



CAPTURED HEARTS

A HALLOWEEN ANTHOLOGY

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✿ Created with Vellum

The book cover features a repeating pattern of skulls and floral motifs in a dark, muted green color on a black background. In the center, a larger skull is highlighted in a vibrant pink color, surrounded by a matching pink floral wreath with various flowers and leaves.

Captured Hearts

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Garnet Christie
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Beautiful Nightmare

ELIZABETH BROWN

Beautiful Nightmare



Elizabeth Brown

Blurb

Nysa doesn't remember her life before the institute. All she remembers is waking up one day with golden sand falling from one hand and black sand from the other. After that? Well, she tries not to focus on the torture.

Nysa's life takes a drastic and deadly turn when swirling black and golden sands coalesce into Morpheus and Neiros—better known as the sandman and the boogeyman.

Dreams and nightmares are sacred things. They power magic and give life to super nature creatures. Their kings aren't pleased that someone has been tampering with their powers. They plan to eradicate any and all threats to their realms.

Nysa has gone from one jailer to another. Taken against her will and facing her imminent demise, Nysa will use the only tool she has available to her, the forbidden powers of the gods who kidnapped her.

*I was thinking with my vag. She's a hungry beast who likes it
rough.*

Author's Note

For those of you that follow me on social media, you know that my life has been a major dumpster fire for over a year now. I want to thank those of you who have stuck with me. I appreciate it more than words can ever express. I'm working my ass off to deserve that. I promise.

Nysa can't remember her life before the facility. She can't remember her childhood, how she ended up at the facility, or anything prior to waking up. Even though I do plan to continue Nysa's story, she is never going to remember these things. This is all very intentional. I am doing this in an attempt to bring to light a very real and very devastating mental illness that not many people are aware of. You see, her memories weren't taken from her by those who worked at the facility. Her mind, in an effort to protect her, took those memories from her.

Dissociative amnesia is very real. In most cases, it's a single traumatic event that is erased from a person's memory, and through therapy that memory comes back.

I suffer from an extreme form of dissociative amnesia. I do not have any memories before the age of 19-20. I don't remember meeting my best friends. I don't remember family vacations. I don't remember school events. Anything. This is all due to a pretty severe case of Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. There was no singular defining traumatic event, instead, I was exposed to near constant trauma during my formative years.

Nysa is different, but I wanted her to have this particular struggle because I am trying to work my way through it. This is how I'm dealing with it. This might be distressing knowledge for some readers, and I apologize for that.

Trigger Warnings

This book contains the following:

• **There is a flash back of a rape scene in chapter 2. I label it so you can skip that section if needed. It is not detailed. While it's an important part of Nysa's backstory, I do not want to trigger any reader. So please skip that section if you need to.**

• Graphic sex scenes (with the aside of chapter 2, all other sex scenes are graphic in nature)

• Torture

• Sexual harassment

• Dub con with hints at non con

• Sexy times with sharp objects

• Branding

• Attempted murder

• Thoughts of suicide

• Choking, both of the sexy variety and not of the sexy variety

• Sexy times while covered in blood

• Bloody fights

• Dismemberment

• Murder

- Child abuse (there is a scene in a dream where the child remembers getting beaten)

- Mental Illness representation (which technically shouldn't need to be a trigger but I'm putting it in here so people know what's what).

Reader acknowledges these warnings and reads at their own risk.

CHAPTER 1

Where Dreams and Nightmares Intertwine

NYSA



“Nothing happens unless first we dream.”

—Carl Sandburg

Darkness is my salvation. That beautiful, endless void where fantasy and reality blur together to form a new state of being. One that—regardless of whether the images are horrific or peaceful—centers my soul in a way nothing else can. The oblivion darkness provides transcends space, defies time, and laughs in the face of logic. It is where all things begin and where all will eventually end.

It’s often hard to tell whether I master the darkness, or it masters me. Perhaps it’s a mutual mastering, one born of respect and admiration for the other. Perhaps any mastery I feel is merely an illusion, one meant to keep me compliant and subservient.

Darkness was the first thing to greet me when I ultimately became aware of myself, and it has been the only constant in my life since. It’s the only thing that embraces me without fear. The only thing that doesn’t look at me and quake or scurry back with a flinch. It is the only thing that appears to be blind to what I truly am.

An abomination. An affront to nature. A creature that by all rights should not exist. And yet, here I am. I don’t know how I came to be, only that I *shouldn’t* be. It’s a feeling that

scrapes at my bones, tears my soul, and feasts on my every breath.

“Fucking bitch!” A loud masculine shout causes my eyes to snap open an instant before my body jerks. A scream rips past my lips as the electric current seizes my muscles. The immediate arching of my back slams the back of my head against the cold concrete floor, and then my entire body begins to violently spasm. “You’re leaking. Rein that shit in, you dumb cunt.”

I don’t bother to tell the man ramming the cattle prod into my side that torturing me only causes me to leak more. Thankfully, whatever magic that courses through my body has me healed almost immediately after the prod is removed, and I’m able to quickly right myself on the floor. Once again assuming a cross-legged position with my hands on my knees—palms up, I take a moment to breathe in through my nose and out through my mouth. One more breath before I roll my shoulders and look down around me.

Black and gold sand litters the floor in front of me. I bite back a string of curses, knowing that if any were to make their way to the guard’s ear, I would most likely go hungry...again. I’ve been denied food for the past five days, so ensuring I get something today is paramount. Especially if I want to attain better control over my powers. My wardens haven’t seemed to grasp that the healthier I am the better control I exhibit during our sessions.

“My apologies.” I keep my voice light and airy, forcing a note of contrition I don’t actually feel, all while wearing a neutral, unaffected mask. “I’ll try again.”

“You need to produce a dream.” The condescending feminine voice of the doctor interjects. “If we see black sand again...”

I don’t need her to finish that sentence. If they see black sand again, I’ll need the medical team to work their own special brand of magic to keep me alive. Or bring me back if I’m too close to the brink. This particular doctor likes to push

how close I can come to death. Sadistic bitch. Considering my stomach is trying to eat itself, I'm far too physically weak to take much of a beating. Not that that will really stop them.

Forcing my lungs to take deep, even breaths and slow my racing heart, I allow my muscles to go lax. They want a dream, not a nightmare. A dream.

Dreams are harder for me to produce. They require me to focus on happy thoughts. Unfortunately, I lack any happy memories, as all I can ever find when I search my mind consists of torture in this place. No childhood. No parents. Nothing. Only waking up here thanks to a bucket of ice water. It doesn't seem to dawn on those running this sham of a facility that they need to treat me well to get the dreams they so desperately want.

The pain, the fear, those only fuel the nightmares. But this particular doctor isn't interested in my ability to induce nightmares in my victims. She wants dreams. She wants dreams that are so perfect, that my victim never wants to wake up. It appears that she believes dreams can be more powerful than nightmares, especially for controlling individuals.

Yet she thinks torture is the best method for controlling me.

What an idiot.

"What's taking so long?" The doctor's voice, nasally and high pitched, causes my left eye to twitch once before I once again school my expression. I don't want my face to give me away. "Get on with it already."

I'm half tempted to tell her to do this herself, but I know that'll just lead to more pain, which will lead to more nightmares, which might lead to my death. As much as my life sucks, I'm pretty determined to stay alive. I have an epic revenge plot to enact.

Gold sand. Happy thoughts.

Air fills my lungs. It exits moments later. I force my mind to go blank.

Calm.

Gold sand.

Happy thoughts.

With a sweep of my hand toward the human sleeping in the corner of the room—poor soul, I doubt they volunteered for this—I release the magic that’s swirling deep within me, praying that it’s dream magic and not nightmare magic. They feel so similar it’s hard to know what I’ve unleashed until it’s free.

I crack an eye open and nearly turn into a relieved puddle on the floor. The glittering sand shooting toward the human guinea pig is gold. Dreams. Thank the gods.

“Mark the time. I want to see how long this lasts.” The doctor snaps at her assistant. Her eyes narrow on me. “That took too long.”

My gaze shoots to her, and I have to fight back a cringe. “Apologies.”

“I don’t want your fucking apologies, 2319, I want results.”

2319. Despite not having any memory of before this place, I know what my name is. Nysa. It’s been the one thing I’ve kept to myself, clinging to it for dear life more often than not. I refuse to bring it up to the staff here, I don’t want them to take something else from me.

“Take her to the deprivation chamber. Make sure that you wash her first.” The doctor waves her hand at the guard, effectively dismissing both of us.

“You heard her.” The sizzling of the cattle prod has me scrambling to my feet.

I trudge after the guard, never letting my gaze stray from his back. This particular asshole likes to catch me unaware. It’s no secret that he gets off on hurting me, and I don’t want to give him that satisfaction, especially not tonight. Unfortunately, since I’m off to deprivation, he’s going to get

his rocks off regardless. The thought has a shiver skittering down my spine like a massive hairy spider crawling around under my skin. I fight the urge to reach back and try to claw the skin off, but it's almost too strong.

I tightly clasp my hands in front of me, the nails digging into the backs of my hands. The pain grounds me and takes my focus off that crawling sensation on my back. Deprivation was once a blessing, but now it's torture. Each step closer causes a tightening of my chest, a band that squeezes my lungs until my breaths are short, sharp, and shallow.

Hyperventilating. Shit. I'm hyperventilating

My nails dig deeper into my hands. I've always used self-inflicted pain to center myself and calm the panic that is ever lurking on the edges of my mind. It's a temporary distraction, I know that. The panic always comes creeping back, a predator just waiting for the right moment to strike. Try as I might to fight against it, it always finds a way to take a bite out of me in the end.

"Get in, 2319." The guard grips my shoulder and shoves me into the small, round room.

That band around my lungs shrinks, my vision tunnels, and all I can hear is the frantic pounding of my heart. The room spins. My legs tremble.

Snap out of it, Nysa! The voice is small and quiet. *Now!*

But I can't. I can't snap out of this spiral. It came on too fast, too hard. And now I'm unable to pull myself to the surface.

My knees slam onto the floor with a resounding *crack!* A distant part of my mind registers the pain that radiates along both legs. My entire body is now trembling so hard that my vision—what little is left of it—shakes violently, blurring the objects around me.

Tha-thump. Tha-thump. Tha-thump. That too fast rhythm is all I can hear. My lungs refuse to suck in a sufficient amount

of air, narrowing my field of vision even more. Ice and fire war in my veins for dominance. My muscles seize.

Distantly I can hear a voice. I can't make out what they're saying or how loud they are. It's almost as though they're underwater and a great distance away.

Pain explodes across my temple and the floor rushes to greet my face as everything goes black.

"WE NEED TO DO SOMETHING MORPHEUS!" The voice that reaches me in the darkness is an alluring mixture of sex and sin. It sends my heart racing. "I've had several creatures break free, we cannot allow this to continue."

"I'm aware we have a problem, Neiros." This voice is smooth and deep, yet condescending. "I've been searching for the breach."

The first voice, Neiros, scoffs. Everything around me is still black. I can't see either man, only hear their conversation. This is strange. I've never had anything intrude on the bliss the darkness provides before. The rapid pounding of my heart increases. I'm wary but excited. Are my powers growing?

Before I can ponder this further, Neiros snarls, "That's all well and good, brother, but if one of yours gets out the worst that will happen is the discovery of rainbow unicorns."

Morpheus laughs, the sound sending a thrill up my spine. "Hardly. You're well aware of what lurks within my realm."

"Just as you're aware of what lurks within mine."

"I believe I'm closing in on a loca—"Morpheus cuts off suddenly. "We're being watched."

"I'm surprised you picked up on it," Neiros chuckles.

The silence that follows gives me the sense that Morpheus is trying very hard not to strangle Neiros. Where the thought

comes from, I'm not sure.

"Why don't you show yourself, Beautiful Nightmare?"
Neiros purrs. "There's no need to hide."

I flinch, suddenly very aware that he's talking to me. This is real. My heart skips a beat before taking off like a rabbit from a wolf. How? How do they know I'm here?

Without warning, light floods the area around me and I'm left blinking like an idiot. My hands shoot up in front of my face to help my eyes adjust. I still can't see anything.

"Why hello," Neiros' deep rumble, so close in front of me, *has my hands dropping as I take a step back. My eyes are still trying to adjust when he says, "Aren't you a delicious morsel."*

"Neiros," Morpheus snaps, stepping up beside him. *His eyes are a vivid violet with streaks of silver, and they hold me hostage as he studies me. "Who are you?"*

I open my mouth but my vocal cords are paralyzed. Alarm blares through me, telling me that if I answer his question I'll be giving him some way to harm me. My lips slam closed. Morpheus' left eye twitches at my defiance. Based on his voice alone, he strikes me as someone who isn't often refused.

My mind races back to the last thing I remember, panicking on my way to Deprivation. I must be in the chamber now, which means that I'm not actually here with them. They can't hurt me. At least, not physically. I shudder at how they could mentally torment me while I'm here with them.

I'm not typically able to get myself out of a deprivation-induced vision. I need to be removed and placed back into my room before I can fully come back to myself. Which means I could be here with these two for far too long. I need to figure out how to get out of this vision.

Morpheus' hand clamps down around my chin, tilting my face up as he invades my personal space. My front is plastered to his, and our faces are inches apart. It feels as though he wants to own my space. Own me. My breath hitches at the feel of his skin on mine. The heat Morpheus exudes creeps into my

system, starting with my face before it slithers down my neck. My nipples tighten as the heat continues down my chest to my abdomen before pooling between my legs.

The press of another body against my back makes me feel as though I've been thrust into a furnace. Heat no longer pools between my legs, instead I'm left with an aching, empty sensation. One that has my hands clenching tightly at my side.

My entire body is now sandwiched between Morpheus and Neiros. My lungs forget how to work when Neiros' hands dig into my hips. I wouldn't be able to escape even if I wanted it. And I'm not sure I want to. My body wants to melt into theirs despite my mind still screaming warnings.

"Your name," Morpheus demands. The feel of his breath as he speaks against my lips causes me to tremble. Whether it's in fear or need, I'm not sure.

The sting of pain against my neck forces air into my lungs as I gasp. "My brother asked you a question." Neiros bites me again, keeping his teeth firmly in my flesh this time.

I shudder again, struggling to find anything to say. I won't give them my name. I can't. If I do...

The fingers clamping my chin tighten, forcing my attention back to Morpheus. Rage blazes in his eyes. I can feel myself mentally shy away. I know that I need to get away from the two of them. I need to bring my conscious back to my body. I never thought in a million years that I would want to go back to my wardens.

Better the enemy you know, right?

Morpheus shifts his hand to my throat and squeezes, causing my eyes to widen. Our gazes are still locked and I can see a flare of heat as he adds his second hand. My pulse stutters. My oxygen intake drops drastically. Spots flood my vision.

I can't die here. Can I?

I never thought I was one to get turned on by someone choking me. Especially considering Morpheus seems intent on killing me for disobeying him. Despite that fact, my body feels electrified and oddly sensitive. Everywhere my body touches either of them acts as a hotspot for desire. I can't tell if my vision is clouding because of oxygen deprivation or because all I can focus on is them. Their body heat, the feel of skin against my own. Breath brushing against sensitive nerve endings.

"I don't think she's responding the way you want her to, brother." Neuros chuckles as he runs his tongue along the spot he bit. "In fact, it appears this little spy enjoys having your hands around her little neck."

Morpheus releases a dark chuckle of his own, the vibrations causing my nipples to tighten. "It does appear that way, doesn't it?"

Before I can hear Neuros respond, everything goes black.

CHAPTER 2

A Never Ending Nightmare

NYSA



“I only have two kinds of dreams: the bad and the terrible.”

— Neil Gaiman

My lungs fill to the brim with a gasp that borders on a scream; my eyes fly open, and my limbs—soaked and chilled from the water of the deprivation chamber—shake violently. I’m in my room. Safe. I’m safe. Despite knowing this, my mind reels wildly as I ruminate on Morpheus and Neiros. What I initially saw—the fact that I saw the two of them at all since I have no idea who they are or what connection we might share to bring me to them like that. What they did to me—pressing me to intimately between the two of them as they had, with the heat of their bodies nearly melting my bones and addling my mind. Said to me—*“It appears this little spy enjoys having your hands around her little neck,”* just thinking of how Neiros deeply murmured those words sends a new shiver, one not from the chill, racing down my spine. The responses they easily ripped out of my body—the heat that had curled in my core before branching out to the rest of my body, and the need that went with that heat. All of it.

My hands, still violently trembling from shock, press against my eyes as my lungs heave and struggle to provide enough air to the rest of my tormented, oxygen-deprived body. My mind is a tumultuous storm, drowning out any other noise around me by forcing Morpheus’ and Neiros’ voices to fill my ears even without them present. This has never happened

before. Will it happen again? Gods, I hope not. I'm not sure I can take another round with those two. Unbidden, tears start to slip down my cheeks. My eyes burn, and my body flushes with heat as my chest tightens as I attempt to suppress my sobs. My body may have responded in a positive manner to theirs, but my mind had rebelled the entire time I'd been with them. Even now, my mind is repulsed knowing that two men had once again touched me without my permission. I hated knowing that my body, the dirty traitor, had even flushed with need at all. I don't know them. I can't possibly desire them. My body has betrayed me, and I have no idea how to stop it from doing so in the future.

Flashes of the last time I was touched without my permission—though with vastly different reactions from my body—now have a stranglehold on my thoughts. It's all I can see. Feel. Hear. My shaking intensifies. My breathing becomes more erratic. Tears now form twin rivers down my cheeks. I've spent so long attempting to push those memories out of my mind, but one unconscious interaction has sent me spiraling. The world dims as my mind replays the first time I was truly helpless.

~This is the rape scene. Please skip if you will find this triggering.**~**

“YOU STUPID BITCH!” A slap to my face from the large, beefy hand has my body slamming against a wall before I crumple to the floor. My vision goes hazy and my body screams in protest, but I know that if I react now, whatever this man originally planned will seem like a dream compared to what will actually happen to me. “I’m going to teach you what happens to monsters like you who don’t do as they’re told.”

My stomach drops as furious hands dig into the hair at my scalp, lifting me up to my toes. I cry out but know that no one will come for me. I’m alone with the man staring down at me with such hatred and loathing. Even if someone were to hear me, I doubt they would actually come into the room or attempt

to stop him. I'm on my own. I know better than to fight back, having learned long ago that even trying to shield myself could result in a beating so bad that I will feel Death's breath on my face. So I plead with my body to go limp, demonstrating that I am not a threat.

The air in my lungs is forced from my body as the guard's fist embeds itself in my stomach. The metallic taste of blood tingles on my tongue. I'm worried he's going to get too carried away and kill me. He's come close several times in the past, and I feel as though my time is running out. Soon, I'm going to make one too many mistakes and he won't be able to stop himself from delivering that killing blow. I've been trying so hard to do what's asked of me, but getting control of my powers is proving to be incredibly difficult. So if he doesn't accidentally kill me, I have no doubt that if I can't get my powers under control then the doctor will give the order herself to terminate me.

My head is forced back again, and I shut my eyes in an attempt to keep the tears I feel stinging the backs from falling. I don't want to give him the pleasure of knowing he's made me cry. It's possible that the sight will make him hurt me more. Regardless, I know that he'll gain a sick satisfaction from any tears that escape, and this is one small ounce of power that I can retain. My scalp burns. I try to focus on regaining a normal breathing rhythm. In. Out. Repeat. My mind is so scattered and torn on what I want to do, unable to focus because of the pain radiating from my abdomen and my head. I hate that I constantly—even without pain clouding my mind—struggle with whether I want to give up or keep fighting to be free. Why can't I just pick?

The rustle of fabric draws my attention and my eyes blink open. The guard changes his grip from my hair to my mouth, crushing my head against the wall. He's pulled down his pants. Oh, gods. No. No! My stomach twists, and I fight the urge to vomit. He's going to... He's never...

Tears flow freely down my face as I realize what's about to happen. My body freezes. My mind races as I try to figure out

what to do. I could fight. I could scream. But what would that accomplish? Given that the doctors here allow the guards to beat me whenever they please and for as long as they please, I highly doubt they care if this guard rapes me. Fight, scream, it would only excite him more, make him all the more violent. If I remain limp and non-responsive...It might just take his pleasure away, and it will be over that much faster.

Either way, this is happening. There's nothing I can do to stop it. All I can do is attempt to mitigate as much damage as possible.

So I remain limp as the guard rips my clothes from my body, shoves my legs apart, and thrusts into me. I remain quiet as he grunts. I keep my eyes focused on the wall behind him as my body jerks with each movement. My tears silently stream down my face as he finishes with a soft curse. My mind has thankfully retreated from the present. I think about the first dream I had after I woke up here, one where I was held in a warm, secure, and loving cloud.

My legs refuse to hold me when he removes his hand from my mouth and pulls his pants back up. And I don't scream when he kicks me in the ribs before stomping out of my room.

What I do once he leaves...I remain curled on the floor, nursing what might be at least one broken rib. I nurse that rib, and I plan.

I'm going to kill him one day. I'm going to kill him and paint my skin with his blood.

~This is the end of the rape scene.**~**

REMOVING my hands from my face, I force myself to sit. Force my lungs to slow their frantic pulling and pushing. Force my mind to quiet. Panicking won't do me any good. It never has. Seeing the gold and black sand littering my cot around me causes a scream to catch in my throat. It's been so long since

I've released sand in my room and seeing it shimmering mockingly on my cot has me fighting the urge to stand, yank on my hair, and scream to the heavens.

The backs of my eyes sting and burn as tears flood my vision. What is happening? *Why* is this happening?

Gods, I wish I could remember my life before this place. I wish I had something, anything, other than my name to cling to. I refuse to believe it's for the best that my memories are gone. Perhaps, if I had even the smallest glimmer, I could control my powers better. Perhaps the memories would help me cling to life more firmly. As of now, well...I didn't long for death, but I would certainly welcome it should the Grim Reaper make an appearance.

I hate that my time in the deprivation chamber brought back those memories. I hate that it's left me feeling even more helpless, powerless, and out of control. I hate that I can feel myself slowly giving up all hope.

Perhaps it would be best if I egg the guards on enough for them to actually kill me. At least then the torment would be over.

Gently running my fingers through the sand surrounding me, I silently beg the glittering granules to ease the soul-deep ache that torments me. Unfortunately—though not unexpectedly—nothing happens. So instead, I will the black and gold grains to vanish. I don't want my keepers to know that I've had a mishap in my room. Thankfully, they listen and shimmer away into the ether.

The sound of the lock disengaging on my door tells me that my nightmare is about to start all over again. Bile climbs up my throat, lodging there as I take several deep, steadying breaths. I haven't been this unsettled about my captivity in so long. I'm so torn between giving up and provoking a killing blow from the guards and wanting to find a way out of here. Is the world outside even worth the hassle of fighting my way out? What if it's the same or worse than in here?

The clank of the door opening and the soft tread of large, male boots against the tile has me curling in on myself with a soft whimper. I'm not sure I'm going to be able to use my powers the way the doctors want me to. At the thought, a cold sweat starts to bead along my skin. I have a feeling that today isn't going to be like every other day.

Today may very well be the day I die.

Morpheus

A GROWL of frustration works its way up my throat as I run my hand through my hair. Moments ago, a woman appeared in the psychic link I share with my brother. A link that *only* he and I have ever had access to. There's no way it's a coincidence. We're discussing changes to our kingdoms, and she appears out of thin air.

She's related. I know it.

What I don't know—but have every intention of finding out—is how.

“Are we going to go find the mortal?” Neuros asks as he storms into my castle. Would it kill him to knock? Or have himself announced?

The growl breaks free at the sight of him. Why our mother saw fit to create him has always remained a mystery.

“Come now, brother.” Neuros' voice makes my eye twitch. “We should be working together.”

I snarl at him. He chuckles. Seeing the mortal woman has clearly put him in a better mood. Figures. Neuros loves toying with mortals, and if he can get his dick wet at the same time? Even better. Disgusting.

“She's tied to this somehow,” I grumble. “First we have creatures breaking free of our realm and now an invasion of our psychic link?” I shake my head.

“I agree.” Neuros shrugs. “I’m not sure how, but I could sense a kinship with her powers.”

That’s when it hits me. The how.

“Not a kinship,” I murmur. My mind is whirling, my heart hammering away in my chest. If I’m right... “Neiros,” —I glance over at him as I speak— “not a kinship. The only way creatures could break free is if our powers waned.”

My brother goes pale. “Which could only happen if—”

“If someone stole a kernel of our power.” Dread settles in my stomach, making my tone more guttural. “She’s taken our powers.”

CHAPTER 3

Deadly Dreaming

NEIROS



“Who’s to say that dreams and nightmares aren’t as real as the here and now?”

—John Lennon.

A string of violent curses flies from my lips as heated anger floods my veins. My vision pulses with each pounding beat of my heart. I turn and punch a wall, cracking the plaster and sending the paintings hanging there tumbling to the floor. My heart—hammering away in my chest—clenches. My ears ring. My nails bite into my palms causing the metallic scent of blood to filter into the air.

Morpheus, always the more ostentatious of the two of us, and his castle—both inside and out—reflect that. Shimmering gold accents everything in view. Thankfully, it isn’t too much, though it’s close. It’s just enough gold to make you pause and realize just how exasperating my brother is going to be when you come face-to-face with him. The castle itself, aside from the copious amounts of gilding, feels large and airy. It’s as though you will get lost in a single room. I prefer my spaces to be cozier and more intimate. His space is also always filled with people. There’s never any privacy and the din makes it near impossible to think. Right now, it’s blissfully empty and quiet here. I have no doubt that our little interloper is to thank.

The walls are all painted in muted pastels that add to the feeling of being sucked into a bright void whenever one enters

a room. Like walking outside for the first time on a bright summer day, your eyes hurt and your body recoils at the slight the sun has done to you. Except this is in every room of his home. How he manages to get anything done is a mystery I have no interest in solving.

“We need to find her,” Morpheus growls, snapping me back to the topic at hand. “We need to get our powers back.”

“Of course we do,” I snap.

For the past ten years or so I’ve noticed a change in my abilities. Stronger nightmare creatures were suddenly harder to control and were escaping into the mortal world. I hadn’t initially said anything to Morpheus because he’s a prick on a good day, but I knew that he would notice something amiss eventually. And he did, but only after things were going wrong in his own domain. Our little pocket realm appears to be an island adrift in space. On one side, Morpheus’ kingdom of dreams, on the other side, my kingdom of nightmares. There are points throughout the island where the two kingdoms intertwine and there are bridges, but we function autonomously from each other. Dream creatures started to cross into my kingdom, twisting themselves in the process.

Morpheus had originally assumed I was to blame. He’s got his head too far up his ass to really notice much of anything. Everyone reveres the Sandman. Dreams are highly sought after. Nightmares? The Boogeyman? Not so much. What mortals don’t realize is that nightmares play an important role. Not only do dreams and nightmares feed magic in the mortal realm, they also fuel the human soul. Without nightmares there would be no dreaming and vice versa. Imagination, innovation, experimentation, all of it would cease to exist without us. But the lord of dreams has spent so many centuries hearing how amazing he is for providing mortals with dreams that he often forgets that he is but one side of the coin. His security is lax, as is his authority. So it doesn’t surprise me that he didn’t notice a few dreams missing here and there for a while.

Nor does it surprise me that my brother hasn't taken the breaches in our security all that seriously until now. I'd purposefully pushed his buttons when I said that nothing deadly could escape his domain. I know full well what lurks in the Kingdom of Dreams. But I'm not fool enough to believe that the worst of his monster have escaped. While there are milder nightmares that won't cause too much damage to the mortal realm, all of the beings in my kingdom are deadly. He's left the issue to me...until now.

Now, he's furious. We both are. I just wish it hadn't taken that woman showing up in our link to light a fire under Morpheus' ass. Our mother had split our duties, which makes sense, but she had also stressed that we work together whenever possible. Over the years, we've grown apart, mostly keeping nightmares and dreams completely separate. I'm not sure if we even remember how to work together effectively anymore.

We best figure it out. Fast.

"I think I can trace her," Morpheus mutters, presumably to himself though we both know that I can hear him. "She must have left a faint trail to follow."

He's right. Because dreams and nightmares feed magic in the mortal realm, there's always a trace left behind. There's a reason our powers manifest as grains of sand, after all.

I wave my hand and three large, snarling dogs made entirely out of glittering black sand appear before me. Hades isn't the only immortal with a three-headed dog. Mine are better; they can split apart when I need them to.

"I can have Atlas hunt her down. There's no need for you to do it yourself." I nod to the dogs who scatter in a swirl of shimmering grains. "If there's even a hint of a speck of her power left in our link, they'll find it and then find her."

Morpheus grunts his response. He's so lost in thought he still hasn't noticed the paintings I knocked from the wall.

Which is unlike him. With a mental groan as petulant as my brother, I move to stand directly in front of him, nose to nose.

“We know what’s wrong now, and we’re going to fix the issue.” I’m shit at comforting anyone, let alone the being who has annoyed me for most of my existence. But I am determined to try so he doesn’t completely shut down on me and become useless.

Once we find this woman again, we’re going to need to work together to take our powers from her. Though simply killing her will work best. I’m sure that’s the direction Morpheus is leaning, and I am too, but I also want to know *how* she got our powers. We won’t get any answers—and thereby prevent our powers from being stolen again—if we kill her too quickly.

“We’re going to make her and whoever is helping her pay. I swear it.” Morpheus nods at my declaration, his expression dark and promising endless torture. While one might assume that the king of dreams is the kinder of the two of us, that isn’t exactly true. We’re both heartless, ruthless, and violent bastards. We’ve had to be. We aren’t Primordial like our parents, which means that we’ve needed to fight and kill to keep everything we have. We might now be an intrinsic part of the fabric of reality, but we weren’t always. The Greeks had a bit of it right. The Primordials, the parents of the gods, were created when the universe was created, made from the same energy released during the Big Bang. The gods—like my brother and I—came along after, either through the natural way of things or through magic. We don’t have the same cosmic powers our parents have, and we aren’t eternal like they are, but we’re more involved in the affairs of mortals. We often bicker amongst ourselves, and there’s more in-fighting than I care to admit. We’re no strangers to killing anything and anyone that gets in our way. This will be no different.

“We’re going to make their worst nightmares seem like the sweetest dream,” he vows.

Nysa

I'M STRUNG UP, naked, with my toes just able to brush against the concrete floor. My pitch-black hair is loose and hanging in my face. Goosebumps jump to life along my skin from the cold as my limbs shake with strain and a weak attempt to bring my body heat back up to normal. I've bitten my lip so hard so many times that blood is dripping from my mouth, down my neck and chest, and splattering on the floor beneath me. My wrists feel raw; my shoulders scream at me from supporting most of my weight for hours now.

Everything hurts.

Each shallow breath I take is a second hand ticking ever closer to oblivion. Closer to the sweet relief that only death can offer. Black edges in on my vision, but I'm not sure if that's because I'm about to pass out or because I've been staring at the same patch of gray concrete for however long I've been in here.

"Well?" The nasally, feminine voice of the doctor asks. "What has she produced?"

I've been so lost in my own little world that I don't recall hearing her enter the room. Prior to this, my usual guard had been making sure that I felt each touch he felt like bestowing on me. Thankfully nothing sexual. It seems that he went with unleashing his pent-up rage with other, various forms of violence. I suppose I should be thankful for small blessings.

"Black," the guard grunts. "Typically, by this point, she's produced at least a little gold, but nothing seems to be doing the trick today."

The doctor releases a sigh that suggests she's the one being tortured. The sound is quickly followed by a soft tsking. A shudder shakes my body, and the soft tinkle of the chains rattling has me biting my bottom lip. I know that I've

disappointed the doctor, and disappointment is always worse than anger.

I won't be fed for a few days. I also won't be healed.

The only question now is what else she'll want to do to me. I force my muscles to go lax as the realization that I am never getting out of this facility starts to sink in. I've held out hope for so long, but I need to acknowledge the truth. It's not going to happen. If I haven't figured a way out by now, I will never figure a way out. They've shown, time and time again, that they aren't going to allow me to gain enough strength to fight them off.

This is my life.

This is my life, and nothing is going to change that. Nothing.

"2319." The doctor's nasally tone holds traces of disappointment and a promise of pain to come. "You know what we want."

I don't bother answering her. What's the point? Nothing I say or do, even producing gold sand, will save me from what's coming.

Cold, slender, skeletal fingers close around my chin and lift my face up. Rage-filled muddy brown eyes stare down at me. The force of that stare is like a punch to the face, causing me to wince and attempt to shrink away. The grip tightens, as do the lips just below those hated eyes. The doctor doesn't like that I don't want to be touched by her.

I once again force my muscles to relax. Anything to make this encounter as short as possible.

"2319," the doctor murmurs, "you are such a disappointment." She sighs and shakes her head. "Nightmares don't help us. All of our test subjects have rejected the nightmares. Fear doesn't make people as pliable. We need dreams, 2319."

I have a moment to find it funny that she's run headlong into the point, but it still eludes her. *Fear doesn't make people as pliable.* Fear and pain do not produce dreams. Yet, the good doctor can't seem to grasp this concept. It would be hysterical if not for the fact that I'm still chained naked and cold in a room after having been tortured for hours.

"Let's bring her to the OR. I want scans and more labs done." With this, the doctor shoves my face away and marches out of the room.

Mere seconds later, my body lands in a heap on the floor. The blood rushing back into my arms has fire licking along all of my nerve endings, tears springing to the corners of my eyes. I blink rapidly, trying my best not to let any fall. With deep calming breaths, I lean my forehead down to the floor, trying desperately to gain control of myself.

I feel...lost. Adrift. Empty. Alone. So very alone. I don't want to give up hope or my fight, but what's the point in holding on to those when nothing will change. Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. I've clearly been driven to that point. It's time to change tactics.

My chains are yanked, causing my shoulders to scream in protest. The guard has wrapped the end around his meaty fist, and he tugs again. "Get up." His snarl is laced with venom. I struggle to my feet, my knees rubbery and nearly refusing to support the rest of my body. With a fortifying breath, I take a tentative step, which turns into a stumble to keep my feet beneath me as the guard once again yanks on the chain.

The trip to the operating room is uneventful, save for the occasional pull of my chains to keep me on my toes. I don't spend any time thinking about what's happened or what is to come. I don't think about Morpheus or Neiros. I don't think about my powers. Instead, I leave my mind blank. I float in the blissful numbness that a silent mind offers. I've given up, haven't I? What's the point in ruminating on anything? I

should simply sink into nothingness. Embrace that I am no one and nothing. Beacon to death in truth.

Between one blink and the next, I go from shuffling down the hall to being strapped down onto a chilly metal table by my wrists and ankles. I'm not sure if I'm shivering anymore. That numbness from my mind has spread throughout my body, and I stare blankly up at the ceiling.

How long I stay there—strapped in that frozen room as people poke and prod me, taking pictures, drawing blood—I don't know. I don't care.

I am nothing.

I am no one.

I am empty.

CHAPTER 4

A Nightmare Turned Real

NYSA



“Of all the things you choose in life, you don’t get to choose what your nightmares are. You don’t pick them; they pick you.”

—John Irving.

I’m left on that table for an eternity. Unlike the other rooms in the facility, this room is filled with various medical instruments and tools. The other rooms here are empty save any torture devices they need for me. My room has a small mattress that has seen better days on the floor. Here, there’s the metal table I’m strapped to, cabinets that line the upper walls, a blazingly bright light above me—which is off now, a rolling cart with different instruments, a heart monitor, oxygen, and other medical equipment.

The lights turn off—the inset lights in the room seem to be on a motion sensor, and the sounds of the individuals who had been in here with me before have long since faded. I’ve never been abandoned in here before. Here or in one of the other rooms, it doesn’t matter. I’m always left alone. Always. My head is strapped down so all I can look at is either the ceiling above me or the back of my eyelids. The ceiling is a solid white with that popcorn ceiling that makes you think you’re seeing faces whenever you stare at it too long. Right now, I can see the face of a clown staring down at me, it’s creeping me out.

My eyes grow heavy as my mind continues to wander in the silent nothingness that has consumed me. I find myself

truly relaxing, taking deeper breaths. Despite the constant chill in the air and from the table, I am more at ease than I was this morning. I should have given up long ago since it feels this good.

A soft yip breaks the silence, followed quickly by a low growl. Without meaning to, my body seizes in shock. I've never seen animals down here. Is this the new method they plan to use to punish me? Leave me tied down and alone with an animal? I suppose I should give them points for creativity at the very least.

The growling grows louder, and it sounds as though there's more than one animal in the room with me, though I can't determine just how many. Enough that a trickle of fear starts to crawl its way up my spine to the nape of my neck, where the hair stands on end. My heart speeds up, and the frantic thumping seems to echo throughout the room, drowning out the growls.

"Excellent job, Atlas." My heart stutters to a stop in my chest. My breath freezes in my lungs. That voice. Neiros. My blood fills with ice.

"Indeed. I'm pleasantly surprised that they were able to find her so fast." My skin crawls. Neiros isn't alone. Morpheus is here too.

Soft footsteps approach. I squeeze my eyes shut, not quite able to believe that they're here. Is my mind playing tricks on me?

Warmth bursts along my skin as callused fingers close around my wrist by the restraint. The growls from whatever animals found me have ceased, and all I can hear is the soft breathing of the two men now standing over me. I refuse to open my eyes because that will make this real, but I can *feel* them. It's as though their bodies call to mine. Their souls. Something in me answers, reaching back out to them. Yearning.

The rustling of my restraints being released has my eyes popping open in surprise. I thought they would use my being bound to their advantage. Use it to press me for answers. Eyes a glittering black with specks of silver stare back at me. It's only now that I realize I never studied them close enough to truly make out what they looked like before. I had been too surprised. Too overwhelmed. It's dark, and I can't make out their features, but their eyes seem to glow and shimmer. Morpheus, who is busy releasing my legs, has eyes that glitter a stunning shade of gold.

"How interesting," Neiros murmurs as he releases my second wrist. "Morpheus. She has one black eye and one gold eye."

My legs free, Morpheus moves to stand on the other side of me, studying my eyes. It's unnerving being the subject of such close scrutiny. They study my eyes for a minute longer before their gazes drift down my body as if just now realizing that I'm stark naked.

My body is screaming mixed signals to me. Cover up. Let them look. Over and over again, until finally I sit up, pull my legs against my chest, and wrap my arms around them. I'm not sure what they're going to do with me, but it's extremely possible that whatever it is will be worse than what I experienced here. I'd rather they didn't take their fill of my body first.

"You've got a lot to answer for," Morpheus growls at me.

I give him a numb nod as both men place a hand on my shoulder. The world tilts around me, stars shooting and twirling in the dark. Then suddenly, I'm crashing to the floor in a large, open room. The bright light startles me, and I tuck my head against my knees to help me adjust. The hands on my shoulders vanish, replaced by a bruising grip on my biceps. A small whimper leaves me.

"Enough of that," Morpheus snaps. He's the one gripping me based on how close his voice is. "Open your eyes."

I take a steadying breath and blink my eyes open just as he heaves me to my feet. I sway slightly, internally thankful that he maintains his crushing grip on my arms so I don't immediately face plant. My head spins and my heart tumbles around in my chest, but I force myself to stay upright.

“Now tell us what we want to know.” The bastard can't even give me a minute?

Neiros

TO BE HONEST, I'm not sure what I expected to find when Atlas found our little interloper. She hadn't appeared to us clearly in the link, just enough for us to be able to tell she was female, deliciously curved, and had traces of our powers. Nothing else had been distinguishable about her. We didn't know her at the time so our minds couldn't fill in the specifics, just as her mind would not have been able to fill in anything about us aside from our general sizes and our voices.

Seeing her strapped, naked and alone in the dark, to a metal operating table had been surprising. As had the fact that it was clear from her body, she had recently been physically tortured. She's covered head to toe in cuts, bruises, and scrapes. Her black hair is matted in several places, and her eyes are slightly swollen and bruised. I'm sure she also has several broken bones based solely on the coloring of several bruises.

She's doing her best to hide her pain, but I can see it, lurking just beneath the surface. It's a shadow that haunts her features, hugging her body like a lover. My mind quickly flicks to other things that could haunt her so, to ways *I* could haunt her.

When Morpheus demands she tell us what we want to know, I snap back to the present, eager to learn how she got trace amounts of our powers. It's a shame that we're going to have to kill her to get them back, but we can at least have a

little fun with her in the meantime. Maybe I can send her out into the hedge maze located at the back of my property and watch as my monsters rip her to pieces. I always enjoyed a good game of cat and mouse.

“Nysa.” Her voice comes out broken and scratchy, as though she’s been screaming for hours, and it hurts to speak. My brother arches a brow at her. “My name.”

“That’s all well and good.” I sigh. “But that’s not what we want to know.”

“You asked me for my name. You wanted to know who I am.” Nysa’s response is quiet and soft. “My name is Nysa.”

“That only answers part of the initial question,” I growl.

“I don’t know who I am.” She glances over at me before returning her attention to my brother. He’s still got his hands on her, which means he’s the bigger threat to her right now. She’s smart. “I just know my name.”

“How did you end up with our powers?” Morpheus asks. He looks like he wants to strangle her, and I take a step closer to make sure that he doesn’t act on the impulse. We need answers. We can kill her once we get them.

Nysa looks up at my brother in confusion, her gaze searching his. She turns that inquisitive gaze to me. She has no idea what he’s talking about. I curl my fingers into fists at my side, relishing in the dig of my nails against my palm. Rage fills me. How is it possible? She *must* know.

“Answer him,” I demand in a low, dangerous tone.

“I...I don’t know.” Nysa appears lost. She tries to step away from Morpheus, but his grip is too tight for her to take more than a half step away from him. “I don’t understand. Your powers?”

“Yes,” I snap. “Our powers.”

“The dreams and nightmares,” —her gaze bounces between the two of us as her chest starts to rapidly rise and fall — “those are *your* powers?”

I move to cage her with my chest to her back, leaving no room for air between our bodies. I can feel the shudder that works its way down her spine and hear the hitch in her breathing. It's a delicious and heady feeling, knowing that we have her trapped between us like this. Knowing that she's powerless to stop us.

Morpheus

AS MY BROTHER cages the little thief between our bodies, my hands drop from her arms. Slowly, letting my fingers drag across the skin of her arm and shoulder, I close my hand around her throat, keeping her anchored to me and forcing her face up so I can better see her eyes. I noticed and felt the confusion as Neiros questioned her further about our powers, but how much of that confusion is an act?

“Dreams are my domain,” I tell her. “Nightmares belong to Neiros.”

“Only to you?” Nysa asks. I don't buy this innocent act. Not for a minute. But I'll indulge her if it'll get us answers.

“Yes, thief. I am the only being to harness dreams and Neiros the power of nightmares. No other has been given these gifts or the responsibilities that come with them. Now tell us how you came by them.”

Neiros pushes against her, crushing her hips against mine and I bite back a snarl. I don't want to feel her naked body against me. I don't want the filth that she's covered in to contaminate me more than it already has. Nysa is a mortal, one that clearly doesn't have the ability to engage in proper hygienic routines by the looks of her. Though it is also clear that she has been physically abused recently, that doesn't matter.

“Thief?” A small spark ignites in her eyes, making the black and gold swirl and shimmer in the light of my castle.

“How am I a thief?”

“The only way for you to have our powers would be if you stole them from us.” I sniff. She stiffens against me. “Now tell us how you did it.”

Nysa isn't fighting back, and I'm not sure what to make of that. Her confusion is clear on her face, but she won't be able to pretend with us for long. We'll get the information we want out of her one way or another. I refuse to kill her before we find out how she was able to siphon some of our powers. We can't let it happen again. That said, playing the innocent won't save her life, it will only prolong the pain.

“I woke up with these powers. I've had them for as long as I can remember,” she whispers as she attempts to duck her head and avoid my gaze. My hand tightens around her throat, keeping her in place and forcing her to maintain eye contact. “I haven't taken anything from anyone.”

“That's bullshit,” Neuros snaps behind her. His face is twisted in a vicious snarl. “You entered our mind link. Our realms have been having issues for years now. I can smell our powers on you, little nightmare.”

There's a flaring of her pupils when my brother calls her little nightmare, a flash of heat in the depths there. I allow my lips to spread into a smirk. Another angle we can use against her. I know a needy female when I see one, and the little thief in front of me has sexual repression stamped all over her.

“I swear.” Nysa keeps her voice low, but it's still scratchy and hoarse. “I don't know.”

With a look at my brother, we both take a step away from her, removing our hands from her body. She immediately collapses to the ground in a heap. Slowly, as though every movement pains her, she pushes her torso up with her arms. Her head swivels between the two of us and her eyes narrow at whatever it is she sees.

“Sandy!” I bellow. A small, glimmering being appears at my side. They are made from my power and are the image I

use to help perpetuate the idea of the Sandman. They're small, adorable, and seemingly harmless. Just what everyone wants to think about when they think of a person coming in to sprinkle them with sleep dust to drift off into lovely dreams. The complete opposite of me.

Sandy comes up to my hip and always wears a bright smile. I stand well over six feet eight inches tall. Sandy is bald, whereas I have blond hair that is every hue of gold and yellow there can be. My hair falls to my shoulders, but I usually plait it back, decorating it with various little charms and beads of every shade of the rainbow. Sandy appears to be wearing a pillowcase, though it's hard to tell because they're semi-amorphous. I always wear slacks—in either black, deep violet, or navy blue—a matching vest, and a starched white button-up with black gleaming dress shoes. My skin is a bronze color that suggests—wrongfully—that I spend most of my time out in the sun. My right ear is pierced to the nines, as are my nipples. I have tattoos that swirl and shimmer in white and gold ink along my arms, chest, and back. They reflect the various dreams of the innocent at any given moment, so they're never the same.

