

# *Protector*

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“Caufield, I have a special assignment for you.” Simon DeMille singled his head of security from the sea of employees in the room at the daily morning meeting of DeMille Enterprises.

“Sir?” Reece was used to being addressed simply as Caufield, but a special assignment was completely unexpected.

“David Atkins escaped from prison last night. I need you to join Cassandra in New York to insure her safety until he is caught. See me in my office after you meet with your team.”

Reece was aware of the reasoning behind Simon's request, even if he hadn't been an employee of DeMille six years before. David Atkins became obsessed with Cassandra during her freshman year of the fashion program at the University of Georgia. Atkins kidnapped her at the beginning of her sophomore year, squirreling her away in his parent's basement for nearly a week. Somehow she had fought her way free and was found stumbling down the streets of Athens in pieces crafted by Atkins of her own stolen designs. Reportedly, she had not been sexually assaulted, but had only been imprisoned. Reece still wondered about that one. He had somehow managed not to meet her during his two years at DeMille, but he was familiar with her beauty from the pictures all over her father's office. In his career, he'd never seen a kidnapping that didn't involve money or sex, and doubted it was only her talent Atkins fixated on no matter what police report claimed.

After a semester off, Cassandra had transferred up to FIT and was currently in the last year of her Master's program. Now, six years later, Atkins was on the loose and to hear Simon tell it, the psychologists at Phillips State believed he was just as obsessed with Cassandra now as he was then.

After Simon was finished, Reece had but one question for which he couldn't supply an answer. “Sir, why send me? You and I both know you could hire any number of close protection agents.”

“Caufield, as usual you sell yourself short.” Simon shook his head. Why was Reece Caufield always singing the praises of everyone except himself? “As you said, we both know I could hire any number of people. You and I also know that you are well-suited to this job. You were a decorated FBI Agent before you came to work for me.”

Right, an FBI Agent who had flown off the handle and nearly beaten a pedophile to death, jeopardizing

the case and doing nothing to bring back the child. Instead of fighting the brass, he had resigned and was now heading security at DeMille. With a sigh, Reece accepted what he really had no business fighting anyway, “Just tell me when and where, sir.”

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“Cassie, I'm sending someone to watch over you.” Simon looked steadily into the camera at the top of his laptop as he addressed the image of his daughter.

“Daddy, I'm twenty-five years old. I don't need a baby-sitter.” She was this close to simply shutting the computer on her father, but fought the urge.

“David Atkins has escaped. The FBI thinks he still wants you. It's my job to insure nothing happens to you, you're all I have in this world.”

“Ha. You own one of the largest energy companies in the country. I may be your only child, but I'm hardly all you have.” Her father played the “you're my baby” card all too often, and she was tired of it. She would have her Master's soon and had already lined up a position designing wedding gowns with Justin Alexander. Why couldn't he just accept she was a fully-grown adult?

Simon frowned at Cassie's statement. She might be educated, she may be of age, but he would never stop worrying about her. “You are and will always be my daughter. I have the means to protect you, and I will. Reece Caufield will be there in the next few hours and you will listen to him and do as he says. Until you are safe, you are under Caufield's control.”

Cassandra nearly choked. He was sending someone to control her? “I will let him do his secret service thing, but I will not be under his control,” she declared through tightly clenched teeth. Dammit, why did they have to Skype instead of talking on the phone like regular people?

“Just do as he says and don't put yourself in danger. That's all I ask.” He paused before adding something he didn't often say, “I love you, Cassie.”

“I know you do. I love you too.”

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Reece was not a fan of airports, they were full of entirely too many people. Simon had provided him with not only Cassandra's address, but a key. All he had to do was collect his luggage, hail a taxi and head over to her apartment. Should be easy enough. Right. How was he supposed to keep a woman safe in a city like this? He wasn't sure he could keep himself safe.

Startled by the sound of a key in her lock, Cassandra struggled from her yoga mat, grabbing the nearest thing resembling a weapon she could find. The door swung open to reveal a large man in a scarred brown leather bomber jacket carrying a duffel bag in one hand and a suitcase in the other.

