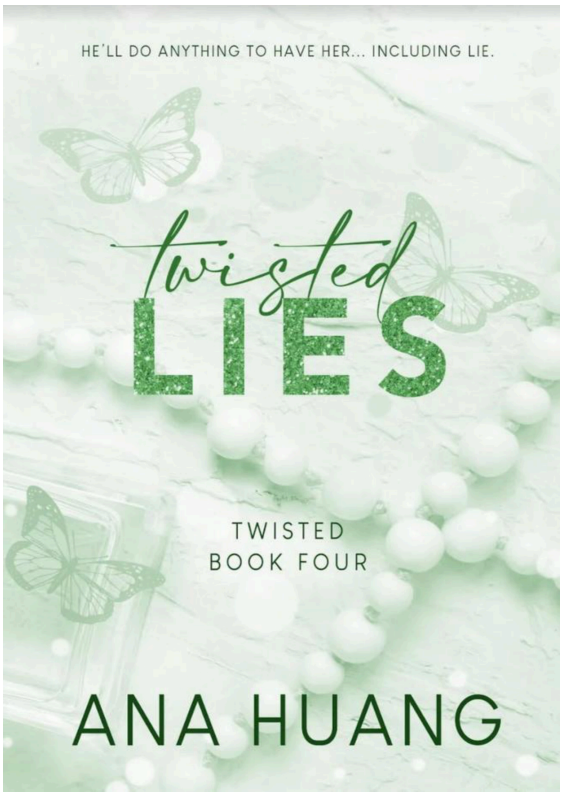


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or scan the QR code to access the digital study portal.

To everyone whose favorite color is morally gray.

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“Tears of Gold (Slowed)”—Faouzia

“Made to Love”—John Legend

“God is a Woman”—Ariana Grande

“Infinity”—Jaymes Young

“Style”—Taylor Swift

“Crazy in Love”—Sofia Karlberg

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“Die for You”—The Weeknd

“Harleys in Hawaii”—Katy Perry

“Said I Loved You But I Lied”—Michael Bolton

He'll do anything to have her…including lie.

Charming, deadly, and smart enough to hide it, Christian Harper is a monster dressed in the perfectly tailored suits of a gentleman.

He has little use for morals and even less use for love, but he can't deny the strange pull he feels toward the woman living just one floor below him.

She's the object of his darkest desires, the only puzzle he can't solve. And when the opportunity to get closer to her arises, he breaks his own rules to offer her a deal she can't refuse.

Every monster has their weakness. She's his.

His obsession.

His addiction.

His only exception.

**

Sweet, shy, and introverted despite her social media fame, Stella Alonso is a romantic who keeps her heart in a cage.

Between her two jobs, she has little time or desire for a relationship.

But when a threat from her past drives her into the arms—and house—of the most dangerous man she's ever met, she's tempted to let herself feel something for the first time in a long time.

Because despite Christian's cold nature, he makes her feel everything when she's with him.

Passionate.

Protected.

Truly wanted.

Theirs is a love twisted with secrets and tainted by lies…and when the truths are finally revealed, they could shatter everything.

CONTENT NOTES

This story contains a morally gray alpha hero, explicit sexual content, profanity, graphic violence, and topics that may be sensitive to some readers.

For a detailed list, click here or scan the code below.

1

STELLA

"STELLA!"

My heart rate sped up. Nothing triggered my fight or flight like the sound of Meredith's voice.

"Yes?" I hid my trepidation behind a neutral expression.

"I trust you can bring all the items back to the office yourself." She slipped on her coat and tossed her handbag over her shoulder. "I have a dinner reservation I simply can't miss."

"Of—"

She disappeared out the door.

"Course I can," I finished.

The photographer shot me a sympathetic look, which I answered with a tired shrug. I wasn't the first magazine assistant who'd suffered under a tyrannical boss, and I wouldn't be the last.

Once upon a time, working at a fashion magazine would've been a dream. Now, after four years at *D.C. Style,* the reality of the job had dulled any shine the position once held.

By the time I packed up the photoshoot, dropped the items off at the office, and started my walk home, my forehead was slick with sweat and my muscles were well on their way to becoming Jell-O.

The sun had set half an hour ago, and the streetlights cast a hazy orange glow over the snow-packed sidewalks.

The city was under a blizzard warning, but the bad weather wouldn't kick in until later in the evening. It was also faster for me to walk home than take the Metro, which freaked out whenever there was so much as an inch of snow.

One would think the city would be better prepared considering it snowed every year, but nope. Not D.C.

I shouldn't have been looking at my phone while walking, especially given the weather, but I couldn't help myself.

I pulled up the email I'd received that afternoon and stared at it, waiting for the words to rearrange themselves into something less upsetting, but they never did.

Effective April 1, the cost for a private room at Greenfield Senior Living will increase to $6,500 per month. We apologize in advance for any inconvenience this may cause, but we are confident the changes will result in even higher-quality care for our residents…

The green smoothie I'd downed during lunch sloshed in my stomach.

Inconvenience, they said. Like they weren't hiking the prices of an assisted living facility by more than twenty percent. Like living, breathing, *vulnerable* human beings wouldn't suffer as a result of the new management's greed.

In, one, two, three. Out, one, two, three.

I tried to let the deep breaths wash away my rising anxiety.

Maura had practically raised me. She was the one person who'd always been there for me, even if she didn't know who I was now. I *couldn't* move her to another assisted living facility. Greenfield was the best in the area, and it'd become her home.

None of my friends and family knew I'd been paying for her care. I didn't want the inevitable questions telling them would raise.

I would just have to find a way to cover the higher costs. Maybe I could take on more partnerships or negotiate higher rates for my blog and Instagram. I had an upcoming dinner

with Delamonte in New York, which my manager said was an audition for their brand ambassador position. If I—

"Ms. Alonso."

The deep, rich voice brushed my skin like black velvet and stopped me in my tracks. A shiver chased its wake, born of equal parts pleasure and warning.

I recognized that voice.

I'd heard it only three times in my life, but that was enough. Like the man who owned it, it was unforgettable.

Wariness flickered in my chest before I doused it. I turned my head, my gaze traveling over powerful winter tires and the sleek, distinctive lines of the black McLaren pulled up beside me before it reached the rolled-down passenger window and the owner in question.

My heart slowed a fraction of a beat.

Dark hair. Whiskey eyes. A face so exquisitely chiseled it could've been sculpted by Michelangelo himself.

Christian Harper.

CEO of an elite security company, owner of the Mirage, the building where I lived, and quite possibly the most beautiful, most dangerous man I'd ever met.

I had nothing except instinct to back up the *dangerous* part of my assessment, but my gut had never steered me wrong.

I inhaled a small breath. Released. And smiled.

"Mr. Harper." My polite reply was met with dry amusement.

Apparently, only he was allowed to address people by their last names like we all lived in a giant, stuffy boardroom.

Christian's eyes grazed the snowflakes drifting onto my shoulder before they met mine again.

My heart slowed another fraction of a beat.

Tiny crackles of electricity hummed to life beneath the weight of his gaze, and it took every ounce of willpower not to