room. The girls were clinging on to two of the guys, their fingers curling around the guys' biceps, heads resting in the crooks of their necks. When they saw me, everyone stared with wide, shocked eyes. Except one.

He stared at me with a smirk on his lips and sin in his green eyes. Brown tousled hair, a grey Henley shirt that hugged his shoulders, and the scent of cinnamon and apples, he looked too perfect to be real.

Over the hum of my music, I heard the girls explode in a fit of laughter. The basket of clothes slipped out of my sweaty palms and tumbled onto the floor. All of my underwear, my latex mini skirt that I wore for Trevon last night, and my dignity laid at their feet. I swallowed hard and pulled down the bottom of my shirt, trying to cover myself.

I quickly backed into the hallway, and once I was out of sight, I sprinted into my room, slammed my door, and leaned my back against it.

Oh, my God.

Maria said she'd be out today. For the whole damn day. Why was she back here with... with whoever they were?!

I pulled out my earbuds, drew Mom's necklace between my fingers, and rested my head against the door. Although ridged at the top, the broken piece of the pendant felt cold and smooth against my thumb.

Breathe, Dani. I'm sure none of them saw anything anyway.

My gaze drifted down to my bare legs and black lacy panties. "Damn-it."

Someone banged on my door. "Dani, it's me. Open up!" Maria said. I tugged on some shorts, opened the door, and narrowed my eyes at Maria. She handed me my now-full laundry basket, a smile tugging at the corner of her lips. Her dirty-blond hair was pulled back into a messy bun. "Well, that was a very impressive introduction to our new neighbors."

"Neighbors? Those guys are our neighbors?!"

Great, I embarrassed myself in front three guys I would see almost every day. Unless... I don't leave my apartment or room ever again. I could become a hermit and live my days in my room, curled up in my plush white sheets with a vanilla candle flickering deep into the night from my bedside table. Never have to be horrifically embarrassed ever again. Never have to face that man with those tempting emerald eyes.

"Dani! Hello?" Maria waved a hand in front of my face. "Are you even listening to me?"

No, I'm trying to get myself out of this mess.

She rolled her eyes and grabbed my wrist. "Since you're all dressed now, let's go introduce you to them!" She turned on her heel and started toward the door.

"Maria, are you crazy?" I dug my heels into the hardwood. "I don't want to meet them! Not after that!"

"Well, you were the one who decided not to wear pants when we had company."

"You told me you would be out all day!"

"Yeah, well, there was a slight change of plans as soon as we saw how hot they were. But, that's beside the point! Come on"—she continued to drag me—"there's one that I think you'll like!"

"No, no, no, no, no, no..." I tried peeling her hand off of me, yet she continued down the hall. "Maria! Stop! I don't want to mee—"

"Hey guys! This is my roommate, Dani."

The guys gave me a half-smile, then turned back to Maria's friends who were desperately vying for their attention, eyes glazed over in a haze, breasts pressed

against their chests—not something I’d expect from girls who had been going to church religiously since I’d known them. I fingered my necklace, not daring to look over at *him*.

But, when his sweet scent drifted over to me, I couldn’t stop myself from looking up. He sat on the loveseat by himself, his arms—covered with black tattoos—stretched across the backrest. Inch by inch, his gaze traveled up my body. The seconds passed so slowly. I shifted. And, when his dark gaze pierced through mine, a sudden rush of pleasure coursed throughout my body.

He stood and stepped closer to me. “Dani...” My name rolled off his lips effortlessly. “I’m Eros.”

I stuck out my hand for him to shake, wanting to keep a distance between us. Something was screaming at me to stay away. To run. Now. But, when he grabbed my hand, I froze.

Instead of shaking it, he brought it to his lips. They were soft and lingered for more than a moment. He was more gentleman-like than I ever expected.

After taking a deep breath, he gazed down at me with dark—black—eyes, and I gasped. “You had quite the entrance there,” he said, his scent becoming overwhelming. My cheeks flushed, and I looked down. Great, Dani, just great. He grazed his finger against the bottom of my chin and lifted it until my eyes were gazing into his. “Don’t be embarrassed.” He leaned over slightly, his lips grazing against my ear. “I should be the one embarrassed.”

Cinnamon. That’s all I smelt.

“What do you mean?” I asked, tingled running down my arms. My breath caught in the back of my throat, and Mom’s necklace chilled my skin as soon as Eros dropped his hand and brushed his knuckles against it.

He stared at the pendant with soft eyes, as if it was a relic that had been lost for centuries, as if it was the only thing that ever mattered. But, then, he looked at me. “It’s not every day I find a woman like you.” And I felt like I was the only one that ever mattered.

