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# **CONFESSIONS OF A BAD BOY COP**

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**CATHRYN FOX**





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## COPYRIGHT

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**(Formerly published by Cathryn Fox writing as Sloan Kincaid)**

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**S**ix years ago:

Dad's pool party is in full swing by the time I step into the backyard, in search of free alcohol for myself—and my friends, who are eagerly waiting inside. Hey, why shouldn't I sneak a few bottles, right? It's summer vacation. I just worked an insane double shift at the mall food court, and I wouldn't mind a cold drink to wind down after a long-ass day with no breaks because my co-worker called in sick. Sick, my ass. I heard she hooked up with a couple guys and went to the beach.

Scorching sunshine beats down on me as I glance around the deck, which is dotted with loud, obnoxious people. I take in the hedonistic atmosphere and skimpy bathing suits as stiff drinks are downed in record time. I shake my head in disgust. Sometimes I feel like I'm the only adult in the house. Yes, I know Mom and Dad had me when they were too young, lost

great scholarships because of it—something my mother always likes to point out—but still, they’re supposed to be the grown ups in this relationship, yet again and again, they prove they’re not.

I search out my mom, and my heart squeezes when I find her sitting on the edge of the pool. Cheeks pink from the sun, not to mention too much alcohol, she looks lost in thought as she runs a hand through her wet hair, and kicks her legs in the water. I grab the lotion and head straight for her.

I go down on my knees. “Mom,” I say, and touch her shoulder gently, not wanting to alarm her. “You might want to get out of the sun.”

She waves her hand at me like I’m nothing but a nuisance fly. “What are you doing here?”

My heart sinks into my stomach at her dismissive, angry tone. “I just got home from work.” I hand her the lotion and she glares at it like I’ve just given her a store-bought enema kit.

“If you want to make yourself useful, grab me another drink.” She shakes her glass at me, and the melting ice clicks on the bottom. As the sound grates on my last nerve, I want to tell her she’s had enough, but it will only lead to a fight. I take the glass and shut my mouth, making a mental note to leave Tylenol and water by her bed the way I always do when she’s on a bender, which is pretty much every weekend, and then some.

As I make my way to the outdoor bar, I let my gaze rake over the crowd a second time. Most of the male cops Dad work with are either falling over themselves drunk, or hitting on someone else’s wife.

Pigs.

Every last one of them.

Well except for Jack Michaels, Dad’s partner and best

friend. I've known Jack forever and have yet to see him get out of control like the others. In fact, he's always rigid, reserved, scanning the room for trouble. A predator in search of his prey. God, I want to be the deer in his headlights. A fine shiver moves through my body, hitting every hot button along the way to the needy spot between my legs. Yeah, that's right. I have it bad for my Dad's best friend.

I pour my mom's drink, making it extra watery, and set it on the bar top. I bend, and Jack's gaze lands on me the second I snatch a couple of coolers from the bucket, and casually slide them into my backpack. I give him a small grin, and put the bag over my shoulder—a dare of sorts. He pushes off the table he'd been leaning against and folds big arms over a broad chest—a *bare* broad chest that my fingers itch to explore—his piercing gaze stealing the breath from my lungs.

Jeez, he is so freaking good looking, so rough around the edges, it makes me all jittery inside. He's taller than every other guy at the precinct, and has an athletic, rock-hard body that any criminal would be a fool to challenge. But I want to challenge him. Oh yeah, just once I want to push him until he loses that hard-earned control and acts on the heat between us. The sexual tension is off the charts, so powerful and volatile I can't believe the other *adults* can't feel it. Then again, maybe they can. Maybe they all know how we feel about each other, but don't much care because Jack is a good man, and a good cop, who wouldn't do anything illegal.

But I won't always be seventeen.

My body warms as his gaze rakes over me, his brilliant blue eyes holding me in place, keeping me captive. I stare back, and hold my own against him like I always do as he closes the distance between us. He stands over me, crowds me, and I toy with the button on my blouse, another little thing I do to tease him. I know it works because his gaze drops to my fingers, the muscles along his jaw rippling as he

clenches his teeth hard. He dips his head, his mouth so close to mine, it's all I can do not to go up on my toes and press my lips to his. Instead, I swipe my tongue over my bottom lip, leaving a streak of moisture that invites him in for a taste.

