

# Prologue

Pretty little whimpers. That's what really gets the blood flowing. Those desperate unconscious sounds that they make when they've given up hope and are overcome with self-pity.

This angelic pretty thing makes noises that get me rock hard, it's amazing I haven't had her yet. I look down at her cowering in the cheap dog crate with a smirk. She's a tiny creature, barely any meat on her and, although the cute yellow sundress masks most of it, I just know that she's all planes of unblemished cream under there.

But God, those noises.

I give the cage a boot to see if I can make her look up at me. If I could just see those round blue eyes reddened and glistening with tears...

"Oi."

Another kick makes the whole cage quake, the sounds reverberating for seconds. She jumps at the violence of it but still she doesn't look up.

The insolent little cunt.

Doesn't she know she's mine now?

I slam my hand down on the top of the cage. "Hey bitch!", I shout, curling my fingers between the bars, gripping them like it's her flesh. "Look at me!"

She looks up, her pretty pale face contorted in terror as her blue eyes meet mine.

"That's fucking better. I'm going to have to teach you a lesson in-" I lean close. Something's wrong but... I don't know what it is. Her face is terrified. Her body is terrified. She's obviously in my clutches and yet-

Her eyes are blue. Not glistening. No tears. Not even a little bit red from tears. Her face completely devoid of puff.

I lean close. Maybe it's the light.

"What the fuck?" I murmur, staring deep into those eyes. Her eyes aren't terrified. Her eyes are.... Triumphant?

She moves and strikes like a cobra.

I'm screaming before I realise what's happened.

It's only when I fall forwards on my knees, collapsing onto the cage that I know what's happened.

My hand is pinned to the bars, a switch blade all the way through the palm, the hilt of it making it impossible to jerk it back.

A cold searing pain shoots up my arm as I stare making me hollar in sheer agony.

She fucking stabbed me!

"Shhh, Marcus," she says gently, soothingly. She sits up on her haunches, her face no longer twisted but riveted. Those eyes, cold unblinking pools of blue fixated right on me, even as the blood from my hand drips onto her cheekbone, leaving trails like the tears I should have had down her face.

"Let Daisy take the pain away," she fucking coos and she reaches into the heel of her chunky boots, pulling a handful of something out of the hidden compartment.

"You sneaky fucking-" I growl, but only get so far when a small pain sends a shiver of dread through me. I look down to where my thighs are pressed against the bars.

There's a needle sticking straight into the muscle.

Just like I did to her.

My eyes meet hers and she smiles. Those adorable little dimples appearing as she says:

"Sweet dreams, Marcus."

# Chapter 1- Cole

The precinct men's room tap won't stop dripping again. I thought I'd fixed that, I'll need to bring my wrench again tomorrow.

Sighing, I look up into the mirror as the faint little '*drip, drip, drip*' boring a hole into my already tense brain. The intrusive thoughts of how old I look all of a sudden. I've started to get more salt in my pepper hair recently, some creases between my eyebrows don't seem to want to budge when I relax my face.

*"People start to look like their personality,"* as my mother always used to say.

Great.

I don't think I frown *that* much.

The hum of chatter outside the letterbox window gets louder- although still not loud enough to make me forget about the tap- and I know it's nearly time: The press release of my career.

As the detective who made the connection between all of the victims, I'd requested to lead the case as they were put together and he'd said it was high time.

But when I asked to take the lead, the idea of speaking to a crowd of journalists hadn't sunk in.

I have faced rapists, mafiosos, murderers and those *pale* in comparison to journalists. People have a right to know what's happening in their city, I get that... but... ongoing investigations? Really? Because all that means is that there will be a million and one armchair detectives who think they know everything and waste police time trying to fix it.

A knock on the door interrupts my thoughts and the captain pops his head in. "Ready Maddox?" he asks in his Dad-like voice, warm and friendly... how he ever got the position of being a Captain I'll never know. He's too... *nice*.