I am intimidating. Sandy...well...Sandy looks like a squishy pillow. They should knock Nysa off-kilter enough for us to start getting answers from her. I should tell Neuros to bring Boogey out to play, too, but that can wait a bit. Let her settle, think that we're going to play nice for a bit.

“Take her to the room we had readied.” Sandy bows their head at me before waving their hand and lifting Nysa in a cloud of golden sand, carrying her off.

CHAPTER 5

Violently Dreaming

NYSA



“A lot of dreams can turn into nightmares...if you don't really work them.”

—Dolly Parton.

Sandy, the surprisingly adorable creature made from dream sand, gently places me on the largest, fluffiest bed I've ever seen. I grimace as my skin touches the clean, cotton sheets. I should bathe. I don't want to soil the sheets. Sandy bows to me before bursting into a shower of glittering, microscopic grains that drift beautifully to the ground. Shimming off the bed, I stand next to the large piece of furniture to study the room and attempt to get my bearings.

The head of the four-poster bed rests against a wall that's painted a pale yellow. The sheets all compliment the paint in various shades of reds and oranges with small pops of teal and blue. There aren't any paintings or photos on any of the walls. Two nightstands sit beside the bed, both the same warm brown wood that makes up the bedframe. It creates a warm, homey feel. Which is surprising given how open and empty the other room in the castle felt.

The wall to my back has two large windows that are currently covered by curtains that perfectly match the fabric on the bed. On the opposite side of the bed, but along the same wall, is a closed wooden door that matches the rest of the wood in the room. A closet? Possibly a bathroom? To my left sits a large dresser and another door. There's also a small desk tucked in the corner that allows for views out of one of the

windows. Both are made in the same wood that's scattered throughout the rest of the room. Finally, facing me is the door that Sandy and I entered through. It's plain but has a pretty bronze knob that is engraved with the letter 'D.' There's a stone fireplace with a small fire going beside the door. I don't see any wood in the room to keep the fire going, so I should probably bathe quickly if I don't want to freeze when the fire goes out. I glance down and notice that there's only an area rug that surrounds the bed and the rest of the floor is a dark, nearly black, wood.

I've never stayed in a room so nice. I'm not sure I like it. I certainly don't trust it.

I run my hands down my face and then my body, wincing when I touch a deep cut or particularly sore bruise. The aches are a reminder that I can't let my guard down here. At least at the facility, I knew what to anticipate. Here...I have no idea what's going to happen to me. I'm not sure I care.

With stiff movements due to my painfully throbbing joints, I shuffle my way around the bed to the door that sits next to the nightstand. I'll start here. The door swings open on silent hinges, and I'm surprised to find a sitting room on the other side. I blink in shock for a moment before closing the door. I can explore there later. I turn and shuffle to the other door on the opposite side of the room. It, too, opens silently.

"Oh," I breathe out.

The bathroom is the definition of luxury. It's all white marble with gray veining. Soft peach-colored walls, and fluffy area rugs. There's a large shower stall in the corner that could fit at least ten people. The tub that's sunk into the floor could easily fit five. There's also a double vanity with a large mirror. Along one wall is a set of shelves that holds soaps, shampoos, conditioners, salts, and various cosmetics and towels.

I can feel my body relaxing as I move into the room to turn on the shower. I want to scrub myself down before I climb into the tub. Turning the heat all the way up, I turn to sniff at the soaps, grabbing one that smells like lavender and a shampoo

and conditioner that smells the same. Once I've stuck my hand under the spray to ensure that the temperature is the appropriate skin melting temp, I step under the water and release a low, pleasure-filled moan.

The scent of lavender wafts into the air as I attack my skin. I don't care that it hurts to scrub myself so viciously. I just want to be clean. I want to erase the feel of the guards and doctors from my skin now that I'm free. My hands glide to a stop on my stomach at the thought. Am I free? Or have I merely traded one prison for another?

Just because Neiros and Morpheus took me from the facility and brought me to this room doesn't mean that they aren't going to do everything in their considerable power to get the answers they want out of me. I need to remember that. I need to remember that they aren't my heroes. There's every chance they're just as monstrous as those that held me captive for years.

Get it together, Nysa. I chide myself as I continue to lather soap over my body. My fingers are massaging my scalp, working the shampoo through every inch of my hair when I notice it.

Gold sand.

It's glittering up at me from the floor of the shower and running in small rivers down my body. I blink in surprise and pull my hands from my hair. My fingertips are shimmering with dream sand. I've never leaked just gold before. It's always been mixed with black, nightmare sand. I blink in surprise, just staring as the gold continues to flutter from my hands.

But I'm not...happy. Right?

Oh, gods. Has the bar been set so low that a hot shower, some nice smelling soap, and a comfy bed make me so happy I start leaking gold sand?

I shake my head and choose to ignore anything that shimmers, getting back to scrubbing myself raw and basking

in the scalding heat of the water. I'm not going to focus too much on what I'm feeling. My emotions have never done me any good, and they won't help me now. Now, all I need to worry about is getting myself clean, and clothed, and then I can fall into bed. I can ruminate on what Morpheus and Neuros will do to me later. It certainly can't be worse than what I've already been through.

After I've scrubbed myself down head to toe three times, I turn the shower off and wrap a warm, fuzzy, white towel around me before plugging the tub and turning the water off. I want to soak my muscles more. Hopefully, that will help me heal. Heading back to the shelves, I select a clean-smelling bath salt and dump it into the steaming water. I then drop my towel and lower myself into the basin.

A long bliss-filled sigh escapes my lips, and my body melts. I'm not covered as much as I want to be, so I continue to let the water pour out of the spout. The tub itself is big enough that I can lay completely stretched out if I want to. It's perfect. I lower my head back against the rim and allow my eyes to slide closed.

I'm not sure how long I drift there, the sound of the water and my breaths soothing something deep within me, but the next time I open my eyes, the water is off and there is someone sitting next to me. I yelp and slide down into the water, sputtering after my head pops back up.

Neiros is sitting on the edge of the tub, a dangerously sexy smirk plastered on his face. His arms are crossed over his massive chest as he stares down at me. Well, two can play at that game. If he wants to look his fill, so can I.

He's massive. I remember the feel of his body against mine, and I estimate that he's almost seven feet tall. Based on what the doctors at the facility told me, I'm only five foot two, so he has plenty of height on me. And based on the muscles that bulge out of him everywhere, he's got plenty of weight on me too. Granted, anyone who eats regularly probably has plenty of weight on me. I mentally wince as my fingers dance

over my clearly visible ribs. His hair is black, like mine, with hits of silver shimmering throughout. It's about the length of his jaw and he has half of it tied back in a messy man-bun with the other half loose. The lower half of his face is covered in a five o'clock shadow that makes his pale skin more pronounced. His chin looks like it could cut glass, with an appealing dimple that draws the eyes there, which brings attention to his full dusky-red lips. His left eyebrow has a shiny black bar through it, and both of his ears are pierced. He's got tattoos going down his neck, and they vanish into the collar of his skin-tight black t-shirt. Neiros' arms are also covered in tattoos that move and swirl so fast that I can't determine what they're supposed to be. But they're appealing regardless.

"W-what are you doing here?" I stutter, turning my gaze away from his body to lock eyes with him.

"Had to make sure you're staying put." He shrugs, that smirk still in place. I'm not sure if it makes me want to punch him or maul him. Do I care? "We don't trust you not to run off."

I snort. Where the hell would I go? I don't even know where here is, let alone how to get anywhere else. I don't even have anywhere else to go. They're also the only link I have to understanding my...sorry, their powers. They're also my best bet at a quick death, so why would I fuck that up?

"Well, I'm here." I wave my hands in a shooing gesture.

Neiros leans over and braces his hands on either side of the tub, bringing his face dangerously close to mine. We're sharing air. My lips are tingling. My entire body is tingling, if I'm being honest with myself. Whatever space remains between us feels charged. His black, silver-specked eyes have a knowing look in them. Gods, and that infuriating smirk of his that only widens when I glance down at his lips. "I've given my brother some of my more bloodthirsty nightmares, little one. If you try to run, they will rip you to shreds."

I blink up at him, trying to ignore the heat that unfurls in my core at how close he is. My mind is sluggish to process what he said, the threat there. I shouldn't be turned on by someone threatening my life, right? What is it about the two of them that makes my body ache like this? I don't like it.

Neiros

I FIND I like those two-tone eyes of hers glittering up at me. While I thought she was delicious enough to eat when we first grabbed her off that operating table, now, clean and wet from her bath, she's stunning. Her long pitch-black hair has a soft curl to it now, and it's long enough that it floats in the water behind her. The skin that isn't covered in cuts and bruises is a soft golden color, which is surprising because I doubt she's been out in the sun much. She's far too skinny for my liking, but that's something that can easily be fixed if she's around long enough for us to feed her properly, and I know that once she's well fed, she'll have curves for days.

When I tell her about my nightmares, she gets a mutinous look on her face. A small part of me hopes that she'll try to run. I love a good hunt, so I won't let my nightmares have all the fun. Especially not when something so mouthwatering is the prize.

"I...I don't even know how I got here, let alone how to get out of this place." Nysa shoots me a small glare that has me struggling to hold back a chuckle. She's adorable when she's grumpy.

I run my fingers along her jaw before crooking a finger under her chin and tipping her face up. We study each other in silence for a moment before I speak. "Good. I just want you to know what's waiting for you."

"What will you do to me?" There's a hint of bravery in her tone that hasn't been there before now. "If I can't give you the answers you want."

“You’ll give us the answers we want,” I assure her. “And once you do...” I shrug. “We’ll kill you.”

What little color the warm water put into her cheeks instantly drains, and a shudder goes through her entire body. She gapes up at me, and I smile down at her. There’s no point in lying to her. We’ll get answers either way.

CHAPTER 6

*The Line Between Dreams and Nightmares
Blur*

NYSA



“They’ve promised that dreams can come true - but forgot to mention that nightmares are dreams, too.”

—Oscar Wilde.

I’m not sure how many days pass after the incident with Neuros in my bathroom. I’ve been kept in my room, never allowed out for any reason. I’m brought three meals a day, and I’m surprised at how violent my hunger is. I tear into each meal with a vigor I thought had been long beaten out of me. I’ve noticed that my body is starting to fill out, which surprises me. Shouldn’t that take longer? Is it possible I’m miss judging the passage of time here? Regardless, my body feels better than it has in ages. It’s all I’ve ever hoped for. How long had I prayed when I was at the facility to be left alone, fed a solid meal, all of it? And yet...Something is missing. I haven’t seen Morpheus or Neuros since that first day.

I pulled the curtains back the first night, finding a stunning land filled with rolling hills, gentle rivers, and soft, fluffy clouds beyond the castle walls. I want to go explore, but Neuros’ warning rings out in the back of my mind. I’ve caught sight of a few glimmering black masses several times, and each time my lust to go out into the world beyond is curbed instantly.

I spend most of my time in the sitting room, which is filled with a large bookcase, another desk that has paper, pens, and other art supplies. I read, sketch, and journal. I write down my experience in the facility, my thoughts, questions, and

anything else that pops into my mind. I'm not sure why I do it, but it does make me feel better, so I continue. I try to sit down and write at least once per day, getting everything out in a confusing jumble. When I can no longer hold a pen, I then curl myself on the seat before the fire and read until I ultimately fall asleep.

I find myself yearning for more, of what I'm not sure, but more of anything. Perhaps I need physical exertion? My mind is being well occupied, so it must be my body that has unfulfilled needs. I know that jogging and the like keeps you healthy, but gods, at what cost? The thought of jogging around my sitting room is vastly unappealing. Maybe I also need fresh air? I snort at the thought, no way I'll be getting that any time soon, though I do open my windows a crack in an attempt to appease whatever phantom need is buzzing through my veins.

I'm lounging in bed, a book resting on my stomach when Sandy pops up next to me, making me jump. Far too lost in my thoughts, I didn't realize it was already mealtime again. At least, I assume it's mealtime. They only pop up when it's time for food, but there's no tray in their hands.

"Hey Sandy," I chirp.

"Ms. Nysa," their soft, soothing voice washes over me as they bow. They have been doing that since the first time they brought me food. I've tried to get them to stop, but they won't. "Master Morpheus would like you down in the dining hall this evening."

I blink. That's new. I'm not sure if I'm excited or nervous. The change in routine can't mean anything good, can it?

"Okay." I slide my feet to the floor, wiggling my toes in the soft rug.

"You'll need to get dressed," Sandy points out.

I blink a few times, shocked. I am dressed. I glance down at the soft, stretchy leggings and oversized sweater I have on. Is this not good enough? I look back up at Sandy. They simply shake their head.

“Proper dress is required, Ms. Nysa.” Sandy shuffles over to the dresser and pulls out a shimmering swath of silken fabric. It’s a soft silver that glitters in the light. As they stretch it out on the bed, looking around for a pair of shoes after, I stare at the dress.

“That can’t be the entire dress,” I mutter, shaking my head.

“Do you need assistance?” Sandy asks.

“Can you leave me detailed instructions or something?” I reply, still staring at the dress and trying to figure out how the hell I’m supposed to wear it.

“Allow me to demonstrate.” Sandy transforms into me, shocking the hell out of me. They then proceed to show me how to put the dress on using a dress made from golden sand. “Simple.”

I blink at them, my mouth slightly ajar. They shift back into their typical form, but I can’t seem to shake my shock. Sandy just...turned into me. They turned into me and then they showed me how to put on the dress they wanted me to wear for dinner. A dress that on them—me—hardly covers anything.

“Sure,” I say slowly. “Fun.”

Sandy nods gesturing at the dress, clearly telling me to get on with it. “I’ll go grab some cosmetics and be back to do your hair and makeup.”

I nod, turning my attention back to the slip of fabric. The way it looked on Sandy—when they looked like me—is not okay. I know that I was naked when they brought me here, but I’m not about to prance around them in something barely there. No. Not happening. My gaze goes to the bathroom as a plan starts to form. I quickly get into the barely-there dress and sit down at the chair by the desk.

Sandy comes back out, arms loaded with makeup and hair tools. They get to work on fixing my hair so the curls are more defined rather than their usual beach wave. Sandy then applies

a light layer of makeup on my face, focusing mainly on my eyes.

“Thank you,” I murmur with a smile. “Do you mind if I take a minute to settle myself?”

They shake their head. “Just follow the lights when you’re ready, Ms. Nysa. They’ll show you to the dining room.”

I beam. “Thank you, Sandy.”

Sandy bows and is gone in a puff of glimmering golden sand. I feel bad for tricking the sweet dream creature, but there is no way I’m going to wear this to dinner with Morpheus. Nope. Not happening. I’ll leave the hair and makeup; I don’t have an issue with those.

With shaking hands, I remove the dress and put on what I had been wearing before. My heart starts to pound out a rapid, unsteady rhythm in my chest, and I can feel sweat start to bead at my brow. My skin is clammy and itchy. My fingers are unable to calm themselves.

Despite taking several deep breaths, I’m still shaking like a leaf as I close the door to my room. I’m going to be punished for this. I know I am. The feel of the textured wallpaper against my palm helps to ground me as my vision starts to tunnel. I trace my finger along the grooves mindlessly, focusing on that instead of the various horrible scenarios that are playing out in my mind.

Nothing can be worse than what I went through at the facility. Nothing.

I repeat that to myself over and over again as I blink my eyes into focus, take one last steadying breath, and then follow the lights to the dining room.

Morpheus

THE ONLY PERSON who has ever been able to bring out the twitch in my left eye is my brother, so I'm surprised to find it ticking away at the sight of Nysa, not in the dress I told Sandy to pick out for her, entering my dining room. She's in simple leggings and a baggy sweater that hides her entire body. I know better than to assume that Sandy refused to listen to a direct order. They are made from my magic; they don't have a choice in the matter. This means that Nysa somehow fooled the creature. Her hair and makeup are artfully done, which is perplexing.

Neiros chuckles in his seat to my left, causing the twitch in my eye to worsen. My hand clamps down on the wine glass in front of me, and I can hear the delicate glass in my palm crack. This just causes Neiros to snicker louder. I deliberately close my eyes and take a deep, calming breath to avoid slamming the glass into my brother's face.

We've left Nysa alone for the past several days so we could go back to where we found her and attempt to gain answers. It was also an attempt to lull her into feeling more secure here with us. We'll need her input on the information we gathered, but I want to see if she's going to lie to us. The information we gathered doesn't make it clear whether she was a willing participant or not. That's an important factor. Though, I'm not entirely convinced that even if she wasn't willing we'll spare her life.

Once I've wrestled down the urge to strangle both my brother and our prisoner, I stand and gesture to the seat to my right. Despite having a large table, when it's only a few people dining, I prefer to have everyone sit close. Propriety be damned.

Neiros continues to chuckle away as I pull out Nysa's chair and push it in once she's seated. He can laugh all he likes. Once I'm seated again, I glance at my brother—who, thankfully, stops laughing—and nod. With a flick of my wrist, food appears before us which has Nysa's eyes going wide with surprise.

“Are you ready to give us answers, little thief?” I ask, keeping my tone low and deadly. I don’t want her to think that just because she’s been invited to dine with us, we’re not still willing to kill her to get our powers back. “Tell us how you got our powers.”

Nysa reaches over to grab her wine glass, her hands shaking slightly. She’s trying to hide how nervous she feels, but it won’t work. She’s hiding something. My eyes narrow on her. I don’t believe for a moment that she doesn’t know anything about our powers. She has to know something. Is she nervous about lying to us? She should be.

Nysa

I WATCH as the wine ripples in the glass with the tremor of my hand. I need to get it together. Neither brother has said anything about my choice of attire, though I heard Neiros snickering to himself earlier, and I noticed Morpheus’ eyes tighten when I walked in. At least one of them isn’t happy with my clothes. The real question is what they’re going to do about it.

I’m so focused on staying in my seat and not running back to my room to change and make them happy that I don’t hear exactly what Morpheus says. His tone has the cadence of a question, followed closely by a threatening tone, but that’s about all I pick up. Each breath I take feels too shallow and far too fast to be healthy. I’m hyperventilating. Cool. Awesome.

Morpheus’ fist slams down onto the table causing me to scream and jump in my seat. My eyes widen with panic as I stare at him. My heart has beat its way out of my chest and into the next dimension. My shaking has increased. Are those spots in my vision? Am I about to pass out? When was the last time I passed out? My mind tries to remember but comes up blank.

“Nysa!” Neiros’ voice, commanding with a hint of concern, has my head whipping with violent speed to him. My body shrinks back into my seat as my gaze flies back to Morpheus. He seems like the bigger threat at the moment. “Beautiful nightmare.”

He’s next to me in a blink, kneeling beside me with his hands raised as if to touch me. I flinch back. Neiros frowns, which concerns me more than I already am, but my body keeps trying to move me away from him without leaving the seat. If I leave the seat...

“Little thief.” Morpheus is on my other side which causes me to attempt to curl in on myself on my chair. I need to get away from them both. Morpheus releases a deep sigh before touching his forefinger to my forehead. The world goes dark.

IT FEELS like mere moments later I’m blinking my eyes open again. We’re still at the table, but I’m feeling more relaxed than I had before. The brothers on still on either side of me, each studying me with intense, dark looks.

Before I can spiral again, Morpheus speaks. “There’s no need for that, thief.” While his words are clipped, his tone is softer than it was before. I stare up at him in surprise. “Enough of your games.”

I shoot a quick glance over at Neiros who has a contemplative look on his face now. It reminds me of how the doctor used to look at me. My entire body shudders as I squeeze my eyes shut for a moment. I try to take deep, even breaths and keep myself calm. I need to do as they demand.

“Sorry,” I say in a low tone. My eyes crack open so I can look up at Morpheus. “What did you ask?”

He gives me a stiff nod, gesturing for his brother to return to his seat before seating himself. Morpheus takes a quick sip of his wine and then asks. “Tell us how you got your powers.”

I can feel the panic starting to skitter its way up my spine, but I force it back as I take a sip of my own wine. I need it to fortify me for what's to come. "I told you already. I don't know." Morpheus opens his mouth to argue with me, but I cut him off. "One day I woke up where you took me from. I don't remember anything from before that. I've always had these abilities. At least... I think I've always had them."

"You're lying to us, little thief." Morpheus tsks. Neiros shakes his head. "Try again."

"There's nothing else to say." I grip the edge of the table, still fighting against the panic that wants to take hold of me. "That's it. I can tell you about what they did to me there once I woke up, but that won't give you the answers you want."

"No," Neiros agrees, "it won't."

Morpheus places a thin tan folder on the table, placing his fingertips on it to hold it in place. "Do you know what this is?"

I shake my head; my eyes are glued to the folder. It feels big.

"This is information from the facility we retrieved you from." Morpheus looks over at his brother. "We stopped by a few days ago."

I suck in a deep breath through my teeth and let it out in a low hiss. They went back? Why? My gaze bounces from the folder to the two men in front of me. The absurd urge to lunge for the folder nearly overtakes me, my butt lifting partway off the seat before I force myself back. Morpheus catches the action, however, and shoots me a smug smirk.

"Would you like to know what's in here, thief?" The question is asked far too innocently. I know it's a trap. I know that he's going to twist the information in that folder against me somehow. I should shake my head. Tell him no. Something. Anything.

"Yes."

CHAPTER 7

Blissful Horrors

NYSA



“Dreams are often most profound when they seem the most crazy.”

—Sigmund Freud.

Y *es.*

That one three-letter word seals my fate. I know it the moment the word leaves my mouth. I’ve fallen into whatever trap Morpheus set for me, and I did it without so much as a second thought. My mind doesn’t care, though. Not right now. All it cares about is learning whatever information is in that folder. I *need* to know.

Morpheus opens the folder and then slowly slides it over the Neuros. “Why don’t you do the honors.”

Neiros grins over at me as he takes the folder in his hands. “Nysa Whitethorn. Age 28. No children. Never married. Born on October 31st—Halloween, how nice.” He glances up at me once he reads my birthday. There’s an intense look in his eyes that I don’t like. It’s a condemning look, but my mind is screaming at him to continue reading and thereby ignores any warning bells that go off. I didn’t even know my last name or age until he read it out moments ago. I’m so thirsty for any drop of knowledge.

“Mimic,” Neuros says it like it’s the most blasphemous word he knows.

“What the hell is a mimic?” I ask without pause, unable to stop the words from flowing out of me. “I-I don’t know what that is.”

“Bullshit,” Morpheus spits. “Bull fucking shit you don’t know what a mimic is.”

“Does it say how long I was in that facility?” I ask quietly, choosing to ignore Morpheus’ vitriol for the moment. I want to try to prove a point.

“Fifteen years,” Neiros replies.

My body goes numb. I was a child? But... I don’t remember waking up to a child’s face. My fingers start to explore the slopes of my cheeks, the ridge of my nose, and the peaks of my brows. Adult features. I don’t recall ever having childish features during the rare times I was allowed to use a mirror at the facility. I had certainly looked younger than I do now, but not like a *child*.

I was thirteen if that folder is to be believed when I entered the facility. Thirteen, and I don’t have any recollection of it. My palms go clammy, and I clench my fingers in my sweater to keep them from shaking. I still don’t understand what a mimic is, but thinking about it is secondary to the crisis I’m currently having over my lost memories.

There’s too much to think about. My mind is running in circles. Grief. Anger. Shock. Loathing. It’s all I can focus on. All I can feel. If the doctors at the facility took my memories from before I was thirteen—for any reason since I’m assuming I didn’t go into that place willingly—where are my memories from thirteen to eighteen?

Fingers closing around my throat from behind have my hands flying up in defense. I try to dig my nails into the flesh I find there, but another hand clamps around my fingers and pulls them away.

“Now, now, thief,” Morpheus murmurs next to my ear. I go to turn my head in his direction, but yet another hand tangles

in my hair and holds my head still. “No more games. Stop acting.”

That liquid sin voice of his in that tone that threatens a world of unimaginable pain has my heart skipping several beats and my breath catching in my throat. I’m not sure how to convince them that I’m being genuine. I’m not sure if I want to. Wouldn’t it be easier if I just let them kill me? I know they want answers. I know they don’t ever want this to happen again, but if I provoke them enough, I’m sure they’ll end my suffering right now.

I open my mouth to do just that, but Neuros’ other hand clamps down over my lips as he releases a disgruntled sound. “Don’t you dare.”

Something other than panic sparks in my chest. It’s bright, and hot, and it flies through my system at break-neck speeds. I can feel my cheeks flush, my eyes narrow, and my heart rate kicks up. The inexplicable urge to bite down on Neuros’ hand has me clenching my jaw.

“You’re a mimic,” Neuros says again with that same tone he used initially.

I narrow my eyes even further. *I have no idea what a mimic is!*

“Which means that you had to have had an active hand in obtaining our powers.” Morpheus makes it sound all so reasonable and straightforward, but that’s not how any of this works.

It’s becoming clear that the brothers only see things in black and white. There doesn’t appear to be any gray in their lives. Which is interesting considering their powers. Dreams and nightmares are intimately woven together. One can lead into another or be mistaken for the other. Things are never as simple as they appear. Even my time at the facility was filled with various shades of gray. Life is nothing *but* gray. I know that they won’t want to listen if I were to argue that point.

“Sandy,” Morpheus snaps. “Bring her back to her room.” He’s dismissing me and I’m not sure how I feel about that. Don’t they want answers? Why not press me more, see if I break? This form of psychological torment leaves me far more unsteady than any physical torture. I don’t know where I stand with either of them. Why do they press only to stop so suddenly?

None of this makes sense.

The tiny Sandman glimmers into existence as the brothers remove their hands from me and take several steps back. They’re glaring at me as I stand. I want to argue my point, make them understand, but given how they’ve responded so far, I don’t see it going anywhere. Maybe I can find a way to use my powers to help me better? I think about that as Sandy leads me back to my room.

Later that night, I’m hunkering down in bed with my covers up to my chin as my mind continues to whirl from the earlier revelations. I can’t move past my missing memories. Those are core, formative times. They’re events that would have shaped my personality. How is it possible that I don’t remember any of it? I don’t know who I am anymore.

My eyes begin to droop, the heat of the room, the soft sheets, and the stress of the day forcing my body to shut down. My mind needs to unplug. It needs a reprieve from everything. I need that blissful emptiness that sleep brings. The sweet oblivion that helps me heal physically and mentally.

If only that’s what I get.

I’M BACK in the dining room, Morpheus’ hands are once again around my throat and tangled in my hair. Neuros is still across the table, a look of dark hunger painted on his face. A matching hunger starts in my core and slowly spreads throughout my body. I can feel my skin start to flush.

With my body still at his command, Morpheus drags my chair back just enough for Neuros to kneel in front of me. How did he move that fast? Wasn't he just across the table? Before I can ask, callused fingers trail up my thighs, leaving goosebumps in their wake. Wait...what happened to my leggings? Morpheus tilts my head back further so our gazes lock. He has a sinister smirk on his lips, and those golden eyes of his are sparkling with depraved desire.

"I'm not going to let you watch what he does to you, little thief. You're only allowed to feel." His tone, so deep and hungry has my breath catching in my throat. I bite my lower lip to prevent me from whimpering. "Your eyes are to remain on mine. Blink once if you understand." I blink. "Good girl. If you take your eyes off me for any reason, you will be punished. Do you understand?" I blink again.

Morpheus releases a dark chuckle, which seems to be the signal to Neuros. Glittering black sand swirls around us, and I feel the grains condense around my nipples, pinching, tugging, and teasing. A gasp rips its way past my lips. My hips try to move closer to the nightmare king.

Neuros grips my hips with crushing force—the bruises will be delicious later. He tsks at me, giving my inner thigh a stinging nip in reprimand. "No moving, beautiful nightmare. We're not about to rush this."

Gold sand joins with the black. I'm not sure which, possibly both, bring my arms around the back of the chair and bind them there. Neuros continues to nip and lick my inner thighs, getting so close to where I need him. My clit is throbbing. I want to scream in frustration, but Morpheus has such a tight grip on my throat, I doubt anything will make it out.

Sand glides over my entire body—soft, feather-light touches, scratches, bites—until I'm panting and struggling to keep my eyes open. Morpheus has a knowing smirk on his face, as though he's taking a great deal of pleasure out of my struggles. Like he wants me to close my eyes.

It's only when I feel ready to burst out of my skin that Neiros finally, finally, closes those luscious lips of his over my clit. A garbled scream works its way up my throat, only to be strangled by Morpheus' large fingers. His grip tightens and I can feel my field of vision narrowing. It only makes the pleasure that much more intense.

Neiros sucks, flicks, and nips at my clit. My hips try, with no success, to grind against his face. I want more pressure. More everything. The feel of my nightmare's fingers digging into my hips only adds to the pleasure, as does the feel of my dream's fingers around my throat and in my hair. The sand playing with my nipples. All of it. Bliss.

Neiros removes one of his hands from my hip so he can slide two fingers into me. There's no warning. It's not gentle. One minute I'm empty and the next, I'm partially filled and being finger fucked to within an inch of my life. He isn't gentle. The noises our bodies make because of how wet I am is obscene, and I'm sure I'll be embarrassed later.

But right now?

Right now, Morpheus is tightening his hand on my neck again, my vision is going dark, and Neiros is working me up to an earth-shattering release. One that will change everything.

"Come," Morpheus whispers against my ears, yanking my hair back and taking my mouth with his.

Neiros clamps his teeth on my clit, shoving a third finger into me. I shatter. My eyes slide shut. My body goes taught. My pussy flutters around the fingers stroking my g-spot over and over again. My lungs release an explosive scream into Morpheus' mouth.

WHEN MY EYES BLINK OPEN, I'm no longer in the dining room. I'm strapped back onto the operating table Morpheus and Neiros had liberated me from days ago. My lungs are still

working overtime and my body is still coming down from the aftermath of the orgasm I was given.

But that wasn't...here? No. That was...

I blink, trying to focus. I'd just been in the dining room of Morpheus' castle, and now I'm back in the facility, strapped to the operating table. How?

I glance around, confused. What the hell is going on?

The kiss of cold metal against my skin has my head whipping over. Neuros is standing next to me, a scalpel in hand. He hasn't cut me, using the blunt end of the instrument to caress the skin on my arm. I'm still overly sensitive, so the sensation makes my body shake with need.

"I'm going to be the first one to brand you, little nightmare." Brand me? "It's such a shame that this won't cross over. But I'll be sure to make it permanent in due time."

What?

Twirling the sharp blade in his hand, a sinister smirk on his face, Neuros leans down until our lips are nearly touching. "I'm going to carve my name into you while I'm fucking you."

My breath catches, and I can feel my eyes widening. I shake my head. No. I don't want him to cut me.

"You'll beg me for it. Not tonight. But eventually. Eventually, you'll beg me to brand you, mark you as mine. You won't be able to live without it carved so deep into your skin that you'll be born with it in your next life." He smiles down at me and then nips at my lips. "You're going to beg us to own you."

"N-no," I stammer. "I don't want to be owned." I wince at how breathy my voice sounds.

"Yes, you do, nightmare." Warm fingers travel down my chest, my stomach, and then cup my pussy. "We already own this, don't we? We're the only ones that are ever going to be able to give you pleasure from now on."

He thrusts two fingers into me, using the base of his hand to rub against my clit. I'm only able to buck my hips an inch or so off the table thanks to the restraints. I moan and lunge up to press my lips against his. The dark chuckle I swallow tells me that no matter what I say, I'm going to be branded. I'm going to be owned. He's going to do whatever he wants to me.

Surprisingly, I'm not upset about that. I think, deep down, there is a part of me that revels in this. Wants it more than anything else. But I can't think past the pleasure as he works my body into a frenzy again, bringing me ever closer to that explosive edge.

Then he stops.

I pull back and stare up at him. His eyes, pitch black with specks of silver, have turned molten. Neuros nips my ear before whispering, "You aren't going to come until I tell you to, nightmare." I can only manage a whimper in response.

Hours, maybe days later, I'm covered in sweat. Neuros wasn't kidding when he said that I wouldn't come until he told me to. He's brought me to the edge countless times, in countless ways. I'm out of my mind, needing release so desperately it feels like a soul-deep ache.

"Neuros," I whine. "Please."

"I love hearing you beg," Neuros murmurs as he glides his naked body up mine, nipping and licking as he goes. He just had his head buried between my thighs, and his lips are glistening. I want to lick him. He pauses above me, studying me closely.

I know I'm blushing by the heat that invades my cheeks. After everything he's done to me, I shouldn't be ashamed or embarrassed, but there's something in that look that has me feeling a bit self-conscious. I tug fruitlessly at my bindings.

"I'm going to stuff you with my cock." His eyes burn bright at the admission. "You're going to come squeezing the life out of my dick while I'm carving my name into your chest."

I still don't want him to brand me, but I need to feel him inside me more, so I merely nod. Perhaps I can make him just as crazed for me that he forgets to sink his blade into my flesh.

Neiros doesn't hesitate, thrusting home with a single, decisive thrust. I scream at the invasion. He's larger than the guard that used to take what wasn't his, bigger than his fingers too. I don't scream in pain though. I scream in relief. The feeling of being full to the brim, finally, so welcome that a tear slips down my cheek.

Our gazes locked, Neuros slides his hand to the front of my throat, using it as leverage so he can watch as he drags himself out only to slam back home. My body strains against the restraints at my wrists and ankles. My breathing is mostly cut off, but that only makes everything so much better. It forces me to focus on his cock filling me over and over again.

"Fuck, you take my cock so well," he growls. "Your pussy grips me like it was made for me."

I whimper as he moans and increases his pace. "I'm going to come."

"Fuck, no you aren't," he snarls. "Not yet. Don't make me punish you." He removes his hand from my throat to tightly grip my breast. His other hand comes up with the scalpel, digging the tip into my flesh near my collarbone. "You only get to come when I'm done carving my name."

My pussy flutters around him, and he hisses, digging the blade in even further. I don't feel the pain, my body is far too lost to the pleasure he's ripping from me. I can feel my blood pooling at the hollow of my throat and dripping off my shoulders, but that only enhances the pleasure. His thrusts are violent, as though he can't get enough of me.

"Now." He roars as his release rips through his body.

I scream as my orgasm floods every nerve-ending, every cell, every inch of my being.

"Fuck. Fuck! Your pussy is strangling my cock." Neuros leans down to bite my shoulder hard enough to bleed. "So

fucking good.”

Moments later, he pulls out, snarls, and then brushes his fingers against my legs to shove them back into my pussy. “You’ll keep every fucking drop of my cum, do you hear me? All. Of. It.”

ONCE AGAIN, I’m not given a moment to come down from my high before the scene changes. I’m back in the dining room, except this time only Morpheus is there with me. I’m standing—in the dress I chose not to wear—by the door as the dream king takes long, threatening strides toward me. The look in his eyes is almost feral, and much to my surprise, my body responds happily.

What the hell is going on with me?

“Did my brother fill you with his cum, little thief?” Morpheus asks in a tone that is deadly. He doesn’t sound jealous, but he does sound ready to kill. “Did he have you screaming his name?”

I can’t remember what I screamed while Neuros was pounding into me, carving his name on my chest. I glance down to see that my skin is unmarred. I’m not sure if I’m disappointed or happy about that. Which is fucked up. I have to keep reminding myself that all of this isn’t right. It can’t be...can it? I don’t actually think I care though. I think...I think I want this, regardless of how fucked up it is.

When Morpheus reaches me, he cages me in with his arms against the door, pressing his much larger body against mine. I can feel how hard he is through our clothes, and my body—mindless to my direction—arches against him.

His laugh, dark, deep, and delicious, shoots through my body and tingles in my clit. I tilt my head up, my lips searching for his. Instead of the kiss I yearn for, his hand clamps down around my throat as he ducks so our gazes lock.

“You will never be rid of me, little thief. I own you now.” I moan and lick my lips in invitation. In acceptance. “I may have allowed Neuros to go first, but don’t you ever assume that you do not belong to me. Do you understand?”

I blink up at him, lost for words. He snarls, biting at my lower lip and shaking me with the hang around my throat.

“I asked if you understood, little thief. Answer me.”

“Yes,” the word comes out on a breathy whisper.

“Yes, what?” Morpheus does sound like he’s about to fuck me. He sounds like he wants to kill me. Gods, does it work for me though.

“I understand that I belong to you.” I lick my lips again. I want him to touch me more. I need it. Crave it.

“You’ll scream my name every time I make you come. If you don’t, there will be consequences,” he growls. I whimper. “Say you understand.”

“I understand.”

“Good girl.”

In a flash, my back is pressed against his front—his hand still around my throat, and his other hand is clamped to my hip. He grinds that large, hard cock against my ass. I bite my lip to keep from making a sound. Morpheus guides us to the table, where he stops. The hand around my throat moves to tangle in my hair, and then he slams me against the table. My hands come down on the wooden surface with a fleshy slapping sound.

The hand that had been gripping my hips, moves to my lower back, keeping me pinned in place. One of his legs forces mine apart. The hand on my lower back moves, and without warning he thrusts two fingers into my pussy. The sound that makes is obscene, but it only makes my desire burn hotter. I arch my hips back with a loud, long moan of encouragement. Morpheus simply hums in approval of how wet I am for him.

“You’re going to ride my face on this table, little thief,” he orders as he continues to finger fuck me to within an inch of my life.

“Wha—?” I try to look back at him, but the grip he has on my hair doesn’t allow for much movement.

“I said, you’re going to ride my fucking face on this table.” I cry out as he adds a third finger.

“I don’t...”

He cuts me off. “When I tell you to sit on my face, I don’t expect you to speak. You’re to try to crush my skull with your thighs. Period.” And with that, he pulls his fingers out of me, shreds my dress, and then quickly arranges us so I’m kneeling above his face with his hands on my hips.

Morpheus pulls me down on top of him, his tongue flicking out against my clit, but then he pulls back, our eyes locking. “You play with those pretty nipples, and you smother me with this delicious cunt. Now.”

He pulls me down so hard, my legs can’t fight against me and all of my weight is now on his face. Morpheus doesn’t care, however, he’s too busy groaning as he eats me out with unparalleled vigor. My hands, slaves to his whims it seems, immediately start to play with my nipples. I cry out at the sensation overload. My hips try to move, but he keeps me anchored where he wants me. All I can do is feel.

And gods, do I feel.

I feel it all. Every nip, lick, suck. Every hum, groan, and hiss. I feel the pressure of his fingers against my oversensitive flesh. I feel the tug and roll of my own fingers against my peaked nipples. I feel the pleasure as it floods me and binds me to the man beneath me. I feel myself hurtling at an alarming speed to the edge, bliss just there out of reach. All it takes is two of his fingers sliding into my empty pussy to have me screaming his name in release.

When I’m finished, he the table runner and ties my hands behind my back. I’m limp from the pleasure overload of this

evening, and I don't do anything to fight his manhandling of my body. I want this. I want him to do whatever he wants to me. I want to revel in the pleasure that he rings from my body. I'm too blissed out to want anything else. Morpheus then uses the remaining runner to tie me to the end of the table. I'm not sure what he ties to my ankles to keep them spread and tie them to the table legs, but I don't really care.

"You're going to take my cock now, thief." He leans down to bite one of my ass cheeks. "I'm going to fuck you until you can't stand. Then I'm going to fuck you until you're so raw you think that you'll die without my cock in you."

I get no other warning. Morpheus thrusts home, a feral sounding snarl ripping past his lips as he bottoms out. It stings. He's wider than his brother, and he's pierced. I wasn't expecting that. My pussy clenches down around him and he groans in pleasure. I want to smile, but he slaps my ass. The sting sending shock waves to my clit.

"I am in charge here. Not you," he growls.

I lose count of how many times Morpheus brings me to the edge, only to deny me release. I'm stuck, sobbing for him to just show mercy on me, teetering on the edge. I need him to finish this. Give me release. Give me death. Anything. Just finish it.

"Do you want my cum?" He snarls low against my ear. I whimper in response. "Use your words, thief. Do you want my cum?" He thrust home with each word of the question.

"Yes," I sob.

"Good girl." Morpheus' praise sends me flying higher.

His hand curls around and finds my clit, pinching it between his thumb and forefinger. It's all I need to see stars, scream his name to the heavens, and clamp down around his dick with enough force he has to stop moving inside me.

"Fuck yes!" He hisses as his own orgasm rips through him. "Take it all."

I'm panting, sweaty, and a complete mess when he eventually pulls out of me. A whine crawls up my throat as how sore I am. He tsks at me, running his fingers down my thighs to scoop up the cum that drips out of me.

"Open your mouth," he demands.

Too tired to do anything else, I oblige. He immediately shoves his fingers, covered in our combined release, into my mouth. "Suck."

I do as I'm told.

"You are to never let a single drop go to waste." All I can do is hum in agreement as my world goes dark.

THE REST of my dreams that night aren't nearly as pleasant.

CHAPTER 8

Corruption of the Innocent

NYSA



*“My best dreams and worst nightmares have the same people
in them.”*

—Phillippos Syrigos.

It’s been two days since Morpheus and Neiros used their abilities to torment me with images of my past and things I’ll never have but yearn for. Two days since they violated me in a way that I hadn’t thought possible. It’s been the longest two days of my life. I spend most of my time journaling more and practicing my own magic. I want to see what I’m capable of. At the facility, the goal was for me to put people to sleep and then have them either dream or experience a nightmare, but it’s clear—based on what I’ve seen the brothers do—that I can do much more with my magic.

I’m still unsure about what I want to do in regard to my life; do I play their game, or do I provoke them into ending my life? Do I still try to get them to see my truth? Do I accept their version as the truth? I’m lost and so very, very confused.

I ruminate on all the possibilities as I change and get ready to sleep. I pray that the brothers will leave my dreams alone tonight, but knowing those two sadistic bastards, I’m sure I’ll get another visit, another taste of what I won’t ever have outside of dreams, another taste of the terror I felt every day in the facility. All I know for sure at this moment in time is that despite not being at the facility any longer, I’m not entirely convinced that my life is any better than it was.

Sure, I'm fed; I'm able to sleep; I'm clothed. However, they have found new and terrifying ways to torment me, ways the doctors at the facility would love to know about. Sneaking into my dreams giving me nightmares and making me want things; things I never knew I wanted. I wake each morning with a mixture of gold and black sand—the gold now in equal amounts as the black. They've managed to do what the doctors hoped to achieve in mere days.

My eyes drift closed with one last thought. If they want to leave a mark on me, I'm going to mark them in return. I won't be the only one scarred.

“PLEASE,” a small voice cries. “Please. Not again.”

The darkness around me is lifting, and I gaze at the young girl before me. She can't be more than five or six, and she's huddled on the ground in the fetal position. This isn't a memory. The girl has bright blond hair, so it certainly isn't me.

She whimpers and tucks herself in tighter. I glance around, trying to see what's frightening her. That's when it hits me. She's having a nightmare. A nightmare.

Fire streaks down my spine; my hands curl into fists, and my lips twist into a snarl. Neiros is tormenting a poor, innocent child with a nightmare. How. Dare. He?!

“I won't do it again,” the girl whimpers. “I promise.”

A booted foot comes into view, kicking the poor girl in the back, causing her to scream in pain. Tears burn the backs of my eyes, and I stride forward. There's no way in hell I'm going to sit back and allow this little one to continue on in this nightmare.

As my body wraps around hers, I release a gust of golden sand. I may not know how to use these powers, but that isn't going to stop me from trying anything and everything. I will change this nightmare into a pleasant dream for this girl. I

won't allow her to relive her trauma, not like this. She doesn't need to see this when she closes her eyes.

I pour every ounce of my will into changing the scene around me into a calm, beautiful dream. Something that will, with any luck, fill this girl with hope instead of despair. I want it to be light and airy, so she doesn't feel trapped, imbue it with the knowledge that she is smart, strong, fierce, and a force to be reckoned with. I want it to feed her fighting spirit, one I know is locked deep within her.

It had been locked away for me, too. Until tonight.

Seeing the torment this little girl is being forced to relive has sparked my inner rage. My need to fight. Defend. Protect.

Neiros is going to pay.

But first, I need to make sure that this child is taken care of. That she's safe and secure for the night.

So I continue to encourage more golden sand to flow from my body, spinning it around me with just my will. I tell it to find what the girl finds safe, her happy place, and to recreate that. I tell it to build a wall to keep the nightmares out. And then...Then I create glimmering, golden monsters of my own. They are to hunt down every last speck of black sand and obliterate it.

My monsters are enormous and take on various forms. Dogs, cats, mythical creatures, everything. With the flick of my wrist, they run off on their mission, promising in their own way to come back to me once they have succeeded.

With that done, I pull away from the girl. She sits up and stares up at me, blinking in confusion and surprise.

"Are you my fairy godmother?" She asks.

My heart breaks as I stare down at her. I gently push the hair from her face and smile. "No. No, sweet girl. I'm not a fairy godmother."

"Then how did you do all of this?" She gestures around her.

“Technically, you did this.” I shrug. “I just gave you a little push in the right direction.”

“I’m Lacey.” Lacey stands and looks around. “Is it okay if I go play?”

“Absolutely. Enjoy.”

“Thank you, queen of dreams.” With that, she skips off.

Queen of dreams, huh? I like the sound of that.

IT’S the middle of the night when I wake up, filled to the brim with determination. Those assholes want answers? Well, so do I. They don’t believe me? I’m going to make them. They want to kill me? I’d like to see them try. I’m going to kill them first.

My monsters are gathered around my bed in a protective circle. I praise each of them for a job well done as I climb out of bed and search through the clothes available to me. If I’m going into battle, I need to dress appropriately.

Once I’m dressed in leather pants, boots, and a black long-sleeve t-shirt, I braid my hair. I study myself in the mirror as my fingers work on my hair, pausing for a moment. Instead of the single pitch-black color it used to be, there are now glittering golden highlights at the front of my face and underneath. My two-tone hair, like my two-tone eyes, must mean that I’m either growing my powers or accepting them more freely.

Do all mimics look like this?