"Do you know what you're doing?" he asks.

Poking the bear?

Then again, maybe he's talking about the alcohol, and not my sexual teasing. But I can't help myself around him. From the second I hit puberty a few years ago, I've wanted Jack in my arms and in my bed. I can't tell you how many nights I've laid between the sheets, running my hands over my body, and pretending they were his. There's sixteen years difference between us, but I'm a minor until next month, so those years might as well be a chasm. As soon as I turn eighteen and move into my dorm room at University of Texas at San Antonio—a college close to home so I can keep an eye on my mom—I don't think the gap will come into play at all. Then again, this is Dad's best friend, and if I want him in my bed, I'm going to have to do more than play with the button on my shirt.

"It's just a couple of coolers," I say to him. "My friends and I are going to sip them and watch a movie inside."

His nostrils flare and his gaze drops to my mouth again, fixates on it. "You're too young to drink."

"Are you going to tell on me?" I ask, and coil my hair around my finger, playing the innocent. The truth is I *am* innocent. Sure, I've made out with guys, but I'm saving myself for Jack. Not that it's hard to say no to the fumbling idiots my age. But for my first time, I want a real man to take me. A man who knows his way around a woman's body, not some stupid jock who hits the finish line a second after the gun goes off.

I don't know this firsthand, of course, but my best friend Luanne isn't saving herself for anyone. She sleeps with a



different guy every weekend and is well aware of my obsession with Jack. While she thinks I should get a few fucks under my belt so I'll know how to please a guy like him once I finally get him into my bed, I disagree. I want him to be my first, and I have a feeling that once I give him my virginity, it will bring us closer, and keep us together.

Patience...that's all I need.

"I'm no snitch," he says.

"I never thought you were, but if you're so worried about me having a few drinks, maybe you'd like to discipline me yourself."

"Layla..." he murmurs, his jaw doing that clenching and unclenching thing again.

"I suppose you could always put me over your knee and give me a good hard spanking for my disobedience."

"Fuck," he murmurs, and ignoring his *no touch rule*, his hand moves, his knuckles brushing against mine and sending heat straight to my sex. It moistens and clenches, aching for his attention, something hard to grip on to. His big, broad frame is blocking mine and no one can see us. I step closer, push my body against his and feel his huge cock swelling in his swim trunks.

It thrills me and urges me on. I move against him and he puts his hands on my shoulders to stop me. "We can't," he says through gritted teeth. "We've been over this."

"I know," I say. "But when we can, it's going to be amazing."

"Layla," he grumbles and steps back from me. The bottles in my backpack clink and he looks over his shoulder, then back at me. "No driving?"

"Of course not."

"You know alcohol impairs—"

"Jack," I begin and put my hand on his chest. He sucks in a sharp breath, and every muscle in his body goes rigid as I

splay my fingers. I resist the urge to glance down, to see that other muscle that always grows hard from my touch.

“No touching,” he says, but his voice belies his actions as he takes a small step toward me, giving me better access to his body.

I keep my palm on his body and say, “Don’t you trust me?”

“I don’t trust the guys you’re hanging with, Layla,” he says and looks over my head.

“Liam and Caleb?” I shrug and wave a dismissive hand. “Those guys are innocent.”

Jack dips his head again, and scoffs. “Are you forgetting I was once a seventeen year old boy? I don’t want you to find yourself in a situation that you can’t get out of.”

“That’s not going to happen as long as I have you watching over me.” I smile sweetly and say, “Now is it, Jack?”

“What about when I’m not watching?” he asks.

I swipe my tongue over my bottom lip again and remove my hand from his chest. I instantly miss his warmth, but console myself with the fact that someday we’ll be together and can touch each other at whim.

“But you’re always watching, Jack.” I hand him mom’s drink to deliver, and spin around. I give an extra shake to my backside as I saunter into the house. I shut the patio door behind me, but I feel his eyes on me, burning through my clothes and caressing my naked body.