I nod curtly, straightening my shirt and tie and follow him out of the bathroom. In silence, we round the corner to the front of the station where already, the journalists are gathered in a pack, beady black microphones staring out at me from the throng of bombarding flashing lights. I swallow, nervously looking out at the vultures ready to demand the impossible from me.

A wide palm connects with my shoulder and I take an involuntary step forwards to catch myself from buckling under the weight of the "comforting" gesture. "Just pick one person from the crowd and speak directly to them, kid." He always calls me that. It's infuriating. "It helps with the nerves."

"I'm not nervous," I mumble. But he's already chortling like Santa and opening the door for me.

"Go get 'em."

I step out into the waiting crowd before I'm ready and I feel like the flashing lights and the snaps of the cameras throws me off balance for a moment. Standing at the podium, shuffling my papers, I clear my throat uselessly.

They're staring at me. Dozens of men and women, gawping at me. They know this is big, that I'm here to give them a juicy news item which is going to take over their careers for the next few weeks and they're practically drooling already.

My eyes scan over them, and I see her, standing out of place behind the crowd. I'm not sure what it is about her that catches my attention so strongly. She's pretty, obviously. But I'm not the type of man to be fixated on a pretty face. Waist-length honeyed hair tumbles in lazy waves down her spine, a tendril slips off her shoulder to hug the curve of her breast as she tilts her head quizzically at me looking. Her crystal blue eyes catch the light from the morning sun like sugar as she smiles at me. A soft, secret smile like it's meant only for me, the edges of her lips tilting up to coax dimples from their hiding place.

A particularly aggressive flash of camera startles me from my hypnosis and I start talking, letting my eyes meet with hers. Talking only to her. Everyone else just... fades away.

"Last night, Father Marcus Tarbot, a priest at St. Mary's, was found dead in his garden. City police responded to the call."

I take a breath, looking deep into the sugar-blue eyes like they're my lifeline. The thought flickers across my mind that I'd rather not talk about such gory things in front of such a delicate looking woman. But I have a job to do. And she seems to be my anchor so I keep talking, just to her.

"The victim's body was posed in a deliberate and symbolic manner. We believe this incident may be linked to a series of homicides previously under investigation."

A rush of clicks, and flashes of light make me blink, breaking the eyecontact I've been clinging to with my stranger. The bloodhounds are braying but I can't make out what they're saying. The sugary stranger just smiles bashfully as I meet her eyes once more, as though knowing I'm thinking about her.

"-While we are not releasing full details at this time, we can confirm strong connections between this incident and the murders of Agatha Blackwood, Afia Ofori, Richard Collan, and Yuming Li. We believe these crimes may be the work of a single individual."

There's a burst of camera flashes at my words. Murmurs of '*a serial killer*', '*holy shit*' and '*this is gold*' smatter around in the air like dust particles. My anchor, however, only parts her plump lips, her eyes wide in surprise. I clear my throat, trying to release a tension in my jaw that I've only just found.

“This individual should be considered extremely dangerous. The crimes show significant variation in method, suggesting calculated misdirection. We urge the public to remain vigilant and report any information that may be relevant to the investigation.”

I take a breath and tear my eyes from the woman with skin like silk to look at my notes. With everything said, it's time to wrap up.

“We want to assure the public that this department is dedicating all available resources to identifying and apprehending the suspect. We believe it is only a matter of time before we bring this case to a close. Thank you.”

Applause starts, but I'm already heading back inside. The station door swings shut behind me, finally muting the bloodhounds. I get another thwack on the back from a giant hand as the captain chortles joyfully.

“Well done, my boy! Exactly how that's done. Did you take my advice?”

I think about the blonde behind the braying crowd. “Uh- yeah...”

“Whatever advice that was, it worked a treat,” says an approaching voice as my partner Jahlani rounded the corner. “Cause that was fucking fire!”

My partner has proved his worth more times than anyone else in the department, more arrests than anyone on record and the least amount of complaints. He's instantly likeable with his unshakable confidence and permanent, big grin. Aside from distinction in service, he's fought against judgement from the day he walked in, one of the first black men in the department and definitely the most openly effeminate black men in the history of the precinct.