It’s the first time in days that I’ve thought about that word. I still don’t know what a mimic is, but I’m going to find out tonight.

Morpheus

I FROWN OVER AT NEIROS. Nysa was supposed to have been in a dream I created for her, but she's not. Nor is she in a nightmare. I close my eyes and attempt to locate her but have no luck. My eye twitches. My brother and I are lounging in the sitting room that's adjacent to my suit of rooms. The space here is darker than the rest of the castle, more to bring me a sense of calm after running my kingdom.

"It's possible she can't fall asleep," my brother offers. I shoot him a glare. "I mean, we either fuck the life out of her or terrorize her with memories. Maybe she's on strike."

It's true. Each night we've alternated between fucking her in a pleasant dream or fucking her in a nightmare, blurring the lines between pleasure and pain. We've done all of this and will continue to do all of this, in the hopes that we'll eventually learn something. I'm in this for the long haul.

The fact that her pussy is the sweetest thing I've ever tasted is entirely beside the point. So is the fact that I'm painfully hard right now. None of those things matter. What matters is finding out how Nysa came by our powers, getting them back, and stopping it from ever happening again.

"I should send Sandy with something to knock her out," I mutter, rubbing my chin.

Neiros shrugs. "Do what—"

He's cut off as the door to the sitting room we're in bursts open with an explosion of gold sand. Nysa, clad in leather and black, looking healthier and fuller than she has in a while, strides in. The confidence and violence oozing off her is incredibly appealing. I can't fixate on that, however, as several golden monsters crowd into the room with her.

She's gaining more control over her powers. *Our* powers.

"You." Nysa stabs her finger in Neiros' direction. My brother looks perplexed as she marches over to him. She stands in front of him for a moment before she hauls her hand back and slaps him across the face.

Both Neiros and I go unnaturally still as a red handprint blooms on Neiros' cheek where his beard doesn't cover. Nysa isn't done. No, it seems that she's just getting started.

Chest heaving, eyes blazing, she steps back to keep us both in sight as she begins. "You want answers? Well, so do I!" She holds out her hand and one of her monsters comes forward to drop the folder we should her the other day into her waiting palm. My eyes narrow on it. Where the hell did she find that?

Opening the folder she scans the contents, quoting, "A mimic is a witch with unlimited potential. Capable of copying any gift she sees; the mimic has several potential uses. Unfortunately, a mimic's time with this power is limited. She either keeps the powers for a set amount of time based on her own power level or until she witnesses a new power. She has no other magic of her own.

"Subject 2319 shows incredible and near limitless potential. She was capable of holding onto a single power for nearly three weeks, the longest time on record for a mimic. It is disappointing that her parents will not allow us to study her further." Nysa slams the folder shut. Her cheeks are a bright pink, and if looks could kill, my brother and I would be long dead. "But I'm lying to you about not remembering my past. Lying about not knowing how I got my powers. Right?"

I gesture to the folder. "Keep reading, thief."

With a huff, a soft—although violent—curse, Nysa explodes at me. "I've read it already, Morpheus. There's nothing in here that implicates me as being complicit. *Nothing*. So what are you getting at?"

I motion her over. "Give me the folder."

Her eyes narrow on me, but she does as she's told, dropping the folder in my outstretched hand. Nysa's monsters usher her back to her original spot. Protective things. How interesting. Flipping through the pages, I stop on the one I want.

“2319 has responded remarkably well to the treatment. We have every hope that she will absorb the powers and retain them permanently.”

“That’s what you’re going off of?” She asks incredulously. “That I responded to an unknown, unspecified treatment and that they hope I keep the unknown, unspecified powers permanently? Clearly, you didn’t get the entire file,” she scoffs.

I stand, moving to tower over her. It’s an intimidation tactic, a low-blow, but I’m not ashamed to use it. “This was what was at the facility we found you at. It’s been abandoned.”

“And you didn’t think to go looking for any more of them?” Her eye roll has my hands itching to close around her throat. Nysa needs to be taught who is in charge here. It sure as fuck isn’t her.

“We’re looking, thief. That isn’t any of your concern.”

“Not my concern?” The shrill tone her voice takes makes the twitch in my eye worse.

“While I’ve enjoyed this little back and forth,” Neiros cuts in, “do you care to tell me why you slapped me?”

“You’ll find out soon,” Nysa snaps, returning her attention to me. “You want to play games with me? Fine.”

With that, she whirls and exits the room, her monsters in tow. I stand where I am for a moment in shock, just staring at the doorway.

“What the fuck just happened?” I ask my brother.

“Something brought out her claws,” he murmurs. “Things just got interesting, brother.”

CHAPTER 9

When Nightmares Call

NEIROS



“Unfortunately, a superabundance of dreams is paid for by a growing potential for nightmares.”

— Peter Ustinov.

As the ruler of nightmares, I’m often seen and spoken of as the Boogeyman. Like my brother, I’ve created a creature that takes on this persona. I’ve been told that my appearance is too soft to be the real Boogeyman, whatever the hell that means. So the creature that plays the part is all harsh angles, empty eyes, and hunched back. They adjust their appearance ever so slightly depending on the individual they’re dealing with, for maximum impact.

I haven’t brought Boogey out to play with Nysa yet because the creature can be...unruly when they want to be. They’ve taken on a life of their own, and I have never felt the need—until recently—to rein that in. It’s suited me just fine to allow them to be a juggernaut of nightmarish power. They’re currently lurking on the edges of my brother’s castle with the express order to not venture into the castle and not allow a certain mimic out.

I’ve retreated to my palace for the time being. Nysa’s outburst moments ago—the slap in particular—not sitting well with me. There was nothing skittish about how she confronted Morpheus, going toe-to-toe with him as if she were his equal. It’s perplexing, this sudden change in her demeanor. I want to know what caused it. I *need* to know.

With a soft grunt, I flop into a chair by the fireplace in my bedroom. I stare aimlessly into the flames as I think about our stunning captive.

“You know, Neiros,” Nysa’s voice, smooth and sultry, has me turning my head, “that first night, it took me a while to realize what you two were doing.”

“And what did we do?” I play innocent as I stare hungrily at her. She’s deliciously naked, and I’m pleased to see that she’s starting to fill out. Those curves I knew were there starting to become more pronounced. “Tell me, Nysa.”

“You took something you had no right to take. You showed me things I didn’t want to see.” She saunters over, kneeling in front of me and placing her hands on my knees. My cock, already at attention just from seeing her naked, grows painfully hard. “You made me want things.”

“Go on,” I murmur with a smirk down at her. Her body heat seeping through my pant legs and spreading throughout my body. Her two-toned eyes are hooded and sparkling with heat. Her pouty lips are glistening in the light of the fire, and all I can think about is shoving my cock down her throat until she chokes on it.

“Do you determine what people see in their nightmares?”

I’m caught off guard by the question, my brain too filled with thoughts of all the things I want to do with her. Tilting my head, I answer; “Not necessarily. Morpheus and I send our sands out into the world, whatever the person is most receptive to at the time is the one that takes hold.”

Nysa throws her head back and laughs. “That’s not entirely true now, is it?” She arches an eyebrow at me as she runs her hands up my thighs. Her back arches in a way that has my gaze zeroing in on her now fuller tits.

I widen my legs a bit and fold my hands across my chest, meeting her gaze. “No. I can force a nightmare on someone, just as Morpheus can force a dream. We try not to use our powers that way. We prefer to keep the balance. Dreams and

nightmares are the fuel for magic in the moral realm, if we tamper with it too much, it could have terrible consequences.”

I blink, shaking my head a bit. Why am I answering her so freely? Aren't I the one who needs to get answers out of her?

I open my mouth to speak, but Nysa shifts to straddle my lap, grinding down against my cock. She's naked, wet, and clearly willing. I groan, my hands coming to grip her hips and press her more firmly against me. Her arms wrap around my neck as she leans down to nibble on my lips.

“You're being such a good boy, Neiros,” her whisper goes straight to my dick. “But I need to visit your brother now.”

Wha—?

Morpheus

“I'M surprised you didn't come after me,” Nysa's sweet voice drifts over to me. I turn to see her standing in the doorway of my study. She's dressed in just an overlarge sleep shirt. “After all, aren't you the one that always needs to be in control?”

I growl at her. How dare she barge into my dream like this? How the hell did she get in here? When did I even fall asleep?

“Enough,” I snap as I march toward her.

Before I can reach for her, Nysa is gone, appearing again on the other side of the room. The tsking sound she makes has my eye starting to twitch. With a soft laugh she says, “You do it in your dreams too, that's actually adorable.”

Whirling around with a snarl, I stalk toward her again. This time, I stop before I'm within arm's reach of her. I don't want her disappearing again. “There is nothing adorable about me, little thief.”

“Did you know that you tack on the ‘little’ when you’re thinking sexy thoughts about me?” Nysa asks with an amused gleam in her eye and a tilt of her head. “You remove it when you want to strangle me, but I’m starting to think that’s in a sexy way too.”

In the blink of an eye, her hand is around my throat, her breasts pressing against my chest. How did she get so tall? Does she truly have that much mastery over our powers? The answers to those questions don’t matter as her other hand grips my dick through my pants, squeezing it playfully. A low, hungry growl rumbles out of my chest unbidden.

“Why don’t you believe me?” Nysa asks in a low somber tone. She’s stroking my cock and pressing her tiny hand against my throat. It’s all I can focus on.

“You’re a mimic,” I answer on a moan. Her lips are so close to mine now that we’re sharing each breath. It takes everything in me not to close the gap and devour her mouth. “You’re a mortal.”

Her small, sharp teeth dig into my bottom lip with a hum of pleasure. “There’s more to it, isn’t there?”

There is, but I don’t want to admit it to her. I shouldn’t... right?

“I think you know more about my situation than you let on. More than was in my file.” Her tongue rasps along my lips, and I release a low moan. “I think you and your brother know I had nothing to do with what happened to me. I think you know that I was a victim, but you don’t want to think about that because then you’d feel guilty about killing me for your powers, wouldn’t you?”

“Yes,” I hiss.

Another stroke to my cock has me snapping, lashing my arms around her hips, and pulling her closer. Before I can truly touch her in return, she’s gone.

Nysa

WITH MY MONSTERS' help, I'm able to keep Morpheus and Neiros away from me for another three days. Each night I'm able to easily slip into their dreams, twist them into whatever I want to gain more information. I use my body against them, the same way they did to me. That last night I figure out how to channel memories into dreams and nightmares as well. I stumble upon the knowledge, really. I tuck the knowledge away, choosing not to use the power on either brother. At least, for the moment.

I'm stewing in what I've learned, both about my abilities and what they know of the facility, mimics, and magic in general. The implications of this knowledge...I have no doubt there are more mimics in other facilities undergoing the same torture I went through for years. Young children being subjected to awful magical and scientific experimentation, all in the name of harnessing the power of the gods.

Disgusting.

Unnatural.

Abhorrent.

I'm going to put an end to it. I vow it with everything I am. I won't allow them to continue these experimentations any longer. I am going to burn all of them to the ground, and I'm going to use my stolen powers to do it.

There's never really been any question since the brother's kidnapped me that my powers were stolen. I accepted that fact quickly. What I hadn't accepted was their insistence that I was in on the entire plot. Despite both brothers admitting they no longer truly believe I'm culpable, they don't have enough information to fill in the blank gaps missing from that folder on me. I'm going to need to get that information directly from the source.

CHAPTER 10

Running From Dreams

NYSA



“Strange, I thought, how you can be living your dreams and your nightmares at the very same time.”

— *Ransom Riggs.*

I can't stay here a moment longer. I need answers, and it's clear that neither Morpheus nor Neiros is going to be of any help. They both have their heads too far up their asses to stop and think about anyone else. Which is a shame because they're gods—and their asses are too fine for heads to be that far up them. Neiros even admitted that dreams and nightmares feed magic. They have a much larger responsibility than they realize. Perhaps they knew how important their roles were once, but it's clear that they've forgotten.

It's time I remind them. Better yet, I'll just take on the responsibility myself. I'm not about to let them take my powers, not anymore. They're mine. If they won't do their job, I'll do it and do it far better than they ever could.

I'm covered head to toe in leather with my hair braided back as I crack open the door to my room. I have no idea where Morpheus or Neiros are, but I have my monsters slinking around the castle to make sure that I don't run into them. I even made sure to attach some sand to Morpheus, Neiros, and Sandy so I could figure out the maze of hallways. I had no idea that the sand—both black and gold—could be so versatile.

I've learned so much in the last few days, and I know that I still have so much left to learn. It's a shame that the brothers won't be the ones to teach me. Trial and error it is. No way that could end badly...right? It appears the only limit to my abilities is my imagination. So I'll just keep going until I find a stopping point.

Stalking slowly down the hall, I follow the directions given to me by my sand spies. Surprisingly, nothing pops out at me to stop me from heading toward the exit. In fact, the castle is deadly silent. I should be more nervous about that, but excitement floods my system as I rush to the door. Perhaps Morpheus and Neiros decided to stay away now that I'm able to play their little game and turn the tables on them. From the mortal dreams I've been able to observe lately, that's typical male behavior. Gross.

I'll happily let them continue to sulk.

The front door opens without a sound, and I send up a silent thank you to the gods—*not* Neiros or Morpheus—as I peek out. It's dusk, making the shadows of the garden beyond the front door seem alive. It's possible they are alive, but I have to keep going. I can't let the knowledge that Neiros has his own monsters lurking keep me from getting back to the mortal realm.

I won't let anything stop me from helping those who are vulnerable. What is the purpose of powers if you aren't using them to help people? Neiros and Morpheus don't deserve their powers.

With a deep inhale to calm my nerves, I step outside. My monsters forming a whirl of gold and black sand at my side, called to me once I left the castle. They take form as I make my way down the stairs. My feet crunch on the stone drive, and I pause for a moment to take soak in the fading sunlight. I haven't felt sunlight on my skin in...at least ten years. Maybe longer.

It feels...indescribable. Euphoric. Soul-rending. All of it. It feels like everything. My vision swims and I allow several

tears to stream down my cheeks. I'm free. My eyes blink open—I hadn't realized that I'd closed them to bask in the fresh air and sunlight—when a low, sinister growl sounds from my right.

Turning my head slowly, I see glittering black slink between the shadows as the growl sounds again. Something in me snaps. I smile. Game on.

I flick my wrist and send a monster after the nightmare as I take off down the drive. Morpheus doesn't realize that he left a book about his kingdom in the sitting room attached to my bedroom. Maybe he thought I wouldn't go through all those books that fast. Stupid man. I know all about the portals throughout both kingdoms that both lead to the other kingdom on the other side of this island, as well as the ones that lead to the mortal world. I don't need them to get them to and form. I just need to make it to a portal.

As I race off, more growls and snarls sound from either side of me. The nightmares are closing in. Fast. I don't think. My monsters leap to my defense. My power unfurls within me, happy to be of use. I give it a mental stroke as I envision twin whips, both made of gold and black sand, uncurling from my hands. I lash out at any nightmares that get past my monsters, ripping them to shreds and reducing them to glittering grains on the grass.

I'm covered in sand, but I don't stop to think about it or try to find a way to absorb it. I need to keep going. I know that it's really just a matter of time before Neiros and Morpheus join the fray. I need to be closer to the portal—preferably through the portal—before that happens. Sweat drips from my brow, causing my skin to stick to the leather covering me. The hair that has escaped my braid is sticking to my face and neck, but I don't stop.

My muscles, not used to this much exertion, scream at me. I don't stop.

My lungs are heaving, trying desperately to provide my body with the oxygen it needs to keep going. They protest. I

don't stop.

“You know, little girl, my master warned me you might try to run.” The voice, deep, deadly, and sinister is a whisper on the wind. It's difficult to tell whether the voice is male or female. Regardless, its intent is clear. The sky grows darker, the shadows longer, and I slow a bit. “He said that you might be too stupid to stay where they will keep you safe.”

I stumble at the word stupid. My feet skid to a halt, chest heaving, as I blink sweat out of my eyes. My grip on my whip tightens as I look around. It's nearly pitch black now. My heart stumbles in my chest. The other nightmares were a test. Whoever or whatever is playing with me now is the main event.

“He doesn't know you're out yet, girl. I've kept the knowledge from him. For now.” The voice laughs, and it sounds like it's coming from everywhere. My head keeps whipping around, trying to find the source of the sound. “I want to have some fun of my own with you first. Though, I'm afraid you'll find that the fun I have in mind doesn't involve a cock stuffed inside you.”

In the next blink, a tall, skeletal figure appears inches from my face. I flinch back, shocked and terrified by the sudden appearance. The figure is at least eight feet tall. They're all angles, harsh lines, and their very aura screams danger.

“Boogey,” I whisper in understanding and horror. So this is the infamous Boogeyman.

Neiros' counterpart for Sandy, Boogey is everything that goes bump in the night. They make my skin crawl as hallowed out eye sockets stare down at me. Teeth sharp as a knife flash as they grin down at me. My pulse skitters at the sight.

“I wanted to see what all the fuss was about,” Boogey murmurs in a bored voice. They lean down so our faces are inches apart. “I'm going to enjoy ending you, girl. I love it when mortals scream.”

I brace myself, but Boogey slips away with another sinister laugh. Glittering black sand swirls around me like a tornado. The wind whistles around me, whipping my hair and my whips. They lash out with small stands of sand, cutting me wherever they land. My leathers are quickly reduced to shreds.

I try to dodge or counter with my whips, but I can't see anything. I'm determined to keep my mouth shut. I won't give this bastard the pleasure of hearing me scream.

A hacking cough rattles my chest, and I feel something coming up and out of my lungs to spill out of my mouth. I brush my wrist against my lips and everything in my stills. Sand.

Oh, gods.

He's going to drown me in sand while he slices me to pieces.

Neiros

MORPHEUS and I are once again in his sitting room, each of us with a tumbler of whiskey in our hand. We're staring silently into the fire, lost in our own thoughts—thoughts I can only assume are centered around Nysa for both of us. The last few days, she's turned the tables on us, owning us at our own game. Leaving us both with a horrid set of blue balls.

I run a hand over my face. She's been fishing for information about our roles, the hierarchy of the gods, and how magic works in the mortal world. We've done nothing to prevent her from getting the answers she's seeking. And I know why.

She's ours.

There's another answer, beside killing Nysa, that will give us access to our powers, stabilize our domains, and return things to normal. It was a path neither one of us wanted to

think about because it meant that our parents had meddled. It also means that Nysa is far more important than either of us was willing to initially believe.

We're meant to bond with her.

The thought of it isn't abhorrent. In fact, it's incredibly appealing. I'm just not sure what Morpheus thinks about it. I cast a quick glance his direction, but the stoic bastard doesn't reveal anything. It doesn't really matter what he thinks of it all now. He'll eventually come to the same conclusion I have.

Nysa belongs to us. Period. End of story.

I scratch at my beard, opening and closing my mouth several times. I need to just talk to him about it. We need to come to an agreement.

"We can't kill her," Morpheus suddenly bursts out. He sounds defeated and determined. "I won't let you kill her."

"Thank fuck," I mutter loud enough for him to hear, and watch as his entire body relaxes. "I was worried I was going to need to beat you over the head with what she is to us."

Morpheus lets out a chuckle as he raises his glass to me. "Thankfully, this is the one time I'm not going to fight you on something."

"How are we going to tell her?" I ask as I raise my own glass before taking a sip. "She's got claws now. I doubt we can just waltz in and expect her to be grateful that we've changed our minds about killing her."

"No," he agrees quietly. "We'll have to think of something. I doubt normal courting rules apply here."

I bark out a laugh. "No."

Something stirs in me. Alarm. Fear. Anger. I press a hand to my chest, trying to figure out what's going on.

"Do you feel that?" Morpheus asks, his hand also against his chest.

"Yes." We stare at each other, puzzled.

I'm about to ask something else when I feel Boogey's glee. My heart plummets. My eyes go wide, and a feral sort of possessiveness takes hold of me. My gaze meets my brothers.

"Nysa," we say at the same time.

Panic unlike anything I've ever felt before floods me. She's run. Fuck. She's run and Boogey has her. He's killing her.

No.

No!

With a storm of gold and black sand, my brother and I disappear, intent on finding the woman that belongs to us.

Nysa

I'M COUGHING up more sand, my eyes squeezed shut, hands clutching my chest.

How could I have been so stupid? I had assumed that my monsters would have kept the worst away from me. Oh, how wrong I was.

Another cough rattles my chest, and I fall to my knees. My chest hurts with each breath I struggle through. I'm not getting enough air. My fingers dig into the dirt under me. I want to fight back, but I can't. I don't have enough strength. I slump to the ground.

"You're pathetic, little girl," Boogey taunts. "I thought you would put up more of a fight than this." I flip him off before covering my head with my arms, trying to keep the sand out. Sharp, stinging fingers grip me and haul me up. "It's such a shame."

A tendril of sand slowly closes in on my mouth. My eyes go wide as I press my lips together. I shake my head, trying to

move away from the death that is inching ever closer to my face. No. No. No!

Gold flashes overhead. The swirling sand around me and Boogey falls with a soft rustling. The nightmare creature clutching me snarls as he spins to face the newcomer.

“I was told to kill her if she tried to escape. She’s my prey!”

I blink, my vision blurry from lack of oxygen. There, all around me, are smaller monster, but they’re attacking Neiros and Morpheus. Can Boogey control nightmare sand?

Gritty granules pry my mouth apart and I’m not allowed to think about it further. I hear the brothers scream my name, but I can’t see them. I can’t see anything but the Boogeyman as he shoves his sand into my lungs, suffocating me.

I large, glittering black scythe slices through Boogey’s hands and the strands of sand shoving into my mouth. Boogey screams in pain and backs away from me as I crash to the ground. Morpheus is there, trying to coax the sand out of my airways, but its not gold so he can do nothing. Neiros has Boogey in a death grip, skewered on several blades made out of his magic.

“Mine,” the nightmare king roars in Boogey’s face before ripping the nightmare apart.

Something warms in my chest, but that just causing me to cough. My vision goes black. I feel like I’m floating.

So this is what death feels like. It hurts more than I thought it would. Though, I’ve been through worse. I had still hoped it wouldn’t hurt quite so bad. I guess we can’t get what we want, even in this.

Morpheus

AS I WATCH the light fade from Nysa's eyes, I panic, reaching out with my magic to grab my brother and haul him over. "Fix this," I hiss as I turn to attack any remaining nightmares.

We're going to need to talk about how Boogey gained so much autonomy, and we'll need to ensure that any sand that made the nightmare up is absorbed back into Neiros, so the fucker doesn't come back. I'm not going to let Boogey anywhere near Nysa ever again, even if the creature is completely different this time around.

"Have Sandy get a warm bath ready," Neiros calls out. "I need to warm her up. The sand is out."

With a stiff nod, I mentally send a message to Sandy before gripping my brother's shoulders and transporting us to Nysa's bedroom. The small dream creature is rushing around in a panic, but I can hear the water filling the tub, so I don't snap at him.

"Ms. Nysa!" The creature squeaks in dismay.

"Will be fine," I snap as I help Neiros get Nysa out of her clothes and into the bath.

We work painstakingly slowly as we wash the sand off of her and clean all of her cuts. Once that's done, we dry her off and bandage her wounds before placing her gently on her bed. She's breathing, deep even breaths that settle my rattled nerves.

Nysa

I FLOAT TO CONSCIOUSNESS. Something I've never done before. Consciousness usually hits me in the face like a freight train. Slamming into my mind and jump starting my body with a jolt. This time, I'm eased awake, like I'm being rocked by my mother. My mind is slow to start up, and my feels glued to the mattress beneath me.

That thought jolts me awake, leaving my mind muddled and confused. I'm sore, and everything hurts.

"Didn't I die?" I ask aloud, not expecting anyone to answer. My eyes are still closed, so I assume I'm alone.

"You're not allowed to die, little thief. If you had, I would have had to punish you." I can't think about how ridiculous that sounds because someone else speaks.

"Fuck, no, you didn't, beautiful nightmare. It was close. But you belong to us. We're keeping you."

I'm sorry...what?

My eyes fly open to see that both Neiros and Morpheus are sitting on either side of my bed staring down at me. I shrink back into the bed as memories assault me. The Boogeyman, suffocating, and then...them? They saved me? They saved me!

My gaze bounces between the two brothers and questions fly through my mind at lightspeed. The most important one, "What the fuck?"

Neiros chuckles and Morpheus smirks. I blink up at them. Are they sure I'm not dead? Are they dead? Why aren't they pissed? Why aren't they trying to kill me? Why aren't they doing both at the same time?

I sit up and grab both of them by the scruff of their shirts and pull them close. Heat flares in their eyes, but I scowl. "Why are you trying to kill me?" I demand in a harsh tone. I don't trust any of this. Something is up.

"Would you like to explain?" Neiros asks Morpheus. "Or should I?"

"Your ours."

I'm sorry...*what*? I blink at Morpheus.

"Fucking hell," Neiros mutters. "What my brother means to say—"

"I said what I meant," Morpheus snaps. "She's ours. She doesn't die. She doesn't leave us. She belongs to us. We own

you. Period.”

I look over at Neuros who is silently shaking with laughter. What is happening right now? Should I be panicking? I have to be dead. There’s no other explanation for what’s going on. I’m so confused. I don’t know if I should start fighting and throwing my powers at them, or if I should try to figure this all out. I’m still determined to do a better job than them, but that has to be put on hold for the time being. *Because apparently Morpheus has lost his fucking mind.*

“If I’m yours,” I snap back, “then I’ll own you in all the ways you own me. You so much as look at another and. I’ll make sure that you never see anything ever again.”

I’m making a big assumption, thinking that they want to own me in a sexual way. The way Morpheus is look at me like he wants me to be his next meal, and the way Neuros isn’t jumping in to suggest any other meanings points to me being right in my assumption. They won’t be the only ones laying claim here. We’ll all be owned equally. I’ll be just as psycho as they are, except I’ll be far more even headed...for the most part, anyway.

“That’s the plan, beautiful nightmare,” Neuros murmurs as he leans down. “Instead of killing you to get our powers back, we’re going to fuck you until you can’t remember your name.”

I’m sorry...what?

“That was an option this whole time?” I demand in a shriek. I release Morpheus to grab hold of Neuros and shake him. “Are you telling me that this entire time you could have been fucking me for real instead of just in dreams and you didn’t need to actually threaten my life?”

Both men laugh. I’m going to throttle them.

“It was always an option, nightmare, but we weren’t sure we wanted it to be. It requires binding you to us for the rest of eternity. Which is an awful long time.” Throttle. Them. Neuros, the smirking asshole, is going to be the first one to get it.

“I can’t believe you two.” I shake my head. “I’m not binding myself to either one of you.”

That shuts them up.

“Now, little thief...”

“No.” Using my power, I push them both back. “You didn’t even bother to explain the different ways things could have gone. You *assumed* that you would kill me and then you toyed with me in ways that hurt me in ways you can’t even imagine. *What the fuck?!*”

“When we first took you,” Morpheus starts again, “we thought we would have to kill you. We thought that you were part of the scheme. When we found out you were a mimic, that cemented that thought. We’ve come to the understanding that these events were most likely set into motion by our parents. The Primordials don’t often interfere with mortals or gods, but when they do, they do it in a big way.”

“Are you telling me that I was raped and tortured as part of some grand plan?” My voice is hysterical and I’m shaking with rage.

“Raped?” Neiros growls. “Who?”

“Don’t tell me you didn’t know,” I spit. “You used some of my worst memories during our little sessions, don’t you remember?”

“But never those memories. I never saw those and never would have picked those,” Neiros argues.

“No?” I whirl on him, getting off the bed and stalking him into a corner. He has his hands up in a pleading gesture. “Then explain the little girl reliving her abuse in a nightmare. Explain!”

Black and gold sand shoot out of my body, pinning both men in place. My chest heaves as I stare Neiros down. The rage I feel is growing, becoming almost too big to be contained, and I want to release it. I want these two men to

feel what I felt. Not the pleasure. The pain. The fear. The emptiness. All of it. I want them to hurt the way I did.

A hand closing around my throat and another pulling me back into a large frame gives me pause. I tilt my head to look up at Morpheus. He presses a gentle kiss to my forehead.

“It’s not use you’re truly mad at, love.” Another kiss. “You have every right to be unhappy with us. We will properly grovel later. But you need to acknowledge who you’re really angry with.”

The tears burn as they rise and slide down my face. He Morpheus kisses each away, murmuring soothing words as I shake and cry. Neiros comes up and presses himself to my front. They hold me that way as I work through my emotions. They soothe the raging beast within me with each moment that passes.

“Tell us,” Neiros prompts. “Tell us who we need to unleash you on.”

CHAPTER 11

The Slaughter of Monsters

MORPHEUS



“The thing about nightmares was that you couldn’t prepare for them. They sneaked up on you when you were most vulnerable.”

—Sylvia Day.

I’ve never been the more level-headed of the two of us. Neiros is usually the one who remains calm while I rage, but seeing my tiny thief rage against someone who isn’t present fills me with a sense of calm determination. I want to give her the chance at revenge. I want to unleash her on those that sought to harm her. I want to watch as she bathes in their blood. I want to give her that power back. Seeing her reclaim it...I want nothing more.

As my little thief cries against us, I start to plan. I had already been looking into where the individuals holding Nysa fled after we took her, so the first order of business is going to be tracking them down. Hopefully, whatever facility we find them at has more extensive files than the ones we found at hers. Then again, we won’t be giving them a chance to clean house the way we did before. We’ll be slaughtering everyone there and taking what we need.

I press another reverent kiss to Nysa’s face as my brother glues himself to her, humming softly under his breath. Anything to soothe her as she releases all the pent-up rage, fear, and helplessness. She isn’t helpless anymore. Now she’s powerful and will soon be bound to two gods. Her lifespan

will match ours and so will her powers. Nysa is and will continue to be our equal in every way.

I just hope Nysa realizes what she's in for with us. My brother and I are not nice men. We aren't gentle. Despite that, we will move heaven and earth for her. She will want for nothing. She is our queen. She will have power over us no other has.

"I want them to pay," Nysa whispers, her voice cracking from her tears. "I want them all to pay."

Neiros pulls away slightly to look down at her, gently brushing her cheeks with the backs of his fingers. "Of course, nightmare. Say the word and we will deliver them to you."

"No," I snap. "No. We will bring her to them. I want them to see her in all her glory. I want them to realize what they had and let slip away. I want them to see what we will cherish."

"You'll help me?" I hate that she sounds broken. It makes me want to go completely scorched earth.

"Yes, love," I answer her. "We will do whatever you bid."

When Nysa smiles... Gods. It's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen. She beams up at us now. Her face tear streaked and red is the most amazing sight I've beheld. I'm a lucky bastard. I don't deserve her. But there's no way in hell I'm going to let her go. Even if she asks me to. She is mine.

"Why don't we get you cleaned up, nightmare. Get you some food and a bit more rest. Once you're feeling better, we can go after those that have wronged you." Neiros sounds so reasonable, but nowhere does he mention binding her to us.

Binding her to us would ensure that she can't die and that we'd be able to find her no matter where she is. I want it done as soon as possible, before we confront those from the facility. I don't want her stepping out of this room without being tied to us in every way possible. I can acknowledge that Neiros is right, she does need to rest and eat. She's recovering from a near death experience, but that knowledge doesn't do anything to settle my need to tie her to me.

Is Neiros struggling with this feeling too?

Sandy pops up at that moment, causing Nysa to jump a bit in surprise. I tuck her in closer to me, scowling down at my dream creature. They look sheepish for a moment before turning their focus to Nysa.

“Ms. Nysa! I am so glad you’re okay!” They bow their head. “I came to see if you were awake. I will bring you something to eat. Would you also like a bath?”

“Yes.” I answer for her. Nysa shoots me a small glare before nodding at Sandy and issuing a soft thank you to the creature who nods before disappearing in a cloud of gold sand.

Nysa

THE BROTHERS STRIP me of my clothes, that I presume they put me in, before stripping themselves. I can feel a blush work its way onto my face, which doesn’t make sense. I’ve seen them naked before, and they’ve seen me.

Except that’s not exactly true. I’ve seen them naked in dreams. They’ve seen me naked before I gained my curves back and in dreams. Things are...different now. I can’t put my finger on it, but it’s not just a sexual charge in the air now. Though, both men stare at me plenty, and I do the same. There’s just more here now.

I’m theirs. They’re mine.

It should sound simple, but I know it isn’t. Not after everything we’ve been through.

Neiros lifts me in his arms. I wrap mine around his neck and glance over his shoulder to see Morpheus watching me closely. The heat in his eyes sends a shiver down my spine and has heat curling in my core. Which brings my attention to the fact that my body—my *naked* body—is plastered to Neiros’ naked body.

He's so warm. It seeps through my veins and relaxes my muscles.

My limbs go limp in his hold as he lowers us into the steaming water. A small moan escapes me as I'm surrounded by warmth. Then, a second body is pressing against me. Both men caging me in between them. My body feels like it's been struck by a livewire. Yet, I'm also blissfully limp. I'm not used to feeling like this around them. At peace. Happy.

"We'll be able to track down everyone that kept you at the facility," Neiros says as Morpheus starts to pour water over my hair.

It's heaven, having the two of them touching me like this at the same time. I rest my forehead against Neiros' shoulder and drift as they take care of my body. Mentally, I'm preparing myself to face the doctor and the worst of my guards. Despite everything we've been through—or maybe because of it—I feel confident knowing that the two men in the bath with me will be by my side throughout this. I know what they're capable of. I know what *I'm* capable of.

I'm capable of ending them. All of them.

"YOU'RE SURE this is the location?" I ask Morpheus as we appear in front of a rundown looking building.

We're in a mostly abandoned warehouse district of a city. I can hear the hustle and bustle of life in the distance, but the immediate vicinity appears completely desolate. Was I kept somewhere like this? Right under the noses of thousands of people? Rage at the thought surges through me and I clench my hands to keep myself in check. I can't be distracted. Not right now. I can ask more questions once we've cleared this facility out.

"This is it." Morpheus nods. "We're pretty sure there's another mimic in here."

That startles me. I'm not sure why. It makes sense now that I'm thinking about it. Of course it does. If they had me, they must also have others in various locations. It even makes sense that they wouldn't keep us in facilities together, especially if they're attempting to give the mimics they have godly powers. Depending on the powers, two of us would easily be able to overpower the guards and most of the staff.

"She comes with us," I say, leaving no room to argument.

Neiros and Morpheus each arch a brow at me in question. I glare at them but decide to explain myself. "She's a prisoner, just like I was. I doubt she's here willingly. I doubt any of the mimics these people have are willingly participating in these experiments. I was tortured for years. There's no doubt in my mind that they're torturing others."

Neiros holds up his hands. "Okay, nightmare. We just wanted to make sure that you were positive that was what you wanted it. We'll make sure that the mimic in this facility gets out safely and comes with us until we can figure out what to do with them."

I nod, not willing to get into the specifics standing out here in the open in front of a facility just like the one I was held in for years. I don't want to give the people inside the chance to work up a defense or escape. Every single person in here, aside from the mimic, is going to die. I'm going to make it hurt.

"Let's go." I take a step forward as I speak, and I'm immediately flanked by both Neuros and Morpheus.

Something stirs in my chest feeling them move in tandem with me. It feels right. Atlas, Neuros' three-head dog—who is currently in this three-headed form and not three separate dogs, as Neuros informed me he could shift—guards our backs. All of us stalk silently into the warehouse, finding a single elevator that appears to be in working order.

This is it.

I nod to Neiros and Morpheus, who dissolve into glittering sand and melt away. Atlas and I move into the elevator. We agreed in the tub earlier that I would allow Neiros and Morpheus to go on ahead and kill everyone who wasn't my former guard and doctor. While I wanted them all to pay, I wanted to focus all of my energy on those two.

Gently stroking Atlas' heads, the elevator glides slowly down. I take these precious few minutes to compose myself. I'm a little too excited about the prospect of killing two people, regardless of whether they deserve it.

"Ready to play, boy?" I smile down at Atlas, who gives an excited bark and tail wag. The elevator stops and the doors slide open.

Part of me was expecting the light to be flickering or off, for this facility to look ravaged by the two gods currently going around killing everyone. But that's not what greets me. It's mildly disconcerting. It's also silent. I can't hear screams, alarms, or anything.

Like I said. Disconcerting.

"Take me to 'em, boy." Atlas trots down the hall, his tail wagging and tongue lolling out. Now that I've had a chance to meet him properly, I'm going to insist that Neiros keeps him out permanently. My good, sparkly boy. He's getting all the treats and all the snuggles when we get back home.

Atlas leads me into what looks like a mess hall. This must be where the staff eats while they're on shift. It certainly isn't anywhere I would have been allowed. There are tables and chairs scattered throughout and a swinging door that leads to what I assume is the kitchen. Morpheus and Neiros are leaning against a table with grins on their faces. No one else in the room.

"Well?" I ask as I come up to them.

"They're in the room the mimic had been held in," Morpheus offers. "We've already sent the young woman

home. I put her to sleep for the time being. I didn't want to traumatize her more by dumping her awake in a new place."

I cross my arms and raise my brows. The dream king at least has the good sense to look ashamed.

"She came to no harm," Neiros assures.

"Good." I nod. They flank me, each placing a hand on my hip. My gaze bounces between them in question.

"Are you sure you're ready, love?" Morpheus asks, there's a hint of concern in his voice and on his face.

"We can always bring them back with us," Neiros offers.

I shake my head. "I *need* to do this. Especially that guard. They took my identity. My innate power. My family. Everything. They took everything from me. And then they tortured me for years. They..." I take a deep breath and blink back tears. "They broke me."

I'm suddenly sandwiched between two giant slabs of muscles, each of my gods hugging me close. I'm still getting used to affection like this from them, but I'm starved for it, so I let it soak into me.

"I want to take my power back. I want to take *me* back," I say in a shaky tone.

I'm not leery about killing those two. Not in the slightest. But I am feeling emotional about it. About taking back parts of myself that they stole from me. It's a big step, one that is going to put me on a path I won't be able to turn away from, so I need to make certain I'm ready. And the truth is, I think I've always been ready. I have just been waiting for the two gods at my sides. They helped me see what and who I truly am.

A powerful, badass woman.

"I'm ready."

“2319?” Hearing the doctor’s nasally voice again has my muscles locking up. Fear skirts the edges of my mind, but I push it back with Morpheus’ light touch to the small of my back. “You’re alive.”

“Probably because she’s whoring herself out to these two,” the guard mutters.

I can feel the two at my back tense. I just shake my head. He isn’t worth the effort. Staring at the two people who ruled my life for so long, I’m finding it easier to calm and fear that lingers. They look...small. So small. Especially compared to the kings now at my sides. After all, I faced the Boogeyman and survived. Two run-of-the-mill witches? I almost want to laugh at the thought.

“It’s funny,” I address the doctor in a soft, assertive tone. “How you can still call me 2319 knowing that I’m about to kill you. I know you know my name. It was in my file. The file, I assume, you added to if you didn’t start it yourself.”

The woman narrows her eyes but doesn’t otherwise respond. So I continue. “Fifteen years of torment and experiments. You’d think someone would remember the name of the person they’re slicing open, beating, and starving. But hey, what do I know, right?”

The guard opens his mouth, but I cut him off. “You. Will. Not. Speak.” I fling my hand out and his mouth is sewn shut with a glittering thread made out of gold and black sand.

“Astounding!” The doctor exclaims and moves closer to the guard. “You have far more control over your powers now.”

“For the love of...” I rub my temples then throw a glance at Morpheus and Neiros. “Do you see this?”

They both roll their eyes and nod. I’m not imagining the sheer insanity playing out in front of me. That’s reassuring.

Another flick of my wrists has the doctor flying into the wall, being held by her arms and legs. The guard is now anchored to the floor. I hold up a hand before the doctor can speak and silence her the way I did the guard.

“Yes, I have more control over my powers.” The sarcasm dripping from my tongue tastes good. It feels good to give them a bit of lip before I end them. “That’s actually how I plan to kill you both. Super fun, right?” My tone turns chipper and excited. “The only question is which one of you dies first?”

“I don’t want to tell you how to do your thing, nightmare, but might I make a suggestion?” Neuros wraps his arms around my waist from behind and nuzzles the top of my head. When I nod, he says, “I suggest you create your own version of the Boogeyman for the good doctor here. Don’t put her to sleep. Let her be fully aware of what’s happening. And for the guard... Well, I think you should do the honors with your whips or by hand.”

Morpheus hums in agreement. “I think you should make your sand into knives and then kill him slowly, little thief. Slice by slice.”

A surprised laugh bursts from me. “I told you,” –I grin over at Morpheus—“You only call me little when you want to fuck me.”

“I never denied it.” Morpheus shrugs. “I won’t lie, seeing you reclaim your power is going to make me hard as fuck.”

“Same,” Neuros agrees in a somber tone. “We’re probably going to ravage you after.”

Another laugh bursts from my chest as I turn my head to look back at Neuros. Mirth is glittering in his black eyes. I love this side of them. A side, I have a strong feeling, only I will ever be able to see.

I TOOK THEIR ADVICE, and hours later I’m covered in blood, standing in the shredded remains of the doctor and the guard that will never be able to torment another soul ever again. I run my bloody hands over my face, which is already coated in the

viscous liquid. I thought I would be disgusted with the gore, but I'm not. I *like* the feel of their blood on my skin.

“Death looks good on you, nightmare.” Neiros’ voice is a low, seductive purr. I turn to look at him, a smile spreading across my face. “Now come paint us red.”

They’re surprisingly still clean, no blood in sight. The thought of painting them red with the blood covering my body and the rest of the room is vastly appealing. I see it as a way of marking them as mine. Of cementing this changed dynamic between the three of us. I also see it as a small threat to the two of them. I want them to be aware of what I can do—what I will do—should they attempt to control me again.

Morpheus sidles up to me, a wicked smirk on his face, and his eyes flashing with heat. “You’d better paint us fast, love.”

“Oh?” The question comes out breathy, but I don’t hesitate to reach out and smear red across his face. Then I reach out to slather some on Neiros’ bare chest.

When did he take off his shirt?

“Fuck it, we can let her ride us in the blood,” Morpheus mutters in a low tone laced with desire. He steps into my space, crowding me, which sends shivers of desire down my back to pool in my core. “I’m going to lick you clean, little thief. Now put your hands against the wall and bend over.”

I guess I’m too slow to do as I’m told, because Neiros spins me, slaps my hands against the nearest wall in a way that has my ass in the air in invitation. He then rips my shirt and pants off. The sudden cold air against my flesh only serves to arouse me further thanks to the blood that’s seeped through the fabric.

A squelching thud behind me has my head turning so I can look over my shoulder. Morpheus, gloriously naked, is kneeling there, staring intently up my body.

“I’ve had you ride my face in dreams, little thief. As much as I want you to smother me with that sweet pussy of yours...”

He shakes his head. "I'm not going to be able to last too long before I have to have my cock in you."

I let out a whimper. Neiros, not to be forgotten in all of this, has black sand swirl around my nipples, pinching and plucking them in maddening strokes. My hips thrust out to Morpheus with a mind of their own.

"Shh," he soothes. "I'll lick my pussy before I fill it up. Don't worry, love."

"Once he's done," Neiros murmurs into my ear, "I'm going to have my turn, nightmare." I groan and he chuckles. "You like the thought of that, don't you? Having both of us fill you up with our cum."

Before I can respond, Morpheus is lashing at my clit with his tongue, two fingers sliding into my drenched pussy with a wet slap. My head drops forward as I push against the wall to anchor him more firmly to me. The sound of Neiros spitting has me blinking over at him.

He's spit in his palm and is now stroking himself as he watches he brother feast on me. The sight has me moaning out his name, loving the way his eyes flash dangerously at the sound.

A Third finger gets worked into me as I rocket toward release. The sensation of sand toying with my nipples in conjunction with Morpheus eating me out has bliss flooding my system. It all feels so fucking good.

"Our names," Neiros snarls. "Chant our names. The other gods aren't here worshipping your pussy. We are."

I hadn't even realized I'd been saying anything.

With a bite to my clit, I come, screaming both of their names as I do.

Morpheus pulls back, keeping his fingers inside me as he says, "We're your gods now, little thief."

I'm not given a moment to respond as Morpheus stands and thrusts home. His movement is so fast I only have time to

gasp before he's rutting into me, lavishing me with praise. His hand tangles in my hair and he yanks me back so our bodies are flush.

"You felt amazing in dreams, little thief. But in reality?" He groans against my ear. "I'm going to fuck this pussy as often as I want, do you hear me?"

I try to nod my head, but his grip on my hair won't let me. He bites my neck hard enough for me to yelp in surprise. "I said, do you hear me?"

"Yes," I release on a long moan.

"You'll have my cum dripping down your legs." I can only groan in response. He feels amazing as he continues to pound into me. "I'll have you ride me at dinner, on my throne for everyone to see, in every fucking room of my castle."

"Yes," I hiss out in pleasure.

The hand not tangled in my hair starts to stroke my clit while the sand starts to tug harshly at my nipples. My pussy starts to flutter. I'm so close.

"Be a good girl and strangle my cock," Morpheus demands.

When he puts it that way...

I come screaming his name.

Neiros' hands grip my hips and move me away from Morpheus, who collapses to sit on the ground. Neuros positions me so I'm on my hands and knees in front of the dream king. I glance over my shoulder at him.

"Lick his cock clean while I fuck you," he orders.

Morpheus groans lightly before once against gripping my hair. He tugs my face forward and toward his dick, which is still hard. Gods must have amazing recovery times. I lick the tip, ripping a curse from Morpheus as I adjust my stance a bit so I don't slide in the blood.

Neiros growls as he watches me lick his brother for a moment. Unlike Morpheus, who thrust home without questions, Neuros takes his time. He slides in inch by inch only to put out and tease me. He starts to stroke my clit with sand as he does and soon has me writhing back against me, trying to coax him to sliding in to the hilt. I want him to fill me. I need it.