“Did you get it?” Caleb asks and practically rips my backpack from my shoulder.

“I grabbed a few coolers.”

Liam unravels himself from Luanne and rushes toward us to help Caleb tear through the backpack. “Come on, man. What about the harder stuff?” he asks.

“I couldn’t.” I shrug innocently. “One of my Dad’s friends caught me. I’m lucky I got away with the few bottles I was able to snag. For a minute there I thought he was going to

put me over his knee and spank me.” I slide my gaze to Luanne, and she grins, knowing exactly who I’m talking about, and just how much I’d love to be put over his knee and disciplined.

“Fucking girly drinks,” Caleb says as he pulls the vodka coolers out and tosses one to Liam.

“I’ll try to get more later,” I say. “Soon enough they’ll all be drunk and won’t even know we’re in the house.”

“That’s what I’m counting on,” Liam says as he makes a crude ‘fucking’ gesture, thrusting his hips back and forth as he gazes at Luanne. Charming.

“I always know you’re in the room,” Caleb says, his voice lower, full of heat as he grabs me. He pulls me to him and his cock presses against my stomach. Heat sizzles through me, but it’s not from Caleb. Nope, not from Caleb at all. I angle my head, catch Jack watching us. I should push Caleb away. I want Jack to know I’m his and his alone, but it’s so hard waiting. Instead of shoving the slimeball asshole off me, I put my hands on his chest and laugh. I can feel Jack’s rage through the glass patio doors. I shouldn’t poke him so hard, but when it comes time for him to take me, I don’t want him holding back an inch. I want him to let his guard down, to use and abuse my body the way he needs. The way we both need.

“Caleb, you’re such a pig,” I say, then break from the circle of his arms. “Find us something to watch. I need to shower. Some of us do work during the day, you know.”

“Need any help up there?” Caleb asks, ignoring my jibe about him lounging all summer while the rest of us work to pay for college. He comes from money, I don’t. Even if I did, I doubt my parents would help me. They didn’t want me in the first place. Guilt for being alive and interfering with their hopes and dreams tangles in my gut. Both my mom and dad planned to become lawyers, but instead my mom now works retail and my dad became a cop. They make a descent living,

but constantly remind me they could have done better, had they not made a ‘mistake’ with me.

Not wanting to think about the disappointment my life has brought them, I say, “I think I know how to get all those hard to reach places myself. I’ve been touching them myself for quite some time.”

“If you tease me like that, you’re going to get what you deserve.” There is a warning edge to his voice, and it actually makes me a bit nervous as I bolt up the stairs. I really don’t know Caleb that well. I only started hanging out with him a few weeks ago when Luanne hooked up with his best friend, Liam.

I strip off the god-awful brown uniform I have to wear in the food court, drop my phone onto the counter and turn the water on hot. I open the sliding glass door and stand under the spray. As it pours over my naked body, I exhale a soft breath and grab my favorite vanilla-scented soap to lather up. My hands skim my body and the whole time I picture Jack in the shower with me, his mouth all over me, between my needy legs, licking and sucking and taking what’s his. I continue to pleasure myself, my mind on an erotic journey as bubbles form in my hands. A soft moan escapes my throat, my clit so swollen I’m only seconds away from an orgasm.

“Is that moan for me?” I hear from the other side of the glass shower door, and gasp when I turn to see Caleb standing in the bathroom.

“Get out of here,” I say, and cover my body with my hands.

“You know you don’t want that. Let me come in there with you, show you how good I can make you feel.”

“I’ll scream.”

He laughs. “Everyone is shit-faced drunk.” He pops the button on his pants, and panic explodes inside me. “Go ahead and scream. No one’s going to hear you.”

“I’ll hear her.”

At the sound of Jack’s voice, my heart jumps into my throat. Through the steam, I see Jack’s big outline as he steps into the room and stands over Caleb. God, he’s so huge and intimidating, if I didn’t know him, I’d be shaking in my boots.

“Hey come on. She invited me.”

Jack looks at me, and even through the mist, his eyes are piercing and deadly as they meet mine. “Is that true?”