I had initially been worried about being partnered with him. Old military judgements die hard but Jahlani wasn't going to let my past life get in the way of us being friends as well as partners. By the end of the stake-out he had me picking out designs to get shaved into his fade.

Right now that same fade is sporting a geometric series of lines and squares- he's never one to relax on his image.

He strides to a stop, his hands on his hips as he looks between me at the captain who skates his eyes down his extravagant attire.

“New nails, Sinclair?” he says, a note of humour in his voice.

Jahlani holds up a hand to display his long plastic nails with pride. “Like them, Cap? I got little cactuses on my middle finger, wanna see?” He holds up his middle finger triumphantly as if he's been dying to do this to someone all day. I roll my eyes holding back a smirk as the Captain gives a jolly chortle.

"Very good, Sinclair. I see you're flirting with the dress code a bit today as well." His words might be stern, but the small quirk of his lips says otherwise. A pot-bellied man nearing retirement, the Captain is the only man I've ever worked under that could get a troupe of rambunctious men and women with power complexes under control with a smile and a pointed request.

Until Jahlani, that is.

"I think the jacket really pulls together the whole look, don't you?" he asks, a smug smirk on his face as he pulls the black suit jacket over a hot pink and baby blue hawaiian shirt.

The Captain chuckles slightly and tips his head towards the office "get going, gents. You've got a serial killer to catch," dismissing us back to our desks.

As we walk away, however, the door behind us opens and I catch a swish of blonde and sky blue catches my eye as a voice like silk shoots through my body like a drug. Instantly, I'm rooted to the spot, mid turn, my legs braced for a movement I don't want to take.

It's the anchor.

"Uncle Martin!" she exclaims in an English accent. I've never had a thing for accents before... but now she speaks I can't for the life of me imagine why not. She skips to him, throwing her arms around the captain's neck like he's a cuddly teddy bear. Which is not outside the realms of even my imagination.

"There she is!" His voice is warm and affectionate as he picks her up and spins her like she's a Disney princess- which again... I can see. She's got the soft, warm, loving look that Disney Princesses have. The curves of her face are defined but graceful like she's been designed by a team searching for the woman of your dreams. And when she moves, I'm reminded of watching a bead of mercury sliding over glass, the swish of her skirts as she turns to me, those same sugary blue eyes dragging up my body to meet my gaze once more.

But... wait... Uncle? She's the Captain's niece? And, just like that, the doors slam shut on my little fantasy. That *definitely* can't happen. I barely date anyway and I will not be risking my career for a woman of any description.

She doesn't blink as her eyes sink into mine. "Hello, Detective," she says and I have never been more grateful for that title. The way her lips move around the word is like she's speaking in slow motion, her teeth momentarily grazing her bottom lip to form the 'v'.

"Ah." The Captain looks between us with a big grin like he knows he's about to make the introduction that will change our lives forever. "My dear this is Detective *Cole* Maddox. He's up for sergeant this year, isn't that right Cole? And this is Daisy, Daisy Rayne." He looks over at her, a deep, proud smile on his face. But her eyes never leave mine. "She's my niece." He adds, his voice dipping into warning, a darker tone I've never heard before in his voice.

"It's nice to meet you, Daisy," I say more curtly than I want to. Not that I mean to be. I just can't seem to get my face to move into a smile. It can't be that long since I made it clear to a

woman I liked her could it? I latch onto the Captain, praying for a lifeline. “I- uh- didn’t know you had a niece.”

Contrary to being annoyed or put out by my gruff greeting, Daisy seems to be delighted, dropping arms with her uncle and taking closer to me.

“I just moved here from England,” she says sweetly, looking up at me through long lashes.

A thought unfurls slowly in my head as she blinks rapidly: *is she flirting with me?*

“Maybe Cole can show me the station, Uncle M.?” She doesn’t take those blue puddles off me for a second as she addresses my superior “He looks like the type to give a good tour.”