He took me in so steadily, gaze shifting from eye to eye, drifting down my face, thumb brushing against my cheek. And I just stood there, staring back, unable to speak, unable to think, unable to get myself to push him away.

“It’s not every day a woman in her underwear runs away from me.” He stepped back and blessed me a smirk that would destroy me if I wasn’t careful. “And it’s not every day that I want to follow that woman back into her bedroom and take her right then and there.”

My eyes widened and nervously darted around the room to see if anyone else

had heard what he just said to me. Maria had her arm around one of the guys, her head falling into the crook of his neck, eyes closed, looking like she was in Heaven. The other three girls weren't better off. Even Maria's shyest friend—Hallie—was resting her cheek against one of their shoulders, eyes cloudy and distant.

I parted my lips and pressed them back together. My head felt foggy, like I was in a daze, in a trance, in something, because who in their right mind would say something like that to someone that they just met. And his eyes flashing black? Those couldn't be real. But what if they were? What if I wasn't imagining it?

I needed to get away, yet I couldn't peel my eyes off of him. I wanted to feel his nose running up the side of my neck, his teeth dipping into my flesh, his hands pinning mine against my leather headboard, refusing to let me go. I pushed my knees together.

Sinful words from a sinful man that made me think sinful thoughts. Mom always told me that the devil disguised himself as our deepest desire.

When I looked back at Eros, he chuckled. I tugged on Mom's pendant. "I... uh..."

"*You want me,*" he said. But his lips didn't move, not even a little.

Okay, I was definitely just hearing things. God, I was really going crazy.

He brushed his fingers against my hip and stepped closer. Black specs reappeared in his eyes. His breath warmed my neck. Cinnamon. "Tell me you want me, Dani, and I'll enact all those fantasies running through that dirty little mind of yours. Every. Last. One of them," he murmured.

My tongue ran over my bottom lip. "... erm..."

The tips of his fingers snuck under the hem of my shirt and grazed against my stomach. I let out a shaky breath, not being able to distinguish the real from the fake. "I... uh... gotta go."

Without hesitating, I stepped away from him, staggered back, and sprinted into my room.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

Every time I closed my eyes, I could feel his fingertips gliding against my skin, burning into my flesh. They were tormenting me already in places he hadn't even touched yet.

I cocooned myself in my plush pink throw blanket, trying to put as much space between Eros and me as possible. If this was how I felt after five minutes of meeting him, how would I feel seeing him every single day? How would I

feel when Maria brought them over again?

There was only one thing that I could do now.

Let Project Hermit begin.

CHAPTER 2

“Can you just open the door?” Trevon asked through the phone. “I left my key to your place back at home.” I gnawed on the inside of my cheek and walked to my bedroom door, hand on the handle, heart thrashing against my ribcage. “Hello?” he said, a hint of annoyance in his voice.

“Hi... I... uh...” I pressed my ear to my cold door, listening to the light hum of the refrigerator in the kitchen. No talking. No shuffling. Maybe they weren’t here. “Give me a second.”

After peeking my head out and gazing down the empty hallway, I tiptoed to the kitchen. Shadows from the cabinets loomed over me in the darkness, but at least it wasn’t Eros’s shadow.

I stood on my toes and checked through the peephole. In the brightly lit hallway, Trevon had his hands stuffed in his pockets and his eyes shielded by the navy baseball cap I had given him for his birthday last year. But still I waited. I didn’t need this to be some sort of prank and have Eros appearing out of nowhere.

When Trevon looked straight at the peephole with the most heavenly brown eyes I had ever seen, I pulled open the door, wrapped my hand around his wrist, and yanked him inside.

“What the fu-” He stumbled forward.

I slammed the door. “Sorry,” I said, standing on my toes and kissing him.

“Is everything okay, babe?” He tilted his head to the side slightly, like he did when he was thinking, and eyed me. The bitter scent of beer sickened me. I licked my lips nervously, nodded my head, and pulled him into my room.

Another door Eros would have to get through to get to me.

Trevon tossed his hat onto my dresser. “You haven’t returned any of my calls or texts since yesterday morning.”

“I’ve just been busy with my psych internship and... um, stuff...” Like trying to hide from Eros. Maria had him and his roommates over all day yesterday and even for breakfast this morning, and I couldn’t handle it anymore. If I saw him

one more time, I was going to—

Trevon threw his shirt onto the end of my bed and crawled under the comforter, the light from the candle flickered against his brown and brawny abdomen. “I know when you’re lying.”

The wind whistled lowly, blowing the curtains away from the window and brushing against the side of my bed. Outside, the city night was unusually quiet.