“No,” I say without hesitation, my pulse pounding so hard in my neck the room grows fuzzy.

Guard up, jaw tight, Jack turns his focus back to Caleb. Caleb snorts and says, “I’m a minor. Lay one hand on me and you’ll be in a shitload of trouble, pal.”

I’ve never seen Jack wound so tight. His gaze is focused, targeted, with Caleb smack-dab in the crosshairs. “Lay one hand on her and same goes for you, pal.”

Caleb stands there for a moment, sizing up his opponent like he’s actually thinking about taking him on. The guy clearly isn’t too bright. Then, as if deciding it’s a suicide mission, he backs down, and lowers his gaze. “Fine. I’m fucking leaving. No piece of ass is worth the trouble.”

Jack’s eyes narrow in anger, and his fingers curl into fists like something has been unleashed inside him. I don’t think he’s going to attack Caleb—as much as he looks like he wants to. The fight wouldn’t be fair, and if there is one thing I know about Jack, he’s a just and ethical man—a real rule follower. He’s a man of his word, and when he makes a promise, he sticks to it.

“Don’t go near her again. Ever,” he seethes. “I’ll be watching and if you do, I won’t let you walk away in one piece next time.”

Jack turns to the side to let Caleb pass. Caleb looks like he’s about to pee his pants, but once he clears Jack, he seems

to gather an ounce of bravado, and shoots back with, “What is she to you anyway?”

I slide the humid glass panel open, and steam billows into the room. Jack has his back to me—clearly glaring at Caleb—but I’m sure I heard him say, “Everything,” under his breath as Caleb rushes down the stairs.

“Thanks, Jack,” I say and fight off a tremble. I hate to think what could have happened if he hadn’t shown up. “I guess you were right about him.”

His body is rigid, his back hard, and I wish I could wrap my arms around him, hold him tight and help loosen him up a bit. “I’m right about a lot of things,” he murmurs.

“I know,” I say in total agreement. I trust Jack, trust and take everything he says to heart.

“I don’t think he’ll be bothering you again.”

I grab a towel off the hook and wrap myself in it. “You can turn around. I’m covered.”

He turns, and takes in the big fluffy towel as I knot it over my breasts. I draw in a slow breath, everything about this man seducing my senses.

“Where’s your phone?” He scrubs his face like he’s in total agony. I gesture to the bathroom counter. He picks it up and swipes a big finger over the screen. God, how I want those fingers on my body, deep between my legs. My clit throbs and I squeeze my thighs together, desperate for an orgasm.

“I’m punching my number in.” Rich, intense eyes lock on mine as he breathes in, the scent of my vanilla soap strong in the room. “If you ever find yourself in trouble and need anything, don’t hesitate to call. If you’re in a situation where you can’t call, text with the word ‘vanilla.’ It will be inconspicuous to others, but I’ll know you need me.”

My heart thumps at how sweet he is. “You’re giving me a safe word?”

He angles his head, gives me a dark, warning look that I

totally recognize. He hates the thought of me with anyone else, as much as I hate the thought of him with some other woman.

“What do you know about safe words, Layla?”

I grin. “Oh, not much. Just what I’ve read. But when I’m with you, you can bet you’ll never hear the word *vanilla* come out of my mouth,” I say. His turbulent gaze alerts me to the fact that he gets the meaning behind my words—when it comes to him, vanilla is the last thing I want. I look him over; the need to hand myself to him, let him take charge of my body is so intense it’s almost painful. I put my palm on his bare chest, feel the strength of his heartbeat beneath my fingers.

“You don’t need to say it, just text it when you need something,” he says.

“There *is* something I need, Jack.”

“What...what do you need?” he asks, his eyes half closed, like he’s in total agony. God, he’s so intense, so unlike the boring guys from my school.

“I need you.” His lids flash open and I give him a small smile as I shake my wet hair out. It falls over my back, and my breath comes out in a low hush when I say, “But you already know that.”

Desire clouds his eyes. “You can’t have me.”

“Not yet, but soon,” I say, playing by society’s rules for a little bit longer. “While I’m waiting, I just need something to help me get through the next few weeks.” I drop my towel and expose my naked, quivering body.