“Use your words, nightmare,” Neuros teases as he pulls out until only the tip is inside.

“Please,” I moan.

“Please, what?” There’s laughter there, and if I weren’t so desperate to have him fuck me properly, I’d be mad.

“Please fuck me.”

“Good, little nightmare.” Neuros slaps my ass before thrusting into me so hard my elbows give out and I slide a bit on the bloody floor.

Morpheus catches me and helps to stabilize me. He once against lines his cock up with my mouth, a wicked gleam in his eyes. “I want to hear you gag, little thief.”

I wrap my lips around Morpheus’ cock and use the momentum of Neuros’ thrusts to move me along him. Each time Neuros thrusts to the hilt, I move down Morpheus’ cock to the point where he’s brushing the back of my throat, causing me to gag and my eyes to water.

“She looks so good crying over your dick,” Neuros growls. “I can’t wait to have her lips around me in the same way.”

“We can take turns shoving our cocks down her throat. Keep her tied up before us and covered in sweat and our cum.”

I moan around his dick at the thought.

“Our own personal fuck toy,” Neuros agrees with a particularly hard thrust.

“I want her tied, naked, in the throne room for all to see. I want them to watch as we fill her up. As she begs for our

cocks,” Morpheus snarls.

I can see it. Gods, help me. I want it.

“That’s it, nightmare. Clamp down around me.” Neiros grunts as he picks up the pace. “Are you going to cum all over me?”

I moan around Morpheus again. The dream king chuckles and responds, “I think that’s a yes.”

“Thank fuck.” Neiros grips my ass and changes his angle ever so slightly.

It has me seeing stars and screaming around Morpheus’ dick. I can hear the two men roaring out their releases as my world goes black.

CHAPTER 12

Slumber's Embrace

MORPHEUS



“They’re just nightmares, and they end eventually. The terrible dreams are the good dreams.”

—Neil Gaiman.

After Nysa passes out, we bring her back to my castle and put her in bed. My bed. We then climb in on either side of her, curling our much larger frames around hers. I’m not about to leave Nysa alone, and I very much doubt Neiros will either. We’ll need to venture over to my brother’s kingdom soon as he’s been neglecting his duties there since we found Nysa. We also need to deal with the new mimic who is currently sleeping in another room down the hall from Nysa’s old room.

All of that is secondary to the small, warm woman currently curled in front of me. Neiros is staring at her as well. I think we’re both still in shock. I am, at the very least. It’s hard to believe that she’s now the center of our beings. This tiny woman, who was once mortal, is now the fabric that holds our realms together and keeps our magic stable. She’s the core of everything.

A few hours later, Nysa starts to stir. We’re all still naked and covered in now dried blood. The first order of business now that she’s awake is getting clean. Then we’ll discuss what to do with the other mimic.

I can’t resist gliding my hand along the curves of her body, pleased that she’s no longer skin and bones. Her wide hips and

generous ass give me something to hold on to while I'm fucking her. My hand closes around a fleshy globe and she mutters something while arching into the touch. *Good girl.*

"I'm too sticky for that." She slaps my hand away. "Let a girl shower first."

"Only if we get to shower with you, nightmare." Neuros drops a kiss to her shoulder.

Nysa's eyes crack open. She stretches before studying the two of us. I'm not sure what emotions flicker in her gaze, but I brace myself just in case. I know that we don't deserve her, not after everything we've done. I also know that there's no way we're going to give her up. So if she decides now that she's gotten her revenge and healed that she wants to leave, she's going to find herself locked in this room until she changes her mind.

"I'm not sure I like that look on your face, Morpheus," Nysa says with a laugh. "What are you planning?"

I'm surprised she can read me so well. The knowledge warms something in me. Something I've assumed long since dead.

"He's probably scheming on how to keep you locked away in her," Neuros teases. "Unfortunately, we have too much to do. We can take a shower and then we need to go meet the mimic we saved."

"Oh shit!" Nysa bolts from bed and rockets herself into the bathroom. I hear the shower turn on and more muttered curses. Chuckling, I get up and head after her, Neuros hot on my heels.

As much as I'd love to fuck Nysa in the shower, we keep things strictly business as we wash up. Nysa seems too distracted and eager to get to the mimic for anything else. Which is a shame. I'll allow it for now. I do take the time, however, to dry her off, wanting to get my hands on her as much as possible.

Nysa gives me an amused look before she shuffles back into my room, looking through my wardrobe and grabbing

clothes at random. None of it is going to fit her, but I like the fact that she wants to wear my things. Since neither of us has been able to brand her yet, this will have to do to settle my need to leave my mark all over her.

Covered in a shirt that drops to her knees, Nysa finger combs her hair and asks, “Where is she?”

“In a room near your old room,” I answer.

“Old room?” She glances up at me in confusion. “Where am I staying now?”

I stare at her. She stares back.

“Here, nightmare.” Neiros laughs, shaking his head at the two of us. “While you’re in this kingdom, we’ll be staying in here. When we’re in my kingdom, we’ll be in my room. You’re ours now. Like it or not, that means that you stay with one or both of us. Always.”

“I’m not sure our relationship is at the level where I feel comfortable with you two watching me pee.” Nysa’s lips twitch as she speaks.

“Too bad.” My brother and I reply at the same time.

Nysa shakes her head and walks out of my room, trying to get her bearings before heading off in the right direction. My eyes narrow. How does she know where to go? She must have figured out most of my castle before she escaped. Clever little thief. I’m impressed.

Nysa

FIRST, they kidnap me, now they’re going to stalk me. At least life won’t be boring with the two of them around. I chuckle to myself as I make my way toward my former bedroom. Neither one of them does anything by halves, and I find that I am thrilled with that knowledge.

“Which room?” I ask as I glance behind me. They’re so close that I’m surprised I can’t feel the heat from their bodies.

“Just there, on the right,” Morpheus responds, pointing to the door and brushing his hand against my arm as he does.

I’m sure the touch is intentional. Ever since I woke up after my brush with death, they’ve been touching me in little ways. I didn’t notice it at first, but now it’s obvious. When they claim something as theirs, they *claim* it. I meant what I said back to them. I’m going to own them in every way that they own me, so they had best be ready for some reciprocal stalker tendencies.

When I’m standing in front of the room, I spin to face them. Placing a hand on each of their chests, I nudge them back a bit. “I think it’s best if I go in alone.” Before they can argue, I shake my head. “You two are large and threatening. She’s in a new place and she doesn’t know how she got here. I need to go in and explain things.

“We haven’t been through the files we got from the second facility. We don’t know what her powers are,” Neuros argues. “We have no idea how she’ll react. Morpheus put her to sleep before bringing her here. We haven’t let her wake up. She’s going to be disoriented and confused.”

“If you want to go in alone, you’ll need to wait until we’ve read through all the files we collected so we can determine she isn’t going to hurt you.” Morpheus crosses his arms over his chest, indicating in no uncertain terms that he isn’t going to budge on this.

I let out an exasperated sigh. I’ve had enough of this. “You two were willing to kill me two days ago.” A sarcastic smile stretches across my face. “I understand that you two have suddenly changed your minds about that, and that’s sweet. Really. Very touching. But I’m going in that room, without either of you. End of story. If it seems like she’s going to hurt me, I can always put her back to sleep. I’ll be fine.”

Neiros is the first to cave. I have a sneaking suspicion that the king of nightmares won't be able to deny me anything, which means I'm going to need to be careful about what I push for. I don't want to take advantage of him. Not like that.

“Okay, nightmare, but you need to bring Atlas in with you.” He steps into my space, causing me to tilt my head to look up at him. “And you don't hesitate. If you hesitate to put the mimic to sleep and she hurts you, I'm going to punish you.”

He's threatening me with a good time, but I don't tell him that. I give him a solemn nod. Lightning fast, Neuros grips the back of my neck and hauls me flush against him. We stare at one another for a moment before he crushes my mouth with his. His teeth nibble on my lower lip enough to sting, which has my hands clenching in his shirt, refusing to let him go.

When he finally pulls back, I'm left panting with a doopy grin on my face. Neuros just chuckles, lightly taps my ass, and steps back. Morpheus immediately takes his place. He studies me, a frown marring his handsome features. I place my hands on his chest and wait.

“Even with Atlas in there with you, I'm less inclined to allow this than my brother.” He rubs his temples. “But it seems that you're determined to do this your way.”

“I am,” I agree.

“You will not like the consequences if you're injured. Do you understand me?” Gods, I love this voice when he's all commanding like this.

“I understand.” He seems pleased by my immediate response.

I'm a little disappointed when he doesn't bend down to kiss me, and my shoulders drop a bit as I turn toward the door.

“Did I say you could go in yet?” Morpheus whispers next to my ear. I shiver. A hand tangles in my hair and pulls my head back. Gold, glittering eyes meet mine. The heat in them has my breath catching. “I wasn't done with you, little thief.”

Morpheus kisses me as though it's the last thing he'll ever do. He nips, licks, and sucks on my lips, owning my mouth while all I can do is try to keep up. If his goal with this kiss is to make sure I know he owns me, mission accomplished. I'm all but a puddle on the floor when he eventually pulls back.

"Now you can go."

"Look, you can't just kiss a person's brains out and then expect them to go about their merry way," I hiss up at him.

"We can do whatever we want, nightmare." Neiros is now right next to me, his smirk dark and dangerous. "Especially where it concerns you."

I need to get away from them, for my own sanity. So I grip the handle and shove into the room with a little too much force. Low, dark chuckles follow me into the room.

The young woman sitting on the bed jumps at my entrance, her eyes wide and frightened when they meet mine. I hold my hands up to indicate that I mean her no harm, but her eyes drop to my side, where a black glittering Atlas sits.

"He's harmless," I assure her. "Really just an over large puppy."

"Where am I?" Her voice comes out small and rough, like she hasn't used it in a long time.

"You're in the castle of the king of dreams. His name is Morpheus." With my hand, I gesture Atlas to stay by the door as I take a step closer to the bed. "My name is Nysa."

"I'm..." She pauses with a frown on her face. "I'm... Allani. H-how did I get here?"

"That's a long story." I take another step closer, but when Allani tenses, I freeze. "I'm like you. I was held by them, too."

Tears spring into Allani's eyes. "Like me? How?"

"Let me explain," I plead.

She wraps her arms around herself with a nod. I don't dare move any closer. I want to keep her as comfortable as possible.

Since we don't know what her powers are, I don't want to risk bringing them out if I spook her.

Standing in the middle of the bedroom, Atlas now laying on the floor, I begin my tale. I tell Allani about my time at my facility, the years of torture, and about my powers. Then, I tell her about my first interaction with Morpheus and Neuros, and how they took me from the facility because they'd noticed I had their powers. I explained it all, only leaving the sex out of my story. She didn't need to hear about that.

When I was done, Allani's eyes were wide with shock. Her arms were now by her sides, and she appeared more relaxed than she had when I started. That's good.

"I saw you," she whispers. "I didn't see your face, but I saw that you would destroy the facility I was in."

"Is that your power?" I ask.

She nods. "I have the gift of foresight. I foresee doom." Well, that sounds...ominous. "Two men have been speaking to me in my mind. Moros and Shai. Do you know who they are?"

I shake my head. "No. But I can ask Neuros and Morpheus if they know. What do they say to you?"

"They say that my gift is not my own. That I am tampering with fate." I hate that she sounds terrified as she speaks. "I try so hard not to use my ability, but I can't always control it. The people at the facility were trying to get me to be more consistent with my sight. They wanted me to be able to tell them specific things about a certain person whenever they wanted. I couldn't always do it."

"I understand." Allani allows me to sit on the edge of the bed and place a hand on hers. "They wanted me to create dreams in people on demand. I wasn't always able to. Making nightmares was easier there."

Neiros

WHILE NYSA IS in with the other mimic, Morpheus and I pour over the files we stole from the second facility. We were right when we assumed that files from Nysa's facility had been taken and moved. We had several files on her, as well as the other mimic, Allani.

Allani is only twenty-one and was taken at a much younger age than Nysa. She was only five. A swift flurry of rage ignites within me at the thought. Whoever these assholes are, they're taking children and experimenting on them. Disgusting.

It seems, based on what we've read, that both Nysa and Allani's parents were killed. There isn't any detail on how, though I suspect that whoever is running these facilities had them murdered to get to their children.

The files also say that Morpheus and I were specifically targeted because we're gods. Which means that the other gods are at risk. We have no idea how many facilities are out there. Similarly, we have no idea how many mimics they have. Some gods may have their powers taken with little consequence, others...I shudder at the thought.

We need to put an end to this.

"Allani was given powers from Moros and Shai," Morpheus mutters. "Doom and fate."

"Ah, fuck." Moros is annoying to be around on a good day. Shai? He makes Morpheus look like an animated cartoon character. "They couldn't have picked someone fun?"

"We're going to need to let them know." My brother puts the file down. "They're going to want to take her."

"I know," I sigh. "Nysa isn't going to like that."

"She's not going to have much of a choice. If Allani having their powers has interfered with fate..."

"I know, I know." I scrub my hand down my face. "You need to break the news to her."

“Why do I have to do it?” Morpheus demands with a frown.

“Fuck you, that’s why,” I shoot back.

“Tell me what?” Dammit. How did we not hear her enter the room? Why hadn’t Atlas let me know she was on her way. The traitor.

CHAPTER 13

An End to Dreaming

NEIROS



“Like nightmares, dreams are insidious things, and don’t like being locked away.” —Laini Taylor.

I wince as Nysa makes her way further into the room. This wasn’t the conversation I wanted to be having right now. There’s no getting around it, though.

“We need to talk to you about Allani,” Morpheus murmurs as he gestures for her to sit between the two of us on the couch. We’re in the sitting room of her former bedroom, so the couch is a bit small for the three of us, but having her pressed between us is nice.

“It seems that whoever is running these facilities is specifically targeting gods.” I had her the file I was look at, pointing to a page. “Allani was given powers from Moros and Shai.”

“She said that she’s been hearing them in her mind,” Nysa mutters as her eyes scan the page. “Doom and fate?”

“That’s right, love.” Morpheus drapes an arm around her shoulders. “We’re going to need to let them know that we have her. They’ll come for her.”

“If she doesn’t want to go, we’re not going to make her,” Nysa argues.

“We won’t have a choice, love.”

“You call me love whenever you want to butter me up,” she snaps, causing me to chuckle.

I love how feisty she's gotten. It speaks volumes about her trust in us. If I'm being honest, I'm honored to have her trust. I'm going to strive every day to make sure I keep it.

"Easy, nightmare," I soothe. "It's not as simple as being able to tell them no. Relationships between gods is... complicated."

"That's putting it mildly," Morpheus huffs.

"What I'm trying to say, nightmare, is that given the powers at play, we need to let Allani go with Moros and Shai when they come for her. A lot more could be at stake than we know." Especially with Moros. That bastard can make doom befall anyone.

An adorable frown creases Nysa's brow as she takes in what I've told her. She knows the consequences of having been given our powers. It's important for her to know that there are always consequences, and more often than not they're unpleasant.

"If we're going to ship her off to some random gods, I want her to know what's happening and why." Nysa looks up at me. "She can't go into this unprepared." I nod, that seems fair to me. "And I want us to come up with a plan to get more mimics away from these facilities. We need to take them all down."

"We'll help with that, but I think it might also be a good idea to let the other gods know what's happening. They might be able to track the traces of their missing powers and help us free anyone else," Morpheus says as he stands. "I'll go make a quick call."

Once he's gone, I return my attention back to Nysa. "We're going to need to head to my kingdom for a bit. I've let things slide and I need to set everything back in order."

"Where, exactly, is your kingdom?" She turns her body to face me, so I do the same. "I read in a book that it's on the same landmass, but it wasn't any more descriptive than that."

“Our kingdoms exist within a pocket realm, each god has their own, but Morpheus and I share one. Our little island basically floats in space. He’s on one side and I’m on the other. There are several portals scattered around that allow us to travel between kingdoms and to the mortal realm,” I explain. “It’s easy to get to and from.”

She nods. “Okay. I let Allani know that she’s welcome to the books in her room, and to call Sandy if she needs anything, but she’s in shock and is processing. She asked for space.”

“We can give her space, and some time, but I’m not sure how much,” I admit. “It depends on Moros and Shai. Don’t worry, nightmare, we’ll make sure that they’ll take care of her.”

“Like you two took care of me?” She asks with a sniff and raised eyebrows. I cringe a bit at that. She’s not exactly wrong, but Morpheus and I will make it up to her.

I pull her onto my lap and press my nose to her hair, inhaling deep. To me, she smells like jasmine on a warm summer night. It’s intoxicating. Gripping her chin, I tilt her face up to mine.

“I still haven’t branded you yet.” My voice is husky and low, sending a shiver throughout her body. I smirk at the reaction she has to me. “When we’re in my kingdom, we’re going to claim you. Bind you to us for all eternity.”

Nysa

“WHAT, EXACTLY, DOES THAT ENTAIL?” I ask in a breathy voice. His dark eyes are glittering with need and his devastatingly handsome face is a mask of hunger. A hunger that mirrors my own.

“I’m going to make you run from us, nightmare.” Neiros nips along my neck as he explains. “You’re not to make it too easy for us. We need to earn the right to claim you.” I have to

bite my lip as he hits a particularly sensitive spot just beneath my ear. “Once we catch you—”

“Once we catch you, little thief,” Morpheus’ voice jars me out of the haze Neiros’ lips put me in, and I turn my head to face him. “we’re going to fuck you to within an inch of your life, carve our names into your very being, and keep you.”

I bite back the urge to loudly tell them to sign me up. Instead, I smile and nod. “Understood.”

“Good girl,” Morpheus murmurs with a grin, then he turns serious. “I’ve sent a message out to the other gods. We aren’t the only ones who have experienced problems. Moros and Shai are on their way.”

Neiros’ grip on me tightens. “When will they be here? Nysa needs to be claimed before that happens. I don’t want to leave any doubt in their eyes that Nysa is not to be touched.”

I rather like how protective they suddenly are. It leaves me feeling warm and safe. Feelings I haven’t experienced.

“We’ll have a day, maybe two.” Morpheus shrugs, but his face hardens. “We should leave no. Allani will be well taken care of. Sandy knows what to do.”

Neiros stands with me in his arms. I let out a startled yelp and wrap my arms around his neck. He chuckles, giving me a light squeeze, and the three of us head out.

I’M STANDING IN NEIROS’ throne room, it’s so different from Morpheus’ it’s shocking. It’s smaller, cozier. I had expected it to be all dark and gloomy, but this is very nice. Neiros went with jewel tones and plush furniture. I glance over at the nightmare king, who is talking to a tall, dark, glittering subject. He’s not what people expect. In fact, personality wise, Morpheus is more what people would assume the king of nightmares to be. Neiros, well he seems to be far kinder than anyone would believe. Unless, that is, they know him.

Neiros laughs, claps the tall figure on the shoulder, and then heads over in my direction. Morpheus is standing to my side, glancing out the window to the ancient-looking window to front of the property, but he looks over as Neuros heads my way.

“Things have been running smoothly. Thankfully.” Neuros beams. “No more creatures have escaped since we brought Nysa to our realm. I think things are starting to stabilize.”

“Good.” Morpheus looks back outside. “Are you ready, little thief?”

My heart misses a beat at the dark heat in his voice. Desire coils its way around me and pulls me under. I feel the itch to run. Neuros gives me a wicked grin but shakes his head. “Not until we’re outside, nightmare.”

My gaze instantly goes to the large double doors that lead outside. I start striding in that direction. Both men chuckle at my obvious excitement and follow.

When we’re finally all outside, Neuros presses against my back. His hand tangles in my hair as he kisses along my neck. Morpheus stands in front of me, his hand circling my throat possessively.

“Now you can run.” Neuros nips at my neck. “Run, beautiful nightmare. Run fast. When we catch you, you’ll have no choice but to take both of our cocks at the same time.”

I whimper at the thought. Neuros yanks my head back, and Morpheus gives my throat a vicious squeeze.

“That’s right, love. We’ll fuck you so hard you won’t be able to think about anything but us for the rest of your existence. We’ll leave our marks so deep in your skin no one will question that you belong to us.” With that, Morpheus presses a kiss to my forehead before stepping away.

Neiros gives me one last kiss to my neck and then also steps back.

I take a deep breath.

I run.

I'M NOT sure how long I've been running, but the moon hangs high in the sky now, lighting my path through the trees. My chest is heaving with each breath I take, my lungs screaming at me to stop.

I won't.

I can't.

Something deep within me tells me that I need to continue. That I need to make them chase me with everything they have. I'm running on instinct now, and that instinct is telling me that they can't catch me. Not without effort. Not without a fight.

I can hear the sound of running sand to my right. It startles me, and my heart takes off in a frantic flight. They're getting closer. I keep a close ear out for any other sounds, but that's the only indication I have of where they might be.

It could be a trick. They could be using their magic over there to get me to run to the left, away from the sound and toward them. I skid to stop. I'm sweating, and my lungs hate me, but I need to take a quick moment to think.

"Don't tell me you're giving up, nightmare," Neiros' taunt comes from all around me.

"What's wrong, little thief? Not sure where to go?" Morpheus sounds close, but I can't pinpoint where his voice is coming from.

If the two of them are going to use their magic, well then so am I. Sand pours out of my body and starts to swirl in the air around me. A deep, delicious laugh floats to me. Neiros.

"That's not going to work, Nysa."

My breath catches and I whirl. There up in the trees, on a branch about ten feet off the ground sits Neiros. Morpheus is

leaning against the tree on the ground. Their eyes flash as our gazes clash. They look...larger. More. It causes me to take a small step back before I catch myself.

I slice my hand through the air, sending darts of sand at the two of them. They leap into action, dodging everything I throw at them. Neiros is grinning like a fool, and even Morpheus has a smile on his face. It dawns on me that they think this is fun.

In the next blink, I'm looking up at the sky, my hands pinned above my head and my legs pinned as well. Shock skitters across my skin. What? Struggling, I realize that I've been bound by their magic, and there's no getting out. They realistically could have ended this little chase at any time.

Neiros and Morpheus appear on either side of me, completely naked. Their cocks are hard and already dripping. The looks on their faces suggest that I'm about to be devoured, and I can't find it in me to be upset.

Morpheus tilts his head. A cool breeze hits the skin of my chest and I gasp. A glance down reveals that he's used his magic to take away my shirt. Neiros does the same with my pants.

Neiros helps me up, the magic holding me to the ground shifting away with a thought. He tilts my face up to study me. Morpheus presses to my back, his hands gripping my hips. A glittering black dagger waves in front of my face, and I can't fight the smile that spreads across my face.

"I told you I would make it permanent." Neiros has a stern expression on his face.

"Please," I let out in a breathy whisper. The need in my voice is clear, and it has both men humming in approval.

"You're going to take us both now, little thief. Are you ready?" Morpheus asks as he kneels behind me, dragging his lips down my back as he goes.

I gasp and arch into him, nodding my head.

“I want to hear you say it,” he demands.

“Yes.”

“Good girl.”

Two fingers make their way to the opening of my pussy, teasing me for a moment before sliding in. I moan, but it's caught by Neiros' lips as he kisses me senseless.

“Fuck, she's already soaked for us,” Morpheus growls.

“Don't tease me. Just fuck me,” I demand once I'm able to rip my lips from Neiros'.

“Happily, nightmare.” Neiros grips my hips and spins me. “Straddle my brother.”

Morpheus is stretched out on the ground, looking up at me like he can't wait to get his hands back on me. So I happily lower myself on top of him, Neiros moving with me so he's pressed against my back. I don't waste time, sliding Morpheus' cock into me as I settle myself on my knees.

The groan that rips from the dream king's mouth has me clenching around him, and my nails digging into his chest. He hisses out a pleased sound, and his hands make their way up to start playing with my nipples.

I'm about to start moving when Neiros pushes me forward, his hand between my shoulder blades. I glance back at him, but he's focused on where Morpheus' body meets mine. Neiros glances up at me through his lashes, flashing me a wicked grin, before he lines himself up and pushes into my pussy.

Full. Gods, I'm so full. My head slumps forward, and I arch my hips back so I can better take them both. Morpheus grunts, and Neiros releases a low stream of curses as they both settle to the hilt.

Neiros' hands tangle in my hair and yank my head back against his chest. “Carve your name, brother.”

Morpheus blinks his eyes open but doesn't hesitate to form a blade with his magic. The tip slices into my skin easily, and I hiss at the pain. Large, warm fingers circle my clit as Morpheus begins to carve his name above my left breast. I moan and squeeze down around the two of them, trying to move my hips as my desire burns brighter. Morpheus groans long and low once he's finished.

"Now, it's my turn," Neuros growls against my neck.

Blood is running down my left breast, and the fingers that have been playing with my clit don't stop, only now they're joined by fingers playing with my nipples. I whimper, wanting the two of them to move so bad.

"One more minute, nightmare," Neuros soothes. "Then we're going to fuck you until you can't walk."

Instead of a blade, Neuros places his hand above my right breast. The pain is hot and bright. I scream and sink down further against them, trying to focus on the pleasure that mingles with the pain. My system is so overwhelmed, and I think I'm about to come.

"Please," I beg. "Now."

Neuros removes his hand, then slides it up to my throat. His grip is tight and cuts off my airflow. But gods, do I love it.

"Now," they both agree.

That's the last time any of us talk. Neuros and Morpheus quickly find a rhythm that has me screaming their names, chanting them over and over until I'm hoarse. I can make out grunts, growls, and moans from each of them, but my mind is too focused on the pleasure they're ripping from me.

I come.

Then I quickly come again.

"One more time," they demand.

I can't scream anymore, but I comply. They follow me into oblivion with roars.

I collapse against Morpheus, my chest heaving, and feeling as though I have finally found myself with these two gods. Against all hope, I found where I'm truly meant to be. They each murmur praise as we pant, our bodies trying to come down from that intense high.

"Best. Kidnapping. Ever." Both chuckle at my declaration.

"You're ours now," Neiros murmurs.

"For eternity," Morpheus agrees.

Yes. For eternity.

CHAPTER 14

Doom and Death

ALLANI



“Everything is more beautiful because we’re doomed. You will never be lovelier than you are now. We will never be here again.”

—Homer.

It’s been nearly a month since Nysa brought me to the kingdom of dreams. A month of healing and introspection. A month of horrifying truths.

A month of listening to Moros and Shai vow that they’re coming to take me away.

When Nysa originally told me it would only be a few days before Moros and Shai would arrive at Morpheus’ castle, I panicked. I begged and pleaded, asking for more time. I wasn’t sure I would be able to face the two gods I’d stolen power from. Well, technically not be, but that doesn’t matter.

They’d agree to a month. Nysa and her gods had put forth that I needed time to heal from my imprisonment, and I couldn’t do that if I was feeling pressured. Reluctantly, Moros and Shai had agreed.

But my time is almost up. In just three days, I’ll be in the hands of doom and death themselves. I’m not sure if the world is going to survive our union.

Do you want Allani's story? Well, Stunning Destruction will be coming in 2024!

Thank you for reading this novella. It's the beginning of the Mimicking Gods universe. Each novel/novella will be a standalone and will focus on a new FMC. We'll learn more about the facility, who is running it, the gods, and mimics with each book, so you're going to want to read them in order!

Acknowledgments

I want to take a minute to thank the three lovely ladies who published this with me. I love each of them to pieces. I'm so lucky and grateful that I am friends with them and have them in my life. Thank you boos!

Next, I want to thank my readers for putting up with my shit. I know that the last almost 2 years have been rough on all of us because of my pregnancy and then living with new born twins and now toddler twins. Trust me, this wasn't what I envisioned when I started my writing journey. But I'm so blessed that you all still love and support me and show the fuck up. SO LUCKY.

To Haley and Julia. I'm sorry I'm such a pain in the ass. But I'm **YOUR** pain in the ass. LOVE YOU.

To my friends. I can't ever promise I'll stop talking about dicks. I'm not sorry. But I love you all.

To my family. My husband is far more supportive than I ever could have imagined and handles my insane ideas with ease, often adding his own. I'm lucky that writing allows me to stay at home with the kids while still giving my life meaning in a way that isn't related to childrearing.

To the haters. Keep on hating. You're just inspiring me. Smoochies!

About the Author

Beth is a 30 something mom of 3 tiny chaos demons, 2 cats, and a doggo. She has around 150 geckos in her house at any given moment (the husband breeds them).

Beth loves cats, alpaca, dinosaurs, and coffee.

She loves getting lost in fantasy worlds of her own creation, especially when they're steamy.

Also by Elizabeth Brown

Blood Crown Trilogy.

Blood Crown

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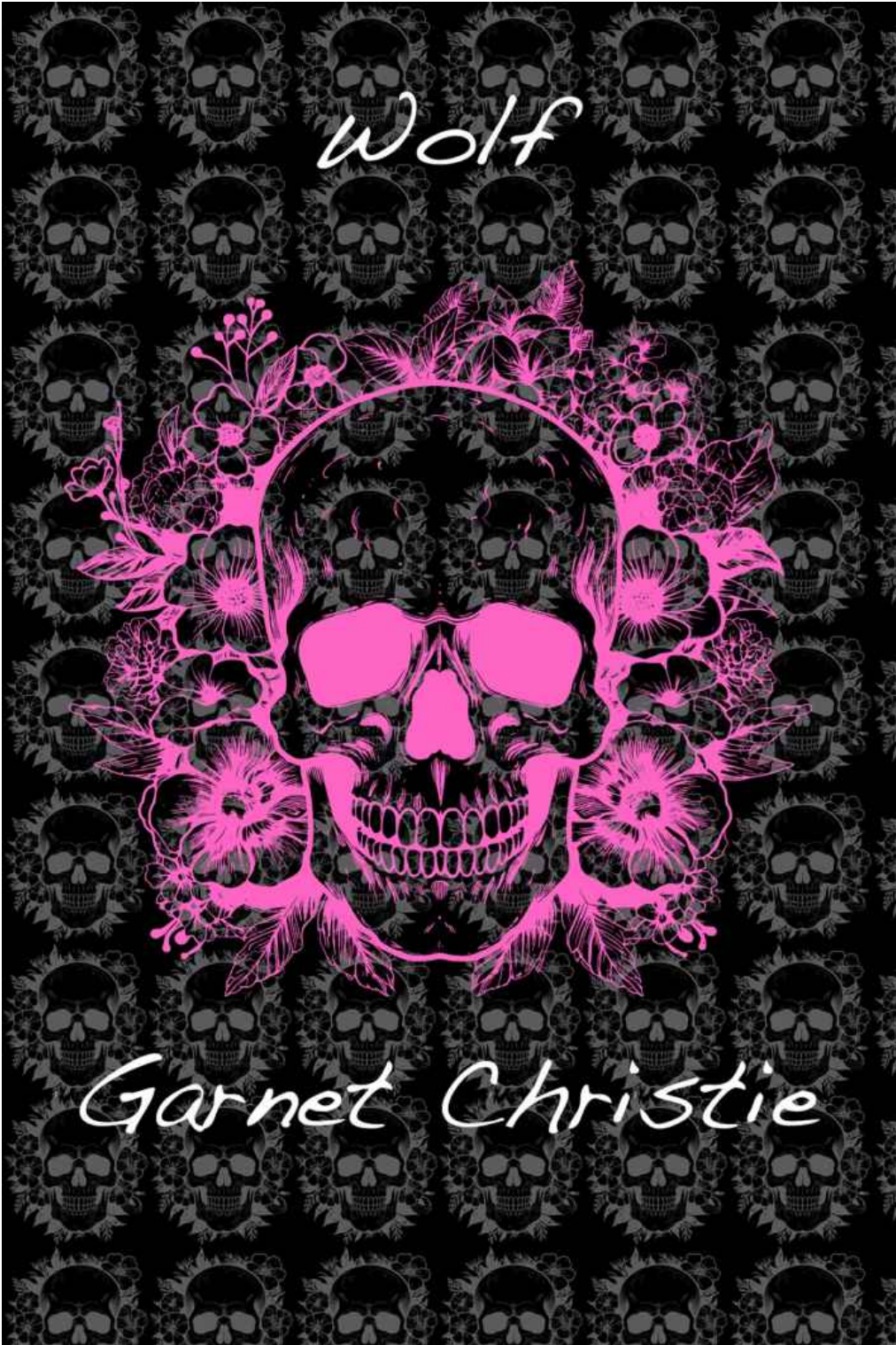
A Very Knotty Christmas

Wolf

GARNET CHRISTIE

Wolf

Garnet Christie



CHAPTER 1

The Wolf



White lights split through the darkness, and I wince at the sudden intrusion. The pain it brings causes me to moan and curse.

Inky, endless black was my friend these last few days. This new illumination flooding every square inch of the cold, concrete basement makes me want to curl up into the fetal position on the floor.

But the chains prevent it.

Thick iron shackles bite deep into my arms. The skin around my wrists has been chafed to the point where it's raw, angry, and inflamed from all the pulling I've done. It won't be long before the natural grind of the metal strips my flesh away. Being short and slender also means the joints in my shoulders feel like they're being torn off. It hurts so badly, I can't stop the burning tears hitting my eyes from the stinging pain.

Who said tough women can't cry? Also, who said that someone like myself—Arabelle Wolf, a person who embodies death—can't experience emotions? The people saying those things are talking straight out of their asses.

I've been snuffing out life, bashing in skulls, and narrowly avoiding death for the past ten years. In that span of time, every emotion listed in the dictionary has flooded my heart.

Adrenaline that spikes when bone cracks, as red, warm blood spills, to the bothersome dread that sits heavy at the base

of my spine on the rare occasions I report to my boss that a job is going to take longer.

And the most costly response of all—paralysis.

The split second when each muscle tenses and fights against you, making your body a traitor to your own commands.

That's something I flushed out of my system years ago. A few close shaves of bullets to the head and nearly broken kneecaps taught me early on that each split second is of the essence.

I snap necks now, and ask questions later.

But right now, I am frozen, and endless questions rest on my tongue as the bolts of the metal door of this room *clunk*, *clank*, and then unlock.

Then the knob slowly turns.

My body itches from a fresh surge of anxiety.

For the first time in days, I can *see* who's taken me, and has gone on to play a derailed game of toying with the one emotion I rarely feel anymore—fear.

Blades, sharp yet never cutting, have been pressed to my ribs countless times. Hot wax has been dripped onto my cheeks, arms, and tongue, all while blindfolded. I've even spent the last afternoon with a clothespin latched on the end of said tongue. After several hours, the muscle was numb and aching, but I'd be lying if I said it didn't turn me on.

Three days later, it feels like a bizarre endurance challenge from a man who only wishes to say, "good girl." Only the fact that I haven't eaten or slept reminds me this isn't leading to a climax. It's leading to my end.

Eventually, this person, or people, plan to kill me. But not in the dark, it seems. I'll personally get to see what my end is. I try to look stern faced as the door flies open.

My pulse stalls when I see the man on the other side, and when he shuffles in with a quiet, yet choking authority, I swallow roughly and regret it. The lack of liquids has made my lips crack.

It stings, but is fairly subdued compared to the shock striking at my chest. Instantly, I know who's joined me.

His name is Hood.

Third in command of a gang called The Huntsmen. They're sexy, deadly, powerful, and demand to be feared.

People worth meeting in my book and the only men worthy of my time.

I work for their only opposition, Mr. Grimm. A man they hate—a man they're accusing of the disappearance of their gang leader.

No doubt, that's why I'm here, because they think I know about it—but I don't—but I also don't care. I'm meeting *them*. The elusive Huntsmen. Or at least one of them.

One of his high-top shoes catches and drags on the concrete as he shuffles closer.

His name fits him well, matching the illusion everyone hears stories about and is eager to witness.

Me included.

He's dressed in a heavy black hoodie and black jeans. A thick hem around the hanging hood blackens out most of his facial features. All I see are two light blue eyes, marble and glassy in their reflection. That one color cuts through the shadows.

It's so incredibly sexy. It makes me shiver with wild, heady anticipation, and my clit is already throbbing from the sight of his cold, heartless appearance.

Blame the masochist in me—all the killing, blood, and screaming. I need it to get off now, and the mere idea is enough to turn me on.

Besides, If I'm going to flirt with death, let it be from the hands of a creation like this.

I smirk at him and nod. A gesture he seems to appreciate.

"Nice to know that you like what you see," he purrs. "Fancy some pain along with it?"

I force myself to speak, knowing my words will be withered from dehydration. "If it comes from someone who looks like you, yes."

"Hmm, but you don't know for certain what I look like. Not really."

"But I've heard, and I'm already impressed, so I encourage you to do your best, Hood."

"Very, very interesting." He sounds pleased, any feature he's making blocked out by his clothing. "Carrying on, then..." His slender yet powerful frame glides effortlessly to the torture table. "Let's see," he hums. "What will break The Wolf?"

Wolf. He states my last name so softly and seductively. The stories are true. They're sexy as much as they are cunning. Everything about The Huntsmen scream prepared and methodical. Even their "tools."

The bright light glistens off the pristine items as I drag my eyes across them. Pliers, razors, hammers, saws—each item looks sharp, polished, and new.

My kind of torture, if you ask me, and oddly, my skin heats while watching Hood hover a thin hand over the table of items. I wonder what his eyes will look like when he hears me scream—probably glowing from the thrill.

So fucking hot.

At last, he goes for the *one* thing that's not metallic on the table. A bat. First, my eyes widen in surprise, only to have my heart thunder in my throat as he flips it over in the back of his palm.

The oak item *whooshes* with a force that knocks into my skin, almost sending me swaying against my restraints. He catches the handle after a spin and smacks the end against his open palm.

It's not his first time handling the weapon. If I were guessing, it's his item of choice.

This will be good. Painful, but good. My thighs clench hard, the muscles beginning to cramp as he spins the bat once more, hooking the handle under my chin to push my head up.

A beat passes, and even though I can't see them, I feel two sensuous lips smiling down at me. My neck muscles tighten in correlation to my body, a ravenous, primitive desire coiling at the base of my stomach. It grows, spilling into my lungs as he speaks.

"Now, Miss. Wolf," says Hood, his voice somehow beautifully low, with a naturally sexual type of timbre. "Tell us where our dearest leader, Grandmother, is."

He's so dominant ... exactly how I love my men. Strong. Violent. Deadly. A smile splits open my mouth, and I'm powerless to stop the next words that leave them.

"Come on, Hood. Let's play, dear."

CHAPTER 2

Rider



I'm flicking my riding crop against my leg, scorning the raw spot building in the tissue. I'm going to bruise myself, but who freaking cares?

Hood took off a while ago, saying it was time for answers, but if he's not careful, he's going to kill the woman in our vault. Trained professional or not, bodies have their limits. Hood usually finds them.

It's constantly him.

He's always taking our witnesses too far. And we don't need this. Our weapon shipments are going missing, along with all the workers we've been recruiting and training.

I have no idea how our stuff is getting stolen.

We live on the outskirts of the town of Markassel, in an area called The Woods. This is our territory. Rural. No roads or cars besides the one owned by us. The only people living here are The Huntsmen and a select few we've allowed inside.

Unless we have shipments and trading to take care of, no one comes into The Woods, and no one goes out. Hell, the police don't even allow their shoelaces to brush the property line for fear of being killed.

So how are all our packers vanishing, and how did someone capture Grandmother? It's Grimm. That motherfucker has been trying to squeeze us out in the open, and into the arms of the feds, for months.

He's pissed by the amount of opiates we have available at our hands here, and would love to monopolize his operations by taking over the endless supply we have.

He's the only person who makes sense. My theory? He snagged Grandmother on the last run she made and is keeping her hostage. We don't have concrete answers, but we did catch that woman who's in our vault right now—The Wolf.

A name and person the whole town is afraid to mention or cross paths with. She's notorious for killing anyone who stands in the way of what Grimm wants.

She was making daily visits to the shop Grandmother last went to—and she's Grimm property. An easy thing to spot. All his hit men and guards wear the tattoo of a reaper's scythe on their left thumb. Since he's good at keeping all his employees informed of what he's up to, we figure The Wolf has to know something.

And now Hood is down there with her, when *he* shouldn't be.

I was three minutes too late to stop him. By the time I was told what he'd run off to do, and reached the foot of the stairs, he'd bolted the vault door.

There's no way in. Not with the unique mechanics that allow it to be locked from the inside via a special code. You use that lock, and *only* the people on the inside are coming out when they're good and ready.

We're going to have a dead witness on our hands, and with me being second in command—

“Fuck this!” Anger twists my nerves, and I slap the slick leather of my riding crop on the wooden table.

The fireplace a few feet away flares, almost like it's yelling at me, and I can't help but scowl.

I swear it's pissed at me for hitting our furniture, but that's idiotic. It was only a gust. A gust fueling a roaring fire. I

blame Mrs. Perrault, our cook. She can transform embers into a full-blown roar.

Tonight is proof.

The flames lick high against the deep inset of the dusty gray brick. Blue and orange flickers threaten to lash through the scrolled openings of the wrought-iron screen, their heat floating across to me and bursting against my flesh.

What if it did burn me? A wave of fear climbs up my limbs. I'd never tell anyone, but fires scare me a little.

They always make me think of *that* night.

Of my parents, trapped in their rooms, smoke thick in the air as flames crackled. As loud as the whirling flames were, I homed in on the screaming of my mom and dad, telling me to run from the house and save myself.

To forget about them.

Impossible. I've been trying to scrub their final moments out of my mind for the last fifteen years. I can't do it. And I hate fires too, everything about them. This one's no exception.

I fold my arms over my chest, rolling my eyes, when I hear the clacking of dress shoes. The sound repeats on the hallway flooring, migrating to the kitchen. A few more clicks, and I have company. Pretty obvious who this is since he's the *only* one to wear wingtip Oxfords in this house.

After a sigh, I place the heels of my riding boots on the chair crosswise from me, my riding crop resting across my thighs.

"It's so cold tonight," a deceptively kind voice says. I smile at how soft-spoken it sounds when I know the owner of the voice is a savage.

Red, my "brother" and fourth in command after Hood. And no, he doesn't have red or auburn hair. His locks are chestnut, styled back, neat as a pin.

Red earned the nickname for his bedroom style. It's rough. He won't be able to orgasm until someone in the bedroom has spilled some blood.

The more that gets on him, the better.

You can't tell that by looking at him, however. He looks like a business mogul fit for running hotels in Paris. As he settles into the chair opposite me, Red smooths out a wrinkle in his pinstripe suit. No wool coat, scarf, or gloves. Just his suit. Thin, high-dollar silk from head to toe.

I smirk. "I don't think you dressed for warmth."

"Why would I? That's dull." He shivers. "Besides, who said I can't complain about the cold if I want? I bet you it's colder than a vampire's nut sack out there."

"Probably so," I mumble. Fresh unease makes me grip the handle of my crop. I've tried not to think about the temp drop. It's near freezing and we have no fucking idea where Grandmother is. What if she's outside in these conditions?

Grandmother—she's not old by any means. Pretty freaking young to be in charge of an operation like ours, actually, but her knowledge and the way she runs The Huntsmen make her seem older.

Grandmotherly, if you will. And she might be dead from frostbite, or worse.

"She's fine, Rider." Red addresses my thoughts like he's heard them.

My brows snap closer together. "And you know that how?"

"Because she's tougher than the four of us together, that's how I know that."

"But if Grimm has her—"

"Grimm. Grimm." He waves a hand in the air, blowing off my statement. "That guy has nothing on her. She'll castrate his balls off and eat them for dinner."

“Fuck.” I exhale harshly, scrubbing a hand over my face. “I hope you’re right.”

“I am.” He nods. “You’ll see I am.”

We say nothing for a moment, as I try to buy his words and calm my nerves. A tendon finally loosens in my neck. I almost smile at his statement, but then the fraction of ease dissipates as tension pulses in the air.

At the same time, Red and I shift our eyes to the door that leads to the vault downstairs.

Red gestures for the door, his expression tight. “Has he been down there long?”

“Too long.”

“*Dammit*,” he rattles out.

“Exactly,” I say in an annoyed breath. But I’m taking a completely different irritated inhale when I realize *why* Red is shaken up.

“So much blood wasted without me there.” His lips twist in a distressed frown, like he’s suffering from a serious bout of missing out.

Stupid—he’s so stupid sometimes. I’m tempted to whip him upside the head with my crop. I would too if he wouldn’t get giddy from the pain.

I jerk my hand to the door, pointing. “Go downstairs right now, and wait to get in. I’m sure after Hood is done, there will be enough for you to bathe in it.”

“Tsk, tsk.” His eyes, a mixture of hazel with bright flecks of orange from the fireplace, darken slightly. “You know I like having it fresh on me. Older blood is so... disappointing.”

“You’re seriously only thinking about the blood?” We both startle higher in our seats as our fourth brother, Little, interrupts with his chipper voice, strolling into the kitchen.

He passes by, patting me on the back, and approaches the chair to my far left. Wooden spokes squeal as he plops

forcefully into the seat, and I don't know how he makes that happen. On a good day, he's 5'7", and maybe 150 pounds with boulders in his pocket.

But don't let that fool you. He can out bench-press me, and will cut you down before I even think about it. He's mostly partial to his shank—short, quick, unassuming. It fits his style.

He combs a hand through his long, raven locks, then pulls them upward before taking a hair tie around his wrist to tie it in the perfect bun.

Nothing I'd wear.

That would drive me nuts. I prefer to keep my dark brown hair shorn tight to the sides. I shake my head. "One of those days you're going to get scalped by Grimm. The hairstyle makes you an easy target."

"Grim would lose his fingers before he even *thought* about doing that," Little says, his crooked smile irking the hell out of me. He's so cocky sometimes. But as his gaze pulls to the door, he grimaces. "Hood is *still* down there?"

We both nod silently, and he whistles low.

"Damn shame right there," Little adds, resting his heels on the cool tile floor. "That Wolf girl was stunning. Did you see the lips on her? So big." His eyes widen in amazement. "Fucking gorgeous."