I look up at him for support, I am not equipped for the niece of my Captain flirting with me, no matter how pretty she is. Things like that get people into all kinds of trouble that I do *not* want to be in. Especially in the middle of a serial killer investigation. Especially when I’m waiting to hear about my Sergeant’s exam.

If he sees my wide eyed plea, he doesn’t care, giving a Santa chortle in answer, “of course. Save me the walk. I’ll see you in my office when you’re done.”

I turn my begging to Jahlani, who is uncharacteristically quiet with a big shit-eating grin on his face. “Uh- Detective Sinclair...?”

“Yes, Detective Maddox?” He purrs innocently, twinkling brown eyes flickering between the girl who has not stopped looking up at me sweetly.

“You’d like a walk around the station wouldn’t you?” I raise my eyebrows, meeting his eyes and holding them as I feel a delicate warm hand slink into my elbow.

Jahlani just chuckles and shakes his head mischievously. “Actually, I think the charming Ms. Rayne is safe in your capable hands.” *Traitor*. “But you two have fun.” And he strides away with his hands in his pockets and whistling a tune that sounds remarkably like ‘can you feel the love tonight’ leaving the blonde Daisy Rayne and me alone in the precinct hallway.

## Chapter 2- Daisy

He. Is. Adorable.

He looks like a big grumpy dog.

One of those ugly ones with the underbite and the squished nose. Ugly cute.

Not that he has an underbite. Or a squished nose. He's just got that gruff and broody thing going for him.

His nose and mouth are actually really adorable actually. A strong nose with clean edges so straight you could use it as a ruler, and his lips were thin, broad, the kind of mouth that, when he smiles, it'll spread across almost his entire face.

I need to see that smile.

The rest of his face is pleasing too, the whole architectural masterpiece: Two little frown lines in the middle of his eyebrows like quotation marks, chiseled face with a tiny notch just under his right eye a chink in the marble. I like it. I want to bite it.

And oh my god, the hair. It's the perfect ratio of black and white. Jet black with white temples like the night sky when it starts to snow.

The eyes are unremarkable in their colouring, someone's just clicked 'fill shape' and 'brown', but the way they keep darting to me and around like he's looking for danger in every corner. I melt- he wants to keep me safe!

I drift closer, my eyes low, mimicking a blush (can't blush, I've tried), hoping to appeal to the masculine protective instincts as I hang on his arm like a lost damsel in distress.

"How long have you worked here?" I ask as sweet as candy floss on a summer day.

Cole looks a little distracted as I press my chest into his bicep (very good bicep, nine out of ten), but he answers nonetheless. "Twelve years."

"Wow," I purr, letting him lead me into a room.

It's bland grey and sterile blue. But I light up as we walk in. "Interrogation Room!" I trill with a giggle. "I've only ever seen them on TV!"

And it's exactly like it is on TV, one table, four chairs and even a mirror- which I make a beeline for.

"Does this go both ways?" I ask excitedly, bopping from foot to foot. "Like in the movies?"

Cole doesn't look as excited as me, he just looks outside the room, keeping the door open with his foot. "Uh... yeah."

I beam at him and look closer, trying to see into the room beyond. I can't.

It's amazing.

He clears his throat as I press my nose to the glass, all business in his tone. "We have four interview rooms in the corridor. We use them for-"

"-getting the bad guys to monologue about how and why they did the deed?" I finish for him, looking up from the mirror. His eyes flicker to the glass where I've left a forehead-shaped make-up smudge, his hands itching towards his pocket.

If he brings out a fabric handkerchief right now, I will die of joy.

"Something like that," he says and tucks his hands into his pocket- so close to where I'm certain the offending handkerchief is, but he doesn't bring it out. "We use this room when people stop being cooperative."

"Shame. I'd be so good at cooperating." I can't resist. He goes pink- from the apples of his cheeks right up to his ears. But it's true. I would. I would be such a good girl for Cole.

He freezes up- I made him all flustered. "Do you want to see the office?" He says uncertainly.