His gaze rakes over me. Hungry. Ravenous. Dangerous. “You’re so fucking beautiful,” he murmurs.

“And I’m all yours.”

His eyes glaze, like he’s forgotten all rational thought, but then a laugh sounds outside my window. A splash follows the sound as some other drunken cop lands in the pool.

“Layla, fuck...” The sound pulls him back and he inches away.

I step up to him again, push against his thigh and he holds his hands up, palms out. “I can’t touch you. I won’t.”

He’s such a good man and that’s one of the reasons I love him. “Then don’t,” I say, never wanting to get him into any kind of trouble. “Don’t touch me, Jack. Just stand here, hands behind your back.”

I shove his hands around his body, and as I do, I straddle his leg, and push down until my hot sex is wide open on his bare thigh.

He sucks in a quick breath. “Holy fuck.”

I move against him, rub my clit, and let loose a low, needy moan. I know he’s currently off limits—sex with him taboo—but everything about this feels so good, so right. As heat zings through my body, I cup my breasts, needing something to do with my hands before I run them all over his hard muscles.

“You’re so wet,” he murmurs going as still as a stealth soldier as I continue to rock against him. I move restlessly and my clit swells, still so achy and needy from not being able to finish myself off in the shower.

His gaze slides over me, then he pinches his eyes tight shut. “This is so wrong.”

“You’re not doing anything wrong, Jack. And for me, it feels so right.” I press down harder, and heat sparks through me as I ride his leg, taking what I need from him, for the time being.

“I’m going to come all over your legs,” I say.

“You’re going to be the death of me,” he growls and links his hands behind his neck.

I chuckle. “Just think, in a couple of weeks, you’re going to be able to do anything you want to me. Anything at all. I won’t say no to you, Jack. I won’t say no to anything.”



“Jesus, fuck,” he growls, as I pick up speed.

“Then after college, we can move away, finally get out of Texas like we both want. You have that job in New York you’re always talking about, and once I have my law degree, there will be plenty of firms where I can work.”

As I think about the life we can have together, I rub myself hard, creating friction as I massage my breasts. I throw my head back and punch my nipples until they’re swollen and begging for this man’s hot mouth.

“In a few weeks, when I’m finally allowed, I’m going to take your cock into my mouth. I want to swallow every inch of you. You’ll let me do that won’t you, Jack? You’ll let me take your cock so deep into my throat that I won’t be able to breathe.”

He grunts in response, the sound so loaded with promise it makes me a little hotter and a whole lot wetter. My lids flutter, and I angle my head to see the agony he’s in as his cock throbs, but I won’t touch him. I’m not allowed.

“I’m going to want you to own me, everywhere. Nothing is off limits. You can own my mouth, my pussy, and my ass.”

“I’m going to fucking own you, Layla.”

A hard quiver moves through me at the deepness of his voice. I hate that I can’t help him take the edge off. But I’m not going to break his no touching rule. Than again, I guess I sort of am by rubbing my pussy on his leg. At least our hands aren’t involved, which is his hard rule. I gyrate, and slide over his muscular thigh, taking what I need. Each movement builds heat and friction, and in no time at all an explosion tears through me. My body soars, each clench taking me higher and higher until I’m free-falling without a net.

“Jesus Christ,” he groans as I soak his leg, my juices dripping down his thigh.

God, if this is what can happen when he doesn’t even touch me, I can’t imagine what will happen to me when he

finally does. I take deep gulping breaths, and Jack stays still, his eyes holding my gaze as my heartbeat regulates and I come back down to earth.

“I have to go,” he murmurs, once my body has settled again.

“I know.” He inches back, and a burst of cool air brushes over my body with his absence. My pussy aches for him as he grabs my towel off the floor and wraps me in it. His hands are big and rough, but so gentle on my body. “I’ll see you soon, Jack,” I say, my voice full of promise.

“Don’t forget your safe word, Layla,” he responds.

“Will you come running to me like a knight in shining armor?” I ask.