Holy shit. The pictures he'd seen didn't do her justice. She was clutching a crystal lamp in her left hand, but she didn't catch his interest because she might try to brain him with Waterford. Older now than in any of the pictures he'd seen, her reddish-brown hair was tied up in a messy ponytail, her beautiful face bare of makeup. He'd obviously scared her, the tiny pink tank top doing little to hide high, firm, round breasts, accentuated by her rapid breathing, and her matching cotton shorts were just long enough to actually be considered shorts. He looked his fill before answering her.

“Your father didn't tell you, did he?” The man asked with a hint of the south in his deep voice.

Calming herself, she acknowledged that if he were here to hurt her, he wouldn't have a key or brought luggage. Her right hand to her chest, she answered, “Daddy told me someone was coming, I just didn't expect you to waltz in my house with a key.”

Reece Caufield walked into her apartment then, setting his duffel and suitcase down before closing and locking the door. As he did, she studied him. He was tall, a good six two or three, and now that she saw him in the light, he was quite attractive. He wore his coffee brown hair almost military short, with a nicely trimmed goatee to match. He looked like he must work out, and when he bent to reclaim his luggage she nearly gasped at his backside. Lovingly cupped by worn jeans, he had a world-class ass.

“I would have knocked, but your father provided me with a key, so I used it. I'm sorry to have scared you.”

Although he had nearly scared her to death, she wasn't about to admit it. "You didn't scare me."

"So, you always answer the door with a lamp?" He cocked an eyebrow at her. He knew he'd frightened her, and honestly he was happy she was jumpy. It would be much easier to keep her safe if she believed she was in danger.

"It works very well on the Jehovah's Witnesses," she lied before turning around to replace the lamp in question. As she plugged the lamp in, she asked a very important question, "How did you get past the doorman?"

Watching her crawl on the floor, Reece cursed his boss. Her father had to know just how gorgeous his daughter was, and still he'd sent Reece up here. She was only a few years younger than he was, and watching her, he hoped he'd be able to keep his hands to himself. "Your father called ahead."

Brushing her knees off, she turned around to look at the imposing man in her hallway and thought that being under his control might not be as bad as she'd imagined. Instead of saying anything of the sort, she simply told him, "Lucky for you, I have a guest room."

She gave him the nickel tour of her two bedroom, two bath apartment. Admittedly it wasn't a Penthouse, but she knew it was expensive nonetheless. When she'd asked for an apartment in the Garment District, she had expected a studio or perhaps a one bedroom. She should have known that wouldn't work for the illustrious Simon DeMille. She did love the place with its stainless appliances, granite counter tops, marble bathrooms and hardwood floors. The master was large and having a guest room-slash-studio was perfect. In fact, the only thing she'd change was the fact that her father paid every bill on top of her tuition. She was determined to make it on her own as soon as she graduated. Until then, she'd enjoy the little bit of luxury she had while she could.

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He stared at her over his coffee cup. She had to know she was driving him crazy with her pajamas. Here she sat on a barstool in an almost see-through green t-shirt that barely covered her ass. He could easily see her hard nipples, and if she was wearing underwear, it was most certainly a thong. Was she

trying to kill him? Chuckling, he turned to head back to his room.

Dammit. He'd come into the kitchen this morning in only a pair of jeans, his defined muscles on display for her morning enjoyment, but he'd only grabbed coffee and bolted. She knew they were both enjoying the game, but it had been almost a week and she was running out of "accidental" skimpy outfits. She wandered back to her own room, changing into a grey cashmere wrap sweater, pairing it with jeans tucked into knee-high black leather boots and expertly applied makeup.

Swinging her hips as she sauntered down the hallway, she grinned as she called for Reece in a terrible British accent. "Driver, oh driver... Please pull the car 'round, I wish to attend classes."

Used to her shenanigans by now, Reece played along. Picking up the landline, he dialed the doorman, requesting a taxi in ten minutes.

Reece settled into the back of the classroom with his laptop. He had no interest in the history of worsted wool, or whatever it was they were talking about. Instead, he alternated between email, news sites and watching Cass. The more time he spent with her, the more impressed he was. The woman had every right to act a spoiled little rich girl, but despite the luxury she was accustomed to, she was a hard worker. She spent hours designing, well, he assumed it was designing when she was bent over a sketch pad, and she never shirked a responsibility that he could see.

