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# DADDY'S PRECIOUS CRIMINAL

Claimed by Daddy - Book Four

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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only.  
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## Chapter 1

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**T**he cold disturbed her. Not icy, but chilly enough to be uncomfortable. Eden stirred and the book she'd been reading fell to the floor with a thud. Her eyes flicked open. It took a second for her to realise she was in the Bird's Nest in the big oak tree in her backyard. Not much more than a platform attached in the nook where the trunk branched into three a bit over eight feet from the ground, it was big enough for a comfy, waterproof chair. When the weather was good, it was her favourite place to read, but she'd fallen asleep and dusk was coming on. Damn.

Stretching and wriggling to get the circulation going in her stiff limbs, she mentally kicked herself. She'd been waiting a week for this. If she'd slept through it, she'd have to wait another whole week, but a check of the phone in her lap gave hope she'd woken in time.

From her vantage point, she could see across to the forest, the hill rising above it and the castle ruins atop. She squinted her eyes and pursed her lips as she scanned the roads. A few months back, the Kepton Council had passed a by-law banning people from going to the castle or its surrounds with

the exception of Fringe Keep, the Fringie's settlement at the base of the hill. But in recent times very few people apart from the Fringies and Eden still went there anyway.

The ban on going up the hill made no sense, and there had been no reason given other than 'safety,' despite there being no recorded accidents or injuries in longer than living memory. It was now a serious and punishable offence to be caught near the castle, but that hadn't stopped Eden from continuing to go anyway. She loved the ancient, broken building with its history and mystery too much. With a bicycle and considerable knowledge of the forest paths, she could sneak up without being spotted, and sit against the grey, stone wall, listening to it whisper its secrets.

Two weeks ago she'd spotted a car on its way up. When she had seen it again last week, also quite by chance, she realised it was the same day and time as previously. It had stopped near the top, and a second car had followed. Each time, fifteen to thirty minutes later, she had seen the two vehicles come back down the hill.

That accounted for her being on the lookout and ready for action this week. And there it was, resembling a black beetle crawling up the winding road on the side of the hill, looking out of place in this time of prohibition. It shouldn't be there. But it was. And Eden meant to find out why and who was in it. Her heart thudding, she tucked the book under her arm, climbed down the ladder and bolted to the front of the cottage. Leaving the book on a small table on the porch, she unlocked her purple bicycle and wheeled it out the front gate, jumped on and pedalled furiously to the end of the street where the houses finished and the countryside began. She knew she was playing a dangerous game. Not only was she heading for forbidden territory, but the nightly curfew, which had been implemented at the same time as the castle ban,

would start in twenty minutes, and woe betide her if she was caught out even a minute after.

Confident she would have time to get up the hill far enough to see the car and maybe who was in it, and then home by six o'clock, she turned onto a side road running alongside the forest. She knew exactly where to find the track that led up towards the castle and the old wooden hut below it.

But before she had made it that far, and with the gloaming settling over the countryside, she saw her quarry were already on their way. Turning around, she pedalled back to the side street and headed towards the main road into Kepton. She would wait for the car to pass and try and see who was in it, or get its number plate at least. She had to hurry, though, to be out of the restricted area when the car reached her. As she turned off the side street, her bicycle felt sluggish and lumpy. She stopped immediately. Damn! A flat. She couldn't ride home without wrecking the tire. She would have to walk and push it, so reaching home before curfew was probably impossible. She couldn't let the people in the car see her walking. It was possible they might not report her, but she couldn't risk it.

Hurrying a bit further along the road, she pulled her bike behind the only nearby bush big enough to provide cover and waited for the car to pass. She could hear it approaching. Making herself as small as she could, she peered through the dense branches as a sleek, black car she didn't recognise loomed darkly, its headlights carving a path through the dusk. Her breathing stopped as she thought she heard it slow. Had she been spotted? It slid past and was gone, leaving her trembling and frustrated that she'd not been able to see either the registration plate or who was inside. Checking no other cars were coming, she pushed her bike back out onto the road, and struck out for home, walking as fast as she could. This close to

curfew, there would be few people about, so she might make it home unobserved.

The deep-throated growl of another engine bearing down froze her in her tracks. There was no bush on the side of the road here to hide behind. She was out in the open, any chance of getting back unseen shattered as a red Ford Raptor thundered up, then slowed to a menacing prowl as it passed by. The windows were high, and the setting sun reflecting on them made it impossible for Eden to recognise the driver or his passenger. She had a fair idea who it was, though; as far as she knew, there was only one red Ford Raptor in Kepton, and if its owner had been one of the people near the castle, she was even more sure they were up to no good.

Checking her phone, she saw she had less than five minutes to get back to safety. Breaking into a trot, she mentally crossed her fingers that her presence on the road had been ignored, but a police car waiting across the street when she arrived home five minutes past curfew abolished all hope of that. It sat silently, witnessing her guilt as she went through the gate and up the path to the front door, then drove away.