I parted my lips to speak, then closed them. What was I going to say? That an undeniably sexy man moved in next-door and he just so happened to have the hots for me. No. No way I’d do that to Trevon. He had known me since we were kids, helped me through Mom’s death, was one of the only constant people in my life that I cherished. “I... I just haven’t been getting much sleep lately.”

It wasn’t a lie. For the past few nights, I’d been tossing and turning. Last night was the worst; my mind kept replaying the interaction I had with Eros. Over and over. The thought—his promise—wouldn’t leave me alone. And, it was getting too damn frustrating.

Light from my candles glimmered off of my black headboard. Trevon leaned against it, crossing one leg over the other. He grabbed my hand, pulling it away from my necklace. “If you keep doing that, you’re going to break it again.” He pulled me down next to him.

Like I had done nearly every night for the past five years, I curled into him, resting my head on his bare chest. He laced his fingers into my hair and scratched lightly. I sighed and drew my finger across the only tattoo he had on his body—a tabono symbol—that he got on his chest after winning his first college wrestling match.

“So, when were you going to tell me you got new neighbors?”

“I, uh...” Don’t stutter, Dani. It’ll make you seem like you’re hiding something. “... didn’t think you’d care. They seem annoying.”

“You met them?”

“Just once. Maria brought them over,” I said, brushing my finger across my hand where Eros had kissed, the skin burning lightly. “How’d you know about them?”

“I met one of them out in the hall,” he said. God, if he met Eros... “Ian? Or Evan? Nah, that’s it, it was Eros. Seems pretty chill.”

Oh, my Lord. I licked my lips and sat up, intertwining my fingers with his. “What did he say?”

“Nothing. I told him that you were my girlfriend though.” He trailed his hand alongside my forearm, sending goosebumps up it, and smiled. “Just so he won’t

get the urge to hit on you.”

If he only knew that Eros had already made it perfectly clear that he wanted me.

Trevon brushed his lips against my cheek, toying with the ends of my shirt. “I wouldn’t be surprised if he still tried though, you’re hot as hell.”

I pushed him away playfully and blew out the candle. Okay, good, he didn’t know anything, and it would stay that way because nothing would happen between us. Nothing.

When Trevon wrapped an arm around my waist and his breath evened out, I listened to the soft sound of his snoring. I tried to fall asleep, but light was now blaring under my door. And, even with Trevon’s arms wrapped tightly around me and his breath fanning my neck, I felt unbelievably cold.

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*Lips brushed against my collarbone, setting it ablaze. “Oh, Dani,” Eros murmured against my skin. The room smelled of cinnamon and vanilla—a striking scent. His fingers grazed down the center of my chest and over my breast. “Your skin is so soft...tender....”*

*A breathy moan escaped my lips, and I sunk into my plush sheets. He dipped his fingers between my legs and gently rubbed my red lacy underwear. “... imagine what I could do to it...”*

*Moonlight filed through the sheer curtains, illuminating his sharp features. He slipped his fingers inside of me and smirked against my neck. I gripped his shoulders, digging my nails into him. “Eros,” I breathed, throwing my head back.*

*His lips—quickly, hungrily, brutally—travelled down my chest and stomach, up the insides of my thighs, hovered between my panties and teased me with their heat. In one swoop, he clenched my panties in his hand and ripped them off of me, leaving me bare.*

*He gazed up at me, eyes completely black. So big and bold, so absolutely terrifying yet so damn sexy.*

*“Is this what you want, Dani?” he mumbled against my aching core. Slowly, he drew his fingers down the insides of my thighs.*

*Images of him pressing his lips onto me, holding my legs apart until I was trembling around him, of pleasure pumping through my body flooded my mind.*

*He wrapped his hands around my thighs, pulling me closer to him, and pushed his lips against my clit. His fingers moved in small torturous circles inside of me. I gripped his wrists, trying to pull him away. It already was too damn much to*

*handle. He gripped my wrist with his other hand and pinned it to the side of my body, holding me in place. I clenched myself around him, my core tightening, and moaned. He slowed down his pace.*

*He gazed back up at me with those big black eyes. "Beg for it."*

*My lips parted, but no words came out. The pressure. Oh, God, the pressure.*

*"Beg," he demanded.*

*"Please."*

*"More."*

*"Please, Eros... please."*

*His tongue moved faster, his fingers thrusting quickly. I dug my nails into the blanket underneath me and moaned out.*

*My mind was foggy. My body numb. Wave after wave of pleasure rolled through me. Eros sat back up, resting my legs on his shoulders. "I could do this all night," he said. I widened my eyes, staring down at him, my senses finally returning. He smirked. "I told you that I would enact your fantasies, Dani. You just had to tell me that you wanted it."*

## CHAPTER 3

I sat up in my bed with sweat rolling down my back.