Rapidly scribbling in her notebook, Cass let her mind wander. She didn't feel like she was in danger, at least not from David Atkins. She knew he wanted her designs or whatever his deranged mind had wanted from her, but she felt much more danger emanating from her bodyguard. Every time she was within so much as five feet of him, her body began to hum. When he touched her, even to just guide her with a hand at the small of her back, she felt the imprint of his hand for hours afterward. She had never in her life wanted a man as much as she wanted him, and she was sure he felt it too.

She saw him stare at her every morning as she walked into the kitchen in less and less clothing. She knew he had tried to even the field by showing up in only jeans himself. She hoped he would continue the game, step it up. Last night he had her pinned against a wall, but when she was sure he would kiss her, he'd walked away. The man was frustrating. As blatant as she'd made her intentions, he hadn't

taken her up on her unspoken, but very clear offer.

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“You are not going out like that.” Reece was very careful to school his tone. If she were to go anywhere like that, men would be thinking the same thing he was thinking.

“Daddy sent you to protect me, not give me fashion advise.” She spun in her too-tight top and too-short skirt, and Reece let out a groan. Turning back to him, her long, chestnut hair flying, she told him, “I know I don't look bad.”

Not bad, naughty, and more than fuckable, he thought. Risking looking at her again, he shook his head. “That is a matter of opinion.”

Cassandra looked at Reece and briefly saw raw lust in his amazing face before he iced it over. He had been doing this since he arrived, riling her up just to walk away and she was having none of it any longer. Pinning him with her dark gaze, she said, “Fine, I'll take it off,” and pulled her top open.

He was stunned. Cassandra DeMille was stripping for him. Hard as a railroad spike, he managed to say, “That's not what I meant,” before she was naked.

Licking her lips, she advanced on Reece. She got within a hairsbreadth of kissing him, then instead sank to her knees. Ignoring his token protests, she freed his cock and took as much as she could in, savoring his flavor and nearly swallowing him whole. She loved him like he was a favorite treat, adding a hand when necessary, until he was avidly fucking her mouth. Just when she was sure he would come, she backed off, then repeated the process again.

Tired of the sweet torture Cassandra was putting him through, he pulled her up, positioning her against the wall, his cock teasing her clit. “I have to be in you,” he choked out before capturing her mouth in a wild kiss. She undulated against him, wrapping her long legs around his waist while her hands fisted in his hair. When he had her whimpering, he thrust his tongue into her mouth as he drove home. He took her hard, slamming into her again and again, her head knocking against the wall, her nails scoring his back. He pulled a hand off her ass to finger her clit and she came with a scream, her inner muscles

spasming around him and pulling him over with her.

They stayed locked together against the wall for a while afterward. He tenderly kissed her lips before confessing, “You don't know how long I have wanted to touch you.”

“About as long as I have wanted you,” she answered, loving the feel of him still buried inside her.

“It will put you in danger.”

She kissed him before asking, “How do you figure, Reece? Daddy sent you up here to protect me from a distant threat. How would sleeping with me put me in danger?” She could feel the wall coming down around him as he pulled away and set her on her feet. They stood there, naked, after the most primal sex of her life, and he wanted to stay away?

He stepped further away from her; if he couldn't touch her, maybe he wouldn't. She had broken his control and instead of turning her away, he had fucked her hard against a wall. She was Cassandra DeMille, heiress to the DeMille empire, and in danger. No matter how much he wanted to bury himself within her delectable body over and over again, he couldn't do that to her.

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Distraction equals death. Reece played the mantra over and over in his head and she accompanied Cass to yet another party. She was more than popular, she was a regular social butterfly. Tonight she was dancing with every man there and he'd had just about enough of it. Grinding his teeth, he strode across the room and inserted himself between Cass and the douche grinding against her.

She didn't bother hiding her smirk as she asked, “Jealous?”

No, he wasn't jealous. He was ready to tear the fucker's head from his body for touching her, but that didn't make him jealous. Shit. He was jealous. “It doesn't matter.”

Right. His jaw was clenched, his hands balled into fists and his eyes were aglow with blue fire, but it didn't matter. Uh-huh. “Dance with me then.”

It was a bad idea, but he wrapped his arms around her anyway. She fit there so well, and she smelled so good. He didn't know whether it was shampoo or perfume, but the grapefruit smell was perfectly hers and made him ache.

She didn't know how long they simply stood there locked together before he tilted her chin up and brushed his lips over hers. "Distraction equals death, Cass. We can't do this."