He grins, and turns his back on me. I watch him go, and my body quivers as I mentally count down the days until the time is right, and he can finally be mine.

**P**resent Day.

It's been close to six long years since I'd last spoken to Layla.

After that crazy night in her bathroom, I left the party, and drove straight home so I could whack off in the shower. A few nights later her father died in my arms, and life as I knew it had changed in a heartbeat—literally.

Layla once asked me if I'd run to her and be her knight in shining armor. A strange strangled noise catches in my throat. I'm no one's hero. Fuck, I couldn't even save my partner and best friend.

I take in a sharp breath, suck air into the pit of my stomach where the pain of loss sits like a lodged bullet. I don't want to think about that night we lost Phil. I've tried forever to block it from my mind, but it's times like these, when I'm sitting all alone in my kitchen and nursing a bourbon, that my mind likes to take a journey back in time.

A fucking robbery gone wrong.

I never knew how I would tell Phil about Layla, and sometimes I think this is karma kicking my ass. I was doing some-

thing I shouldn't have been doing, and paid a steep price. Phil was my partner and best friend and this is his daughter we're talking about. While I thought Phil was a shitty father, it still didn't change the fact that he was Layla's father. But after his death, everything had changed. As I held him, applied pressure to his chest wound, he reached out and gripped my arm. With blood oozing from his mouth, he said only four little words that day, four little words that changed everything for me.

*Take care of Layla.*

Our idea on how she needed to be cared for differed drastically—of that I have no doubt. I wanted Layla in my arms and in my bed. No way did I ever want to become a father figure to her. But my best friend's dying words asked me to do just that. How the fuck could I say no? He was dying, for Christ's sake.

I pick my drink up and wander through my sparse house. I've thought about leaving over the years, taking that job in New York, but I don't want to be too far from the woman I love. I've watched her grow, change, all without her ever knowing I was in the shadows. I watched her finish college, blossom into a beautiful woman, full of confidence and poise. She's two years into her law degree now, working for Taylor and Grant in the city. I'm proud of the woman she's become, proud that despite not really being wanted, she overcame obstacles and made something of herself.

Tired of my trip down memory lane, I grab my keys and head to the bar, one frequented by my colleagues. I push open the heavy door, scan the room and make my way to the pool tables. From my peripheral vision I catch a glimpse of Karen—Layla's mother.

She's had one too many drinks again, and a knot of responsibility coils through me. Sure Phil asked me to take care of Layla, and if he hadn't died seconds after those words

left his mouth, I'm sure he would have asked me to take care of Karen, too. It kind of goes without saying. I cut across the room, and grab a pool stick. I slam the handle on the floor, and chalk the end as I check out the game in progress.

The second Karen sees me, she jumps from her chair, but wobbles a bit when she reaches me. "Whoa," I say and pull her into my arms. She goes soft, pliable, and presses her breasts into my chest. "You okay?" I ask.

"I am now," she says and runs her hand through my hair. The guys all look at me. I'm sure many of them think I'm fucking Karen, but I'm not. Jesus, I'm pretty sure I'm the only single guy in the bar who hasn't had her. Not that being single has anything to do with it. I know a few of the married men who've gone home with her, too. The sour smell of lemon gin and sadness wafts over my face as she laughs again. I wince. Karen had always loved to drink, but since Phil's death, things have gotten a little out of control.

"Why don't we get out of here?" I say.

"Aren't you at least going to buy me a drink first," she says and then starts laughing.

"I think you've had enough," I respond, unable to stop myself, even though I know it will put her on the defense.

She pushes off me, her mood darkening. "So now you're my father?" she asks.

"Come on, Karen," I say, switching tactics. "Let me take you home."

She blinks, her head bobbing a little as she works to absorb my words. For the last few years she's been trying to get me in her bed. Maybe if she thinks I'm finally caving, she'll go with me without causing a scene.

"We'll have drinks at your place," I say to seal the deal.

She walks away on too-high heels, and wobbles again as she grabs her purse. I glare at every guy in the room, daring them to say a fucking word. They all avert their gazes. Good-

fucking-thing. Truthfully, if they knew me, they'd know I was nothing like them, and was not about to fuck my dead best friend's wife. But none of these guys know me, and other than my partner, Garrett, who is watching me with astute eyes, I don't really give a shit what they think.