What the hell.

My curtains swayed, cinnamon lingering faintly in the air. I scanned the room. Trevon's baseball cap was still lying on my dresser. Mom's necklace was still resting around my neck peacefully. There was no sign of Eros.

I rested my head against the headboard and closed my eyes. Of course, he wasn't here. It was just a dream, Dani, just a dream.

A damn sex dream.

About the hot guy next door.

While I was sleeping next to my boyfriend.

Oh, God. I was going to Hell for this, wasn't I? I'd burn in the pits of lava and get eaten alive by flesh-eating demons and—

"Babe?" Trevon groaned. He rubbed a hand across his face and slowly opened his eyes. The faint scent of alcohol still lingered on his breath. "Is everything okay?"

"Everything is fine." No, it wasn't.

After chuckling lightly, he rolled over onto his side and wrapped an arm around my waist. "Good, now come lie back down. We still got a few hours—" He stopped suddenly and rubbed my waist, fingers slipping lower than I wanted them. "Damn, babe, sleeping with no underwear on? If you want to fuck, you just have to ask. Don't need to be teasing me and shit."

I swallowed hard and pushed a hand under the blankets. No underwear? Why wasn't I wearing any underwear? Maybe I slipped them off while I was sleeping. It was hot last night, deathly hot, scorching hot.

Trevon nuzzled his head into my neck. "Come on, let's have some fun. You already got me excited."

"I'm... uh... not in the mood," I said. I scurried out of the bed and rushed toward my bedroom door. "I'm going to the bathroom. I'll be right back."

Dull light filed in from the living room window, illuminating the apartment. I glanced down the hall and into the foyer. Empty. Maria's door was closed, like usual. Nothing was out of place.

When I reached the bathroom, I leaned over the counter and gazed at myself in the mirror. The dream felt so real, so damn real. But I couldn't understand why I was dreaming of Eros. I had a perfectly good man—no, a great man. One that cradled me every time I woke up from a nightmare about the night of Mom's death. One that took me on breakfast dates to Ollie's every Saturday morning. One that I had loved for five whole years.

And, here I was, dreaming about my undeniably sexy neighbor.

I turned on the sink, the soothing sound of water calming me slightly, and splashed some on my face. In the mirror, I watched beads of water run down the sides of my cheek, the dark purple circles under my eyes.

You will not think of Eros, again.

You will not think of Eros, again.

You will not—

My eyes widened. There were red fingerprints on my hips, four on each side. I rubbed my fingers against them, trying to make them go away but only making them redder. I swallowed hard—thinking the worst—then shook my head.

Damn, what was I even thinking anymore? These fingerprints were probably just from Trevon holding me. Why was I so paranoid all of a sudden? Next, I'll be thinking Eros was actually in my room last night.

But that would be ridiculous.

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Sorry, babe. Work called. I would've woken you up, but you looked too peaceful to bother. I'm taking you out tonight. Be ready at 5. Love, Trevon.

I grasped Trevon's note in my hand, smiled, and walked into Dr. Uriel's office. After getting back to bed last night, I actually had a good sleep and woke up five minutes before my alarm feeling well rested.

"Morning, Dani," Dr. Uriel said from her royal blue sofa. She handed me a file and a cup of tea. "This is my 9:30 client. She had an absent father and is struggling with feelings toward a new lov—" Her dark brown brows furrowed together. "Are you okay?" she asked suddenly as I took a seat across from her. "You're quiet this morning. Anything you want to talk about?"

She crossed one leg over the other and leaned forward, the way she did when listening to all of her clients' problems. I shifted in my seat. If I knew anything from the last five months of interning under Dr. Uriel, it was not to tell her

anything that I didn't want her to pester me about.

I made that mistake once when I told her that I still had nightmares about the piercing red eyes of Mom's killer. She was hung up over it for weeks, telling me that I should talk to someone—meaning her—because suppressed feelings were nobody's friend.

“I'm fi—”

“And don't tell me you're fine either. You know I see right through that,” she said.

If I closed my eyes and imagined hard enough, I could hear Mom in her voice. When she sat me on her knee at five years old and asked me what happened in pre-school one day, when she waited so patiently for me to tell her that the boy I liked was pushing another girl on the swings, when she gazed down at me with her pretty light blue eyes—so light that they looked like they were glowing—and said that it was okay not to be fine.

Instead of reminiscing, I gazed out the window and sighed.

From Dr. Uriel's office, I had a whole view of the city. The morning sun gleaming off of the river next to us, hundreds of people brushing past each other on the sidewalks, red and blue buses picking up riders. I leaned against the back of the couch. “I just haven't been getting much sleep. A few guys moved in next store and they were over all day Sunday.”