"Better to suck you off with, my dear," Red jokes, and we all laugh harder than we should.

But the laughing dies immediately as the wooden door leading downstairs crashes open.

It's Hood.

I'm going to chew his ass a new hole, then give him a third one with my riding crop. The chair nearly topples over as I stand, blood boiling in my veins, a shout priming up in my lungs. "Hood, what—" My voice cuts out from shock as I take in the sight before me.

The Wolf attached to his arm, blood free. Pale from lack of food and sleep, but alive—and unchained.

“The fuck is she doing here?” Red yells, finishing my unspoken sentiment, since I’ve gone temporarily mute from shock. “You let her go and didn’t even *think* to ask us?”

“She’s a fan,” Hood says simply, his smile impossible to see thanks to his clothing.

The smirk on The Wolf’s face is perfectly visible—and too appealing for my tastes. Her pink lips, a little cracked but still pretty, are curved into a soft smile. They match the pale blue eyes scanning the room.

Killers, man, they always have the best and most dangerous smiles.

“And?” Little stands next to me, tearing my gaze away from The Wolf. His voice is tight. “What the fuck is that supposed to mean? Lots of girls are fans of ours.” He whips his shank out, scowling. “One mistake with her is all it takes and we’re dead. Shit, why not cut off our own heads for her right now and serve them on a platter?”

“She won’t hurt us. Swear it on Grandmother’s head.”

We all grumble in protest, sounds that he raises his hand to and dismisses.

“Don’t believe me, look.” One stride, and he’s right against her. Then, without warning, he yanks up the hem of her shirt to her chin.

My mouth dries, cock twitching at the two creamy breasts bouncing slightly. Her dusty nipples pebble with the influx of air, and my riding pants tighten. But it’s the sight underneath that has the room gasping, nearly chuckling.

It’s a huge tattoo of our insignia on her body. Axes. The wooden handles cross in the middle, then curve under her perky tits, the iron wedges nestling in the valley between the smooth, milky mounds.

Fuck. The Wolf... she's wearing us, and damn, it looks good. Also—I point to the tattoo, pulling my head back in doubt. “And Grimm doesn't care?”

The Wolf tilts her head, a sexy fire in her eyes. “He hasn't seen them. I'm his assassin, not his whore.”

I tap my riding crop against my leg, enthralled with her attitude and lack of fear. Only a few seconds in this room and her no-nonsense energy matches ours. But even those qualities don't erase the situation. She's here because of Grandmother.

Red catches my gaze, and I raise my brows in frustration. Naturally, he reads it, turning his attention to Hood.

“Wonderful.” Red shrugs. “She likes us. So what about Grandmother? We can have a fan girl all day, but what we want is answers.”

Hood opens his mouth, but it's The Wolf who speaks first.

“I don't know about her.”

Exactly what I thought. She's lying to get free, and that means she's worthless.

Little is the first to step forward, his thoughts matching mine as he flips his shank around his wrist. “Then you're worthless, and we kill you. Now.”

“But I can tell you where she *might* be if Grimm did take her.” The Wolf doesn't even blink as she stares Little right in the eyes. She even looks kind of bored, with one brow weakly cocked. “I *do* know all of his holding spots.”

A heavy pause blankets the room. Hood maintains his place next to The Wolf, her tits still on display as Red, Little, and I exchange glances and silent but obvious thoughts. Should we kill her? Keep her alive?

The creak of a board under Hood's weight catches our focus as he shuffles toward us. “If you'd like to stop having your little telepathic board meeting, maybe you'd like my opinion?”

I fold my arms over my chest, nodding. “Spill it.”

“Let her prove she’s loyal and wants to help.”

My gaze dulls. “Ingenious, Hood. And how do we do that?”

“By making her work for nothing in return.” He draws closer, pocketing his hands.

“And?” Little taps his foot on the floor. “What kind of work is that going to be?”

Hood widens his stance, and I hear the overload of mischievousness in his voice. “It starts at the top, right? Let her suck Rider off. If she can make him come, I say she gets to stay.”

Red grunts, and Little laughs while looking at me. They know. Know that I can refuse to come for anybody.

Not fully by choice.

It stems more from a time when I got captured by a gang called The Pokers. People we don’t usually have run-ins with, since they operate in a different town in the town across the bay, and only visit occasionally.

All the same, ruthless motherfuckers. Not people you want to cross paths with if you’re completely alone.

I happened to be on the dock waiting for a weapons supply at the wrong time, and they didn’t know I was a Huntsman. Not until much later.

Either way, after a long fist fight, they captured me, just for fun—just because they could. What came after was four days of sexual torture. Hand jobs, blow jobs, ropes, knotting, biting. I came until it hurt and my skin was raw, the salt in the semen burning my flesh.

It fucking sucked.

The only way to make them stop was to take the fun out of it. I had to show them I was a waste of time. So I didn’t come at all. Eventually, they let me go, but not without a few

permanent scars on my cock. And now, no one goes to the docks alone anymore.

Also, I can turn that function off, if I want—or even when I don't want to at times. It depends on the mood I'm in.

So that's why Little is laughing. He knows what a chore that can be, and he understands that sometimes I don't even have control of turning off the desire.

An interesting idea all of the same, and glancing at The Wolf, she looks way too eager to try. She's licking her lips, rubbing her thighs together with wide eyes.

Amusement twitches at the base of my stomach. I jerk my head toward The Wolf while looking at Hood. "And if she can't get me off?"

"Then ..." he drawls, "we kill her."

CHAPTER 3

The Wolf



Rider—beautiful Rider.

I didn't know he'd be in *this* house when Hood joined me in the vault. Part of me hoped Rider would be here, but given how much land The Huntsmen control, it was impossible to be certain.

But he *is* here, and my chest feels like a crater is plummeting through it.

All these years and I've finally found him. Each cell in my body burns the longer I stare, and my brain loudly announces to my thudding heart that the search is over.

The time that's passed until now is a strange mix.

During the thrill of pulling a trigger or dragging a knife across a person's throat, time is a flashing light bulb. Blink and you miss the moments.

But the times when there's no one? The nights when the wind outside my window sounds like a cyclone? That's when the past catches up, and I fall down into the black vortex of what was, and the concept of time stopping no longer seems impossible. Each instance that's occurred, I've laid in bed and stared at my ceiling and thought of nothing except him.

Of Rider, and I'd like to think he's thought about me as well.

Only...

He doesn't remember me, or at the very least, doesn't recognize me. Not at all. The stoic wash in his eyes is far too apparent. He knows me as The Wolf and nothing beyond that. A flash of disappointment rips through my hopes. *Maybe I was wrong and meant nothing to him.* But I dismiss the thought away, along with the slight bubble of panic rising up my stomach.

If I show a single thing, I'm dead. A well-deserved death, if you're asking me, since outward distractions are amateurish.

Regardless, amateurish might be the way I'm coming across to The Huntsmen with my tattoo. But if they only knew the truth.

The insignia Hood showed off moments ago isn't because I'm an obsessed fan girl. I'm not a woman with a shrill voice and a fluttering heart.

I'll spit in your gurgling, blood-filled mouth and laugh as you choke harder. But callous as I may be, I'm fiercely loyal to anything or anyone that once gave me hope. This insignia is on my body because of Rider.

Because when we were kids, a boy my age played on the other side of the cinder block fence in my backyard. He attended a daycare made for after-school hours. And while my mom was passed out on the couch in the dark living room, with a flickering television channel full of static, a near empty bottle of Oxycontin on the floor beside her, this boy was my happiness—my safe spot—the rare smile in my gaze that was normally clouded with tears.

I can still see us.

Me standing on a broken off cinder block, my nose barely brushing across the fence. Him, with his head tilted all the way backward, his silver eyes sucking me in, and making me compare them to the lit-up moon as he told me all about his "normal life."

"It's not exciting, Bell. Miss Mazie never smiles, and she took her jar of candy from her desk because we were talking

too much. You don't want to go to school."

That's what he used to tell me, but he couldn't comprehend that his normal life was my dream. School halls, grouchy teachers, parents who worked 9-5 ... it seemed wonderful to a little girl like me. One who learned how to read and write from textbooks at home and was trapped within the four corners of her room with only stuffed animals to speak to.

No friends. No birthday parties, or sleepovers.

Just me—*always* doing chores, schoolwork, and taking care of my mom. My backyard, with its high fence, was the only real outside time I got. The term "backyard" is generous, though. It was mostly concrete with a 1x1 patch of dirt. Only the honeysuckle tree with its low-hanging blossoms, reddish orange in color, made up for the bleak surroundings.

My favorite part, however, was listening to the kids on the other side laughing, playing, squealing. Their world seemed so vibrant, and while I used to peek over the fence, none of the other kids noticed me.

Not until Rider.

He was little then too, but damn, he's not anymore. Life has carved him into a man. One I'm thoroughly turned on by at the moment, and I'm doing nothing to stop myself from admiring him.

My eyes are crawling all over Rider and his mouth-watering body. I heard he favored riding outfits and horses and wondered if it was true.

It is.

His tan riding pants cling to him like a second skin. The fabric stretches taut against sinewy leg muscles that flaunt a muscular split down the middle of his thighs. Power—that's what he looks like. Sheer power encapsulated in a manly, gruff style, one showing he likes the outdoors. A light dusting of grit on his tall black boots and his black wrinkled cotton shirt makes me believe he's spent most of his time outside today.

I'm thirsting for him. My mouth is dry and parched, and I don't even notice that I'm licking my lips until Rider says something.

"You're going to try, aren't you?"

My heart knocks against my sternum, exhilaration seeping into my muscles. "Like my life depends on it." I wonder if he hears how eager the words are.

"Cute answer. Wise too." A flick of his thumb, and he unbuttons his pants, the waistband loose around his flat stomach. Tugging the garment beyond his wide thighs, I almost gasp at the sight.

I was right; his legs are just as muscular and beautiful as they let on to be. God, he could choke me with them, and I want to groan at how amazing that would be. Strangled with his legs while I gag and drool on his cock.

Very submissive, I know, and not typical for a hitwoman. But I've never been shy about loving a wild fuck session that gives control. On the contrary, giving control *is* control, and this Wolf quite likes being a sub. Choosing *who* I let dominate me while being the one to say stop, if it goes too far, is the *best* position.

I'm curious as to what Rider's style is. Not overly gentle, assuming from the way he falls back into the chair. The wood creaks loudly under his weight.

A pause lingers as he waits for a beat, almost like he's contemplating. During the slow seconds, I can't miss the flash of amusement in Rider's expression as he looks at me, his eyes drifting over my body. Down, then up, then down again. My nerves want to snap in half from the attention. Then he says words that make my thighs clench all over again.

"Take your shirt off and crawl to me."

My body follows the command all on its own. Catching the hem of my shirt with my fingers, I peel the fabric up. Cold air circulates around my frame. The low temperatures slice at my exposed skin, affecting my nipples the most as I remove

my shirt and discard it to some corner of the room. The other three men make feverish sounding moans, but it's only Rider I see. Even from here, I spot his jaw tightening, his chest hardly moving up or down.

He flicks his riding crop against the floor. *SNAP. SNAP.* The air palpitates with thick arousal as he orders my obedience of getting to my knees.

I drop to them instantly, my heart thumping, panties getting slicker as the other three men in the room groan in what sounds like approval, but they say nothing, and I'm thankful for the lack of interference. It allows me to retain my focus on Rider, which is all I really want.

After this, I'll service the other three however they want, whenever they want. I'll let them fuck me all at once, if that's what pleases them—no objections here. But I'll always cherish it was Rider I got to pleasure first.

The frigid tile against my palms has me swallowing back a small yelp. I wasn't prepared for how cold it would be. The discomfort it brings even bites through my thick jeans against my kneecaps. I grit my teeth, schooling my features.

The mask I'm wearing is hard to maintain as Rider works his cock from behind his briefs to bring it to a full display. I crawl faster, my pulse beating catatonically at a spot behind my earlobes.

God, I want him. And I feel like a pet, made for a delicious type of shame as Rider props one elbow on the arm of the chair and then rests his chin in his palm as he waits.

Never once do his eyes leave mine, and the intensity dries my mouth. I want him to look at me this way forever— and I want to lick up and down his beautifully roped thighs as I come to a stop between them. My shoulders nestle between his legs perfectly, and if I had free rein, I'd start with his inner left thigh first and tenderly kiss the light freckle I'm spotting.

All the lustful energy coursing through my body seizes up, however, when I move too suddenly by placing my hand on

top of his thigh. Rider flinches, a deep grunt leaving his throat just before gruff words fall from his mouth.

“Go. Slow.”

I nod stiffly, chiding myself inside at how thoughtless I’m being. Anticipation made me forget about his run-in with The Pokers that granted him the hushed nickname “The Wounded Huntsmen,” and made him cautious.

Guessing why they picked the name isn’t a mystery—fucking barbarians.

My chest pinches at the jagged scar rippling across the smooth flesh of his cock. Jesus, that must have hurt him. I want to kill them for that. Rip out their still pumping hearts and cook them. I feel myself scowling, only to have my thoughts interrupted by one of the men.

“It’s not going to suck itself, sweetheart,” says the one in a fancy suit.

My lips part, but nothing has a chance to come out.

“Shut it,” says Rider. “You’ll fuck up my headspace if you keep chattering and ruin her shot.”

“Ha,” laughs the shortest one. “Does she even have one?”

Each tendon in my body stiffens at the mocking way he says the words. The only thing I can sense moving is my stomach twisting itself into a ball. Why do I hate this idea that Rider might not want me? I shove that away and glance up to find Rider’s gaze directed at the men, half squinting.

“She does. Like anyone else does, but only if you three shut up. Now...” He flicks his attention to me. My lower lip trembles, euphoric chills racing down my spine as he feathers his riding crop along my cheek. “Your information could be very useful, and I’m sure you enjoy living, so I suggest you try your best, *darling*.” The endearment is spoken on a gentle breath and my heart races.

Darling. My ears sing at the word and, gingerly, I duck my head to begin a fascinating yet twisted game of survival—just

how I like it.

A moan sits at the back of my throat as I trail my tongue along the underside of his cock. Rider is so sweet, so smooth. The combining scent of his naturally vanilla, and earthy one from the outside, could be written down as my new favorite. He smells divine, feels even better, and I'd love nothing more than to shove him down my throat and choke on him...

Only, he's completely soft.

Not even a twitch occurs as I change my technique and gently suckle the top of his head. I wrap my lips around his shortened length, bobbing up and down the best I can.

Nothing.

Unease marries into my blood as Rider is softer and more flaccid than when I started, like I'm a turnoff or disgusting.

It can't be me. Rider has to like this... like me. It's not me. It's not me.

But it is. The three men chuckling in the background tell me so.

The low sounds thread a touch of desperation in me. I cup his balls, hollowing my cheeks, sucking harder. Not an easy thing to do with a soft cock, but it won't stop me from trying. He must like something.

"Hmph," Rider grunts, but it's not a sound of pleasure, and when the three snicker louder, it hurts.

There's no explaining the cut of agony tearing at my chest—it's just there. The seconds turn to minutes. Long, laboring moments where I executed my best efforts. I suck, lick, and glide my tongue on his dick until a line of drool drips down my neck, my molars throb, and my kneecaps are aching against the unforgiving tile.

All my attention and I could be sucking off a corpse with how soft he remains.

The lack of response tells me I'm a failure, and Rider could never want someone like me. That finding him after all this time and us sharing a connection was a pile of false hope and lies. That my whole reason for pushing on and battling to see Rider again was the dream of a fool.

He doesn't remember me, because I *meant* nothing to him, and my mouth around his cock *does* nothing *for* him, since I'm unimportant.

I'm pointless. Worthless. I've never been worth anything to anyone. Not my mom. Not Mr. Grimm, who makes it clear we're all expendable. And especially not Rider.

I see that now.

Fuck how the thought punches through my soul. I battle the overwhelming dejection as I keep trying to arouse Rider by circling my tongue around his head. Agonizing realization or not, I'm *still* The motherfucking Wolf, and I don't show pain, no matter how deep it slices.

I'll smirk at you while you drive a dagger through my heart, and that said smirk is curling up my mouth as Rider shifts uncomfortably in his seat, then pushes his hips back, putting distance between me and his soft cock.

"No go?" the one in the suit asks, a laugh playing in his tone.

A dull look rests over Rider's manly features as he shakes his head. "Total waste of time."

"Too bad," Hood replies. "At least it was fun to watch her try. So which of us is going to take the coveted status as The Wolf Killer? Rider?"

"I don't know..." Rider sighs, tapping a finger on the armrest of the chair. "I'm not in a mood to kill today."

Wonderful... I'm not even noteworthy enough for Rider to kill me. His rejection makes me want to beat my fist against the tile until my hand is nothing but a bloody, bony nub. Instead, I scoff and swing my gaze to the other three.

A sweeping silence descends as the men look at each other, nodding and mulling. I can see their unvoiced communication. A heavy game of *who is going to do this* circulates around them, baiting the air with light tension.

This is it, my mind seems to tell me. I'm going to die tonight, and while I could fight, there's little motivation for me to do so. These are The Huntsmen, highly skilled and trained people. Three men, one woman. Plus, I'm food and sleep deprived.

Also...

Rider. He doesn't recognize me, and all my hopes are pieces of trash now. We're former friends with washed-out memories. There's no reason to carry on, not now.

I use The Huntsmen's seconds of deliberation to glance at Rider and think of our places in life.

Both killers, on opposite sides of agendas, yet the same inside. Grisly, powerful, and ruthless.

So different from us as children.

I shake my head in astonishment, a wry smile on my mouth. "How did we get here?"

"What's that?" Ryder asks, his brows pulling together as he finally looks at me.

"Us," I whisper.

All he responds with is a slow and baffled looking blink.

After placing my hands on the cold tile, I drop my chin so all I see is the floor. Memories flash through my mind, and I think of our last day together. The week after his parents died in a house fire, leaving him an orphan. It was the first and last time he climbed over my cinder block fence to talk to me.

I see him, curled under my bright honeysuckle bush, his frame blurred from the tears clouding my eyes. I *hear* him telling me that this will be our last time together.

“I don’t know where I’m going yet, Bell. Someplace nice... I hope.”

“And if that place isn’t nice?” My blood spikes with fear. What if someone hurts him, or worse?

“Then I’ll have to remember all the things Momma told me until things get better. To stay on the right path and never stray.”

A light chuckle leaves my lungs, and I slightly rock back and forth, amused at how twisted Rider and I are now. And while I think I still know him, the truth is, I don’t know this person at all anymore. We swerved out of our designated lanes long ago.

“What’s so funny?” Rider asks.

“After that day...” I look up at the foreigner and frown. “Things never got better. Neither of us did as your mom instructed, and we strayed from our paths, didn’t we?”

Instantly, he freezes, his eyes widening beyond what seems capable.

My nails scrape against the tile at his piercing look, a mix of excitement and relief rushing through me.

“*Bell?*” he mouths, wordlessly, and I see clear recognition swirling in a sea of silver.

I nod. My mouth parts, wetness hitting my eyes, my heart wanting to explode from behind my ribs. Tears film over his gaze, and I know the truth. He remembers me—*really* fucking remembers me.

“What a fucking waste of time, you two,” the smallest guy’s voice cracks in the air, slicing through our moment, but never drawing Rider’s and I’s attention. “We’re trying to decide when the bitch should be dead by now.”

A loud *shing* of metal chimes in the room, but as I stare into Rider’s eyes, the sound is slow and delayed, and I can’t move.

Footsteps. Light, lethal footsteps, with the intent to kill, charge toward me, but I don't turn their way. The last thing I want is to perish while looking at a blade or my attacker. I'd rather stay fixated on Rider and die happy, knowing I meant something to *him*.

Slowly, I smile, waiting for cold metal to ram through my skin, and for darkness to come. The sound of my executor is closer now. I'll be dead in a moment or two.

A tear glides down my cheek, trailing down to the point of my chin as I whisper. "Hello again... goodbye."

Such a beautiful way to die.

CHAPTER 4

Rider



“G oodbye” over my dead, cold body.
If love is immortality, I’ll make sure Bell lives
forever.

CHAPTER 5

The Wolf



I'm... alive.

Blinking, breathing, and trembling, when I should be dead with my blood spilling across the terracotta-colored floor.

And I *would* be if it weren't for Rider.

Seconds after recognizing me, he lunged out of his seat. Thrusted forward so hard, the wooden chair flew back as he shielded me from the oncoming attack. He clutched the shank in his hand and is still holding on to it.

He's bleeding now. A dark line of red flows down his arm, soaking into the fabric of his shirt.

Not even a grunt sounds out while he squeezes the blade harder and drives it back.

The man wanting to kill me doesn't like this. His pupils narrow, darkening, nearly matching the color of his raven hair. "Let go of the blade, Rider."

"No," Rider growls. "Walk away, Little. Now." He grits his teeth, driving the shank toward Little, making him stumble backward. "That's an order."

"This isn't the agreement." Little widens his stance to steady his footing and gain leverage over Rider. "The rules were simple. No coming, no living. We're not keeping her as a prisoner. It's too dangerous."

"That's before I knew who she was."

“So who is she?” Hood asks.

My heart thuds in my ears, waiting for Rider’s response.

Rider raises a brow, his left arm trembling now from the strain of staving off Little’s blade. “Everyone have a seat, and I’ll tell you.”

“Not happening,” Little counters. “We’ll be dead before making it to our chairs. She’ll gut us.”

“She won’t.” Rider draws in a long-heated breath and scowls. “And you’re not killing Bell. Not unless you want me to teach you the definition of a slow and painful death.”

Rage twists across Little’s face. Veins bulge at his temples and neck, while a dark red flush spans across his skin. “Fucking try me,” he growls.

“Wrong answer,” Rider replies. He bursts to his feet, his hand remaining firmly around the blade. Whatever pain it causes, he doesn’t let it show while shoving a shoulder into Little.

Little stumbles. Both combat boots scuff on the floor. He slips a margin, before grinding his weight down to stop a fall. His free hand draws back, fist balled tightly. A light grunt breaks out. He throws his punch.

Smack!

His knuckles land square into Rider’s hand. The block is loud. But the crack of Little’s knuckles as Rider tightens his grip is louder.

“*Fuck,*” Little whispers.

Rider raises a knee and jams it into Little’s crotch.

“*Ump.*” The sound Little makes is even weaker than before. He drops the blade, and it clatters to the floor. Sweeping his arm around, he goes to put Rider in a headlock. A frustrated growl leaves him as Rider bobs in avoidance.

Rider smirks. “If only you were taller.” He pummels his bloody palm against the side of Little’s temple.

The violent blow launches Little sideways, his feet flying from underneath him. He meets the floor with a ground-shaking *thud*. Groans of pain ring out as Rider kicks his stomach and ribs, and the other two complain in protest.

“Rider, stop,” says Hood, tone demanding but calm.

I use the moment to grab the shank that’s fallen near me. Moments ago, I would have gladly died—thrilled Rider remembered me and made it clear I meant something to him.

Now?

Seeing him fight renews the blood humming in my veins. *Him* wanting me to live makes *me* want to live.

And so, I will. I’ll fight until my breathing feels like pins and my muscles think they’ve torn from their bone structure. I’ll do anything to be with Rider.

Deftly, I take the weapon, holding the handle in my grip and resting the blade against the inside of my forearm. In this position, I can flip it easily in case I need to use it. With the cool edge of the shank pressed to my skin, I fix my eyes on Rider.

One. Two. Three kicks. Rider stops and stares down, towering over Little, who is rolling side to side. “Don’t ever test me like that again. I said no killing.” He looks up at the other two, wiping at his mouth. “You going to start too?”

“Your idea works for me... for now.” Hood pockets his hands. “I say we hear him out.”

“And *we* said she’d die if she failed,” the one in the suit says. He reaches deep inside his jacket. “I’m with Little on this. An agreement is an agreement.”

“Try me, Red,” Rider growls.

“Try you?” Red asks, huffing a laugh. “Okay.”

Flick.

I hear the sound of a dense and heavy knife being opened before I see it.

He opens his blazer, and when the blade comes into view, a small thrill winds up my spine. If I do have to fight, this will be one of the best ones I've had in a while. The shaft is probably four inches wide by six or seven inches long. He knows exactly what he's doing with it.

Red drags the blunt edge of the blade down his open palm. The metal sings viciously against his flesh as he glints at Rider. "You'd be a wise man to step aside. Don't make me come over there and find out how loud you scream while your heart is being gutted from your chest."

"You fucking wish you could," Rider grumbles and gestures at his suit. "Forget it. You're not dressed for the occasion."

"I'll cut you, suit or no suit."

"And I swear," Rider says, "brothers or not, I'll rip you apart limb from limb and use you for dog food if you hurt Bell."

I'm helpless to stop my gasp. Rider's devotion stirs a softness inside my chest that I thought had long since died. But it's still there—I can practically feel the organ melting behind my ribs as I stare at him, mouth slightly agape.

"Fucking try to touch me, Rider," Red bites out, reminding me what's actually taking place. "If you think I'm going to stand by—"

"Red," Hood interjects. "Rider *is* second in command."

Red sighs heavily in response.

Hood steps closer, nearly brushing shoulders with Red. "It was his idea on how to capture The Wolf to start with. Let's give him a chance."

Rider's back muscles clench, as he grunts and nods in his own silent defense.

"Fine." Red snaps his knife shut, then pockets it before his eyes flick to mine. "But get that fucking shank out of her hand."

I stiffen.

Red smirks, casting his attention to me. “Thought I missed that, sweetheart?”

“I did,” I say, freely handing the blade over to Rider, a dull look plastered on my face. “I thought the commotion was enough.”

“I miss nothing, dearest.” A handsome smile pulls at his mouth. “I see you.”

Already, I like him. Maybe more than I should, and I’m uncertain if it’s the lustful, crazed look in his eyes, or the fact that I have a weakness for sharply dressed and observant men. Either way, I’m into him, and I hold his attention for as long as he gives it to me.

Slowly, he folds his arms across his chest, and a pause takes over the room as Little clamors to his feet and shuffles over to the other three guys.

He glares at me, a look none too pleased flickering in his hardened gaze. He’s positively pissed, and I can’t say I blame him. Who likes getting their ass handed to him while their ideas are shot down?

The three men direct their attention to Rider as leery and uncertain looks pass over their features.

Finally, Hood breaks the silence. “So what do we do?”

“I’ll cook for her. You all get her warm clothes.” Rider’s lips pull into a stern line, and as the men do nothing, a tightness tenses his jaw. “Now!” he barks.

All three snap into action, moving with speedy purpose without another hesitation.

I’m fixated on the three, until I notice Rider standing in front of me, smiling.

“Let me walk you to the table. Get you comfortable.” Gently, his arm loops around my shoulders. The skin he grazes heats under his touch, and we start off on our first step in sync.

“I’m surprised you recognized me.”

His brows raise high. “You think I’d forget about saying something like that?”

“It was a long time ago.” I shrug, hanging my head slightly, a pinch of embarrassment flooding my chest. “I wasn’t sure if the memory was worth hanging on to.”

“It was,” he counters. “It might have taken me a moment, but I made a promise years ago that I’d always remember you. Always.”

The corner of my mouth lifts, matching the small burst of butterflies rising in my stomach. “Then I’m glad I meant that much to you.”

“You did... *do*.” His correction is almost a whisper as we come to a full stop near one of the chairs. It warms my chest, but I become speechless, not sure how much to push since it’s been so long for us.

Rider and I have a past, but right now, I feel we’re in a field of freshly planted flowers, and I have no idea where I should step. So I nod instead, preparing to seat myself. My shoulders stiffen when he stops me by gripping onto my arm and looking me dead in the eyes.

“Bell, it’s been years, and I think it’s obvious we’ve changed, but do me a favor?”

“What is it?” The question is parched, matching my shock, and I can’t stop the shivers spiraling through me as he lowers his head, bringing our mouths mere inches apart, his breath coasting into mine.

“Never think about saying goodbye to me again. Ever.”

CHAPTER 6

Rider



“You having a soft spot like that for someone? Shock of the year,” Hood says, catching me by surprise, joining me in the kitchen.

I scoff while pulling a whistling teakettle off the stove. Shock of the year is an insult. I have a soft spot... too many, if I'm being transparent with myself. “What do you mean?” My brows snap together. “I have—”

“I mean, the kind of soft spot you have for Grandmother and me,” Hood interjects. “I didn't think anyone could match that.”

The pointed statement snaps my mouth shut. He's nailed me in place, like always. Hood can do that, because he's known me the longest. The Huntsmen started with us two and Grandmother as our guide. We trained together for three years before Red and Little joined our organization.

Some days, I wish it was just the two of us, even though Hood gets on my nerves from time to time. I guess he really is like family—aggravating, but you still love the hell out of them.

Breaking away from his gaze, I make sure the gauze around my hand doesn't need to be changed yet and flick on the switch for extra lighting.

I don't want the eggs I'm cooking for Bell to over scramble, and without more light, it's impossible to see their texture. Most of the light in this room gets eaten up by the

mahogany wood panels on the walls. Rustic overtakes any brightness. Something about the floor doesn't help either, but at least the theme matches the dining room. The entire house, actually. Dark, almost cozy, but too menacing to fully sink into comfort.

We don't read, relax, or laugh much in this cabin-style mansion. Planning, killing, torturing, smuggling—that's what this ten-bedroom place was built for. The shadows are needed. Without them, I think our activities would feel fraudulent.

Simply put, the light doesn't suit us.

It also doesn't suit Bell—thank God.

Bell. Fucking Bell. I can't believe after several years, I'm seeing her again. Plus, there's something so sexy, knowing she has our insignia tattooed on her body. Did she do it for me? Did she know I was a Huntsman? Has she been looking for me? What has her life been like as the renowned Wolf?

So much catching up to do, even though there's not really time to do that. Still don't care, though. If I wasn't cooking for her, I'd be out there in the dining room right now, talking about all the things we missed.

But her health is more important than talking.

With Bell sitting comfortably in front of a fire, wrapped in one of my Sherpa jackets, I decide to re-hydrate her with some herbal teas and a plate of protein, sugars, and carbs. Eggs, a banana, and a small portion of rice. Easily digestible, which is needed, considering she hasn't eaten in a few days. All of them will provide quick strength without upsetting her stomach.

"You like her," Hood states. "More than me. Maybe more than Grandmother."

"For sure, more than you," I joke. "Bell and I go back." The grin of a fool creeps up my face as I say it.

My chest has a tender pinch in it too as I glance at the timer for the rice.

The pinch is something I haven't felt in years—I don't think it's a lie to say I haven't experienced it since last seeing Bell. Something about *her*... As a kid, I thought she made my chest feel funny. Years later, I realized what I felt was affection, and I wanted to give her everything I could to improve her circumstances, because she had those eyes.

Not pretty ones that you get wrapped up in.

Ones that show you they learned too much too soon. Maturity, pain, things you can't say due to their twisted weight. Bell's eyes held all of that and more. Any time we talked, I smiled at her a lot, but only because that was what she needed to see.

Inside, my heart frowned for her. All the time. So to smile genuinely at seeing her now is amazing.

"I guess I had a crush on her. Still do." I shrug.

"Yeah. I caught that." He settles onto the bar stool at the center island, dropping the hood to his jacket—something he rarely does.

Neither of us says anything, but the wide silver scar which stretches from his temple to his jaw leaves him looking like, as he says, "a monster."

While I don't think it's *that* bad, it is pretty jarring to see if you're not prepared.

The stripe barely misses his right eye, with jagged edges of silver rippling in the outer corner. He hates how it looks, and how it messes up his otherwise Hollywood appearance. The hoodies can be deceiving. You expect to find some emo kid underneath. Underneath is tawny, golden skin that doesn't need the sun for a tan, discerning eyes of bright blue that will cut through your bullshit before you spew it out, and a jawline so sharp it could cut you.

He'll admit it himself. He's been vain about his looks, and ever since The Pokers left him with the scar eight years ago. Hood always wonders if the scar was the price he paid for placing his appearance at the forefront of everything.

I personally think The Pokers just happened to find a way to fuck all of us up in some way. Red and Little have their history with them too. They live on the other side of Lake Kahn, which thankfully isn't a hop across. It's a seven-day trip by boat.

Many times, I've thought about making the journey with some of our best trained fighters and fucking them up a little. Even if it's just for Hood's sake. I hate seeing how sad the scar makes him and how he never feels comfortable showing his face. In our early days of our training, he was our frontman of our operations.

He could charm the argument out of anyone. I think even men wanted to fuck him. And his smile? It was so bright, you'd do anything to see it. Then the fight happened, and Hood retracted into himself. I became the new frontman, as Hood became our bone cruncher and the one who hid in the shadows.

Most days, it's all he thinks about. But he doesn't seem hyper-fixated on it today, however, as he threads his hand through his cool-colored brown hair. The natural wave makes one set of strands flip upward when he's done.

“So you think your Wolf girlfriend is going to help us?”

“Girlfriend is a stretch, innit?”

“No. Not when I think of how excited she was to suck you.” Hood smirks. “Did you see her face?”

I shake my head. “Wasn't looking at her face. I was staring at her tits.”

He laughs, lightly knocking his knuckles on the counter, but the smile quickly fades. “Think Little is going to come around?”

“I don't care if he does or doesn't.”

Hood startles at my directness, his face sobering. “He's part of us. You should care about his opinion.”

“Maybe so.” I pull the eggs off the stove. “But he’s emotional and leads with this head, not with logic. Even if The Wolf wasn’t Bell, it’d be stupid to kill her when she might know where Grandmother is.”

He nods, lightly trailing a finger over his scar. “Little is younger. Give him some time.”

My eyes go skyward, annoyance simmering in my chest. “We’ve been giving him time for the last six years. Him being younger doesn’t give him a pass, Hood. If we want to find Grandmother, we need to operate smoothly. As a team. If he ever needed to grow up, it’s now.”

“I know. His mind is everywhere. That’s all.” He rests his elbows on the counter and slowly presses his weight on them. “I also know him fucking that girl doesn’t help either.”

A nerve deep behind my gaze twitches. “He’s still fucking Greta?”

“Sure is. And now she’s pushing for him to move in with her.”

My stomach churns. As if Grandmother missing wasn’t enough trouble already. Little moving in with Greta would put everything we have in jeopardy. Greta’s brother, Hanson, has threatened Little, telling him to leave Greta alone more than once. Even crossing the line into passing death threats his way.

Normally, I wouldn’t care. I try to be the kind of person who allows others to deal with their own personal issues. However...

Hanson and Greta are the kids of the lady we call The Witch.

One of our most important people.

The Witch is the one woman who takes all our mushrooms and brews it into the incredible powdered opiate that sells out before a batch is even made.

Trust me, I can show you a two months’ long waiting list. Demand is everywhere, and while I understand The Witch is

only one person, I wish she could brew faster. We've tried teaching other people how to do it, but they never get it right.

The formula comes back too diluted. The grams are wrong and we lose money. Or worse, the cutters and brewers start using the opiate themselves, and you can't be a slave to your own product. That's bankruptcy waiting to happen.

We need The Witch. Odd as she is, the product she puts out is perfect, and she stays clean. We can't lose her. I'd rather cut off Little from The Huntsmen before jeopardizing our connection with The Witch.

I clench my fist, just as the timer for the rice beeps.

"Fuck." Hood hangs his head. "I shouldn't have said anything."

"Yes, you should have," I counter while shutting off the timer quickly as I can since it's only aggravating me more. "If I need to step in between Little and Greta—"

"You mean, if you need to kick Little out."

I freeze.

His eyes narrow. "Don't think for one moment I didn't pick up on that. I know how you think."

"He's a liability."

"He's our brother."

"I. Don't. Care." I scoff, turning my back and marching for the stove, angry blood roaring under my skin. "I won't let some undersized piece of shit fuck up our operations."

"Rider—"

"We're supposed to be a team, Hood. And the loyalty starts with us. If Little can't commit to what we have at home base, and is willing to put us at risk, he doesn't deserve to be here."

"Well, when you say it like that..." He sighs after his voice trails off, letting a pause hang as I start putting the rice in a bowl.

“You agree, but still don’t like it.”

“Because while it’s true, you also say it because you don’t like Little. You’ve never liked him. He’s always annoyed you.”

“He has—”

“Tell me, Rider, would you cut *me* off that fast?”

“If...” The words choke up inside me. Hood knows the kind of argument he’s hurling my way, and I have to stop long and hard to think.

Could I do it?

Do something like that to Hood? The brother I never had? The teen who used to bring me cups of hot chocolate when I’d wake up screaming after dreaming of my parents burning to their death? Could I seriously cut off the friend who used to make sure the open wounds on my back didn’t get infected after training on the spike bed so we didn’t spill information if we were caught?

What about the ways I helped him?

The memory of the time I walked in on him burns my chest. He was moments away from slicing his wrists wide open, the air swirling with the smell of bleach, while the scar on his face still had stitches in it.

The way he broke down, the way I held a teen in my lap like he was a toddler, and soothed him to sleep with Mom’s old lullabies. Songs of peace and happiness—things we didn’t have at all but hoped for.

That’s the history I have with Hood.

Could I cut off a part of myself like that? That’s essentially what Hood is. He isn’t just himself, he’s me.

I swallow past the sudden lump in my throat, attempting eye contact, so I can tell him yes.

But I’m met with that shocking blue of his gaze that cuts right into me, so I look away. “If you started compromising

things for us, more than helping. “Yes.” My reply is weak, but I carry on. “I wouldn’t have a choice.”

“You’re a fucking liar, and I hate the way you treat Little. You’re second in command, and for a reason. You’re good at keeping things in order. But! Grandmother wouldn’t cut him off like that. She keeps us strong. Mess-ups and all; she’d try to talk to him because she understands Little brings a passion to the table that none of us can. When we don’t feel like doing something, he’s the one firing us up. He’s important. We all are.”

I should have been honest. Hood hates lies and now he’s angry with me. I feel it oozing out of his pores, in the way his jowls suck in. But that’s all he says as he stands, then promptly walks out of the kitchen.

“Hood—” Too late. He’s gone. Not bothering to look back.

His stony departure leaves me with this dreaded suspicion that he’s right. We’ve only made it this far because of Grandmother. We’re nothing without her. *I’m* nothing without her, and my lack of leadership is exposing every flaw lying within our operation.

Grandmother was our glue, and while I’m trying to keep us together, I feel like I’m the acetone eating through everything she’s done.

This situation is going to crack us all open, and the longer she’s gone, the more we’re going to disintegrate until we have nothing left except the truth.

That we weren’t as strong as we thought—and that can’t happen. It simply can’t.

We need to find Grandmother. Fast. Now. Yesterday.

Urgency floods my system. After pouring the tea in the cup, I gather the plate and start walking toward Bell, hoping she can lead us to the person we need the most.

Before we all fall apart, and I’m left with nothing all over again.

CHAPTER 7

The Wolf



The loud crackling of wood inside the fireplace seems subdued. Bundled up inside one of Rider's jackets, light whiffs of vanilla and dirt are what I should be focused on, but I'm not. At least not like I thought I'd be.

My ears keep perking up to the noise of repeated *clicks*.

It's a steady, methodical rhythm. So precise in its timing, I could bob my head to it. Like a loud *clack* of doom. Is it weird to like it? To find the threat of it somewhat thrilling?

Probably, but that's perfectly fine with me. I lazily close my lids, relishing the sound a bit longer.

Eventually, my eyes snap open and swing over to the corner where the sound is coming from, and the person who is causing it.

Red.

The man has been toying with his hunting knife for a while now, and I don't have the slightest idea if wants to stab me, or if he's turned on. All I know is that his gaze hasn't stopped roving over me since I was changed and seated.

I tilt my head, shooting him a sly smile, and he surprisingly returns it. Maybe instead of enjoying the sound, I should test the waters to see how this guy plays, if at all.

"If you want to fight, I'm up for the challenge. What do you say, best two out of three?"

“You’d be bleeding before the number one even started,” he counters, his voice coy. “I didn’t earn the name Red for no reason, *sweetheart*.”

“And I didn’t earn the title of The Wolf because I have no bite, *dearest*.”

“Be careful with the biting thing.” He pushes the blade closed, slowly. Amusement lights up his eyes as he spreads his legs wide and leans forward, dangling his hands between his thighs. “You might find I like it too much.”

“Maybe I’d like to see you enjoy it,” I purr.

“My kind of woman.” He winks, and even though the gesture is small, the implication is heavy. So is the lust that’s tightening my core. He’s sexy, and he knows it.

A wave of flutters swells at the base of my stomach as I tilt my head, curious as to why he’s more open than Little—who still hasn’t returned after leaving the dining room moments ago. Or Hood, who gave me a solemn nod, and then chased after Rider as soon as he left the room. It was an action I can appreciate. Hood seeks answers, and understandably so.

I’m their enemy, so besides Rider, I’m not expecting warm welcomes and conversations riddled with banter. So with Red, it almost seems like we shouldn’t be doing this at all, or at the very least, that he shouldn’t be reciprocating.

I expect some pushback.

After crossing my legs at the knee, I sink farther into my chair, staring Red down. “You don’t mind me?”

“Not if you don’t mind me wanting to kill you earlier,” he shoots back. “Although I did want to hesitate for a moment. Not often I meet a sexy hitwoman. Most female assassins look like they trained to fight the whole army of Sparta.”

“I enjoy dressing like a woman. I find it more fun to brag about eliminating a target in stilettos than Vans.”

He clicks his tongue, winking. “Some lucky bastard I am, then. If you pick me as a target, try to remember I like closed-

toe shoes on my women and nothing lower than a five-inch heel.”

I was right. I like him—even more than before. I lick my lips, sounding parched as I answer. “I’ll remember.”

He lightly chuckles, and the mirthful sound takes a piece of my soul with it. I know it now, he’s trouble.

Absolutely, my heart beats for Rider. But that’s because Rider feels safe and familiar. Comforting and warm—all of those things are wonderful and sweet, but this man injects the organ with a dangerous thrill I’m already becoming addicted to.

It’s a thrill I don’t wish to fight.

Sometimes you need a little wild to complement the calm. In my mind, it’s impossible to appreciate calm without chaos.

And Red is the kind of chaos I like getting lost in.

His self-assurance only adds to my attraction. The confidence is easy to see when he smoothly pulls to his feet. As his hands glide down his tie, I can’t help but fixate on his long fingers.

Sinful fingers.

They make my mind wander like crazy, because I know they’re capable of doing the devil’s work to my insides. No one should be gifted hands like his; it doesn’t give you a fighting chance.

My pulse accelerates while he swaggers over to the chair across from me, his eyes piercing into mine. Slowly, his tongue pokes out, and he licks the corner of his mouth. A wicked gleam sharpens his look when my brows skirt up in response.

I think he notices the shift I make while he sits. Propping his ankle on top of his knee, he takes a pause, pressing a long index finger to his very plump bottom lip, and freely examines me. Dark, sensual eyes rake me over in a blatant fashion.

Once. Twice. Three times. On the final pass, he lingers on my breasts, and then chuckles, reclining farther into the chair.

I cock my head, folding my arms over my chest. “So despite me being The Wolf, you think we can look past our differences?”

“I think we already are.”

The truth riles a small laugh out of me—not something this Wolf does often.

Giving me a pointed look, he brushes over his joke and sits tall in his seat. “Tell me how you know Rider.”

“Bossy.” My head jerks back, teasing.

“Always. Get used to it.” He lightly drums his index finger on the tabletop while keeping his focus on me. “Spill. What is he to you?”

One of my brows raises in slight defiance. “Why are you so anxious to know?”

“High curiosity. Because if you must know ...” Those deft fingers I’ve been fixated on tug at the edge of his suit coat. I have to pull my gaze away before I start drooling. “I can count on one hand the amount of times Rider has stepped in to defend someone. He doesn’t do that. That guy lives and lets live, and allows people to scrape their own way out of a fight or even Hell. You mean something to him, but what?”

“He’s not the sensitive kind, then?”

“Not usually. No.”

The news is a little surprising, seeing how Rider was always soft and kind to me. But that’s what life does to you. If it’s brutal enough, it will rub out the softness, shaping you into a fixture of uncrackable stone.

“So,” Red says, interrupting my train of thought. “What is he to you?”

“He was a friend.” I pause for a moment, mulling over the statement before I shrug and reveal the honest truth. “Okay...

he was my only friend.”

His lids narrow a fraction. “Did he know you before or after his parents died?”

“Before. We lost contact shortly after.”

“Then that’s what it is.” Understanding passes through his carved features. “You’re the past, and that’s something he’s been hung up on since I met him.”

My lips pull down in a frown. “The man I tried to suck off didn’t strike me as someone who gets hung up on things.”

“Well…” he drawls out, slowly, the corner of his mouth ticking up. “We all have some kind of secret buried in us, don’t we? Don’t think I’d be far off the mark by saying that’s Rider’s biggest weakness. The past.”

“Hmm.” The statement hits a vein of hurt, and I want to wince at the phantom ache threading through my chest. “It is a brutal motherfucker at times, isn’t it?”

I swear his eyes dull, going a deeper shade of brown, and he seems numb to what I consider a heart-wrenching statement. “Necessary evils, sweetheart. Without them, life is a candy patch, and we end up being filled with cavities.”

“I suppose you’re right. Although some sweetness is kind of nice from time to time.”

“Not sure how I feel about that statement. I’ve never had much of a need for it myself. Personally, I think any kind of sweetness is a lie. It only makes it harder to slip back into reality. Give me a bleak sky all day. Fuck the sunshine.”

“Well, aren’t you poetic?” I joke.

He chuckles, and it’s easy to see a man like this doesn’t full out laugh. He’s too composed for a reaction like that. Repositioning his ankle on his knee, Red settles into a new comfortable position. One that has him facing me more head on as he jerks his thumb toward the kitchen. “Just giving you a warning not to expect too much from Rider because, oddly

enough, even though he wants to hold on to the past, he's terrified of it."