"Sure! Wherever you want to show me, Cole."

I slink closer to him, leading with my breasts (my best feature) and stopping only inches from his shirt. I can feel his body heat through our clothes. But he's not ready yet and steps back, plunging us both into the cool surrounding air like a bucket of ice water.

"Let's go, I'll show you the holding cells." He rushes for the door, away from the smudge on the mirror that I know he's itching to wipe off. I have to skip to catch up to link my arm in his again.

"That sounds fun, are there bars? Like in Chicago?"

His lips tweak like he's about to smile. But he doesn't. He's so delicious.

"No."

I laugh chirpily at his stoicism, making him raise an eyebrow at me. "You're funny," I shrug, snuggling a tiny bit closer. He gives me a curious side-eye and takes me through a door - which he needs a keyfob for and I'm disappointingly faced with the sight of ordinary looking doors with letterboxes in them. There's a small window in the top but...

"They're all empty," he says fidgeting with his keys as I walk down the corridor looking in at the bland white rooms on the other side of the windows. No bars. Sad.

I twirl round to face him in the middle of the corridor, watching in delight as his eyes travel down my body - he tries to hide it but he's smitten already, I can tell.

"You ever role play in one of these?"

His eyes snap back to my face in absolute shock and I suppress a shriek of delight at the crack in the marble. "Wh-what?"

"I said have you ever sat in one of these?" I say sweetly, batting my lashes in the way that makes him stare.

He raises an eyebrow, tilting his head like that ugly-adorable dog with the underbite. He's not going to challenge me, even though we both know what I said. He's too straight laced.

Sure enough. He doesn't.

"Uh- yeah a few times. Speaking to suspects, you know."

I slink back in his direction, "When they're being cooperative."

He holds the door open for me (uh- swoon!) and walks me through the maze of corridors towards a hum of noise.

"Exactly."

I smile up at him, very much enjoying hanging onto his arm like we're about to walk into a big soiree together.

We are. He just doesn't know it.

He takes me exactly where I want most to be. The bullpen. The beating heart of the precinct. Desks are littered in what once used to be lines but through hours and hours of heavy, stressed and tired people leaning into them, they now lie littered around the room at weird angles. Every cluster of desks has a display board of juicy pictures and post it notes, hand written scribbles. A murder wall.

But Cole doesn't lead me to mine. No, he leads me straight to the break room on the other side.

This is the issue with playing blushing and coy- you've got to be willing to put your time in to manipulate your way to what you want.

"Want a coffee?" He says holding up a mug that says *I can't fix stupid but I can arrest it* under a picture of the flag. It instantly makes me want to gag.

An instinct which does not come easily.

"No, thanks." I flash him my best candy-sweet smile as I perch on a chair with a suspicious looking stain. "But don't let me stop you - is that your mug?"

He looks at it, as if surprised to see it in his hand. Of course he is, he's too busy staring.

"Uh- no."

And he picks up a plain black one. Because of course that's his. He's perfect.

"You like working for my Uncle?" I ask, crossing my legs and allowing my skirt to gather a little bit higher on my thigh than normal.

"He's a good man." is all I get in response. He continues to make his coffee (instant, black, no sugar- of course.) clearly comfortable in silence.

Which I am not.

"He's a good uncle too. I never really got along with my parents but he's always been there for me. Through all the... yeah. It's nice to be around him again. It's been a while. I'm staying with him for a bit."

I leave an expectant silence, looking at him as though he has a cue for lines he hasn't learned.

"Um..." he starts, hiding the fact that he's too flustered to come up with a question behind washing up his individual teaspoon, drying it on a paper towel and putting it back in the drawer. Adorable. "What do you do?"

"I'm a dog walker," I say, rewarding him with a bright smile. "I love dogs. You look like a cat person."

It's the biggest insult I know to a dog person. He just shrugs. "Not really an animal person."

My heart plummets. How? How could Mr. Perfect NOT be an animal lover? How is that possible?