“Tell me about these new guys,” Dr. Uriel said, clasping her hands together. “Are they loud?”

I moved Mom's pendant between my fingers, listening to it glide against the chain. Dr. Uriel eyed it. “No,” I said.

“Are they over a lot?”

“Yes.”

“What are their names?”

“Javier and Zane,” I said. She sipped her tea, waiting for me to continue. “And Eros.”

She paused for a long moment, gazing out of the glass windows. “Eros,” she said softly. “Is he the reason that you're not sleeping?”

Damn. Was it that obvious?

When I didn't say anything, she frowned. “Dani, I will tell you what I tell all of my clients. Whatever you're feeling toward him—”

“I feel nothing toward him.”

She raised a sharp brow, and I pressed my lips together. “What you feel toward him is nothing compared to your relationship with Trevon, right?”

I closed my eyes when Eros's black one flashed in my mind and nodded. "I know."

Leaning toward me, she readjusted her black blazer and placed a hand on my knee. "Those feelings—those lustful feelings—are nothing compared to feelings of absolute love. They will pass, and so will he."

I drew my finger across my knee. She was right. Lust was nothing compared to love. But love never made me feel like this before.

CHAPTER 4

Trevon wrapped an arm around my waist, pulling me close, as we walked into Crimson's Nouveau, an upscale dining restaurant in the center of the city. Couples sat at the rustic bar in the center of the room, waiters placed plates of food in front of people in black leather booths, and the hostess who was standing in front of a chalky brick wall gave us a perplexed look when we just walked right by her.

"Aren't we getting a table?" I asked Trevon.

He gazed down at me, leading me through a maze of people. "We're meeting Maria and Eros here," he said.

I stopped, pressed my lips together, and yanked on his sleeve. "What?"

"We're meeting—"

"Why? Why them?" The only plan that I had come up with today after my little chat with Dr. U was to avoid Eros. No, not confront the problem head on like she would want me to do. Just ignore the problem and hope he'd go away.

Trevon shrugged. "I saw him this morning, and he asked if we wanted to go out. I didn't think you'd mind, but we can leave if you want."

"Dani! Trevon!" Maria yelled from a booth from across the bar. She waved her hands in the air, as if I could miss the bright orange cropped shirt she had on. Eros and his roommates were sitting in the booth.

Eros's eyes were on me and only me. I gulped and squeezed Trevon's hand.

Lust was nothing compared to my incredible, amazing, trustworthy, handsome boyfriend.

Trevon pulled me over to the table and immediately dropped my hand. He slid into the booth next to Javier, and I grumbled to myself, taking the only open seat left which was directly across from the man himself—Eros.

My gaze stayed glued to the menu. Yet, I couldn't help smelling that cinnamon scent, tasting it on my tongue. I didn't have to look up to know that Eros was staring right at me.

Truth was, I was afraid that, if I looked up, Eros would be able to read every

one of my thoughts about him last night. It was absurd, but I couldn't risk it. Those thoughts were intimate and so damn embarrassing, especially with Trevon sitting—cluelessly—next to me.

After we ordered, Trevon curled an arm around my waist and leaned close. “Is everything alright? You're tense.” His eyes were bright, and a small smile was plastered on his face.

Hoping that it would help me shake my lustful thoughts, I tried remembering all the times I'd seen that small smile on Trevon's face. On the swings in elementary school when he shared his grape juice box with me. Through one of the foggy classroom windows while I sat in fifth grade detention alone because some girls were picking on him for his hair, and I wasn't going to let them hurt my best friend. While we danced together in the rain in his backyard the night of prom because Kellan from his wrestling team never showed up as my date.

I had always loved Trevon, and one annoyingly sexy smirk wasn't going to change my mind.

“Everything is *fine*,” I said, sipping my white wine. It was the only thing getting me through tonight.

“We can go if you want,” Trevon said to me.

Yes, please, let's go home. Far away from Maria who kept gazing at me, then at Eros, then back at me like something had happened between us. Far away from Eros's smoldering stare. Far away from these feelings that wouldn't leave me alone, no matter how hard I tried.

“No,” I said. Trevon was happy, and this was one of his only nights he had off of work during the week. I didn't want to ruin that for him, even if I had to endure the rest of dinner. He gave me a big smile, planting a kiss on my cheek, and turned back to Javier and Zane.

Under the table, Eros's foot grazed against mine. I pressed my lips together, trying to ignore it, but then it happened again. “Quit it,” I whisper-yelled across the table, not daring to look at Eros.

He continued.

“Stop.”

Still, his foot brushed against mine.