Something about Red's dismissal of what I used to be to Rider makes my teeth clench. My jaw grinds so hard, it throbs. "I'm different. He just stopped a knife for me—"

"Because he wants to preserve you. Like a doll." He stands then, eyes on mine. In leisurely yet powerful strides, he crosses the distance between us, his sharp features leached of kindness—all I see is cleverness. "And while dolls are adorable, you're not that," he purrs.

The thighs in my muscles tighten, heart drumming at a pace so quick it actually hurts. He lowers down to reach my eye level, and his clean scent rushes up my nose. Then I hear the *click* of his blade and, ever so slowly, I see a glint of the silver steel catching in the firelight as he raises it.

Is he trying to leave me starving for him, because I think it's working.

I'm certain he knows it too. "*Fuck*," he whispers. "Sweetheart, you're famished."

A groan gets stuck in my throat as he presses the spine of the knife to my skin. The cool metal stings like ice against my burning cheekbone and my eyes want to roll to the back of my head as he lowers his voice even more.

"You feel this. Our pull. We're instant you and I, you know that like I do."

I nod, eyelids drooping half shut.

Red hasn't even touched me, but it's like his fingertips dance across my naked flesh as he readjusts closer to me. So close his breath coasts along the hollows of my face. "I'm going to thoroughly enjoy fucking you. Learning all your little sounds, and the feel of your little holes."

Fucking me—like I gave him permission. His bold assumption that anything he thinks he'll do to me is a given plants a small seed of contempt in my veins.

I hate arrogant men.

My gaze flies open, fire resting behind my irises as I shimmy away from his blade and scowl. “We didn’t reach a conclusion, and flirting isn’t the same as fucking. You don’t get me unless I *want* you to have me.”

A taunting smile spans his mouth as he stands. Not at all bothered by my defensive tone. After clicking the blade closed, he returns it to his coat pocket and takes a step back. “And that’s where I know I’m right. You will want me to have you.”

“No—”

“Just wait, Wolf. I know that look you just gave me. It’s one of a woman who’s been waiting so long to just give it all up. To not be in control, to not have to think for the night, to be told when to come and how to do it. You want it. More than most women, because you’re tired of wearing power all the time.”

The words plunge into the darkest parts of my heart, and I have no clue how a total stranger has picked me apart so easily. He has made me feel like I’m wearing nothing but frayed threads, despite having on three layers of clothing.

I hate the burden of power at times. Despise how it drives me forward and forces people to bow to my every whim when they see me. How many times have I prayed for it to be ripped away for a single night? To feel submissive and helpless. And while the craving is there, finding a man who can *make* that happen is like finding the holy grail. I haven’t had any luck.

And he knows this? Just by looking at me?

My mouth dries up, like a cotton round has popped up in the back of my throat, as I try to counter with anything. There’s nothing, especially as the apples of Red’s cheeks round with a gentling expression.

“I’ll only say it once,” he says, shuffling back one pace. “When you’re ready to forget, find me.”

“I—”

Swiveling away on the heel of his Oxford shoes, he’s already vanished, and slipping out of the dining room before my voice can be heard.

Red has also left, just as Rider enters with a plate of food. I am happy to see him. I even attempt to smile, but I feel how stiff it is.

“Hey.” Rider has a soft expression of his own, but I see the tinge of strain working between his brows. “Are you okay?”

“I’m—I’m good.” I steady my tone and nod twice. And while I’d love to seem more welcoming, I can’t.

It’s impossible, thanks to Red.

How do I wade through my headspace while drowning in thoughts of a man with the blade—a man who has already fucked my mind without even laying a hand on me?

For the meantime, you don’t. And while it might make me a bad girl, a part of me wants both. Red and Ride.

At the same time.

Greedy little girl, aren’t I?

CHAPTER 8

Rider



“You know what’s insane to me?” Bell asks, gently coasting her fingertip over the rim of her teacup.

“What?”

“You look different, but the same all at once.”

“How so?”

“Your eyes,” she says, voice like velvet. “I know you’re a Huntsman, but they’re still kind, like they always were.” A smile kicks up the corner of her lip, and while I’m trying to get lost in it, I’m struggling.

Am I drowning or breathing at this point?

I can’t tell. Sure, my chest has been hitching up and down for oxygen this entire time, but every intake feels like liquid in my lungs. They’ve been getting heavier by the minute. Second. But frankly, it feels good, and at the moment, there’s no killer sitting across from me right now.

The way she says I changed but not really, I see it gleaming all over her face. Have for the last hour we’ve been seated at this fire, undisturbed. It’s her... the gentle little girl I used to talk to on afternoons.

“You look almost the same as well,” I say, my throat tightening as I linger on her soft, luscious mouth.

“Almost?” she shoots back coyly. “Be honest. Do I look better or worse than you expected?”

“Prettier. Way prettier,” I whisper, almost mindlessly. My fingers wring against the handle of my riding crop that’s resting across my left thigh.

My fist loosens. The impulse to reach across and feather my touch along her skin pulses throughout my hand—but I stop myself.

It feels... too much? Too soon? Something. I freeze my brows into place, stopping the confused furrow.

The hesitation I feel is odd, considering she had my cock in her mouth with a line of drool dripping between her tits two hours ago. A sudden sadness rips open in my chest when I stare at her for too long—it drains away the euphoria I swam in moments ago as an unwanted thought rings in my ears.

It’s me. I want her. I need her, I love her... but I’m too damaged, too terrified to touch her. It makes me think of The Pokers, because when I was getting tortured, there was a woman there that looked just like the version of Bell I had in my mind.

And she was present for every session.

Every beating.

Each burning of the rope across the flesh of my cock.

The pins they would shove down my urethra while jerking me off furiously... she was there. And *she* became the one person I focused on during each visit.

The woman who stood back in the corner and just watched. I’d stare into her empty yet smirking pale eyes as she watched. Despite them being lifeless, I thought of Bell. The memory was my one weapon to drive away the pain, to numb out cruelty, shut myself off and become untouchable. I’ve never told anyone that.

I’m still not sure if I can or even want to.

“Hmm.” Bell’s quiet mumble breaks my thoughts. “You’re thinking about something. Something that happened. Probably about something awful, or something you can’t have.”

“Are you sure about that?” I counter, masking the haunting emotions I feel. “I’m a Huntsman, remember? We don’t recall the awful things; *we are* the awful things... and there’s nothing we can’t have. We take whatever we want.”

A sharp knowing shoots through her gaze. “Suit yourself and don’t mention it. Just know you can’t hide too far from me, Rider. You and I are too much alike. We try to forget everything and are never happy with what we have, even when we have it.”

Guilt thrums deep in my sternum for not being transparent with her. Of course Bell would know I’m not being truthful with her—but telling all my secrets after being reunited for a few short moments feels awkward.

I jerk my vision away, refusing to look at Bell to better control my tongue. Something about staring into her eyes siphons the control out of me, and that’s the last thing I need. It’d be better to tell her later.

I can only hope later is an option for us. Who knows how many days we have left with the kind of lives we lead.

“You make good tea,” she says, obviously changing the subject. “What else have you gotten good at as a Huntsman? Riding, I assume?” Bell nods to my riding crop.

“Riding is therapy,” I respond while gliding my vision over the smooth black leather. “For Red, Little, and Hood, it’s merely a means of transportation, but for me, it’s my lifeline. The Woods and I are friends.”

“Is that so?” The corner of her mouth lifts. “Are these woods accepting new friends?”

“Why?” I cock a brow. “Do you ride?”

“Some things I ride better than others...”

“I mean a horse, you pretty little smartass,” I quip.

“Nothing about me is little,” she counters. “But yes, I do ride horses. I learned shortly after signing on with Grimm.”

“Grimm... I’ve always hated his name. Plus, he’s an asshole.”

“Hey.” She wags her finger at me. “Be careful about how you talk about my boss.”

I smirk as I lean forward. “You’re in a Huntsman’s house, my Bell. I’ll talk about your piece of shit boss, however I see fit.”

“Then don’t get pissed when I talk shit about your dear sweet Grandmother later on. She’s caused lots of problems for us recently.”

“Don’t give Grandmother all the credit.” I wink. “All that trouble could have been me.”

Bell giggles, and it’s one of the sweetest sounds I’ve heard in years. An easy silence settles as she takes a long sip of tea, and then swallows a bite of egg.

After several moments, I finally nod up to her, asking a question that’s been eating at me since I first learned who she was.

“So why work with Grimm? If you have our insignia tattooed on you, why are you working for that bastard?”

“The reason for the insignia is my secret,” she states. “I’ll tell you why I have it after you tell me what you were thinking about a few moments ago.”

My mouth opens to object, but she cuts me off.

“As for working for Grimm... I finally found something I was good at. And—” A frown passes over her mouth. “And I found a group of people who felt like family. Kind of, anyway.”

“Family?” The word is revolting to me.

Grimm knows nothing about the meaning of family.

The difference between Grimm and Grandmother is the stories I’ve heard. Grimm practically eats his own. Once you don’t have a use for him, he’s done with you. Grandmother, on

the other hand, truly treats us like we're her kids. Fuck-ups and all, she's always been loyal to us, and us to her.

“Rider.” The annoyance in her voice tells me everything I need to know. She knows exactly how I'm thinking. “Whatever you've heard—”

“I've heard plenty. Too much for you to convince me otherwise, Bell. You deserve a boss who cares about you, and not just about getting what he wants at the expense of everyone who works for him.”

She takes an angry sip of tea, and then sets the cup down with such force I think the base will crack. “Fine. Say whatever the hell you want, but there are people who work for Grimm who I care about. There're so many times that people have literally saved my neck at the expense of their own. So go ahead and stay ignorant. Just know I wouldn't be The Wolf I am today without the family that fed me when I was a pup.”

“Shit, Bell. I'm sorry.” I scrub my hand over my face in shame.

I should have known better—maybe her boss is a piranha, but naturally, she's going to find ties in that organization that are thicker than blood.

“No.” She sighs. “I'm sorry I was so bitchy about it. How could you know?” Bell shrugs. “You're not exactly going to have friendly encounters with people in Grimm's organization.”

“I don't know.” I can't stop myself from smirking. “I thought our encounter earlier wasn't the worst thing.”

Her head tilts. “That's your idea of a meeting not being all that bad?”

“Perhaps.”

She chuckles lightly, letting out an amused whistle. “You need to meet more people, Rider.”

“Ha.” I flick the end of my riding crop against the toe of my boot. “Are you going to introduce me to anyone in the

Grimm organization to prove how friendly everyone is?”

“No. Not to my people” A flirty expression makes her eyes sparkle. “As far as the Grimm crowd goes, you’re all mine.”

My nerves fire up, intense desire threading through my fingertips, yearning to firmly grasp her hair, yank it back, and tell her I’m hers as much as she’s mine. Yet it feels too soon. I close my fist, drowning out the aching sensation, tilting my head instead.

“All yours, eh? Who’s the prisoner here? Are you forgetting?”

“Not at all. I know exactly who has kidnapped me and whose cock I attempted to suck off for freedom.” Her response is a breathy whisper, and it makes my pants strain.

Bell is sexy. Straight down to her core—and as damaged and as fucked up as my headspace gets about sex, I want this woman. I want her salivating all over my cock again, no matter how many bad memories I have to fight past. I want her to make me hard and suck me off until I explode in her mouth and my cum drips down her chin.

More than anything, though, I want her to know that she’ll never have to sell any part of herself to be free when she’s by my side.

Fuck. The drive to be closer to her sends me leaning forward until I’m out of my chair, shadowing over her. With my cock now stirring to life, her chest looks like it’s struggling for breath as I infiltrate her bubble. I see how vulnerable she is to me.

I’m already addicted to her reaction to my presence, and I crave more.

“Bell.” I can’t control how low my voice comes out. “You may not have gotten me off earlier...” My lips are nearly brushing her ear now. “But please know that wasn’t your fault. It’s not your fault I’m a damaged son-of-a-bitch. And regardless, if you ever get me off or not, you’ll always be free with me.”

A small gasp escapes her mouth, and it sounds like she's about to pant with need.

I release a groan when her delicate yet well-trained hand finds my stomach. When her palm presses flat against my abs, I hiss in pleasure at how good Bell's touch feels. No one's ever instantly felt so good or safe.

It's because it's Bell. My forever. My body knows it's meant for her.

The chair Bell is seated on creaks as I grasp the sides and squeeze.

"*Fuck,*" I murmur in response to her clenching my shirt and yanking it up.

"It hurt when you didn't get hard earlier," she whimpers, and the sound makes my chest tighten. "I was desperate for you to recognize me and devour me whole."

"Oh, Bell." My eyes close, sweat growing at the base of my neck while she tugs on my belt. "If I'd known it was you—I never have forgotten about you. How could I?"

"I want another chance, Rider," she pleas. "I'm dying to feel how much you want me. Please. Let me try again."

The word "yes" is on the tip of my lips... until I hear the echoing voices of Red and Hood coming from the other end of the house.

Jesus. I'm literally losing my head in the middle of this freezing dining room while we have our leader to find.

The guys are counting on me to come up with a plan. Grandmother is counting on me to rescue her.

I can't do this now, no matter how badly I crave it.

The aggravation that springs to life within me makes me want to bang my fist on the table until it's been reduced to splinters.

My back molars grind together while I summon the strength to look Bell in the eye.

“Darling,” I whisper. “You have no idea how much I want you right now—”

“But?” she asks, her pouty mouth sinking into a frown.

“But I have to put both our needs aside so Grandmother can be located.”

The disappointment flashing in her gaze is apparent, but there’s no discernible rejection. With only a brief nod, I know she understands.

“There are other priorities that are bigger than us.” Bell drops her hand from my stomach and folds her arms over her chest. “Duty calls. I know that protocol well.”

“What can I say?” My boot grazes the tile as I shuffle back a step. “You’re a true professional.”

“Please.” She waves her hand in dismissal. “Don’t remind me. I loathe my professionalism at times.”

“That may be so, and we’re stopping ourselves short for now, but let me tell you one thing...”

“What’s that?” Bell prompts with a bite to her lip, reclining into her seat.

“Watch out, Wolf,” I say darkly. “Soon, I’m going to have you in my grasp—right where I want you, and I’m going to keep you there. But for now, let me round up the guys, and let’s see if you can help us with a game plan. Alright?”

“I’m holding you to that.” A quick glance at my cock, and she flicks her tongue across her lips. Almost like she can already taste me again. With the fire returned to her eyes, she looks up at me, jerks her head for the door, and says, “Gather everyone up. I’ll help you find your leader.”

CHAPTER 9

The Wolf



“**A**nd to the north, you have the Strike Lair hideout.” I make a circle on the tablet displaying the map. “If I were Grimm, that’s where I’d take Grandmother.”

All four men lower their heads, their skulls, and hairs of black and brown, nearly touching as they examine the tablet.

Red is the first one to make a sound I can clearly decipher as uncertain. A light huff leaves him, and he taps a long index finger rhythmically on the tabletop. “Why would Grimm pick that place?”

“It’s the hardest to gain access to.” I shake my head, staring at the screen, merely thinking about the security measures. “Three biometric doors that only open with retina *and* fingerprint recognition. Plus, a military-grade bomb shelter. If he’s wanting to hold someone important for ransom, or to gain intel, he’ll take them there.”

“And if all he wants to do is kill them?” Rider asks, his tone tight. He doesn’t seem at all like the lost and lustful man I teased thirty minutes ago. I’m still trying to forget that happened so I can retain my focus.

“Then. It’s the wastelands.” I tap my finger on the eastern corner of the map. Even mentioning it sends a prick to my chest after seeing how Rider asked the question. Raspy, with underlying hints of fear.

I know it’s not my imagination—the uncertainty in his eyes runs deeper than the others.

After talking with these men for nearly an hour now, I feel their different sets of energy, and I *definitely* mean different.

Hood almost seems bored. His posture is slumped, and he's been sighing often. Red strikes me as thrilled by the chase. A wild look dances in his eyes and his fingertips occasionally tapping rapidly on the tabletop.

Little? Obviously pissed. He refuses to make eye contact with me or Rider.

But to Rider, this is different. His strong body is rigid, his jaw flexing any time Grandmother's name is mentioned as he rakes his hand through the sides of his hair. He's distressed about his family.

Just like the boy I knew growing up. I guess not so much has changed after all. A fondness weaves through my heart at the idea of him still being the same person, despite the amount of pain he must have gone through. You don't end up as a Huntsman if your life has been silver lined. You'll die in this lifestyle if you're not heartless, or close to it.

"And you can get us into either place?" Hood asks, suddenly cutting through my thoughts.

I tear my gaze away from Rider, not even fully aware I'd been staring to start with, and firmly nod. "I have access to any of the holding grounds, even some supplies, and most of the weapons. I show my face to do the biometric scans, and we're in. It's simple."

"Still don't know why the fuck you're doing this," Little finally grumbles. "Feels like a trap to me."

My mouth parts to form a response, but I'm cut off.

"I'm not saying it again. Drop this, Little." Rider's knuckles clench, the fingers of his left hand pressing tightly against the thick bandage wrapped around his palm. "She *won't* back out on us."

"Like you can guarantee shit, Rider." Little takes a step back, red, angry hues flashing across his dark skin. "I seriously

need to remind you Grandmother was taken on a run where *you* should have been accompanying her? She's missing because of you."

"Wrong," Rider bites out. "She's missing because *she* directly ordered me to stay behind and check on our opiate production. Get your facts straight and don't say I failed when I *was* following her orders." He squints, eyes darkening as he takes an exasperated breath. "But you wouldn't know about *following* anything well, would you? You rebellious, hot-headed piece of shit. You barely listened to Grandmother and you're not listening to me now. But I'm not gentle like Grandmother either. If you don't want your ass pounded again, you'll sit down and shut up."

Little shoots up his middle finger. "*Pinche putas.*" He promptly leaves the room, mumbling in Spanish the whole time.

"We're not pussies," Red yells out to Little, just before he exits the room, and rolls his eyes. "I swear if he calls *me* that again, he won't have a brain left between his ears when I'm done with him."

My brow raises. "You'll beat it out of him?"

"More like *carve* it out of him." He pats at the knife tucked away inside his coat, smirking, and something about it makes my veins heat with lust.

I see it already, because the sly glint dancing in his eyes is a look I understand well. Red is the most blood-thirsty, and he draws for pleasure. Fun. Not yours—unless it's your thing. Just his, and as he stares at me with a half-cocked brow, I think he knows I'm deciphering it drives me semi-wild.

His features alter, returning to contemplative as he stares at the map. "So Grandmother. Which place we going to first?"

"The Strike Lair," I reply. "Knowing Grimm, he'll want her alive. I'm certain of it. If he's been trying to destroy your operations, he'll want to siphon any intel he can out of her."

“We’ll need a solid plan to make sure we can all get in.” Rider’s shoulder brushes mine, his breath coasting across my skin while he takes a long examination of the tablet. “I don’t want any of us separated or kept on the outside in case shit hits the fan. We’ll be stronger together.”

Hood and Red grunt in agreement.

Rider grants me his attention. “Can you draw out floor plans for us so we can start there?”

“I’ll start drafting it tonight and can have it done by morning, and I’ll mark which rooms I think are best to look in first.”

“Excellent,” Rider says, sounding the brightest I’ve heard yet.

“Yeah.” Red nods. “Nice to have some headway, at least.”

I’m about to smile when it’s stopped in its tracks.

“No. No, it’s not,” Little interrupts. “Stop everything. Immediately.”

“Why?” Rider bites out, folding his arms over his broad chest. “I warned you—”

“We have a problem,” Little says. “Just got off the phone with The Toymaker.”

My brows knit together in confusion. “The Toymaker?”

“Our weapons supplier,” Red answers. He gestures towards Little. “What did he call about? Is there a problem with a shipment?”

“No.” Little re-secures his bun, re-twisting the hair tie, then rubs at the back of his neck. “I guess he’s been tapped personally from Grimm. Grimm is on a blood hunt.”

Not good. My fists clench until I sense my knuckles whitening, but I say nothing, only wait on a bated breath. As Little paces in a small circle, my breathing kicks up.

“Grimm issued an order commanding all his company back to main base. I think he called it a ‘Call To Home.’”

Fuck. There’s no way Little is making this up. That Call To Home or CTH is rarely used, but incredibly important. It means something has gone terribly wrong. A mole in our operations might have been discovered and they want to debrief all of us. A major operation might have been compromised and they suspect a snitch, or one of the Made Men has died.

My blood runs cold, freezing my veins. I know what the consequences of not responding to a CTH are. Failure to show up at base in less than forty-eight hours means there’s a warrant on your head, as the Grimm organization no longer trusts you. It gives them shoot-on-site permission.

I can practically feel my throat closing in fresh panic as I attempt to swallow. “When was the call made?”

Little frowns. “Four days ago.”

Fuck.

“There’s a hit on your life, Miss Wolf,” Little continues. “Grimm doesn’t care who turns you in. He only wants you dead.”

We’re screwed, and with me not being able to gain access to any of the holding points, I’m as good as dead to The Huntsmen too.

I have to be.

CHAPTER 10

Rider



“I’m dying to know how your soft spot is useful to us now, Rider?” Hood throws a small rock into the roaring fireplace and continues to pace.

To say the meeting moments ago was a failure would be a mammoth understatement.

Little stormed out after breaking the news. Bell was blanched of her natural tan color from the shock of the news, and promptly excused herself to a bathroom. I swear to God, I heard her vomiting. The noise made my fist clench so hard my knuckles popped.

Bell wouldn’t admit it after the news dropped, but she’s scared.

And I’m scared of losing her again. I didn’t wait all these years just to watch her slip through my fingers.

I’ll do anything to protect Bell from Grimm—even if that means sacrificing Grandmother. I’d never tell the guys that, even if it is the worst possible case scenario to me.

Naturally, I want to save both Grandmother and Bell. But even the smallest hint that I’d pick Bell over Grandmother would promptly get me shanked, dismembered, and tossed into the fireplace limb by limb.

Instead, I’ve been keeping that treasonous thought to myself as Red, Hood, and I try to figure out what our next chess move could possibly be.

Hood makes his train of thought obvious. He's done with Bell. Period.

"I've been backing you up this whole time, Rider," Hood says, now furiously stalking in small circles. "But this is getting ridiculous. I don't even think you're scared of Wolf—I doubt you see that she's the wicked kind of animal. At this point, I'm ready to take orders from Little."

"Please," Red objects before I can say anything. "If we're going to do that, let's just put a dozen eggs on the tile, stomp on them, and gamble that none of them crack."

Hood scoffs, his top lip sneering. "That's a stupid thing to say. What does that have to do with anything?"

"That's referring to our future," Red states. "Those are a betting man's odds, because I think we have a higher chance of having no broken eggs than Little having a successful plan."

"Thanks, Red," I say quietly. He might be half-crazy, but I appreciate the faith he has in me.

"What is it with you two?" Hood halts to a stop between the chairs Red and I are seated in. "We captured a target, we interrogated said target—"

"Tortured," I interject, my stomach twisting with the acknowledgement since we're talking about Bell. "But yeah, please continue."

Aggravation twists Hood's features. "Whatever you like to call it. We did what we planned, and she can't help us anymore. The agreement was if Wolf wasn't of use to us anymore, that she would die."

"That's too impulsive." My brows furrow. "There's no way of us knowing if she's no longer of use to us."

"She's not going to go Judas on us. Besides, even if she did..." Red reclines in his chair. "She's too damn hot to kill."

"Hey!" I lurch up higher in my seat, annoyance racing through me. "Watch your tongue, Red. Bell is mine."

“Really?” Red’s eyes glint. “Why don’t you ask *your* Bell to make certain. We had a nice tête-à-tête while you were playing the role of a saint and brewing her some tea.”

“Red...” I’m out of my chair before I can fully comprehend that I’m standing.

“I had *your* so-called little soft spot writhing in her seat, Rider,” he calmly states. “Ask her.”

“The fuck you did.” My eyes burn with the glare I’m giving him.

He cocks a simpering smile, and I’m itching to reach for my riding crop. I’m going to lash the leather so viciously across his cheek, he’ll feel the sting for days. It’s the disgruntled voice of Hood who stops me.

“You two are acting like high schoolers in a dick measuring competition. Stupid. Both of you,” he barks, before leaning a shoulder against the edge of the fireplace. “Not that it matters. I swear on my mother’s grave that if she can’t be useful to us, I’ll drag her straight to that holding cell again and slowly crush every bone in her body. Huntsmen tattoo and all”

Every cell in my being sparks with furious heat as I stare at Hood. “Go against my orders and just see how slowly and painfully you die, Hood. I’ll use every nasty tool you’ve ever created on you. I’ll filet the muscles off your bones while you’re still alive.”

“And I’ll join in,” Red states, standing beside me. “Of course I’ll use my own weapons. Nothing draws out a better color like my own blade.” He taps the breast pocket of his suit, and I hear his hunter’s knife *thunk* against his chest.

“You’re serious?” Hood questions, his brow raising, the silver scar near his eye expanding in the glowing firelight. “Me? Your own brother—?”

“We’re not the ones going against orders,” I growl, my blood seething. “It’s you, Hood. You’re the one about to grab hold of Bell—the last puzzle piece that can get us to Grimm and toss her away like she doesn’t fit anywhere. I’m giving

you one last direct command to stand down. You'd be wise to follow it."

"Both of you are going to regret this," Hood grumbles.

His vision drops to the floor, and even though I'm pissed off to the point of wanting to bash part of his skull in, I loathe the obvious hurt I see in his eyes.

This whole situation of us almost being pitted against each other is so fucked up that I know some kind of cruel entity is watching us and laughing.

We're The Huntsmen—unbreakable. Untouchable. Invulnerable. And here we are, falling apart in our own territory over what has reared its head and revealed itself to be our weakest link: Women.

One woman we're desperate yet powerless to save, the other we're half torn on either fucking or killing. No matter how we feel, all four of us are unraveling into frayed pieces of who we used to be.

We're nothing.

"Fuck!" Frustration boils over into rage. I pick up a chair by the leg, launching it across the room.

The wooden piece of furniture cracks as spokes, legs, and random splinters become shrapnel in the air. I bite my tongue, holding in a grunt when a thick chunk of broken wood collides against my shin.

Red and Hood straighten, standing like soldiers. Neither of them utters a word. Most likely because they don't have to.

They don't need to ask questions about what's wrong or tell me to calm the fuck down.

I can tell by the mixture of concern and defeat on their faces that they understand exactly how I'm feeling and thinking.

Spinning on my heel, I march out of the dining room. Creating distance from the fireplace makes me aware of how

cold this cabin is. And I'm glad for that. I'm so hot, I think my clothes are about to catch fire.

"Where are you going?" Hood asks, calling after me.

At first, I don't think I'm going anywhere, but I realize I'm wrong. My subconscious has been working on a plan this whole time. I simply didn't know it yet.

I stop in the archway, with my back to Hood and Red, just before entering the hallway, and force a calming breath.

Purpose finds me, and I inwardly chastise myself for how stupid my outburst was. I'm better than that. I'm stronger than these circumstances.

"First, I'm going to make sure Little isn't trying to kill Bell. I haven't seen him since she left the room."

"And then?" Red asks.

Determination sends my jaw into a clench. I look at the bathroom door, to the one Bell escaped to and know this can't be over. Not yet.

Grandmother wouldn't give up.

I can't either, and I won't.

"Then," I finally state, "once I know Bell is alive, I'm going to see if she and I can find a way to get to Grimm and find Grandmother."

Both of them grunt in doubt, but I ignore that and focus on what's important—finding a way to where neither Grandmother nor Bell lose a hair on their head.

CHAPTER 11

The Wolf



It's stupid to cry, and I shouldn't be doing it. Sitting here on the bathroom floor and rocking myself, I can't remember one single time when crying has ever helped solve a problem.

But that doesn't make it any easier to stop.

On the contrary, the fact that I have no answers and no solutions makes me sob even more. The tears fall so heavily that the taste of salt is now coating my lips.

My path is muddled—and I never could have foreseen how conflicted and torn my heart would feel.

Yes, I've found Rider, the man I've spent half my life pining for.

So why does missing the Call To Home make me feel like a failure? More than that, why do I find myself already mourning the loss of all my comrades who work under Grimm?

Maybe it's because, while I have found Rider, he's not family. On the contrary, Grimm's organization was the closest thing to family I've ever known. Yet all of those connections are lost if I've missed the Call To Home.

The Grimm assassins don't ask questions. Instead, we follow orders, kill on sight like instructed, and then question if we made a mistake later. I don't carry around this illusion that I'm special enough to be gifted some grace.

It will be the opposite.

Am I good at what I do? Fuck yes. I'm the best of the best, and it's because of that I know how the organization works. I'll be considered one of the biggest threats to Grimm of all time. No one is going to even grant me the chance to blink, much less hear me out.

You would have lost everyone anyway. A voice vastly different from mine rings in my ears, and I tilt my head back and take a slow blink.

Whoever is speaking to me is right. I was prepared to take Rider to the most guarded area we have. In fact, I didn't hesitate to sacrifice everything Grimm has to free Grandmother, Grimm's sworn enemy.

I most definitely would have lost my found family in the Grimm organization... But now I can't even do that. Not with me becoming something that's worse than a fugitive.

Without me being able to help The Huntsmen, they'll never accept me.

Fate has put me in a place where I once again feel like an orphan. I have nothing. Worse yet, I have no purpose. *This cabin is where I die.*

A sob bites out from between my lips. An ache ripping through my ribs until I bow over. I knew the risks when I signed up to do this job. Yet I didn't think it'd end with me feeling so crushingly alone.

I'm trying to stop the tears, reminding myself this is part of the life of an outsider, when a knock on the door makes my head jerk up.

"Bell." It's Rider, and something about his voice makes me mad at myself for crying.

I wipe a fat tear away and stop the rest from flowing. "Yeah," I croak out, wincing at how pathetic my voice sounds.

"The door is locked. Can I come in?"

I'm already on my feet, untwisting the lock, and yanking the door open. When I stare up, I'm kicking myself at the concern in his eyes.

"You're crying—"

"Don't worry about it." I steel my voice and coolly arch a brow. "Just a momentary lapse. I am still tired from being chained up." That's not a lie. My bones ache.

"That wasn't my idea," Ryder says, joining me in the bathroom, quietly shutting the door behind him. He opens his mouth wide, and I sense a speech of endless explanations coming.

"Rider. You're talking to The Wolf, remember?" I hold my hand up in objection. "Do you know how much blood's been squished beneath my boots, or how well I can mimic the sound of someone gurgling on their own blood?"

He breaks eye contact, gently shaking his head.

"You don't like killing much, do you?"

"Violence is a job requirement." He smooths a dark strand of hair away from his face, looking terribly uneasy.

"That's true, it is, but you don't like picking it.

"Unlike the other three, I prefer quick." A grimace twists his handsome features. "I don't like slow, I despise torture, and most of all, I loathe messy. The cleanups are a bitch. Blood always ends up on everything, especially my pants."

I can't help but smirk while glancing at his clothes. They're too light colored and expensive for what he does. "Switch to black pants," I quip. "That problem will be solved."

"Ha. You're starting to sound like Little."

"Great." My vision goes skyward. "If I start sounding too much like him, do me a huge favor and slit my throat."

"Don't like him?"

"Do *you*?" I retort.

He clears his throat, before resting his back on the door and sliding into a wide-legged sit. “I don’t know...”

A drawn-out pause consumes the confined bathroom, and the silence is nearly suffocating. Rider’s expression goes through a myriad of transformations, from torn, to angry, to sad. I sink down, making myself comfortable on the ledge of the bathtub, waiting for him to sort his thoughts.

“Lately,” he finally says, eyes fixated on the ground, “I think Hood is right. I think I’ve been a touch too hard on Little. Funny thing is, I only admit that to myself when I have a moment to think about it, or haven’t seen Little in a while. When he’s around, he drives me fucking nuts. That hothead doesn’t listen to anyone but Grandmother, and if there’s a time I needed him to listen to me, it’s now.”

“You bicker enough to be brothers.”

“Maybe that’s why I want to kill him personally. But maybe that’s also why, deep down, I know I’ll chop off the head of anyone who lays a finger on him. At the end of it all, I guess we’re the family who can’t get along yet can’t be without each other.”

“That is where you exceed Grimm. You may not always like each other, but you’re loyal. The Huntsmen are loaded with second chances... our team is one fuck-up and you’re dead.”

“Not if I can help it, you’re not.” Rider’s voice is the most determined I’ve heard yet. “I can’t make a lot of promises, but I *can* promise I’ll protect both you and Grandmother with every ounce of blood in my body. Don’t worry, we’ll figure out a solution together.”

“See what I mean,” I say, tilting my head in amazement. “You’re loyal.”

“I don’t feel loyal right now, Bell.” He taps his long index finger against his kneecap, and the motion looks anxious.

“Why not?”

“If the guys knew how torn I was right now between you and Grandmother, they’d most likely tie me to the back of my horse and have it drag me down the gravel road.”

“Your secrets are always safe with me, Rider.” I say the words so softly, I barely hear myself. “I hope you know how thankful I am that we found each other again.”

“Yeah.” A bright smile lifts his lips. “Fucked-up circumstances and all, I’m happy we found each other again too, Bell.”

He looks directly at me, and it’s not only softness I see in his eyes, but a touch of desire as well. It’s a small, flickering flame, but it’s enough to make me think my nerves have been doused in gasoline and a match has been lit.

My mouth parts and his gaze darkens, as two very sure eyes study the perimeters of my face before dipping to my mouth.

I’m wondering if I’m the only one with labored breathing when his chest suddenly hitches. Instant desire threads deep through my stomach, and I’m parched and starving for him to hold me.

He’s always been someone who’s made safety and comfort a reality, and I’m dying to be as close as possible.

Does he know I’d give anything to feel his touch? That I think I’d sell my soul in this moment to have the warmth and strength of his body wrap around mine?

What swirls between us is a vortex so overwhelming it’s impossible to battle—and no part of me wants to. All I crave is to close my eyes, to sink into him, and forget what thinking is.

All I want is to mindlessly feel.

His fist clenches, and a hiss rolls out from his partially open mouth. I’m expecting him to stand up, cross the room, and devour me.

Instead, disappointment blasts through my core as he jerks his gaze away and blankly stares at the wall, fighting a

disgusted-looking twist of his mouth.

In an instant, there's been a switch from desire on his end to near repulsion, and I have no idea why. The only thing I can pinpoint is the way it sends a pang through my heart.

My brows pull together, most likely showing the confusion and pain I'd love to conceal, but can't. "Rider—"

"It's getting late," he interjects, and my mouth snaps shut. "You'd probably like a bath and could use some sleep."

The porcelain of the old tub lightly scrapes under my nails as I curl my fingertips. I hate how the bond between us is disintegrating.

"Let me get you some clothes to sleep in." He's still not looking at me. "And you can have my room for the night."

Fuck. I don't know if the idea of sleeping in his scent makes that better or worse. I swallow roughly and gulp back all the questions resting on the tip of my tongue.

Slowly, Rider pulls to his feet, and I speak before I can stop myself.

"What about you? Where will you sleep?" *What a stupid thing to ask. I sound desperate and weak.*

"I doubt I'll sleep, Bell." His back is to me as he slowly opens the door. "Little is gone, and I have no clue where he's at. Brother or no brother, he's a stranger-friend, and currently, I don't trust him not to hurt you."

Before I can thank him, or even utter a word, he's gone.

An emptiness crashes into the room, and a new wave of sudden fatigue thrums through my bones. I want to be depressed, but I'm too tired for the emotion.

A string of curse words rolls off my lips as I grumble about the confusion of underlying tension protected by a wall of coldness.

Rider isn't going to let anyone hurt me, but how can someone who feels so distant stay close enough to keep me

safe?

Exhausted, confused, and now aware of the cold in the air, I turn on the tub and pray that water does more than wash away the grime. If I need anything at the moment, it's for the water to wash away my thoughts as well.

Forget being strong.

Tonight, this Wolf is tired of being big and bad.

CHAPTER 12

Rider



This night is aggravating and puzzling as hell. Bell has to be mirroring the same feelings.

I could see it written all over her pretty face, how confused she was.

My heart is screaming for me to reach out, wrap my arms around her slender yet strong waist, and yank her into me so fiercely the wind gets knocked out of her.

Yet this mind of mine can't override all this stupid broken trauma. All I could see while staring into Bell's eyes was the girl I used to hold eye contact with. I didn't want it to happen, but instantly, the correlation choked out all the crazy want driving through my body.

This heart of mine couldn't rewire my ridiculous brain and reassure me that it's Bell I'm looking at, and not that cold-hearted bitch from years ago.

I'm safe, but my brain doesn't know that, and you could argue that I have two organs from different bodies, since they both have completely separate emotions and responses.

It's impossible to know what's going to happen between us; however, if things progress, I'm going to have to do the one thing I hate doing and tell her all about my past with The Pokers.

A confession of how I pictured her there and not the assholes who tormented me *will* be necessary.

I dread that day.

Possibly, I'm wrong, but I don't think Bell is going to take the news as a compliment.

"Fucking hell," I grumble, trying to scrub out of my mind the way I left Bell as I stalk through the halls.

Thirty minutes or more have gone by and there's no sight of Little. That rat bastard seems to have vanished.

The more time that goes by with me not finding him, the more I think I've lied to Bell—I could definitely learn how to live without Little.

I might even be the one who kills him.

After making a sharp left at the end of the narrow-paneled hallway, I return to his room to make one more round.

"Little?" My voice bounces off the walls of the nearly vacant space. He needs more furniture here, or at least some padding on the walls.

All he has in here is a bed and one dresser drawer—a drawer I've practically turned over in hopes of finding a clue to his whereabouts.

A stack of black shirts and sweatpants were the only things in there.

I stomp into the adjacent bathroom once again, hoping for anything.

It's so empty and clinical inside, I'm uncertain if I'm in a bathroom or an abandoned laboratory.

"Shit..." Not good. Unease was already climbing inside of me at what Little might try. And that was *when* I knew his location.

Now I'm flying blind. Conceiving how to protect Bell sounds like a ludicrous plan when I don't even know where the possible attacker is.

Frustration bubbles over into fury. I'm practically seeing through the color red, and I spot a small wooden trash can.

Not even God can stop me as my foot unleashes a set of attacks, and I kick furiously. Even when the small object lands on its side, I can't stop.

The scratch forming on the top of my leather boot pisses me off that much more, and I kick harder.

"Stupid. Fucking. Idiot. Motherfucker—"

I don't know who I'm angrier at. Little, or myself. As this night unravels, I'm starting to learn how unequipped, powerless, and small I am.

All of those are things I hate.

It's not until the room blurs that I notice the tears swelling in my eyes. I stop my kicks, knowing this trash can is about to fracture to bits—and if it does, I might too.

Both my shoulders sag as I take a heaving breath and hang my head.

"Feel better?"

Red's voice from behind causes me to spin around quickly, and I scowl.

"Not really. No," I curt.

"Shame," Red mulls. "You should have taken it out on someone and not a something. Drawing blood when you feel like that is much more soothing."

"When are you going to learn that, unlike you, red isn't my favorite color?" I spit.

"When are *you* going to learn that the longer your violent side is suppressed, the worse it's going to be when you crack?"

That's not true. It can't be—but the sliver of him being correct sends a tsunami of fear to ripple down my tendons.

I've always wanted to be the peacemaker of this group. The "good" Huntsmen, if you will—the one who gets the job

done while leaving the least amount of carnage behind him.

But these cracks forming make me wonder if I might become the most violent.

They say the sweetest tongue has the sharpest tooth... but what if the souls that fight darkness the hardest snuff out the most light?

What if I become the blackest being of them all?

Out of answers and still no closer to finding Little, I pluck open the collar of my riding shirt, hoping the cold air will work underneath my clothes as I begin to leave the bathroom.

“I’ll take the first watch,” Red states.

His words make me freeze mid-step and my head swivels to meet his gaze. “First watch of what?”

“It’s obvious that’s why you’re here. You’re worried that Little will try something with Bell, yeah?”

I blink in shock. “How did you—”

“Because I’m worried about that tiny fucker too.” Tension makes his brows tug together. “I think Hood is safe for now, but I don’t trust him fully either. We’ll need to work together. I’ll sit by until 5 a.m. and make sure Little can’t get to Bell. If Bell isn’t up by then, you take over.”

Both my arms fold over my chest in suspicion as I face Red head on. “Why would you do that?”

“I happen to like her, and I think she’s useful. Those reasons work for you?”

My eyes narrow as I study him intently. I know Red likes her, but physically protecting her is a different situation.

He smirks at my silence. “Of course, if you think you can be a one-man band, then by all means...”

“You realize you might have to stab or possibly kill Little or Hood if they go after Bell? Can you do that?”

“I *know* I can.” He scoffs with disgust. “Unlike you, I know how violent I am, and I don’t try to hide it. Blood will only add to how much I love this suit. The question is, can you kill anyone who tries to hurt Bell? You are the one who holds yourself back, after all.”

“Am I?” I snip. “According to you, my violent side is only suppressed, remember?”

“I do remember,” he says confidently, “and I’m right—but tonight isn’t your breaking point, Rider. Bell or no Bell, this isn’t the night your apprehension dies, and you are reborn as a lover of blood.” Adjusting one of the buttons on his suits, he almost looks bored. “It will take more pressure than this. You won’t kill any of us tonight.”

Fuck him. My teeth grind.

Did I mention how badly Red annoys me at times?

He’s right, but I don’t want to admit it. I’ll fight to keep Bell safe, but the thought of killing Hood makes my stomach twist.

“Fine.” I try to conceal the amount of annoyance straining my vocal cords. Spinning on my heel, I march out of the bathroom for good this time. “Take the first watch. Bell is sleeping in my room. Come find me later.”

“Excellent,” he purrs, and there’s nothing but eagerness in his voice. He’s going to enjoy this far more than me.

Both my fists clench, and I grumble under my breath, preparing to escape to the library as I question if I’m truly a Huntsman, or simply dressing the part.

CHAPTER 13

The Wolf



“**D**on’t fucking move and don’t even think about trying to scream.

Weight from a heavy man’s hand presses against my mouth and something sharp pokes into my cheek.

My lids flutter open—It’s Hood.

I’m tempted to roll my eyes. Perhaps it was foolish of me to think I could sleep undisturbed, despite Rider’s promise.

I’m in a house with men who are trained to kill, and two of them don’t trust me—Hood certainly falls into the category of untrusting.

A simple twist of my wrist makes me realize I’m handcuffed to the black metal bed frame. Flicking my vision to the right, moonlight catches and glimmers off the plain silver handcuff latched painfully tight.

He takes the blade off my skin, but more pressure drives against my lips and nose as Hood leans forward, and I’m certain he’s trying to intimidate me.

Not that it’s working.

Between the thin layer of the sheets, I can feel his nuts, and all it would take is one solid drive of my knee to send him rolling and moaning. He may have me handcuffed, but I’m not helpless.

The muscles in his forearm tighten the longer I stay unmoving. “You’re not going to scream?” he asks gruffly,

almost like my unaffectedness pisses him off.

Am I going to scream? What a stupid question. Hood would have to rip my fingernails out before I'd start screaming—something I know from experience.

Calmly, I shake my head, taking a slow blink.

His hand lifts, and as he shifts away, I remain still. I'd love to remind him of who the hell he's trying to ambush, but that seems pointless. No information will be gained if I act rashly.

Instead, I wait to see what Hood wants because he wouldn't be here if he wasn't seeking something.

Seconds are minutes—I think it's because I can't decipher anything. With Hood's face concealed, there's nothing for me to read.

I don't know if he's scowling, studying me, staring off into space... nothing. All I'm fairly certain of is that he must have come in here undetected. I'm doubtful Rider would have let Hood stop by for a visit.

Cocking a brow after more silence, I dare to speak. "Tell me how you got in here. Was it a magic trick?"

"No," he answers in a near whisper. "Let's simply say that I know this house better than the others do."

"Very well," I agree. "So, tell me what you're wanting."

He huffs out his nose. "You think I'm here for a negotiation when you're still our prisoner?"

"Obviously, you are." With the moonlight shining on my face, I shoot him a bored look. "Come on, Hood. Neither of us are amateurs. You wouldn't have chained me to this bed and told me not to scream if you didn't have some kind of angle you're trying to work."

Slowly, he taps a finger against his knee, his head lowered in contemplation. A thick hesitancy fills the air. I could be wrong, but I think my calmness is giving him second thoughts.

That, to me, is weak, and I squint with a glare working behind my gaze.

“You can’t kill me,” I growl. “If you could or wanted to, you’d have done that already.”

His head snaps up.

“And you can’t keep me handcuffed after you leave. Rider will find out if you leave me like this. If you uncuff me without negotiating, the moment you set me free, I’m going to slit your throat with your own blade.”

“You wouldn’t,” he hisses.

“I would,” I snarl. “Because tying me up, and then backing out, is cowardly, and cowards deserve to be punished.”

“Fuck you,” he spits.

“You wish. Are you a coward or not?”

“Fine. You win.” Hood sighs, and his broad shoulders sink. “Mind telling me how a prisoner is so good at manipulating the ones who should be controlling her?”

“Years of experience,” I retort. “Now, tell me what you want.”

“You’re going to do something for me,” Hood states, resting his forearms on his thighs.

“And what would that be?”

He looks at me with a bated pause before he carries on. “You’re going to try to turn yourself in to Grimm.”

What a laughable statement. It’s so ludicrous, I’m swallowing back the chuckle bubbling up inside just so I don’t anger him.

“That won’t work,” I manage to say.

“Don’t be so quick to shoot it down, Wolf.” The moon outlines his figure as he leans forward. “It will if you say you’re offering information about The Huntsmen. Grimm is starving for information on us.”