I curse the stars for aligning me in a match with an animal-agnostic. "I don't know how that could be possible for someone not to love animals." I can't help the edge of darkness that creeps into my voice at the words.

"I think they're fine," he bumbles sitting down next to me, obviously backpedalling. "I just never had one growing up. So never really saw the big deal."

My anger spirals into pity the instant the words are out of his mouth, my eyebrows meeting in the middle over wide eyes as I mourn the person he could have been with a golden retriever in his life. "You... oh..."

He barks a laugh. A big, soulful “Ha!” that bursts out of him unwillingly. “You look upset for me!” His lips are twitching, suppressing the genuine laugh that threatens just under the marble.

“I am upset for you.” I sink closer to him, letting my knee touch his. “You’ll have to come with me and my pack one day. We’ll get you dog-mad in no time.”

He makes a noise that’s equal parts huff and hum as those eyes trail back to my lips. I think he’s about to say yes, to set a date so we can be together for real but he doesn’t. Instead he stands up all business with a definitive “Well!” and I snap to attention as well. “Let’s get you to the Captain’s office.”

My smile takes a moment to surface, it’s true. I had no intention of leaving Cole’s side so soon. But I need to be perfect for Cole. He’s perfect for me- I’ll fix that animal thing tout-sweet- and then we can be perfect together. I spread my sweetest smile and nod. My smile turns genuine less than a second later though when he offers me his arm this time. Oh yeah, he’s mine.

\*\*\*

I know it’s bad to go home with a man on the first date- my mother taught me all this. But I just couldn’t resist. I knew Cole was absolute perfection from the moment he looked at me and told me what a bad girl I’d been.

Oh my god I’d *dïe* if he said that to me right now.

I shake the thought from my head and focus on the task at hand: getting to know Cole.

Of course, I’m a little limited by the walls his house has, but it’s fine for now. Until I can figure out his security system, it’s totally manageable.

His home is small, tidy and perfectly kept up. The corners of his bed told me what he nerve did: ex-military. Everything else, neat, minimal alert, just confirmed it. He keeps all his curtains open for me to see in, which is nice of him, so I get a good look as he walks through his house and starts to cook. Didn’t even flop onto his sofa once, even after it was such a long day at work. Love a man with stamina.

He’s obviously cooking for two though- which I’ll obviously have to fix one way or the other. I hope that he’s cooking for a friend or sister or...

But no, when she comes to the door she gives him a polite kiss that says together-too-long-to-smooch-not-long-enough-for-a-key. She’s pretty. Blonde as well - obviously a type- although hers is bottled. She has a pleasant, if unremarkable face, some pimples on her forehead from stress. And she’s definitely a cop too even though she’s taken her badge off. Just the way she walks says ‘cop’.

From my perch in the park opposite, I watch as he lets her in. They eat, and she starts to get ready for bed. She's asleep within half an hour - not got the same stamina as our man- and he quietly gets out of bed.

I perk up, loving this side of him. What secrets is he keeping from Little Miss Perfect, who doesn't have an instagram account for me to stalk? He sneaks into a room next to his bedroom, it's small, like a tiny office space. He hasn't been in there all night but when the lights go on I know, 100% that this man is already mine.

The room is a shrine.

Floor to ceiling.

Covered.

In me.

My kills. My victims. Their deaths, crime scene photos, medical reports. Newspaper coverage, receipts, even in some cases, bagged up evidence (naughty boy). And there, right on the corner, is a little red origami heart.

It's not mine. I've never used red. They all tend to be purple, white, blue or yellow- depending on the message I'm trying to send. The purple is reserved for the assholes who mattered, the ones who really pissed me off. White is for those who had reasons of their own that broke them. Blue for the ones who just needed to not be here any more. And yellow, they're for the ones who needed to hurt first.

Never red. Red doesn't say that. Red says passion. Red says love. Red says *mine*. That red origami heart- in its clumsy little attempt at looking like my signature. That claims me.

It's then that I realise.

How true this all is.

Cole isn't just smitten with me. No.

Cole is *obsessed* with me.