I raised my gaze and glared at him. He leaned back against the leather booth, swirling his glass of red wine in his hand. The black ring on his left index finger clanked against the glass. He narrowed those piercing green eyes at me as if he was trying to figure me out. And just when I was about to turn away, his eyes darkened.

They reminded me of my dream when his eyes were beautifully black with no whites in them at all, but...

My eyes widened. My dream.

Heat crawled up the sides of my neck, and I rubbed Mom's pendant again. God, he had to remind me of that stupid dream.

"How was your night last night, Dani?" he asked.

Did he know that I dreamt about him last night? How I begged for him? That I couldn't stop thinking about him? The mischievous glint in his eye made me think he knew everything. But he couldn't.

"Good."

"Just good?" He cocked his brow. A strand of his dark hair curled onto his forehead.

"Just good," I repeated, trying to convince myself of it.

He took a long sip of his wine—jaw clenched—and nodded. When he placed his glass down, his fingertips were white. "We'll have to fix that next time."

I narrowed my eyes at him, leaning against the dark wooden table. "What did you just say?"

Without answering me, he gazed back at our friends. A smirk still clear on his face. I leaned closer to Trevon; fingers interlaced with his. "I'm going to the bathroom." I needed to get away from Eros. He was making me absolutely insane. I didn't know what was real and what was fake anymore. Reality and imagination were so closely woven together, I couldn't pick anything apart. Maybe talking with Dr. U would be a good thing.

I hurried to the bathroom, closed the bathroom door, and groaned. "Why? Why? Why? Why? Why?" I leaned my back against the chic brick wall and covered my face with my hands.

This was not how Project Hermit was supposed to go. I should've been back at home with my faced stuffed into the *Games People Play* book that Dr. U gave me to read before I left today, Beyoncé blasting through my ear buds, locked in my room. Not out with Eros, sitting across from Eros, thinking about Eros, dreaming about Eros. Why wouldn't he leave me alone?

One of the toilets flushed, and a high-heeled woman, who couldn't be any older than me, walked out of a stall. She washed her hands in the sink and gazed over at me. "Is something wrong?" She tossed her toffee brown hair over her shoulder, her amber perfume overwhelming me.

My cheeks tingled, and I looked away. "Nothing." Strangers didn't need to be in my business.

After drying her hands, she pulled out a stick of bright red lipstick from her Versace purse and leaned closer to the mirror. “Come on. Tell me Sweet Cheeks. I’m not going to spill your secrets to anyone.” She applied a coat of lipstick. “Let me guess. Boy trouble?”

I sighed, somehow feeling relaxed in the presence of a stranger. “Something like that.”

“Bad boyfriend?” She narrowed her eyes at me, then shook her head. “No... hmm... love triangle?” I furrowed my brows together. I wouldn’t call it that. “Getting closer...” After a moment, she smiled. “In a relationship but attracted to another guy?” When I frowned, her smile widened. “I guess that’s the one.” She threw her lipstick back into her purse. “Well, if you ever need someone to talk to, I’m Kasey.”

I smiled awkwardly at her. “Uh, Dani.” Was it normal to make friends with people in restaurant bathrooms?

“Here,” she said, handing me her phone. “Put your number in.”

I rubbed my sweaty palms together, unsure if I should, but I ended up entering my number anyway. I didn’t know how much longer I could keep this to myself and I sure didn’t want to tell Dr. U about *everything* that had happened, especially the dream. She’d just lecture me about how these lustful thoughts were the Devil’s doing.

With a smile, she walked out of the bathroom, her heels clacking. I took one last look in the mirror and followed. I just needed to get through the rest of the night, then Trevon and I could go home and act like nothing happened. Because nothing did happen.

When I stepped out of the bathroom, I bumped into someone’s chest. Eros. He grabbed my hips, fingers grazed against my skin, to steady me. Then, he pushed me against the door. “Dani, Dani, Dani,” he said.

Great. I swallowed hard. Just... great.

“Why have you been ignoring me?” His fingers dug into my skin.

“I... I haven’t.”

He chuckled and tilted his head, staring down at me with those dark eyes. “Yes, you have.”

“I have a boyfriend,” I blurted out, pressing myself into the wooden door.

“Why’re you getting so defensive?”

“I’m not.”

He raised a brow. “Is it because you’ve been with him, but all you could think about was me?”

I forced a laugh—the cringiest damn laugh I had ever heard. “No! That’s ridiculous!”

He stepped closer, and I couldn’t get myself to step back into the bathroom and slam the door in his face. Instead, I stared up at him, thinking about how close I was to him and how hard my heart was beating against my chest.