My lips pinch in contemplation. Normally, that'd be an accurate statement, but our circumstances are far from normal.

I shake my head. "He *was* starving for information, but he has your precious Grandmother now, remember? Grimm might have already extracted everything he wants to know."

"You'd think that, wouldn't you..." A large inhale causes his chest to expand. "But with recent news, I don't think he does."

"What do you mean?" My brows furrow in confusion. "I thought Rider was certain—"

"My ear is lower to the ground than Rider's and something's not adding up. The more I'm hearing, the more I'm beginning to think that Grandmother wasn't taken by Grimm. Something else is going on."

"And you know all this, how?" My question is loaded with doubt.

"There's too much that's been happening. Think about it," he muses. "If Grandmother went missing recently, it would take time for her to break if she's being interrogated and tortured."

"She's strong, is what you're saying."

"Herculean. We were captured one time, her and I. A gang out of Black Forest ambushed us several years back. They wanted to know who our weapons supplier was. Seems they wanted to start a war with The Pokers. They thought our guy could arm them."

"Your Toymaker," I state, remembering the distinct code name. "Is he good at what he does?"

"The best," he states. "And Grandmother hates The Pokers, but she wasn't about to let what she called a bunch of disrespectful, undersized cock suckers get the intel. It was three days before Rider and Red found us."

His frame shivers, and seeing someone like him respond like that causes my fists to clench.

“Grandmother sacrificed herself to keep me safe and convinced them I didn’t know anything—that she was the one they’d have to break. At one point, they branded Grandmother’s tits with hot irons fresh out of the fire. Her nipples melted off, and you could see fat bubbling out of her skin. She still didn’t talk. Instead, she told them to fuck off.”

“Barbaric,” I utter, breathless, unsure if I’m thrilled or repulsed at the story. Even I haven’t gone *that* far for information. My brain hasn’t even concocted a torture like that.

“Yeah.” His voice sounds sick. I’m sure his face would match if I could see it. “That’s why I say Grimm would have a hell of time getting her to talk. So why have all these problems kicked up a day after Grandmother disappeared?” His shoulders lift, then fall. “If you’re looking at the timeframe, it’s like some of our biggest secrets were drawn out and announced.”

“Secrets like what?” I ask with sudden skepticism. Call me crazy, but I don’t feel like I’m getting handed all the puzzle pieces I need to make sense of this.

“Wouldn’t you like to know,” he simpers. “No way am I telling you right now. We’ll make a bargain, though. Find a way to get back in Grimm’s good graces, help us find Grandmother, and I might let you in on a few.”

“Got it.” I smirk cruelly, completely unfooled. “Risk my life and do all the hard work. All to simply learn some information that I could get myself by going into The Hollow.”

He stiffens, then grunts at the mention of me going underground, and I know I’ve checked mated him.

All his “ear low to the ground” bullshit means he’s visited The Hollow recently.

With it being underground and a place mentioned in whispers, you think it to be a sleepy place—yet it’s anything but that.

The Hollows are where you go when you want to either test fate or hear information which may or may not be true.

Unless you're born into The Hollows or have friends there, it's not a place most of us are going to frequent. I've been fortunate in the past to have access, granted thanks to a friend—a “deserter” of Grimm's who also missed a Call To Home action once and had no place to go. It's been years, though, since I've seen or heard from her. I'm not one to go to The Hollows willingly.

Even if you are willing to go, it's not for the faint of heart or the meek.

Headless rules The Hollows region—a name the leader has obtained for appearing nearly headless in any meeting that occurs, due to a combination of his solid black mask, and dim lighting filtering through the undergrounds.

From the story, it seems Headless was feeling compassionate the day my former associate begged for help. At best, outsiders are captured and poisoned until they slowly die and then buried.

And worst, you're inhumanly tortured, then your head is cut off and placed on a spear near an entrance to serve as a warning to others.

I bite my lower lip in heavy compilation and squint. *If I know someone, that means Hood—*

“Who do you know in The Hollows?” My question blurts out.

“No one,” he growls. “That's none of your goddamn business, Wolf.”

“So you do know someone, otherwise you'd stop at *no one.*”

He shoves to his feet, grumbling and cursing under his breath, pacing with quick, angered steps.

“Is it a girl?”

“Wolf,” he warns. But I don’t acknowledge it. He’s the one who made a mistake thinking he could come out on top with negotiations.

“Your mom?” I prod.

His posture tightens, his steps slowing.

A twisting gut instinct tells me I’m getting warmer.

I huff through my nose. “I’m close, Hood. I’d be willing to stake my life that you have family there.”

“This isn’t up for discussion.” His heavy boots thud against the wooden floor with his abrupt stop. “What’s on the table is you going to Grimm.”

I observe him and the silhouette of his posture. He’s iron stiff—I’m not going to have any luck bending him tonight.

Another moment for me to break Hood of his information will have to be found—because while I’m going to say yes to Hood’s demands, I’ll be damned if I don’t have some information to hold against him.

Part of what I do is use yourself against you. I discover the cracks of who you are and exploit them. That’s what makes me such a successful killer. I take the time to learn who you are first.

“Well?” Hood groans out, obviously fatigued at my silence.

“I’ll do it. I’ll find a way to contact Grimm and see if he’ll be open to a meeting.”

His sharp inhale of surprise hits my ears. “Such a quick response.” Hood’s tone is riddled with suspicion. “Tell me why you’re so open to do this, Wolf.”

“I care about Rider. Plain and simple.” That’s not a lie. I wouldn’t agree to any of this if Rider wasn’t here. As awkward as things are for Rider and me right now, there’s a compulsion deep in my veins to see him happy.

Hood shuffles closer to the bed, his arms doubled over his chest like he's not convinced.

"If I see it, you see it," I reply. "To me, it's obvious how much Rider is concerned about Grandmother. I can't imagine all the signs you're picking up on."

He hums lowly, and I almost think he's trying to tell me that my note of observation is an understatement.

"I don't know if you'll understand this, but Rider is important to me. When I was young, I didn't understand what happiness meant, but Rider convinced me that it existed. Those few years growing up, he was the closest thing I had faith. He made me believe good things were possible."

"He's annoying like that, isn't he," Hood states through a chuckle, and for the first time, he seems more at ease. "Trust me, I do understand."

"Then you'll understand why I'm willing to go through with this. If finding Grandmother will make Rider happy, then I'm willing to risk contacting Grimm. I'll do it for Rider."

A sigh leaks out of his lungs, and he nods once before sinking his hands into the front pocket of his sweater. "For Rider then. I may not completely trust you, but I think we can join together for someone we both want to see happy."

"Absolutely—"

Hood lunges at me so quickly, all I have time for is to gasp. Before I can utter a syllable, there's a pinching sensation behind my ear. My head jerks away, but I'm too late. Hood's sweet breath is ghosting across my cheeks and ears from his gentle laugh.

"Sleep well, Wolf. When you wake up, be ready to work."

My mouth flexes open to speak... nothing comes out. I'm already drifting away—the fucker has shot some type of tranquilizer into my system. There's no use fighting back.

Yet before my eyes draw to a heavy close, I swear I catch a real glimpse of Hood's face.

Piercing blue eyes and the slashed silver scar.

Hood must hide his face because he's hiding an injury, and if I'm right, it will be another thing to use as leverage.

Powerless for this battle, but not for the war. I'll keep my word about helping Rider, but Hood is going to pay for this.

That's my only thought as I hear a creaking of wood floorboards in the distance. Then everything is black.

CHAPTER 14

Rider



“You look like you’ve befriended death, Monsieur Wilhem.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Perrault.” Fatigue coats my response and false thanks. I don’t think our cook is trying to be catty, but the observation is certainly uncalled for. She’d look like death too if she’d been up as long as I have.

Guarding Bell has turned out to be a longer process than Red and I anticipated. Perhaps we took her a bit too close to her limits because she’s been in a dead sleep for over twenty-four hours now. Her vitals are healthy and strong, but forget trying to rouse her.

Thankfully, Hood seems passive enough to where I’m not worried about him. The time away from Bell seems to have soothed over his doubts for now. He’s been out since before dawn to restock our dwindling firewood supply.

It’s Little I remain restless over. He still hasn’t been seen.

Even when it’s not my shift to stand watch at Bell’s door, I find myself lying in bed, staring at the ceiling until my eyeballs burn like rings of fire.

Yeah, that’s why it looks like I hang out with death.

Our thin yet well-abled cook would look the same if she was in my situation.

I’m sitting here waiting for breakfast in the sunlit wooden kitchen, hoping coffee will renew my lost spark. But I want to

shoot myself in the foot for coming in here.

Mrs. Perrault isn't in the best of moods this morning.

She curses in French while yanking a bubbling pot of custard off the stove. "Whoever used this pot last scorched the rice. Stupid," she mumbles in her thick accent. "There are little rice shapes in the bottom."

I'm biting my lower lip in aggravation to stop myself from snapping at her. I was the one who used the pot when I cooked for Bell—and I know Mrs. Perrault is highly particular concerning her kitchen.

Part of it's my own fault.

Knives are sacred enough to be an artifact from the Ming Dynasty. Mishandling a pot or pan is basically blasphemy.

I should have known that cooking with her things would get me an earful.

She grumbles more, half French, half English, and it causes my fingers to tighten around the scalding hot coffee mug nestling between my palms. I'm going to sit here at this tall stool and use this caffeinated drink to try to forget how much a pain our cook can be, even if she can whip up a pot pie in thirty minutes.

I'm gazing out at the dense tree line through the large window.

My lips twist into a frown. Even in broad daylight, it's too heavy to see anything, and Little could be out there. The cover of the trees causes irritation to flicker in my chest. It grows at the sputtering sounds of Mrs. Perrault.

A request for her to work quietly is on the tip of my tongue, when I hear footsteps migrating toward us from the doorway. Thank God... Mrs. Perrault can tell someone else they look they've befriended death now.

"Morning, Mrs. Perrault," Red says in a sing-song way, adjusting a fine gold cuff link that flashes in contrast to his all-black suit. "You're looking lovely." He stands behind me,

peering over my shoulder. “Stuffed French toast. My absolute favorite. Aren’t you a doll.”

My brows raise as a rosy tint spread across the thin lady’s cheeks. Forget it. She’s not going to mention death; she might collapse at his feet instead.

“I’ll make anything for you, Monsieur Emil.” Smoothing a stray hair away before tucking it back under her old-fashioned bonnet, she beams. “Pardon me while I fetch another egg for the meal.” She lifts her skirt to walk faster and is out the back door before Red can slide onto the stool beside me.

A laugh escapes out of me as I hang my head, and Red knows exactly what I’m thinking.

“I’m telling you,” Red responds. “If you compliment her, she’ll be nicer.”

“She just likes you for your clothes.” I smirk, and he laughs. “Either way, I bet she’d let you burn her pans without complaining.”

“Ha.” He reaches for the full pot of coffee in front of him and a clean mug. “I said she’d be nicer, not that she’d let me commit what she considers a sin.”

I breathe out a small chuckle and immediately look again at the trees.

That same nail-biting anxiety coils down my spine. My fingernail *tings* against the ceramic mug in response.

“Still no sign of Little?” Red asks, and he sounds as tense as I feel.

I shake my head, the tendons in my neck tightening. “It’s been over twenty-four hours now. Where the fuck could he be?”

“Where you’d least expect me.”

Each of my vertebrae tenses at the voice of Little—who sounds like he’s right behind me.

Red and I spin around in our seats in unison.

Little stands in the doorway, arms folded. His black hair is pulled up high in a bun, his clothes matching the color of his hair. For being so small, he sure does look big. It must be his ego.

Fury boils through my nerves, and I'm tempted to wring his neck.

Before I can get a chance, Red lurches off of his stool.

Growling, he hunches over Little until they're nose to nose.

"You know, Little," Red says darkly, and it sends a shiver through me. "When I woke up this morning and put on this suit, I was sad. Do you know why?"

Little takes a rough swallow, his Adam's apple bobbing over the top of his turtleneck collar as he shakes his head.

"I was sad because it looked so colorless and bland. So clean. So... bloodless," he coos ruthlessly. "Now tell me why I shouldn't use your blood to pretty up my suit?"

"*Por qué?*" Little narrows his eyes a margin. "Why? You going to kill me? Your brother."

"Some brother," Red sneers. "Running out on us when you're most needed. Not telling anyone where you're at. Making Rider fear for Bell because he doesn't think you can be trusted. That's not how my brothers act. We may drive each other mad as hell, but we don't throw this pack into a spiral. For all we know, you could have been away selling us out—and if you've been doing anything like that, I don't give a fuck about who you are. You. Die. Now."

Red's hand glides under his suit jacket and—*Click*. The sound of Red's hunting knife seemingly explodes in the kitchen space. If Little wanted to defend himself, he's not going to stand a chance.

Little blinks, and horror passes across his features. "Red —"

“Tell us where you’ve been for the last twenty-four hours and that we can trust you, or my suit gets a new dye job, courtesy of your organs.”

A long pause clogs the air, and I observe Little’s skin slowly losing its color. He knows he’s the beta here. Little might be good at shanking unsuspecting people, but he’d never win against Red, who is already primed and ready. Even I question my odds.

A deep, fearful inhale expands Little’s chest, and he finally speaks—fear dialects his pupils. “I was with Greta.”

“Greta,” Red growls. “You’re still fucking her, is that it? Poor Little was upset he didn’t get his way about Wolf, so he sinks his dick into the only fuckable girl within a thirty-mile radius to get by.”

“*Chinga tu madre!*” Little shouts, his face reddening with anger.

Red smirks. “My mom is dead.”

“Then find her grave and fuck her, Red,” Little spits out. “But don’t you ever talk about Greta like that again.” He balls his fists, and I spot them shaking. “You do it again, and I’ll take your tongue out and eat it with my frijoles.”

“*Fuck,*” I mutter in shock. “Fuck,” I say it louder this time, like I’ve been slapped.

Red cautiously swivels his head to catch my eye, but I’m staring directly at Little.

This kind of rage... I know it all too well. It happens when something you care about is threatened. It occurs when someone you love is being bashed.

Red and Little fixate on me, their gazes loaded with a mixture of questions.

“You’re...” I pause, looking sheepishly at the floor for a moment. How could I have missed them? I’m their leader. I’m the one who’s supposed to be in tune with the emotions of the group, so I can lead them accordingly.

I still have so much to learn.

“I’m what?” Little asks.

“You’re in love with Greta.”

Little jerks away, stumbling back—like my words are packed with electricity and it’s hit him straight in the chest. He slides his line of sight away, refusing to look at me.

“Don’t act like you care, Rider.” Disdain coats his reply. “I know you don’t like me sleeping with Greta, so why act concerned now?”

“I don’t, but it’s a risk to our operations. You know that.” My tone drops with the solemn truth. “The risk doesn’t get wiped out because you’re in love with her, Little, but I also know we can’t control who we fall in love with.”

“Ha,” Red laughs, stepping away, refolding his knife. “Well, this is the perfect morning for a romantic pep talk. Why don’t we all fall in love and forget about saving Grandmother.”

“Red,” I correct. “That’s not what this is about, and you know it. We want to protect the ones who are important to us and *still* find Grandmother.”

“And this speech means *you’re* set on protecting Wolf,” Little says, a sneer twisting his lips.

“She can help us, Little,” I say. “I’m sure of it, and if she’s missed the call Grimm put out, Bell will need our protection.”

A darkening red hue builds on Little’s cheeks. “Protect her? *Pinche madre*—”

“Work with me,” I cut him off. “You know what it feels like to have the person you care about most be in danger?”

“No—”

“Two weeks,” I finish before he can finish his next thought. “Give me two weeks. If Bell and I fail to locate Grandmother in two weeks, then Bell and I leave The Huntsmen and we disappear.”

“Rider...” Red tries to intervene.

“Forever,” I reply, tone detached, though my heart throbbing behind my ribs. This might seem stupid, but this is how it has to be done. There’s no other way I can see Little working with me. “I’m willing to protect you and Greta, so please, give Bell and I time.”

“I’ll do it,” Little agrees, his voice hitching slightly. “I will never like Bell, but if you’re willing to protect Greta, I can give you time.”

My chest oddly lightens. I’m about to thank him, when the gratitude is abruptly cut off.

“But if you fail after two weeks...” A glower flashes across his face, then he slowly drags his index finger across his neck, mimicking a knife. “You’ll both feel your throats fall out of your necks with my shank.” He spins on his heel, darting out of the kitchen.

“We’ll be gone before you can do that,” I utter softly under my breath.

“And I’ll be caught wearing a wrinkled suit before that happens,” Red huffs through his nose, giving me a pointed look. “You’re not going anywhere.”

“Red—”

“I don’t care what bargain *you* try to make, Rider. You have to know I’d never let you give up your position so easily. Also, call me insane, but I don’t think you want to leave. You’d do it for Bell, but it’s not your desired outcome.”

“You’re right,” I croak. “There isn’t another way, though.”

“Not true.” He lifts a perfectly shaped brow. “Fear is distorting your options. I’ll ensure you don’t follow through with any of the stupid deals you made today.”

I let out a hard laugh, returning to my stool. “I don’t know if I should thank you or be pissed that you’re corralling my choices like I’m a child.”

“Be pissed now. Thank me later. A bonus note is also to not be sucked in so easily by Little’s ‘she’s the love of my life’ bullshit crockery.” He scoffs. “A tender spot like that will be the death of you.

My nostrils flare. “He *is* in love, though, Red. That’s obvious.”

“Didn’t say he wasn’t in love. Of course he is. He’s ‘in love’ because he’s starving,” Red says dryly as he sinks onto the stool beside me. “When you don’t have anything to eat and you’re famished, leftovers and crumbs feel like a banquet.”

“That’s a little harsh, don’t you think?” A lopsided frown pulls at my mouth.

“No.” He reaches across the counter and grabs the sugar container. “It’s the facts, and while I don’t mind Little as much as you do, he’s too emotional and has a lot to learn.”

A laugh blasts out of my mouth as I watch him dump five large scoops of sugar into his coffee. “You don’t mind him,” says the man who threatened to kill him before I could even say a word.

“Feelings and doing what needs to be done are in no way related.” The mug in front of Red *tings* with the slow stir he makes. “I can like someone just fine... possibly even love them, but if they get in the way of business, I’ll cut them limb from limb. It’s not personal, you understand.” His face sobers with the first show of emotion I’ve seen in, I don’t know how long. “Never let it get personal, Rider. That’s when you’re fucked.”

I gently elbow him, unable to hold back my light chuckle. “You’re one philosophical son-of-a-bitch. You know that?”

“Yeah, well, just don’t forget I’m unhinged too. Philosophy, yes, but gutting hearts out...” He licks his lips, almost like he relishes the taste that would splash across his mouth. “That’s where the brain shuts off and I don’t have to overthink.”

“Balance,” I announce, making a toasting motion with my coffee mug.

“Exactly that.” He beams, returning the motion. “Balance. Now let’s find Grandmother so I don’t have to get a blood-filled fix by killing one of our own.”

CHAPTER 15

The Wolf



“**B**ell, that is outrageous,” Rider exclaims, shoving to his feet. “You? Trying to turn yourself in to Grimm? That’s too dangerous. I won’t let you do that.”

I prop my feet up on the chair across from me, bundling Rider’s shirt around me. It’s cold here tonight, although I’m starting to notice it’s always cold here.

This shirt is three times my size, but it’s all there is to wear here. I love it and hate it. Love it, because at least I have clean clothes. Hate it, because I’m haunted by Rider’s scent everywhere I go.

Trying to ignore the scent drifting up my nostrils, I throw a fleeting glance to Hood. He’s standing in a darkened corner of the drafty dining room, his face hidden, arms doubled over his chest. He shifts weight from boot to boot, and I wonder if Rider’s outburst is making him feel uneasy.

It’d be wonderful if I could see him fully. I’m curious if he keeps his face concealed strictly because I’m around or if the other Huntsmen rarely see his face too.

Either way, judging from his body language, I don’t think he expected so much opposition from Rider. I know I didn’t.

I’ve been explaining the plan now for over twenty minutes; how I’ll contact Grimm and exchange a mixture of carefully selected and false information of The Huntsmen in order to be closer to Grandmother.

At least, that's what I'm telling Rider. The real plan is to find out if she's even there in the first place.

All negotiations with Rider have been a monumental failure. You'd think I was telling him that I was going to start drinking arsenic instead of morning tea.

Flicking my vision back over to Rider, anxiety bursts through my limbs at his pacing. It's an understatement to say that convincing him to let me go and keep my deal with Hood is going to be difficult.

"I promise," I say, slightly gritting my teeth, "I *can* do this. Grimm isn't going to see me any other way."

"You're talking like he's already going to agree to a meeting, sweetheart." Red adjusts the button on his suit jacket, and confidently closes some of the distance between us. His calm composure makes my pulse flutter at the base of my neck. "I think you slept a tad too deeply. We all know he's not going to hear you out. He's going to order you to be killed on sight."

"I think she should try it," Little pipes up, a grin on his face.

"Of course you do," Rider responds, with a deep scowl.

They stay fixated on each other, and my senses tell me there are deep undercurrents of further tension—even more than what I've heard or seen.

I wonder what happened while I was tranquilized. Two days of sleeping in these circumstances was far too much. I bite back a snarl tugging at my mouth as I wish Hood had been more conservative with his dosing.

"You're awfully quiet, Hood?" Red's voice breaks my thoughts. "What do you think?"

"I've stopped giving my opinion on this situation," Hood states bluntly.

"You? Mum on a matter like this?" Rider peers at Hood with eyes of knowing steel. "That's rather odd. Since when did

you stop having an opinion?”

“Sorry,” Hood says, still partially hidden in the shadows. “I wasn’t aware that people couldn’t change how they reacted to certain things.”

“Change over time, *si*,” Little cuts in. “Change their personality overnight, no. You have an opinion about everything—even the flavor of tasteless air.”

I stifle the apprehensive breath trying to suck down my lungs. Fuck. This isn’t going well. No one is buying this. Not even Little.

The grumble Hood lets loose reeks of frustration, and the ploy he’s attempting to execute is slipping.

Amateur. He’s better trained than this, I know it.

Rider, Red, and Little are busy exchanging “what the fuck is going on” glances, and I decide to communicate with Hood.

This is his idea. I’m desperate to help Rider, and this is the best option. I’ll be livid if our weak link for this plan is the person who came up with the plot in the first place.

Slowly, I slide my gaze over to Hood, hoping he sees me looking. I still can’t tell if he’s looking at me, though, thanks to the heavy looking covering shrouding his face. Daring to hold it for a second longer, I narrow my eyes, sending a clear message of “get a fucking hold of yourself.”

Rider grunts, and it unravels my nerves all the more. I scramble and grasp for the only thing I can think of.

“At least consider it.” I hide the alarm in my voice. “I know it sounds like a suicide mission now, but if you all sleep on it, perhaps you’ll see it differently.”

“Unlikely,” Red states. “But hey, I’m an agreeable sort, sweetheart.” He winks. “I’m willing to sleep on it.”

I ignore the breathlessness he causes to swirl in my lungs and smirk at him. He knows exactly how to flirt with me.

“Oh, I’ll sleep on it,” Rider pipes up, his lips pressed into a form disapproving line. “It will make my *no* sound even better when you hear it in the morning, Bell.”

Rider marches across the room, heading for the hallway, and something about his attitude sends flickers of frustration through my blood.

“You know,” I say, my tone dripping with determination. “I’m not a fucking child, Rider. If I want to go... I’m going.”

Rider freezes mid-step. Red stiffens, and I hear shocked inhales from Little and Hood.

Rider’s wide shoulder blades expand as he takes a heated breath. “You wouldn’t.”

“I would,” I bark. “If this is what I think is best, and you’re going to stand in the way of it, then I’ll do it with or without you.”

Spinning on his heel, Rider turns to glare at me, a black shadow looming over his features. His jaw tightens in fury. “If you do this—”

“Rider. Remember our discussion,” Red interjects, but it sounds more like a warning, and whatever it means, it’s causing Rider’s mouth to snap shut as he solemnly nods.

A lengthy pause merges into the air, bringing with it a heaviness that weighs down my shoulders as I observe Rider take several deep breaths.

With his face relaxed, Rider finally looks at me and gestures for the door. “I’d like to talk privately with you, Bell.”

“As you wish,” I calmly respond, standing.

Red catches my eye as I go past and seems to give me a sign that either means *good luck* or *stand your ground*. I can’t tell which one it is. Apprehension makes my stomach cramp.

The feeling sits like a rock in my gut as I round the corner to enter into the hallway and Rider falls in step behind me.

“Rider—”

“Not now, Bell.” He stops me gruffly. “You have *no* idea what you’re doing to me. You always make me feel like I’m losing control, and I can’t afford to be weak right now. Give me a second.”

I nod. Holding back the fact that I was only going to ask where we were going. I’m also concealing how his confession makes excitement build inside of me.

I’d love to see him lose all control. I’ve seen him teeter, but never topple, and I’m craving to experience the side of him that’s unbridled.

We wind down the hallway. Rider’s unique scent, that I was already surrounded by, grows stronger with his actual presence.

The wonderful fragrance wafts into my nostrils, and I’m struggling not to roll my eyes in some sort of strange ecstasy. He smells like a combination of evergreen trees, vanilla, dirt, and a touch of cologne that’s beginning to fade.

It makes my mind flash back to the first night I laid eyes on him and sucked his cock—and it reminds me I’m hungry to try again to see if things will end differently.

Angry at Rider’s need for control or not, I’m helpless to banish the natural want for him that courses in my veins.

His fingers glide down my spine, until they find my lower back and I lick my lips in response like the hungry wolf I am. The longer they rest there to guide me down the hall, the more ravenous I feel.

By the time he’s guided me to his room, my heart is racing at irregular beats and thrumming so forcefully I’m wondering how it’s still encased behind my ribs.

He points to the chair at his oversized desk that’s nestled to the window, and I sit, trying to act composed as he locks the door behind him.

I bite down on my lower lip as I watch his masculine body move. Sinewy muscles pop through the fabric of his thin pants as he walks with measured steps like he's gathering his thoughts.

My head is swirling with how much I want him, that I don't realize the vortex I've been sucked into.

"Stop looking at me like that, Bell." Rider comes to a dead stop directly across from me, and I jolt.

"I can't help it." My confession is quiet, and I hate it. I sit higher in my seat, averting my eyes to a blank wall. "You annoy the living hell out of me, do you know that?"

He laughs under his breath.

"But..." A large sigh blows out of my lungs. "I can't stop this softness I feel for you. No matter how much you grate on my nerves, one look at you, and all my emotions end up being like a tornado."

"And you think you're the only one?" His brows meld together, looking concerned. "Why do you think I got so upset back there? I know you feel like I don't have any right to tell you what to do, and maybe you're right. But do you seriously think, that after all this time, I'd let you so easily put yourself in a position that might get you instantly killed and not have an opinion about it?"

"Sorry." I swallow over the lump of guilt settling in my throat. "I'm not used to having people give a fuck about what happens to me."

"Well, I do give a fuck. A whole lot of them."

"You shouldn't," I bite out. "We have things to do, Rider. We can't be getting in each other's way."

"Shut up. Shut up," he grumbles, rubbing his eyes. "You sound like Red."

"Maybe Red has a point." I feel one of my brows arch.

“Red can in no way be a reflection of what you and I have. Yes, we need to get shit done, and yes, we’re in danger...” He shrugs. “But to deny all the things we feel for each other, strictly due to the fact that we might ‘get in each other’s way’ is bizarre to me.”

He pauses, taking a gentle breath and then—

“I like you being in my way, Bell.”

My heart crumbles at the sweet sentiment, until I think the organ is nothing but a malleable ball of clay residing in my chest. A tremble hits my lower lip, and I wave my hand back and forth, signaling for him to stop. But he doesn’t.

“You see how ridiculous your request is? You telling me not to give a fuck? It’s impossible, Bell. I’ve stopped a blade for you that was coming from one of my own men. And if I’m willing to do *that*, I’ll stop you from going to Grimm too. I’d never let anything happen to you, my dear, sweet Wolf.”

Never let anything happen to me.

“Rider...” One hot tear slides down my cheek, and I wish I could stop it.

His words leave me parched, yet petrified. How do I respond to someone being so devoted? What do I say to someone who makes me feel the warmth of the sun in the dead of winter?

Turns out, I don’t have to say anything.

In one, two, three strides, he crosses the room, and sinks to his knees to kneel in front of me. He grasps my much smaller hands in his, and heat surges through every fiber of my body. Rider’s eyes round, all his usually harsh features softening as he stares deep into my eyes, then trails his gaze to my mouth.

Jesus, he’s going to kiss me. I can feel the tingling sensation of our kiss already stinging my lips.

All this tension between us is about to crackle and shatter—and it might take me with it. One kiss might decimate all the toughness I’ve built up in my life.

“*Don’t*,” is all I can whisper, but it feels more like I’m screaming, “Please do.”

“Don’t what?” he asks, sounding stronger than I feel. “Show you how deprived I feel of your touch? Because that’s an impossible request too.”

His lips, hot and hungry, crash onto mine, and I groan into his parted mouth. Strong fingers grip the fine hairs at the nape of my neck. Air drives out of my lungs as he yanks me out of the chair and firmly against his chest.

With my body flush against his, he pulls us up to a stand, hitches my leg over his hip, and thrusts his cock into the crux of my pelvis.

“Feel me, Bell,” he growls against my mouth, his dick growing harder. “Feel how hot I burn for you.”

His words are hydration to the withered cracks in my soul, and I want to drink him in until I drown.

“Feel me too,” I plea, raking my nails down the back of his shirt. I wildly nip his lip, then go for his ear. “I need you,” I whisper.

Kisses that were merely famished turn brutal. He sucks my bottom lip between his teeth until I mewl from the delightful pressure of my skin threatening to split.

“Good girl,” he coos, breaking our kiss. “Fall apart for me.” He drops his head and savagely bites my neck, shoulders, collarbone, and the tops of my breasts.

Each time his teeth sink deep into my skin, I throw my head back and shudder while crying out.

“Yes,” I groan in painful ecstasy, as he bites hard onto the top of my left tit and stays there. “Mark me, please. Make me believe I belong to someone.”

“I will.” He feathers a kiss on my lips before moving to my earlobe. “I’m going to leave you with no doubts that you’re mine.”

“Ahh.” As he bites my ear, I’m driven to the tips of my toes. I pinch my eyes closed, relishing the pulsing in my clit.

When Rider peppers gentle kisses down the column of my neck, I whimper at the loss of the pain.

“Bite me,” I beg, my knees now shaking. “Bite me more. Harder.”

“Fuck.” His body trembles, his cock now rock hard against my leg. “I’m going to eat you alive, my sweet wolf.”

“Please. Please,” I chant.

“As you wish.”

He sinks to his knees, yanking up my shirt, viciously digging his teeth into the tattoo nestled under my breasts.

“You got this for me, didn’t you?” he asks, but it sounds like a growl.

I toss my head back, moaning a small “yes” as pain and pleasure continue to clash in my system.

“I knew it.”

A cold blast of air sucks in between my teeth as he bites harder than before—I wonder if I’m bleeding. I sure hope I am.

“I love that, Bell.” His warm breath coasts against my stomach, leaving goosebumps on my flesh. “I love yo—”

My heart pauses, along with his words. I’m certain of what he was going to say. *He loves me.* I can’t tell if I’m relieved or frustrated that he stopped.

There’s no time to dwell on figuring out the emotion—not as he insatiably travels down my body. He lingers at my hips, taking an excruciatingly long time of exploration with his mouth.

Fuck, I want him to feel how drenched I am for him.

A low, wicked laugh, that I didn’t think he’d be capable of, seeps out of him as my hips writhe with desperation.

“Stay still, pet,” he orders, his strong fingertips digging into my hips. “Good things come to those who wait.”

I can’t, despite that I’m trying. My lower torso circles in hopes of finding his mouth...

Smack. His palm strikes my pussy with unforgiving brute force, and I scream—part ecstasy, part agony.

“You might be The Wolf, but when you’re with me, you’re nothing more than my needy, fucking whore, and you listen to what I say. I. Said. Stay. Still.”

His authoritative tone is so dark and beautiful; my head swims, my hips swiveling once more, and his shirt rumples as my fingernails dig into his back.

Rider sighs, pausing his movements. “Since you can’t listen...”

I grunt in frustration as he stands to his feet. “Rider, no. Please, no.”

Two strong hands grip around my shoulders. “Bell.”

My knees weaken more, and I begin to sway into him.

Rider gently shoves against the motion, keeping me upright. “We’re only doing this one way tonight. My way. Look at me. Now, please.”

My eyes flutter open. Moonlight streaks across my face, and I come face to face with Rider. He’s standing close enough to make his exhales my inhales.

I take a deep breath, savoring the light taste of peppermint hitting my tongue. Eagerness to try to do better—to be his good little pet for the night and follow his orders—shoots down my body and lands deep in my stomach.

On bated breath, I’m waiting to hear what his orders will be...

But the eagerness is drowned out by horror as I watch as Rider’s face whitens, and his frame goes rigid.

“Rider?”

He flinches at my voice, and my stomach twists into a sick knot.

“*Rider...*” I try to say it softer. Nausea hits my molars as he drops his arms and backs away. “What—what’s wrong?”

“Don’t.” He juts out his hand, and it’s shaking.

Fuck. I think I’m going to cry.

“Please.” My voice sounds so broken, and I hate it. “Tell me what’s wrong.”

His neck tightens, a large gulp bobbing his Adam’s apple. I have no idea what’s just occurred, but he’s gone from being a man who acted like a conqueror to looking like a scared child.

A gap separates us now, and the longer he silently stares into my eyes, the more his grow fraught with terror.

“Please,” I beg once more, and he jumps.

Pain cracks down the center of my chest, tearing me open. I hate how rejection pierces like a knife. It always stings before its serrated edge shreds through your emotions, leaving them frayed. One tear wells, and I’m powerless to stop it.

More painful moments drag on, and I can see now Rider has no intention of telling me what just happened. All he can do is stand there with a trembling body and a locked jaw.

Sniffing back a second large tear, I force a glare. “You know, if you’ve changed your mind and you don’t want me anymore, you should at least have the balls to say it.”

“Bell, no. That’s not—” He scrubs his hands over his face. “*Fuck.*”

“Then what?” I ask, fighting the unsteady edge in my tone.

He stares at me so long my skin itches, and I can’t decipher a damn thing in his gaze. The closeness and intimacy has been obliterated. I’m locking eyes with a stranger.

Disappointment plows through my sternum when he finally breaks eye contact and weakly shakes his head.

“I can’t,” he whispers.

“You’re weak,” I spit. He looks at me like I’ve plucked his heart from his chest and stomped on it, but I don’t care. I’ve gutted men for less.

“Bell—”

“No!” I yell and dart past him, evading his step toward me as I yank open the door and go into the hall.

“Bell, please, wait.”

But I don’t.

I won’t.

The last thing I hear winding around the narrow walls of the terracotta hallways is Rider screaming.

In response, I run faster, because while I’m still being eaten alive by his rejection, the sound mirrors the agony in my heart, and that makes me burst into tears that no one can see.

CHAPTER 16

Rider



“**F**uck. Fuck.”

I’m sunk to a crouch, my elbows on my knees, face covered with my palms as I rock back and forth.

Why couldn’t I tell her? How come the one person who means the most to me is the one I end up being the least transparent with?

It’s the risk of how she’d react, but I couldn’t draw up the strength to tell her that when she opened her eyes, I saw that girl.

The one who’d stand in the corner while I was being tortured—the one I used as comfort.

Back then, imagining Bell instead of that quiet woman in the corner allowed me to slip through the cracks of pain and hell.

Tonight, however, that source of escapism is laughing bitterly at my still open wounds.

It’s backfired. Dreadfully.

I never could have known how terrible the blowback would be.

The only thing I’m certain of as I look up at the full moon streaming through my window is that some way, somehow, I have to tell Bell.

About everything.

My time with The Pokers, and how I managed the torture.

She deserves no less, regardless of how she responds to the news.

And as a waterfall's worth of tears stream down my face, I'm positive that Bell deserves a less fucked-up man as well.

CHAPTER 17

The Wolf



I can't hear Rider screaming anymore, but I'm trying not to remember its sound.

It's not worth remembering, because it makes me want to give him another chance, and tonight, I'm done demolishing the walls of my heart.

If Rider wants in right now—wants me—he'll have to scale the motherfucking thing. Each beat of my heart could be a new puncture wound to my organs. That's how horribly it hurts. My bare feet smack against the tile as I dash away, hoping to make it to my room before the second wave of tears start to flow.

How can I be so emotional? It's ridiculous, feeling emotions. Love, hate, longing, all of it. Stupid.

And they are all things I didn't think possible.

Crying especially.

I didn't think I could cry anymore. Damn Rider for proving me wrong over an instance like this. Why is it so easy to *feel* with him? I hate it. It fills me up with emotions that I can't control and have no place to put.

Fuck that.

An icy breath pulls down my lungs while I suck in strength to will my tears away. No matter how much I feel for Rider or irrationally want him, I won't let him break me. No one breaks me.

I brush away one fallen, fat tear, and round the corner. “Fuck him.”

“Only you didn’t,” says a serene voice.

A gasp leaves me. In my hurry to abandon Rider, I’ve almost literally run straight into Red. Our tiptoes nearly brush. Immediately, the pull of him hooks deep into my core, making it quiver the longer I stare at him.

I mask my features, forcing them stone-solid and stoic while tossing my head back. “Sorry. I thought everyone was in their rooms for the night.”

“Almost.” He half smirks, but I don’t miss the softening that happens as he focuses on the wet stain the tear left behind on my cheek. “*Bell.*” His voice is so gentle. “It’s not you.”

The statement cracks down on my raw emotions, and I sniffle back a new tear and shake my head. “Thanks, but I think it is. You should have seen him back there. He wouldn’t even let me near him.”

“You’ll just need to give it time. He cares about you. I know he does.”

“But is it enough?”

“I can’t answer that with a hundred percent certainty, but with him and you, I’d like to think yes.”

“Thanks.” After brushing back another fat tear, I’m far too aware of my pulse beating in response to Red.

He watches me keenly, raking me over in the way only he can, and an ache wraps around my middle before it surges down into my clit. Is it wrong to think of him fucking me after being rejected by Rider? Is it disloyal to *want* to give in to something that’s more resilient than lust but too weak to live as true intimacy?

I’m not sure, but a certainty crawls through my blood, reassuring me I don’t care.

“What are you doing out here, anyway?” I ask in a tightening voice.

“Going to my room. Would you like to see it?”

I shuffle back a step, finally realizing that he must be feeling the same pull that I am. “I don’t think I should—”

“But you want to.” Red encroaches on my space, leaning closer, making my pulse skyrocket. “It’s written all over that pretty face of yours. So come on. Let me help you forget for a while.”

“You’re a devil,” I say breathlessly.

“Bulletin.” He smirks. “I probably fuck better than him too.” Extending his hand, he tenderly places his fingers on my elbow to guide me.

Wordlessly, he guides me down the old, twisting hallway directly to his right, our steps slow as the air around us thickens.

My mind is telling me not to do this, but my body is too eager.

I’m going to follow him to his room. For what outcome? I’m not sure yet. The only thing I’m certain of is I don’t think Red is going to leave me brimming with disappointment.

By the time Red stops in front of a large wooden door, my skin tingles with anticipation.

“Here we are.” His words sing as he twists the old-fashioned handle and pushes open the door. “This is my room.”

With a knot of excitement in my throat, I poke my head across the threshold, gasping at what’s inside.

It matches Red’s aesthetic. Opulent, classic, detailed.

No expense has been spared here. Custom black furniture. Forest green walls and bed set. A fireplace set before overly cushioned recliners. Gold wall art that’s deco and posh.

A low whistle of awe leaves me as I take in, not only the decoration, but how large the room is. “It looks bigger than Rider’s.”

“That’s because it is,” he says, taking a backwards step to cross the threshold of the room. He ensures he never turns his back to me, holding our eye contact. “I’m the chosen one, Wolf. I get the largest room in the house.”

“Lucky you,” I tease, preparing to join him inside. My feet shuffle one step forward. I halt, swallowing down a gasp as he abruptly stops me, gripping his hand on the door frame, blocking my path.

My mouth dries up, feeling stuffed with cotton with the way his features darken. Suddenly, he no longer looks playful—he looks positively famished, and I’d be lying if I said I didn’t want to be devoured.

“Cross into this room,” he warns, “and I can’t guarantee your safety.”

“Maybe I don’t want safety,” I manage to say, my heart beating so rapidly it’s threatening to steal my words.

“I doubt that,” he murmurs. “I think deep down inside, we all crave a safe place.”

“Maybe not all of us do.” My voice is near a whisper. “I’m at the stage in my life now where I think safety is terrifying.”

“That’s what you’re trying to make yourself believe, Wolf,” Red says, his eyes dropping to my lips. “But, regardless, I bet the thought of you having a real taste of security keeps you up at night.”

“Why do you assume that?”

“Because it keeps me awake.” He leans in closer until I catch the crispness of his cologne. “Can you imagine all those people who have tranquility? Real tranquility?”

I shake my head, my lashes fluttering at how effortlessly beautiful and alluring he is. He’s not even trying, but he’s

causing a growing ache of greedy need to blossom in my stomach.

“Neither can I.” He scoffs. “It sounds like some fucking wet dream.”

“But there are other dreams...” I lightly graze his hand. “Not tranquil, but pleasurable.”

“I’m not pleasurable, Wolf.” His eyes meet mine, and they’re full of fire. “I’m brutal. I like pain.”

I dare to move closer until our breaths collide and I see his jaw tense in response. “Brutality? Artistry? Pain, pleasure? They’re all the same to me.”

“The lines can blur. Definitely. But you’ve never had someone like me.”

“Let’s blur them tonight.”

“Fuck...” he sighs like he’s tormented, becoming aware of how deeply we’re about to fall if he doesn’t stop us. “Rider—”

Anger catches like fire in my blood, making it hot. “Rider. Doesn’t. Own. Me. No one does.”

“Fucking Christ, Bell.” He jerks his gaze away.

“So?” I’m growing impatient. “Are you going to fuck me or not?”

“And...” He cocks a brow. “What if I say I *don’t* want to fuck you?”

“Ha.” I toss my head back and cackle lightly. “I’ll call you a liar. You want this... so do I.”

“Terrible idea, but I’ve never been filled with good ones.”

In one fell swoop, he grabs my wrist, yanking me into the room, then shuts the door behind me and presses me against it.

Casing his arms around me, my heart thumps madly. When his chest brushes mine, my back arches to erase any space between us.

He laughs darkly, and I know he senses my need.

My skin grows feverish at the look in his eyes. “So here’s the thing. We don’t know each other, and that can either be incredibly freeing or limiting if I hit a nerve with you. We need safe words.” He hooks his finger under my chin, ensuring my full attention. “We’ll do traffic lights. Green, yellow, red. If you hate something I’m doing, say ‘red,’ and it all stops. If I ask you to randomly tell me what our safe words are, and you can’t, I *immediately* stop. I’m not here for incoherent and muddled-brained fucking. Understand?”

“Perfectly.” I lick my lips.

“Excellent. Now one more thing.” He nods to his bathroom, stepping away. “Go take four tablets of Motrin.” His gaze flicks over my form, hunger lurking in its depths. “You’re going to need it.”

Quickly, I pad off in the direction of the bathroom, using tap water to swallow down the pills he’s requested. Hesitation draws across my senses, but only for a flash. *Am I really going to do this?* Fuck someone else out of hurt and rejection?

But when I look up into the mirror, I don’t think I’m feeling hurt at all. Not when I catch sight of the high flush in my cheeks and the brightness in my eyes. On the contrary, I look more alive than I have in years... and I think I’m going to enjoy this tremendously.

Returning out of the bathroom, I see Red already stripped out of his suit jacket, and I blink in surprise.

How could I have missed how fit he was? The starched white dress shirt forms to his wide pecks, and I salivate at the tightness of the fabric hugging his biceps. Trailing my eyes down, my chest flutters at the tapering of his waist, but I’m interrupted before I can look any lower.

“If you’re that hungry, Wolf”—he unclips his belt, yanking it out the loops in one fluid motion—“then crawl to me, and come get your meal.” Unbuttoning his pants, he pulls them down with his boxers.

Drool collects at the corners of my mouth at his long, thick cock bobbing between his legs. His package is nestled between a muscular V-cut that calls for me to lick. When he slowly strokes his cock, making himself grow even harder, groaning as he does it, I drop to my knees.

The tile floor is as cold as I remember. It bites at my knees and palms with each motion I take. Crawling slowly, I keep going until I'm so close my head brushes his thighs.

He angles his cock down as I look up. A shivery pleasure rolls down my spine at the sound of his velvety voice.

“Good fucking girl. Open wide.”

I obey. Opening so wide, my jaw pops.

He grins darkly. “Now wrap that pretty little mouth around my cock and show me what that hole is good for.”

Fuck... I'm going to come just from hearing that. A powerful throb in my clit weakens my legs, and I moan, wondering if I'm going to spill over the edge as I take him in my mouth.

He feels so good as I glide him between my lips. I bob up and down hard, relishing every smooth inch of him.

“Faster,” he barks, resting his hands on his hips. “Suck me faster and harder. Be desperate for me.”

I quicken my pace, sliding up and down so quickly spit and drool dangles down to my chin. Each time he tosses his head back and groans, my own pleasure pools between my legs.

Going deeper, a soft *gluck, gluck, gluck* leaves my throat, and warmth coats my skin as Red praises me.

“Yes,” he growls. “Show me how badly you want to be fucked. Show me you want me to use you.”

I go faster, harder, deeper, my nose now going flush against his flat stomach each time I reach the base of him. The sound of my throat getting fucked echoes in the room, a

tremble forming in my legs at how badly I want him. This man has me shaking with need.