Garrett unfolds his arms, and crosses the room. He's a big guy, as big as me, and everyone steps out of his way.

"Need anything?" he asks.

"No, I got this."

He nods and doesn't push. We've grown close over the years, and he knows where I stand when it comes to Karen. Other than me, Garrett might be the only guy in the room who hasn't fucked her.

Karen clings to me like dryer lint as I lead her outside. The warm summer air washes over us, and I guide her to my truck, thankful I didn't bring my motorcycle. I help her in, buckle her up, and circle the front. I feel her eyes on me, and she's trying to play sexy when I slip into the driver's seat.

"I don't see much of you anymore, Jack," she slurs. "You used to come around all the time after Phil died."

"Been busy," I say. It's not a lie. Work has been busy, not to mention stalking Layla. I can't help it if I like to keep an eye on her. I care about her a great deal, plus I made a vow to her father to watch over her. My gut tightens. I hate the way we left things. I said good-bye to her after her father's funeral. Little did she know at the time it meant forever. I can imagine how much she hates me now. But maybe it's better that way. If she hates me, she'll be able to move on.

Karen's arm snakes out and her palm squeezes the gearshift. Still reeking of gin and sadness, she runs her fingers along the length of it, mimicking a hand job. My heart sinks, and I suck in a breath. It kills me to see her like this, but I'm glad I'm the one taking her home. On nights like this, if she's not leaving with one of the guys, she's calling Layla to come

care for her. I hate the thoughts of Layla seeing her mother like this, always feeling responsible for her health and safety, always feeling guilty over being born. Sadly, the roles in that family have always been reversed, and it pisses me the hell off.

I pull up to her house, and help her out. She's giggling, and touching me all over as I use the key she'd given me a long time ago to let us both in.

I guide her to the sofa, and she says, "About that drink."

"Coming right up," I say. I drop my keys onto her coffee table, wanting her to think I'm staying for a while as I walk to the bar, and pour a stiff one. With any luck this will knock her out and put her to sleep. Come morning, she won't know whether I've slept with her or not. Let her think I have, then maybe that will scratch the itch and she'll let it go. I pour myself a drink, but make it weak.

She smiles as I hand the glass to her, and I hold mine out for a cheer. "Bottoms up," I say, and hope she puts it back in one gulp the way I'm doing. She does, and then I excuse myself. I make my way to the bathroom and hope like hell she's passed out by the time I come back.

I take my time, splash some water on my face and give it an extra minute before quietly cracking the door. I head back to the living room, but Karen is not where to be found. Walking quietly, I pad to the bedroom and find her on the bed, half dressed. I shake my head at the sad sight. She really needs some help. I've tried over the years and I know Layla has too, but the final decision to get better has to come from Karen.

I step up to the bed, pull off her shoes, and pants, leaving her in her unbuttoned shirt and panties. I tuck her in, and I'm about to leave when she moans something in her sleep, then sits up. I go still as she stares at me, her look completely blank, and when her lids fall shut again, and she collapses

back onto her pillow, I tiptoe from her room, shut the door behind me and make my way down the hall.

Layla's college graduation picture is hung crooked on the wall and I touch it, shifting it slightly to straighten it. As I look at the beautiful college graduate, it brings back heated memories of that night she rubbed herself over my leg until she climaxed. Jesus, that image is permanently etched in my mind—an image I call on whenever I take my cock into my hands.

I grab my truck keys from the coffee table, and make my way to the front door. As I approach, I pull my phone from my back pocket and turn it over in my hand. I stare at it, like I've done a million times over the last six year. Bone deep loneliness grips me hard. I want to call her, but can't. How can I ever be in her presence, and pretend to be her guardian when all I want is to bury myself in the heat between her legs?

My phone pings and I jump, hitting the wall behind me with a thud. Fuck, the unexpected sound scared the shit out of me. I slide my finger across the screen, and when I see the number flash on the glass panel, I go still, too shocked to even breathe.