Half of his face was shadowed by the dim light above us, giving him a dark, dangerous, devilish look. “I haven’t left your mind since Sunday, have I?” He leaned down slightly, his nose grazing against mine.

This was sin. Pure sin.

“You’re acting stupid now, Eros.”

“Am I?” he asked, his lips were mere inches away. Heat radiated off of them, hitting me in waves. His fingers curled around my waist the way they did Sunday morning.

All I could smell was cinnamon.

“Yes,” I whispered. “You are.”

He stepped even closer, one foot between mine, his waist pressing into the side of my hip. “I’ve been dreaming of all the dirty things I would do to you, how I’d make you beg, how I’d make you scream out as I tormented this pretty little body of yours.” His fingers burned on my skin. “Don’t tell me you haven’t dreamt of the same thing.”

I clenched my jaw, my eyes closing so softly, and took a shaky breath.

His fingers trailed up the side of my body until they reached my lips. He brushed his thumb against my bottom lip, making it tingle. “... so soft, tender...”

Those words... those were the same ones he had said in my dream.

He grasped my face gently and gazed down at me. Every sinful thing that I wanted him to do to me flashed into my mind. His lips on mine, his long fingers tormenting my body, everything.

Mom’s pendant shifted against my chest.

He chuckled. “Even with a boyfriend, you’re so responsive to my touch.”

Trevon. My eyes widened. I pulled myself out of the damn trance he seemed to put me in every single time I was close to him and glared up at him. “I am not.”

“Whatever you say.”

I pressed my lips together. “I’m not!”

He dropped his hands and turned away from me with that damn smirk on his stupid face. I crossed my arms over my chest. I couldn’t believe him. No—scratch that—I couldn’t believe myself.

All those days of Sunday school, all those late Saturday nights at church with Mom listening to a priest preach about a devil that I didn't think existed, thinking about how weak those people who fell into temptation were.

The Devil wasn't real, but temptation sure was.

Eros gazed back at me and pushed his hand into his pocket. "Oh, and Dani... I found these this morning." He pulled something out of his pocket. "They looked like yours. Thought I'd return them to you."

He tossed me the panties I had worn last night and walked away.

CHAPTER 5

I gazed down at the underwear, then at Eros walking toward the table, then back. My fingers curled around the soft material. Where did he get these? When did he get these? *How* did he get these?

After stuffing the underwear into my pocket, I marched after him. Who did he think he was? Offering us to go to dinner with him, flirting with me, stealing my panties while I was sleeping?

“Don’t you just walk away from me! We need to talk—”

Eros slid into the booth and picked up his fork to eat. He gazed up at me with the most innocent eyes I had ever seen, a forkful of chicken breast and apple relish in his hand. “What do you want to talk about?” Innocent eyes, but a devilish smirk. That goddamn perfect, sexy, annoying smirk.

He trapped me. He knew I wouldn’t be able to confront him here. He knew how much I’d stumble over my words, trying to find an excuse as to why I needed to talk to him in front of Trevon. And I hated it.

I sat next to my loving boyfriend, fingers grazing against his. “Nothing,” I said. I dipped a piece of bread into my bean stew. “It’s nothing.”

Trevon gazed at me briefly, then continued his conversation with Javier.

Eros paused for a moment, twisting his ring around his index finger with his thumb, and leaned back against the white leather. “Oh, come on, *Dani*.”

Ignore him.

“Don’t be shy.”

He’s just trying to anger you.

“I bet you’re not this shy *elsewhere*.”

I snapped my eyes to his.

“You’re probably loud, aren’t you?”

I kicked my foot into his shin under the table. Did Trevon not hear this man?

When I looked over, Trevon was in a deep conversation with Javier and Zane about the best places to go in the city on the weekends. He didn’t even glance in our direction. Big smile, wide eyes. I sighed and gazed back at the man of

mystery in front of me.

Once I got home, oh boy, I was going to march straight to his apartment and demand that he tell me exactly how he got my panties. I was having no more of this. He couldn't go around flirting with me and stealing my underwear for no good reason at all.

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After enduring another forty minutes of dinner, watching Eros play with his ring and hoping that he wouldn't talk to me ever again, I had decided that going to his apartment was probably the worst idea I ever had. I could barely keep it together when we were out in public. God only knew what would happen if I ended up at his place.

Trevon slapped a hand on my thigh and smiled at me. "You ready?"

I grabbed his hand, yanking him out of the booth. Oh, I was more than ready to get out of here. He pulled the phone out of his back pocket and grabbed my waist, slowing me down. "Babe, what's the rush?"

"You can check your phone when we're in the car. Hurry up," I said.

We walked out of Crimson's Nouveau, the cold breeze biting my exposed legs. The car was parked less than a block away across the street. There wasn't even any traffic. I was so close to freedom. So damn close.