She tore from his arms, stalking to the other side of the room. Dammit, dammit, dammit. She didn't care about this so-called threat. If David had half a brain, he'd be in Mexico by now. Reece was hot for her, but beyond the most primal sex of her life, she got nothing. Talk about mixed signals.

He followed her, knowing she was upset with him, knowing he had to follow through with his decision. "Cass, I can't let anything happen to you."

"You won't, Reece. You wouldn't if I didn't mean anything to you, and you certainly won't now." At his non-response, she turned and walked outside, tossing an "Are you coming?" over her shoulder as she did.

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"Reece, talk to me." She was tired of his self-imposed guilt. The past week had been hell. Besides giving orders, he'd said little else. In the weeks before she had broken his control, she had loved talking to him about almost anything. He had little to say about fashion, but had opinions about politics and literature, not to mention all the gossip from Atlanta and DeMille. Now, all he would do was tell her to stay inside or bark an otherwise unnecessary order.

Blowing out a breath, Cassandra decided to do the one thing that had garnered his attention before. She whipped her shirt off. "Reece, please look at me." When he didn't emerge from his room, she shimmed out of her jeans as well. She was perched on a barstool in a strapless bra and thong, and he still refused to acknowledge her. Finally, she tossed the bra, and slid her fingers into her panties, sliding through her neatly trimmed triangle to tease her clit. Her other hand cupped a full breast, teasing the nipple into a point. She let out a whimper as she eased three fingers into her pussy. If

Reece didn't notice her now, at least she was enjoying herself. She fucked herself relentlessly, finally crying out with her release.

Reece couldn't ignore her sounds of pleasure, no matter how he tried. He sat on the bed, hard as humanly possible, with two options. He could give in and go to Cass, or he could jack off. It really wasn't much a choice. Shucking his clothing, he walked into the kitchen.

“Baby, stop. Let me do that,” Reece demanded as he strode into the room.

Damn but the man was fine from the top of his dark head to the ropes of muscle that built him, to the hard as steel cock bouncing against his abs. Lost in his dark blue gaze, she pulled her fingers from herself, daring to lick them clean.

With a groan, he dropped to his knees before her, sealing his mouth to her pussy. He suckled her clit, teasing her with his tongue as Cass writhed in her seat. He continued his sweet meal as he slid two fingers inside her, enjoying the frantic clamp of her muscles. She came all over his mouth, her juices sliding into his goatee as she nearly bucked herself off her stool. He rode her through the orgasm before picking her up and walking her to the couch, but instead of laying her down on it, he bent her over the back and rammed into her.

She was fully possessed by Reece and his enormous cock, she almost felt split in half. The rough fabric of the couch teased her nipples and joyfully abused clit as he rode her relentlessly. God, this is what she wanted, needed, craved. No man had ever just taken possession of her body so wholly, always treating her as if she would break. Reece took everything she was more than willing to give.

“Harder, Reece. Please!” The last word was a cry as he ramped up the pace and nearly knocked the couch over with the force of their joining. He felt her climax build, and could do nothing to stop his own from slamming into him, pouring himself into her as she spasmed around him.

She was boneless, draped over the back of the couch, her gorgeous ass in the air. “I'll move as soon as I can walk again,” she told him, her voice muffled by the cushions. “You shouldn't make me seduce you all the time. You could just shove me against a wall or toss me over a couch whenever you'd like, ya know.”

“I could, could I?”

“You could take me anytime, anywhere. I always want you.”

“Good,” he told her before he invaded her pussy again.

She wondered how he was already so huge and hard again for a split second before he wound a hand around to play with her clit. He drove into her almost as frantically as he had the first time, but with every entry and retreat he played her like an instrument. Before she was ready, she came apart, crying his name.

God, how he loved that sound. He continued his rapid pace, never slowing his hand. He pushed her straight from one climax to another and joined her when her body clamped around his again.

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“Your turn.” Cassandra turned to her bodyguard turned boyfriend and grinned. She was sitting at her coffee table in just her underwear, bra and one sock playing strip poker with a man wearing all his clothes. So, she was losing on purpose. What was the harm?

“Baby, if you wanted to make love, you only had to ask.”

“What makes you think that? Maybe I'm just bad at poker,” she answered through her laughter.

“You're too smart to be that bad at poker, babe.”

Her smile faded. “Maybe I'm just trying not to think of what happens when you leave.”

He wasn't ready to go there, but he did anyway. “I work for your father, Cass. What would he think of you banging the help?”

“Am I supposed to care what he thinks?” She popped up off the floor and began to pace. “This is the

real deal, Reece Caufield, and my father can kiss my ass if he has a problem with that.

She was a sight to behold when she was mad. He was going to miss that. “You might not care, but I do. Your father pays for your apartment, your tuition and my salary. If he decides to stop paying any of those things, we're both SOL.”

“I have a job lined up. You could get another job.”

“Are you prepared to give up everything you've ever known for a guy from Aylesford, Virginia? A washed-up federal agent who has been supervising for the last two years? Your father picked me up when I had nowhere to go but back to the Aylesford police force and my brother Reid. I might be able to join the force here, but even if I were to slide in as a detective, I'd make sixty grand, tops. Are you ready to turn your back on your father, on your fortune for that? For me?”

She stopped pacing and turned to him. “What are you saying?”

“I'm saying that no matter how I feel about you, when this is over, I have to walk away. I won't hold you back like that. I can't allow you to hold yourself back like that.”

He left her standing in the middle of the living room in her underwear and one sock, her mouth open to say something, her eyes filled with tears. He couldn't turn back and comfort her, not after what he's just said. So, he loved her. That was something he'd have to live with for the rest of his life, but he couldn't ask her to sacrifice herself for him. She still had another semester of school to finish, and he wasn't going to keep her from achieving her dreams any more than he would put her in front of a bullet.

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“Daddy, I'm in love with Reece.”

Simon wasn't ready for this confession, he wasn't sure if he ever would be. “Reece is your bodyguard, Cassie.”

Not backing down, Cassandra restated her point. "I'm in love with him. Will that be a problem?"

Uncharacteristically speechless, Simon fumbled for a moment before asking the all-important question.

"Does he love you?"

"Yes." The answer came from behind Cassandra, and caused her heart to flutter. She hadn't been expecting Reece during the call, and nearly melted when he'd answered for himself.

Positioning himself behind her chair, Reece spoke into the camera, "I love her, sir, but I realize I'm only Reece Caufield."

"As I am only Simon DeMille. Caufield, you are a good man." He stopped to clear his throat, his gaze locked on Reece. "I feel it's my duty to require two things of you. First, you have to promise you will protect her with your life." At Reece's nod, Simon continued, "Second, you may not just play house. You do right by her or you walk away now."

Reece looked at Cassandra before answering Simon, "I'm not going anywhere, sir."

Eyes locked on Reece, Cassandra asked the next question not sure how her father would answer,

"You're not going to fire him?"

"Should I fire him, Cassie?"

"No, Daddy. You sent him to me, you should let me keep him."

"Should I now?" Simon shook his head, almost letting himself be sidetracked from his real reason for calling. "I called to tell you David Atkins has been captured and you no longer require a bodyguard, but it appears you continue to find him necessary. In that case, I will let the two of you determine what you want to do."

Turning his attention to Reece, Simon told him, "Caufield, I will require you back in Atlanta by the end of the month." With a curt nod, Simon signed off, leaving Cassandra and Reece alone again.

She unfolded herself from her desk chair and turned to face Reece. She had to see him when she asked this question. “You love me?”

“You know I do.” He tucked his hands in his pockets to keep from dragging her toward him. He had to gauge her reactions without his interference, had to know what she felt without him pushing. “What do you suggest we do about it?”

“Daddy didn't fire you. He said you were a good man.” She smiled. “He was right.”

“He wants me back in Atlanta in four days. You have almost six months left here.”

“So, we'll Skype. And I'll visit.”

“And when you graduate? You have a life here in New York, a job designing wedding dresses.”

She shook her head, the tears starting to flow. “No, I don't. I turned it down. When I graduate, I'll be designing gowns in Atlanta with Scott Mardsen. I want to be close to you.”

He opened his arms, and she flew into them. “God, how I love how you fit there,” he murmured, adding, “I love you, Cass,” before covering her tear-soaked mouth with his own.

Unable to answer with words, Cass merely wrapped her arms around him even more tightly and kissed him back with all she had.