Trevon stopped. "Shit," he said. The light from his phone illuminated his dark skin. "Something happened at work. I need to go. I'll give you a ride back home, but we'll have to make it quick."

"I can take her back," Eros said from beside him. Appearing from absolutely nowhere.

"No, that's not happen—"

Trevon nodded. "That would be great, man. Thanks."

My eyes widened. I snatched his arm, pulling him to the side. A bus rumbled down the street toward us. "Trevon, I'm not going with him!" I whispered.

"Come on, Dani. I really have to go."

"No! I—"

His phone started to buzz again. He tapped the screen and lifted it to his ear. After pecking me on the lips, he told me he'd make it up to me.

I crossed my arms over my chest, watching him jog across the street to his car, nearly getting hit by the now-angry bus driver.

Eros walked up beside me, arm grazing against mine. "Looks like it's just me and you."

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“So, what does Trevon do for work?” Eros asked, one hand on the steering wheel, the other dangerously close to my thigh. His car was strikingly clean, the sleek bronze and black leather seats had no scuffs, the silver accents were glimmering in the moonlight, and the small screen on the dashboard had no fingerprints on it.

I gazed at the city lights through the windshield, jaw clenched. I couldn’t believe I was here. “He owns a bar on Sixth.”

He tapped his ring against the wheel, turning onto a four-lane freeway. “You must get lonely.”

“Excuse me?”

“You spend your nights alone when he’s in the bar.” Eros slowed to a stop at a red light. The car screen lit up with *Incoming Call: Luci*, and Eros hit the decline button.

I narrowed my eyes at the screen, then at him. “And that makes you think I’m lonely?”

The corner of his lip curled up. “No. I think that you’re lonely because of the way you act.”

“And how do I act?” I asked, voice rising with each word. Why does he have to get under my skin every time I talk to him? Why was I even here? I should be in Trevon’s car with him, not with Mr. I’m-So-Hot-And-I-Know-It.

“Needy... Wanting...” That infamous smirk stretched across his face. “Horny.”

My eyes widened. “What!” I dug my nails into the leather seat. “You’re the one who’s been acting like that. You’re the one who stole my underwear! Who does that?”

He pressed down on the gas, and we drove forward slowly. Calm. He was so calm. “I didn’t steal them. I found them and thought I’d return them to you.”

I crossed my arms over my chest, glaring out at the trees that lined the street. Fiery red and orange leaves hung off of them. “Pfft, yeah okay. You just magically found the same panties that I was wearing last night.”

“You’re hot when you’re angry.”

“Well, you’re not hot at all, so stop talking to me.” I lied, and he knew it. He was so damn hot, but if he didn’t stop talking to me, I wasn’t sure what was going to happen. I just wanted to be home and be alone—where I’d be able to stay in control of this unexplainable urge that I had to rip Eros’s clothes off and let him do what he wanted to me.

“Why are you lying, Dani?”

“Why are you so full of yourself, Eros?” I clenched my jaw. “You act like you’re this oh-so-powerful sex-god, but I bet you’re not even good in bed. You probably suc—”

Eros hit the brakes, and I flew forward in the car, my seatbelt digging into my collarbone. He tangled a hand into my hair, grabbed a fistful of it, and forced me to look at him. I could see my wide-eyed reflection in the black pits of his eyes.

“You have no idea what I’m capable of,” he said. Despite the harsh grip he had on my hair, he gently grazed his thumb against my cheek. “I can leave you trembling under my fingers, Dani.” He roughly grasped my jaw. “... under my lips...” His hand traveled down the column of my neck, sending a wave of heat through me. “When I’m finished with you, you’ll be begging for more.” His fingers grazed against the hem of my dress, dipping along my cleavage. “Craving more,” he whispered.

I pushed my knees together, my core throbbing. Oh, God. Oh, God. This wasn’t good.

“Until you can’t handle it any longer.” His fingertips grazed against my nipples through my dress. I shut my eyes.

Stop him, Dani.

My fingers dug into the leather, my head resting back on the seat.

I needed to stop him.

He drew his fingers across them again, and I pulled my knees together even more.

It felt too good.

Someone hit their horn behind us, the sound vibrating through the car. Bright headlights flashed in the rearview mirror. Eros released me and waved his hand out the window to apologize to the car. He pressed onto the gas.

I stared down at my knees—wide eyed as realization shot through me. Please let that be a dream. Please let that be a dream. I couldn’t begin to comprehend every thought running through my mind. Why did I let Eros touch me? It felt so good. But it shouldn’t. I hadn’t felt that good—ever.

Not even with Trevon.