Reaching the base of him once again, my eyes widen in surprise as he roughly grabs the crown of my head, holding me in place. I cough. He loves it.

“Gag on me, sweetheart.”

I do—coughing until my eyes are watering, my pussy now aching with how empty it feels. I want this thick cock in my pussy. *Now.*

Just when I think he’s going to release my head, I muffle my surprise as he pinches my nose, cutting off my air supply.

“Like that?” He slaps my cheek, and there’s such an evil tone to his voice that my eyes roll back and my core clenches. “Three, two, one,” he counts down, and then releases me, pushing my mouth off his cock.

Air sucks down my lungs in rapid gasps, spit dribbling down my chin and neck as I stay on my knees, looking up at him.

I’m searching for oxygen for a totally different reason as he sinks down to my level, and cradles my chin in his palm. “Tell me what you want.”

“Fuck me. Please, fuck me.” My tone is so lost, I barely recognize it as my own.

A soft smile hits his eyes, a sharp contrast to the order of his voice. “Take off your pants. Go to the bed. Lay on your back. Spread your legs and show off that pretty pussy for me.”

I yank off my clothes from the waist down, my pants and panties being discarded on the floor as I lie on my back and spread my legs wide. My heart pounds wildly as I listen to his footsteps.

He’s pacing the room. Slowly.

“Arabelle Wolf,” he hums. “The woman who wants to be devoured by her captors. And that’s exactly what I’m going to

do.”

Click. It’s his hunting knife.

A sick thrill swirls in my stomach. I lift my head to see what he’s going to do.

“Head down,” he snaps and, instantly, I listen.

I don’t think I could disobey if I wanted to.

“Your pain is my pleasure, sweetheart.” Step by step, he’s getting closer. “My aphrodisiac.”

A weighted, nearly painful pause swirls thickly in the room as he stands above me.

“Scream for me, Bell.”

The tip of his knife slices across my hip bone.

A high-pitched scream departs from me as my back arches in blissful agony off the mattress.

Heat sears, and looking down, crimson blood pours out of the shallow wound.

Red observes the cut, his eyes pools of black as he stares. “Beautiful. Your blood is so beautiful. I’m going to have to be careful not to cut you to death.” His cock is the hardest I’ve seen as he takes his fingertip, swipes through the blood, and licks it.

Jesus. I’ve never seen anything more fucked up or erotic. I’m suspended in half horror, half infatuation, as my hips wiggle on the bed.

“I need more,” he growls. “Don’t be afraid to say your safe word if you need it. Do you remember it?” he asks.

I nod. “Red.”

“Excellent,” is all he says, and then his blade slices across my torso again.

And again.

And again.

Until pain, screams, and ecstasy are melded together and feel as one. Until I'm so fucking drenched for him, the sheets are damp beneath me.

“Say thank you, Bell,” he gruffs out.”

When I look up this time, he's not the man I've been seeing. He's an animal working on a strained leash of control. Dark swoops of hair have fallen into his eyes, blood is streaked against his white shirt, sweat drips down his face. God, I love seeing him this way.

“Thank you,” I say as I writhe, desperate for more.

His palm, now stained red with my blood, grips the inside of my thigh. He holds me in place, grinning manically, while singing my praises, rubbing my engorged clit.

“So gorgeous. So, so red. I want to bathe in you.”

My head floats with his words, his touch causing my pussy to quiver, and I start to beg. “I want your cock. I need your cock.”

I don't have to say another word. He grabs me behind the knees, yanking me closer to him.

And in the next second, he rams his cock into me so brutally, my spine peels off the bed and I scream in pleasure. With a groan, he pulls out, and thrusts back in, and this one is so powerful, the hunting knife falls off the bed, clanging on the tile.

Red doesn't stop to pick up the fallen blade. Instead, he fucks me relentlessly, until tears stream down my face from the unadulterated pleasure.

“Like that, sweetie?” He puts a bloody hand around my neck, lightly applying pressure. “Like how my cock fills you up?”

I nod rapidly, whimpering, already on the edge of release.

“Then show me how much you do and come for me.”

My body and mind cave. An earth-shattering orgasm cramps up my stomach, giving my clit a heartbeat of its own. Each inch of me convulses as I say “thank you” over and over.

He laughs lightly, not slowing his pace. “You can do better. Come again.”

Is he insane? My eyes snap open in surprise.

“No,” I object. “Not so soon. I’m not ready.”

“Adorable answer,” Red coos, the most devilish smirk on his face. “But the choice isn’t up to you. You’ll come when I say you will.”

Before I can protest, a trail of his spit dribbles from his mouth, landing on my clit. His thumb, weighted and heavy, finds the right spot and mashes down. A burst of pleasure shoots through the nerves on contact. It feels so fucking good. My legs flail in the air, pussy clenching around his length, while I whine and shake beneath him. Something he laughs at.

“Good little wolf. Now fucking come.”

He fucks me harder, faster, the wood of the bed frame creaking from the brute force. A violent quiver winds up my legs, and I shake from the inside out. The way my head throws back, and limbs contort, you’d think he was exorcising me.

When he makes a small circle on my clit, an uncontrollable orgasm erupts, this one even more vicious than the last. An inhuman scream tears from the back of my throat, hands clawing at the sheets as he rifts in and out of me. He shouldn’t be able to do this.

My pussy is clenching so tight, it’s pulsating... but that has zero effect on Red. In fact, he’s thrusting into me harder now, whispering lines about I’m about to see what a real fuck is like. He’s brutal. Pleasantly so, but still brutal. The only thing soft about this situation is his voice as another wave of tingles rush through my clit.

“Such a cute little sloppy mess you are. Good girl.” He leans down, his chest brushing mine, and puts his lips to my

ear. “Look at you falling apart. All come drunk. Let’s see you do that once more.”

I whip my head back and forth against the pillow. A chuckle leaves him as a sob breaks out from me. “I—I can’t.”

“You will... unless you say your words. Tell me it’s too much, and it stops. Red? Is that what you feel, Wolf?”

“No,” I groan, biting down on my lip. “Green. Green,” I chant.

“Then shut up and take it. Another orgasm. That’s your punishment for telling me you didn’t want to come. You’ll have to do it twice.”

He laughs, not even breathing heavy from all the work he’s putting in as he snaps his hips harder into me. His effects are instant, my body already feeling like it’s trained to respond to him.

Fuck. I’ve already come, and he doesn’t care. He’s going to force me again... and I love it.

This build-up is even quicker. My release edging on barbaric. I scream, my toes curling back, legs quivering with more force than before. And just as soon, my limbs go limp, and I’m a rag doll as he drills me into the mattress.

At last, he tosses his head back, gripping his hands into my thighs until I squeal from the pain.

“Fuuuck. Fuck. Fuck.” I slip into something dark. Not subspace, just heaven. My voice finally fades as the squeaking of the bed becomes distant. The only thing I truly stay in tune with is Red’s refined tone.

“Lose your song? Where’s your vibrato, sweetheart?”

I can’t groan or whimper. Only thrash my head against the pillow as pleasure cracks through every sense I have. Hair root to toe tips. Slowly, everything slips into black. I don’t know where I am, but I’m floating, my head light as a feather drifting along with my body.

“Bell, come back.” Red’s soft voice works through depths, and I feel myself being pulled down. His fingers gently sweep down my arms, and I stir at the comforting sensation. “Come back to me, sweetheart.”

My eyes are heavy, fluttering open, and my breaths are weighted in my lungs as Red’s masculine figure comes into focus.

He smiles with a kindness I haven’t seen before, and then gently kisses my forehead. “Good girl. God, you’re such a good girl.”

I can only nod, exhausted.

He grinds his hips against me, peppering kisses on my collarbone, and his frame accidentally grinds on my cuts. When I mewl from the ache, he soothes over my tear-stained cheeks with his thumb, almost like he’s saying sorry.

“Let me get some salve for you, Bell. I’m going to bandage you up.” He sweeps hair away from my face. “You’ve been so good. Let me take care of you. I’d like to get you a bath as well.”

An agreeing, incoherent mumble is all I’m capable of.

The sound of his footsteps migrates away from me, toward his bathroom.

It’s the last sound I hear before sinking into a peaceful, soul-soothing sleep.

CHAPTER 18

The Wolf



I roll over in bed and groan. Tenderness encases each muscle in my body after my wild fuck session with Red last night.

In spite of the fact that I was mad, there's no denying the obvious truth. Red knows how to fuck—and the physical chemistry we have is borderline nuclear.

Thank whatever deity exists that neither of us is looking for a deep, caring relationship. Talk about a catastrophic mess waiting to happen.

As the crisp linen sheet rubs against my hip, it catches on a multitude of bandages.

I run my finger over his handiwork. He put waterproof butterflies on these, so it's unlikely they'll scar badly. He certainly knows what he's doing.

Despite the bandages, I hiss at the stinging warmth from the cuts. That knife he uses to play with sure does bite. Knowing me, I'll be smiling at its bark throughout the day.

Some don't like bruises, cuts, and bite marks after a rough scene. I happen to love them since they're small memories of what happened. Each muted throb of pain is a delightful recall of what happened the night or nights before.

I'm already grinning from ear to ear as I throw back the sheets, and dare to place my bare feet on the frigid tile. Standing, more soreness makes itself known, and I reach for the additional Motrin Red left for me on the nightstand.

Savage and thoughtful—Red’s an odd combination, isn’t he?

After popping the Motrin, I take a quick shower to rinse off the smell of sex and superficial blood from last night, careful not to scrub at the numerous bruises dotting up and down my body.

My stomach rumbles, and I take it as the best sign I’ve had in days. After needing to take it easy from the lack of food and torture, I’m ready for real, hearty meals once again.

Padding out of the shower, I dry off, throw on the warmest, yet best-fitting clothes I can find, and practically race down the hall.

My mind is split in two. Half is focused on the sex with Red and how it oddly re-energized me. The other hemisphere is concentrated on finding nourishment.

I catch a whiff of eggs and bacon. God, I need that and a large coffee after last night. My feet move quicker, and I swing around the large archway leading toward the main dining room.

A powerful, muscular frame rocks mine as we collide. The air drives out of my lungs, and I look up.

Jesus.

I’m face to face with Rider, and by the dark look clouding over his face, he knows exactly what happened last night.

“Good morning, Bell.” He’s so calm, it’s haunting. How can someone who looks so sad talk so serenely?

“Good morning,” I manage to say, the words croaking out.

I hate how silent and still he is. I can basically feel him dissecting me.

A tightness pulls on my shoulder blades as Rider’s gaze remains unchanging. Sickness weaves through my stomach, erasing my appetite as he finally drifts his vision to trail over my stomach, arms, and center.

Fuck. Since I'm now covered in so many marks, I don't know where Rider's begins and Red's end. I wonder if he hates me a little. I think I would if we swapped places.

He cocks a brow, upon finishing his examination, and I can't tell if he's pissed, bored, tired, or all three.

"Come on," he finally says, thrusting a riding helmet my way. "We're going for a ride."

My eyes flash wide in surprise. "A horseback ride?"

"Obviously." He's already thrown his black helmet on and is fastening the strap around his well-shaped chin.

"And if I don't know how to ride?" I ask, tentatively placing the helmet on my head.

"Then it's a good thing you're going with me, because I'm one of the best horse whisperers known to man or beast."

I'm surprised when he smirks softly, and even more surprised at the lustful thrumming that forms at the bottom of my throat in response.

My breath hitches when he reaches out, properly tightens the strap to withstand a galloping horse, and winks.

He doesn't hate me. He doesn't hate me. The realization feels too good to be true.

"Come on, pet," he states softly. "You and I have unfinished business."

He's walking toward the kitchen, where I'm pretty sure there's a side door, and I'm thankful he can't see how giddy my face must look.

Damn straight, we have unfinished business, and I'm trailing after him with abandonment.

I'm certain he's going to explain himself about last night—and I'm also certain that no matter how much goes wrong between us, that Rider and I will be the main vein to each other's hearts for as long as we both kill, steal, and lie.

Rider Wilhem is my forever black streak that blends perfectly with the muted colors of my soul.

“DON’T LET your reins go slack.” Rider’s hand shoots out.

He gathers my reins tight and fists my grip around the smooth leather straps.

“That’s bad?” I ask, attempting to mimic his posture. He rides so well, I’m feeling embarrassed.

“It could be a problem. I doubt Bourbon is going to take off on you. He’s well trained,” Rider says, returning some distance to his horse and mine. “But if he did, you’d be fucked. You better pray he responds to your ‘woah’ if it were to happen.”

“Got it.” My lips pinch together. “Keep my reins tight.”

We ride longer, our horses walking slowly through a serpentine path of tall trees. The heavy *thuds* of their horseshoes against the forest floor mixed in with the occasional snapping of twigs feels therapeutic. My shoulders slack as birds communicate and sing through tweets and twitters, and built-up anxiety flushes out of my limbs from the gentle rustle of the dense leaves and filtered sunlight.

This is a completely different world—I know the heart of this city, Markassel—dirty, dingy, crime ridden. Part dark fairy tale, with its cobblestone streets and multiple stone fountains—part noir, with the numerous gangs, gun wars, and robberies.

But this place? This makes me wonder if I’m even living in the same cosmos as Markassel.

When we pass by a brook, creating another delightful sound, and I shake my head in amazement. “Some home you have here.”

“It is wonderful.” He sounds the most relaxed I’ve heard since my arrival. “So many people say these woods are

haunted, which I guess is a blessing in disguise, since it makes it easier to keep people away. If they only knew the truth.”

“The people who have tried to take over your territory in the past, do they know what this place is like?”

“Unlikely. They might have used drones for pictures, but I’d be surprised if those turned out well.” He points above us while keeping focused on the path. “The trees give us a lot of protection. I’m certain they only want the land because they know our opiate supply grows here.”

“Most likely.” I follow after his pace that is gradually picking up.

He scoffs a laugh. “Even if they killed all of us, or pushed us out, it’d take an outsider ages to find out where our supply is and which mushrooms we use.”

“I heard the mushrooms make you immune to pain. Is that true?”

“That’s a tall tale right there. It can help with pain. Mainly, it’s just to give you a pleasurable high.”

“Are there any medicinal properties, considering it’s sourced from a mushroom? Some mushrooms are adaptogens.”

A wry smile tugs at his mouth. “Well, hello, little miss alchemist. No. Ours are not. The type of mushroom we use contains psilocybin, which, if taken undiluted, can cause some haunting hallucinations. We cut ours to avoid that effect. All you get is high.”

I catch up with Rider and half giggle. “If I didn’t know any better, I’d think I was talking to an insider.” I wink.

He breaks out into a beaming grin. “All of us know what we’re doing.”

“But Grandmother is your tie to everything.”

His brows flash up and down like it’s an understatement. “She is our glue.” He slows the pace of his horse, a sadness

casting over his face. “I really despise the powerless and angry wreckage our group is becoming without her.”

“I don’t see what you see.” I tilt my head, studying him. “You’re all a tad paralyzed at the moment, but you all possess a goal. You’re simply trying to discover the best way to succeed. When unprecedented events happen, it can take time to find your footing again.”

“Mmm,” is all he responds with, and it’s definitely not a sound of agreement.

Before I can say anything in rebuttal, he stops his horse near the edge of a brook, signals for me to stop mine, and then dismounts.

Sliding off, I stand quietly, wondering what he’s thinking. I wait semi impatiently as he grabs the reins for both horses, clicks his tongue, and guides them to the clear running water. Expertly, he nestles their reins under a durable fallen tree trunk, then looks at me and jerks his head, silently ordering me to follow.

I fall in step behind Rider, the silence now feeling thick and dense as the forest as he leads us to a giant oak tree—a tree I’m guessing to be at least a hundred years old, judging from its size.

The beauty of the tree doesn’t pacify my growing apprehension. By the time he’s sunken to a seat in the damp, cool leaves, my fingernails are biting into my palms.

“You disagree with me,” I state, sitting beside him tentatively. My back rests against the enormous trunk as I glance over and frown.

“You’re too nice.” He picks up a leaf and tosses it. “To say we’re merely finding our footing again and not imploding from the inside out is way too gracious of a statement.”

“One thing I’m not, Rider, is gracious. I’m only being honest.”

“Pfft.” He’s all disbelief. “Then your eyesight is flawed, because we’re a fucking mess. I can’t even lead the guys properly so we can find Grandmother.” Pain flashes through his gaze. “I can’t lead anyone.”

“That’s not true—”

“I couldn’t lead you last night,” he snaps, granting me his full attention. “But Red sure as hell could.”

A stifled gasp leaves my mouth. This is not how I was expecting this topic to come up. Guilt rains down on my heart, and I can hardly look at him. “Rider, I shouldn’t have done that with Red. I’m sorry, I—”

“You don’t need to apologize, Bell.” His voice softens. “I was exactly what you said last night... weak. If I had told you what was happening to me at that moment, you never would have gone to Red.”

Fuck, I can’t believe I said that now. I shake my head rapidly, ashamed of my words. “I regret saying that.”

“But do you regret going to Red?”

My shoulders tense at the question. If I’m being honest with myself, I don’t. Red and I have had a magnetic pull between us since the moment we laid eyes on each other.

And while it would be easy to lie to Rider, I can’t. Striking up a deal with Hood that serves as a benefit to everyone is one thing. I can keep Rider in the dark about that. But to blatantly lie?

It’s not possible. I care about him too much to lie to his face.

Apprehensively, I shake my head. “Does that bother you?”

“Not at all.” It could be my imagination, but I think a smile is ghosting his full mouth. “If you knew how many threesomes I’ve had with Red...”

“You’re serious?” I sound as shocked as I feel.

He chuckles, and I know I'm not imagining that. "Naturally, I'm not thrilled that you fucked Red, but I have to say, I'd rather you be with him than Little. That would be an insult. With Red, I can almost imagine how the entire thing played out with you two. It makes it less..." He pauses, searching for a word. "Unknown," he finally says, eyes meeting mine. "Nothing is worse than the unknown."

He's right. Not knowing is one of the most difficult things to accept, and while I don't regret being with Red, I feel shame for the way I dealt with the situation. There could have been a dozen other opportunities for me to be with Red. I didn't have to end up in his arms nor his bed, riddled with hurt and anger.

"Rider." A lump forms in my throat the moment I say his name. I struggle to speak through it. "I really am sorry about last night. I shouldn't have—"

"It's okay, Bell," he says with a subtle shake of his head, stealing the rest of my apology away. "If I'd redirected that whole situation and told you what was going through my head, it might have all played out differently." His shoulders rise and fall with a deep breath. "I wanted to tell you last night. I think I was dying to tell you, but right in the middle of it all—" his voice trails off, followed by a heavy sigh.

A large wave of silence sinks in again. His handsome face tells its own story with a myriad of emotions, ranging from fear, to frustration, to grief. My veins roil with a strange mixture of wanting to know everything, to thinking it would be better to stay in the dark.

But I know ignorance won't be bliss here for us. Ignorance will be the weed that grows between us and chokes out our connection. The only thing that can kill our bond is our past.

And I'm not going to let that happen.

"Rider." I dare to say his name, afraid that it might be too much, just like last night. Relief calms my thudding pulse as he looks at me normally and unafraid. "Do you care to talk about it now?"

He clears his throat, nodding. “You’ve heard about my time with The Pokers a few years back?”

I scowl, instant anger brewing in my blood. “I wish you knew how long I searched for you after I heard the news.”

“I figured you knew. I think everyone in Markasel does. What people don’t know is how I got them to release me.” He swallows roughly, and my nerves thrum, knowing this isn’t going to be good.

“Tell me.”

“There was a woman who attended every session, but didn’t speak. All she’d do was stand in a corner. And I couldn’t even tell if she felt anything. She seemed almost robotic. But—” His chest heaves, and he pauses.

“But—” I prod, the air in my lungs thinning.

“She—she had your eyes, Bell, and during the torture sessions, I’d stare into them. Get lost in them.”

“*What?*” That’s so beautifully terrible, I want to bawl. To know that he thought of me in such a horrific moment makes my heart shatter. I try to ignore the hot sting of tears in my eyes.

“After a while,” he continues, staring straight ahead, “I could only think of you, and I stopped responding to the torture. They didn’t think it was fun anymore, so they let me go.” He takes a deeply broken breath, looking like he’s going to cry. “And that’s—that’s why—”

“You got scared last night,” I finish, understanding what happened. “Oh, Rider,” I breathe out, a tear trailing down my cheek. “I’m so sorry.”

“No.” He cuts off my reply, firmly yet tenderly gripping my chin with his finger and thumb. “Don’t. If you blame yourself, that will hurt more than anything The Pokers did.”

“How could that hurt you more?” My skin burns, craving more of his touch.

“You comparing yourself to them, when *you* were all I had, has the capacity to hurt me more than anything. I might have gotten scared last night, but at the end of it all, you’re still my one light in this world, Bell. I won’t hear you comparing yourself to the dark.”

“Christ, Rider.” His sweet words steal my breath. “If you only knew how dark I am.”

“*Show me,*” he whispers.

I can’t move as he leans forward, full of caution. His lips only brush mine, but it’s like a wildfire flares to life within me. Unable to resist, I kiss him back just as gently, relishing the natural warmth of his skin.

He truly does feel like the rays of the sun in the winter.

A light moan escapes his throat, and his hand glides past my cheek to nuzzle the back of my head. The chirping of birds and the soothing flow of the brook become tender background music. The cadence of our song is the light kisses shared between us as we both go slowly.

“*Fuck.*” His breath becomes mine.

“Too much?” I ask, a bit timid, unsure if his cursing is a good or bad thing after last night.

“Just right.” A small smile lifts the corner of his lips. “Feel my heart, Bell.”

Carefully, he grabs my hands and places them over his chest.

I gasp at how it races. My thinking was so wrong, so flawed. Rider’s always wanted me, and I don’t know how I could have ever doubted that.

“That’s all you, darling. You do this to me.”

A groan of relief leaves me, the admission causing my clit to throb, already edging me to an orgasm. I grab his, placing them over my upper ribs.

“Mine’s racing too,” I admit, and he sighs in delight.

“Fuck, I love that.” His forehead touches mine, and I can’t deny how desperate I am to feel his strong hands ravishing my body.

Slowly, I migrate his hand down. “Feel my tits. Pinch my nipples. Feel how hard they are for you, Rider. Just hearing your voice, simply seeing you, makes me feel like this. Never mind your touch. Actually feeling you is like a dream.”

His body starts to shake, his cock stiffening against my thigh. “God, Bell. I want you.”

“I’m so fucking wet,” I whisper, half panting. “I’m drenched for you, Rider. And my pussy aches.”

The same calmness I saw last night floods over his body. His voice alters to steel as he speaks to me with authority. “That’s because at the end of the day, it’s my pussy. Isn’t it, Bell?”

I stare deep into his fiery eyes, lost in his spell.

His jaw grinds, and he no longer looks scared. Rather, I see remnants of the man from last night returning.

“No matter who you fuck, this drenched pussy belongs to me. Understood?”

My chest heaves for air.

“Say it,” he grits out, and it makes my eyes roll back in bliss.

“My pussy is yours, Rider. Always.”

“Good wolf. Good pet.”

His lips collide against mine, his tongue sweeping across my mouth like he’s begging me for access. I open wide, thrusting my fingers into the nape of his hair and tugging.

In one swift motion, he pulls me onto his lap. Rider parts my hips, allowing me to straddle his thighs, and I grind my clit furiously, needy for all he’ll give me.

A dark laugh leaves him, his strong fingers gripping my ass so firmly I toss my head back.

“Desperate wolf,” he coos. “That’s my beautiful pet. Show me how badly you want this cock in that pussy of yours.”

I groan, the demand to feel his cock stretch my pussy making me rub against him so hard, his back thuds against the tree trunk.

His cock stiffens against me, causing him to hiss between his teeth. “Fucking hell. You make me want to fuck you so bad.”

“Then do it,” I whimper, but it’s more like a demand, sweat now dripping down my neck.

Smack. A squeal leaves me at the sting of his hand slapping down on my breast.

His hands fist in my hair, and he pulls me closer until my ear presses on his mouth.

“You’re missing a word there, Bell.”

“Please!” I’m humping him harder, my tits now flush to his well-muscled chest. “Please,” I plead again, each fiber of my skin ravaged with need. “Please fuck me.”

With one searing look into my eyes, he yanks his zipper down, lifts me enough to tug my sweatpants to my thighs, then slams me down on his thick cock.

We both groan in unison—the fullness of him almost too much to handle. I bite his earlobe as he grabs my hips and continues to work me up and down his length, my wetness making it an easy glide.

“Jesus, Bell,” he pants. “This pussy of yours is so goddamn tight. Mine. Mine. All fucking *mine*,” he chants, fucking me harder, and a delightful heatwave crescendos inside my core at his claim.

Each slam of him, I feel his balls slap my ass, and my brain knocks against my skull. When he bites down on my left

nipple, I scream, the sound of my unbound pleasure filling the forest.

“Come for me,” he says on a breath, sounding out of breath. “Come *with* me.”

I unravel at the order, shaking as I come around his cock, his warmth shooting up inside me as I hold him tight. As he throbs, coating the inside of me, I can’t stop saying his name, nor stop saying “thank you.”

He’s so perfect for me—so right—so wonderful.

With both of us spent and satisfied, I fully collapse onto him, relishing how we pant at the same pace. Our hearts in sync.

Several moments pass, and with him still deep inside me, he plants a tender kiss on the crown of the head.

“Thank you,” he says lowly, running a hand through my hair and down my back. “I needed that.”

I nod, blissful exhaustion slinking into my bones. “So did I.”

“Whatever happens,” he murmurs into my hair, allowing me to rest my cheek on his shoulder. “We’ll always have each other, Bell.”

“Yes,” I agree, out of breath. “Whatever happens.”

We stay in each other’s embrace and fall asleep under the tree until nightfall. And I finally feel at home.

CHAPTER 19

Rider



“Strike Lair is still our safest bet, even with the risks,” Bell says, placing a pin on the tablet.

My fingers itch to hold her closer, despite the fact we’re hip to hip already as we’re all gathered around the table.

Maybe I’m crazy, pussy-whipped, or both, since I can’t believe Bell’s convinced me that her turning herself in to Grimm is a plan that has any hope.

Red and I both think she’s going to be shot dead to the ground or worse the moment she shows her face to Grimm. But she’s a big girl, and one hell of a negotiator, and has convinced us to let her try it anyway.

Anxiety crawls up my insides as I face the cold, hard truth that, even if I don’t like Bell’s plan, it is our only option at the moment.

Bell continues, laying out the plan of trading information about us and infiltrating the deepest part of the Grimm Hideout to find Grandmother, and I glance around the dining room.

At least Little seems pacified. He’s standing off to the side, away from the table, and he seems... dare I say, content? That’s good. Even if it is because he’s certain Bell will be killed immediately. As much as I don’t like his seemingly gleeful attitude at the prospect, I do like that he’s less of a threat.

Frankly, it's Hood who is throwing me off. He's nowhere near the table. It's like he's not interested in the plan at all as he stands close to Little. Plus, he's hardly said a word during this whole process—that's *very* unlike our planner.

Frustration brews within me at how I can't see his face. I know he's not going to do that with Bell around, but some facial cues would be helpful.

I wonder if he's got something up his sleeve? It'd be no surprise to any of us if we found out Hood was concocting a plan all on his own.

Hell, I'm so suspicious of his silence, I'm curious if this crack-headed idea of Bell going to Grimm was his idea in the first place.

Staying trained on Hood, my eyes squint, Bell's voice fading. Hood's shoulder's shift, his head lifting a margin. Even though I can't see his face, I know he knows I'm looking at him.

He half shrugs. And I feel his silent question. "What?"

All I can do is shake my head and try to refocus on Bell.

She's delving into this plan, and more places have been circled on the map. She's debating with Red, who, besides me, is the only one of the Huntsmen who seems invested.

"Tell me this, sweetheart." Red smirks. "If you get taken as a captive at Strike Lair, what makes you think you can get out of there and help us get to these other hideouts if Grandmother *isn't* there? You got some Houdini magic in you?"

She cocks a brow. "I have tricks. You'd be surprised."

"Takes a lot to do that," Red replies with a bored look on his face.

A howling breeze kicks up outside, and with the noise, the hair on the back of my neck rises.

Strange. I've lived out here for several years now and haven't been haunted by the wind.

“You good, Rider?” Hood asks from across the room.

Another shiver runs up my spine, this time mixing with a pit in my stomach that I can’t pinpoint. I shake it off. “Yeah. It’s just the wind—”

I see the flash of the bomb go off before I hear it.

Then, before my reflexes can save me, an explosion rocks the room.

Sailing backward, shotgun *pops* fill the air.

I’m clutching for Bell’s hand as the blow from the explosion continues to knock us backwards. We’re airborne now, everything in slow motion, in a space where milliseconds are hours.

I see the terror and surprise on Bell’s delicate face, the sound of Red cursing in the distance, the yell of Hood.

The only other thing I can remember for the next few seconds, other than Bell being close to me, is the room falling to shambles, darkness, and the fear of knowing that we’re all going to die.

CHAPTER 20

The Wolf



“**Y**ou okay? Bell, you okay?” Through the deep ringing in my ears, Rider’s voice calls out to me. He’s so close. One of his hands is on my shoulder, the other on my back, yet he sounds so far away.

It’s the explosion; the sound must have ruptured my eardrums. The ringing doesn’t stop, but I see Rider’s mouth moving, asking if I’m okay.

I nod, acutely aware of the grit bothering my eyes.

We stand, Rider being the one doing most of the work to get me to my feet. His steady arms wrap around my waist, and he holds me snug against his body.

Thick dust clouds the air, tasting of explosive powder and dirt. A mixture of the pollution sucks down my lungs and I cough. “What the fuck happened?” I ask hoarsely, the ringing finally dissipating.

“A bomb and AR casings.” Red gingerly kicks wooden shards away, making a clearing to stand in. White plaster lightly coats his impeccable navy suit, and he dusts a few spots away before picking up a casing that looks like it’s still smoking. His eyes widen as he stares at it. “Someone went overkill.”

“I don’t know what we’re doing,” Rider says, taking note of the damage above us. “But whatever it is, it’s making them nervous.”

“Let’s keep that momentum going, shall we?” Red gloats.

“You sure about that?” Rider questions, huffing out a breath. “I don’t think our cabin can survive more momentum. I think it’d be wiser to stomp on the brakes.”

I swing my head around, observing the shambles of the cabin through the thin cloud of smoke. He’s right.

The kitchen table is nothing but sharp splinters now. What used to be large stones from the fireplace now give the appearance of broken pieces of plaster. All the windows are busted out. One of the support beams above has been left fractured in half, and the popcorn ceiling sags in the middle.

The more I look around, the worse it gets.

Where the large wall was, a hole now exists, leading straight out into the unforgiving elements of The Woods, and let’s not even get started on the terracotta tile. There’s hardly anything left of it. It’s all shards and grout.

This room is close to being demolished.

My brows furrow in confusion. “How did they find this place?”

“Good question,” Red agrees.

“A better question...” Rider says, his fingertips tightening into my skin. “Where are the others?”

A silent panic floods the room. All three of us survey the space, looking at piles of wood and rock, wondering if we’ll see any signs of life.

When there’s nothing—not even arms or legs sticking out from the rubble—nausea swirls in my stomach.

Hood and Little were standing closest to the hole in the wall, most likely where the bomb was planted and set off.

What if they’ve been blown up?

Rider drops his hands from my waist, worry straining his features. “Hood! Little!”

My pulse leaps to my throat when the response is more dread-filled silence.

Rider starts circling around the room frantically. “Little! Hood!” He halts in front of a debris pile, drops to his knees, and throws the wreckage aside. “Are you here?”

“Hood!” I yell.

“Little!” Red yells.

In seconds, our battered trio are on a mission, sweeping through the entire back part of the house to find the others.

Separately, we go to different rooms and piles, clearing spots away.

While clawing through a mixture of rocks and pieces of wood that I believe was the wall, I am afraid that I will find a severed head or arm.

I’m grunting, shoving a large boulder, that I’m certain came from outside, out of the way, when the urgent voice of Red comes from the kitchen.

“Hood!” Red exclaims. “I found him. He’s here.”

Rider and I scramble into the kitchen, a room that has significantly less damage but is still in desperate need of repair. The stove has been blasted out of its space and is now toppled over.

I slow my pace, stepping aside, allowing Rider to get through first.

These are his men, and this is his home; they’ll need him, not me.

“Is he alive?” Rider asks, after dashing past me. He drops to his knees, feeling for Hood’s pulse.

“He has a strong pulse,” Red responds. “Unconscious, but I think he’ll come around. His leg is pretty banged up. Fuck, that’s bad,” he hisses. “We’ll need good bandaging and stitches.”

Rider strips off his shirt in one fluid motion, shreds the bottom hem off, and firmly ties it around Hood's lower leg.

Concerning Hood, I can distinguish a thick boot and an extremely bloody shin—God, I hope that's not bone I'm seeing—but it's hard to make out much else. I'm too far removed from the kitchen.

Rider doubles the knot, trying to attain as much pressure as possible. "Bell," he barks.

Immediately, I fully emerge into the kitchen. "Yes, Rider?"

"Stay here with Hood," he instructs. "If you can, check for broken bones. I assume you know how to do that?" He glances over his shoulder, raising a questioning brow.

"Of course I do," I reply, not eager, but certainly ready to take his place.

"Excellent," Rider states, then looks in the other direction. "Red, go to the supply shelter. Get what's needed for proper stitching and wound care. I'll be fucking damned if he loses his leg."

"He won't," Red replies, adamant. "That we can mend. And you?" Red asks, staring down at Rider. "What are you going to do?"

"Find Little." His voice vibrates with urgency as he pushes himself to a stand.

He sweeps past me faster than I can blink, calling for Little on his way.

Red gives me a stern look, which says something like, "don't let anything happen to Hood while I'm gone," and then turns away and disappears into the long hallway.

I step closer to Hood, taking a better evaluation of the injury.

Relief erases the tension in my shoulders when I see no bone. It is a fairly deep cut on his leg, but it's not as bad as I feared.

Sinking to a squat, I tentatively press up and down his body, feeling for any breaks or fractures.

No bones are broken in his lower arms or legs, which means we'll be able to move him. Moving up to feel around his shoulders, a gasp leaves me.

His face covering has fallen backward from the blast and he's— "Wow," I whisper, breathless.

Thick, dark hair, golden skin, razor-sharp yet masculine features.

He's more than handsome; he's striking enough to steal your breath away.

And I was right from that time he left me unconscious; those last few seconds were not my imagination. He does have a scar.

From the corner of his eye, a large silver scar trails across his cheek. As a contrast to his high cheekbones and strong jaw, it only enhances his appearance.

I frown. Seeing it now, I no longer wish to use the scar against him. There's no need to, and a pit in the bottom of my stomach tells me it's wrong. Besides, it's not that bad, but I suspect that's why he's been hiding his face.

I trace my finger down the scar with a feather-light touch, noting how old it is. Also, how gruesome. My head tilts out of curiosity. It's so close to his eye, I wonder if he can see properly.

The longer I study the mark, the more pity I feel. "What happened to you?" I ask, almost to myself.

"The Pokers." Red's voice from behind makes me stiffen.

Looking over my shoulder, I find Red staring at Hood, a half scowl affixed to his face, his grip tightening so hard around the med kit that his knuckles whiten.

The Pokers. It's a name I keep hearing in association with The Huntsmen over and over. I may not have all the pieces for

a complete puzzle, but I'm starting to see a grizzly pattern of pain and torture coming from The Pokers.

"How is he?" Red eventually asks, joining me on the floor.

"No broken bones," I state as he pops open the white tin kit. "We'll be able to move him."

"Excellent." He's already pouring iodine on gauze to dress the wound.

I watch Red carefully, his manly brows pulled tight as he focuses, his breaths controlled, no shaking in his hands. He's in full control—I doubt he rarely loses it, though. And I'm certain Red only lets people see what he wants them to see.

I wonder if he's had some kind of run-in with The Pokers... The difference between Red and Rider is that, while Rider will tell me what happened, I have strong reservations that Red would ever share if something unfortunate happened to him.

He's the kind who doesn't talk and only moves forward.

Deftly, he starts to suture Hood's skin back together. Medical needle-nose pliers in both hands as he hooks the skin, closes one section, and then moves down the length of the wound.

He's done this before.

I can't suture half as well as Red, and I've done it more than once. I can't help but watch.

"Keep staring at me like that, pretty girl," Red says, never looking at me, but smirking, "and I'll make sure to take notes that you're interested in round two. It's something I'll look forward to taking full advantage of later."

"My awe of your stitching skills has nothing to do with sex." I roll my eyes in amusement.

"Says you," he retorts. "Anything can be sexual when the attraction is already there. Even my handiwork with skin repair."

I'm about to chuckle, when the sound is stolen away.

“Red! Bell!” Rider bursts into the kitchen, sweat clinging to his brow. “I found Little...”

Silence, and then—

“He’s dead.”

CHAPTER 21

Rider



“So... he’s not dead?” I ask, weaker than I’d like.

Red’s face is somber, washed with gray hues, as he steps back from Little’s bed, yanking the plugs of the stethoscope from his ears. “Not yet, but he will be. He’s lost a lot of blood.”

“*Fuck*,” I mutter, raking my hands through my hair. “I can’t let that happen,” I growl through my gritted teeth. “I don’t care what problems Little and I have had, I’ll be damned before one of my men ends up getting killed by some ambush set off by a phantom.”

Red sighs, shaking his head. “That beam that impaled him most likely punctured his liver. I think I got the bleeding to stop, but he’s lost too much for us to change the inevitable.”

I examine Little, and it’s like I can see the color draining out of skin by the millisecond. My fist clenches. “We’re out of blood bags, aren’t we?” I rock back and forth when Red nods.

“And none of us are a blood type match. Forget about doing a transfusion.” Red sounds as defeated as I do.

“Jesus.” Watery heat cuts at my eyes. “Why couldn’t I have been better to him? I’m failing everyone here.”

“Rider—” Red’s voice is cut off by a gentle knock on the door.

Bell slides in, sadness rounding her pretty blue eyes when she sees Little’s condition. “What’s your verdict?” she asks

quietly.

All I can do is shake my head, disgusted at myself and how I've failed these Huntsmen.

"He needs a blood transfusion," Red states. "But good luck getting that."

"You don't know his blood type?" Bell asks.

"We don't *have* his blood type," I bitterly state. "He's A positive. None of us are A positive."

"Maybe you're not," Bell says, her light voice rising in pitch. "But I am."

She's serious about this, but I see the reality of the situation. She's too weak to give blood. Immediately, I shake my head. Meanwhile, Red starts laughing.

"What's so funny about that?" She scowls.

"What's funny about it is you're practically begging us to kill you, Bell," Red says, biting back his laugh. "That deserves to be laughed at."

Bell snarls, flipping him off.

"I agree with him," I state, folding down her finger. "Bell, you've been through too much and haven't recovered from the torture. We can't do that."

She huffs through her nose in defiance, arching a brow. "You don't know my body."

"Sugar," Red says with a smirk. "I went to medical school. I don't need to know your body; I only need to know science."

"Call me sugar again," Bell growls, "and I'll knock all your teeth out one by one."

"Please." Red rolls his eyes. "This is no time for foreplay, Bell."

Red's answer only serves to further aggravate Bell, whose face has now twisted from the kind one I know to a dark,

sneering one I've not met before. I think she's about to yell, but I interrupt before that can happen.

"It's out of the question, Bell." I don't care if my response is rude or short. This idea is ridiculous, no matter how well her intentions are.

"Even with steaks and red wine?" Bell asks, undeterred, her hands firmly behind her back.

"Steaks and red wine?" Red narrows his gaze. "What the hell do those have to do with anything?"

"I had a target one time," Bell says coolly. "Big-time drug king. Got too much taste for easy money and sold Grimm fake coke after we signed a contract to do business with him."

"Big but not smart," I say.

"Still smart enough to ambush me. He stabbed me fifteen times, and I had hemorrhaged so much blood that for the first time in my whole career, I thought I'd never kill again. Lucky for me, I wasn't alone. Another person was traveling with me as my correspondent. They knew something had gone wrong when I failed to report. They located me in an alleyway, transported me to a safe location. I was just shy of needing a transfusion, but with no way to get me blood, he opted to feed me red steak and red wine for a week."

"And that worked?" Red asks, his jaw going slack.

"Come on, science boy... the iron levels help with blood loss." Smugness tugs at the corners of Bell's pouty mouth. "Four days later, I was on my feet again, weak, but on my feet. If it worked then, it will work now. Get me about a dozen steaks and four large bottles of red wine, and we can save him."

"We wouldn't draw so much where you'd be off your feet for four days." Red frowns, studying Little.

Uncertainty knots my stomach. "What if it *doesn't* work and it's a worst-case scenario for Bell?" I gulp through a sudden tightness in my throat. I'd hate myself forever if Bell

died on top of everything else. Losing her is the last thing I need.

“You know I’ll do my best to ensure that doesn’t happen.” Red nods stiffly, readjusting one of his cuff links. “I will be able to tell if the strain is too much and I’ll stop.”

“It won’t be too much,” Bell pipes in.

“Fine.” I lift my hands in surrender, but not without glaring at Red. “If something happens to her, I’ll kill you.”

“And shoot yourself in the foot.” Red sends me a mocking, gleaming smile. “I’m your doctor and also one of the few men you have left who can walk, but sure... go ahead and kill me.”

Damn bastard. He always knows how to call my bluff.

“So.” Red loosens his tie, and drops the med bag onto the bed, preparing to set up the IVs that will be needed. “Let’s get started.”

“Before we do that...” Bell says, dragging out her words. “I need to tell you, I didn’t originally come in here for the transfusion.”

“Oh?” My brows lift. “What did you come in here for?”

Apprehension tightens her thin face, and it’s only now that I realize she’s been keeping her hands behind her back because she’s hiding something. “I need to show you both something. While I was looking for a clue as to what caused the explosion, I found these...”

An impatient edge courses through my tendons as she pinches her lips together and shows an item she’s been hiding behind her back.

Squinting my eyes, I get a step closer and see—*Jesus Christ, I’m going to be sick.*

“Fingers!” Red exclaims. “Well, that’s a stupid way to send a message. Random fingers. Are they telling us our fingers are next?”

Bell is palming a plastic Ziplock bag, and inside are ten dismembered fingers.

Ladies' fingers, judging from the dainty size and long nail shape.

They also appear to be freshly cut off, since there's no bloating.

"I don't know what these could mean," Bell says, cautiously jumbling the bag around. "But I thought I should show you." She turns the bag once more, the fingers tumbling around inside, the manicured nails catching on the plastic.

When she flips the bag to better examine it, one finger turns, and I spot a familiar outline of black.

Fuck—now I'm definitely going to vomit. Shooting my hand out, I snatch the bag from Bell's hand, and she jumps.

My eyes go saucer wide the longer I stare at the finger.

I'd know it anywhere.

It's an index finger that has the tattoo of a crow's beak on the inside.

I grip the bag until my hands shake, and a furious blaze of rage, hurt, despair, and loss tears through my heart and muscles.

"Rider?" Red's voice breaks through my spiraling thoughts, and I know I have to tell him.

"These aren't just any fingers," I say, my voice cracking. "These are Grandmother's."

CHAPTER 22

Rider



Grandmother. My heart folds in with grief until the organ feels cracked in two. Dead. She’s fucking dead.

I’m holding a bag of her fingers. The tattoo of a crow’s beak on one of the index fingers could pacify a mortician.

“Stop this,” Bell snaps, and it makes my eyes widen in surprise. “You’re in charge for a reason, Rider. If there’s ever a time you don’t need to fall apart, it’s now.”

Fury coats my body as my lip snarls. “Don’t tell me how to feel, Bell!”

Bell’s mouth drops open, but it’s Red who speaks first.

“One thing I don’t come between is a furious woman and her soapbox moment. Excuse me, as I go check on Hood. Let me know when you’re ready for the transfusion. Just remember to make this short, or Little dies.”

He glides past us both, not bothering to look back.

Bell takes Red’s warning to heart, wasting no time as she rests her hands on her hips, glaring at me. “When are you going to stop acting like you don’t know what to do.”

“When I stop losing people who mean the most to me,” I grit out. “That’d be fucking wonderful. That’s when I’ll get it together.”

“There’s more to living than Grandmother, Rider. No matter how much you cared for her, she was a person—”

“She taught me everything I know. How to barter, fight, smuggle, protect myself. All of it. And fucking hell, I couldn’t even help her out one lousy time.”

“I doubt that.”

“You haven’t lost *everyone*, Rider. You have Red, Little, and Hood.”

“And you think those idiots mean anything to me?” The words fly out of my mouth before I can even think about how false they are—before I can even hope to stop them.

“No.” Her eyes are ice, her voice too calm. She knows me too well. “They’re everything to you, and you’re afraid to show it.”

“Fuck. Stop it. Stop it.”

“I won’t,” she cuts in. “I won’t, because I refuse to see you sabotage this group with your own self-doubt.”

I begin pacing, her words making me restless, and I’m angry with myself for not being honest with her.

“Since I’ve been set loose, I’ve watched you. The only thing you were confident about was saving me, but you’ve doubted yourself with everything else, and you’re going to be the weak link that makes the Huntsmen become nothing more than a laughingstock of a memory.”

Her statement halts me in place, like my feet have been grounded with cement.

“You care about everyone here so much it scares you half to death. That’s why you’re in shambles over Little. Grandmother being dead is such a small piece in your life, Rider. Grandmother wouldn’t want you to fall apart like this. She’d want you to fucking get it together and do what needs to be done to survive. The sooner you realize that, the quicker you’ll stop fighting petty battles and start winning fucking nuclear wars. You. Can. Do. This.”

She hasn’t slapped me in the face, but it feels like she has. Her speech has sent the shock into my system that I’ve been

needing. That shock is mixing with determination in my veins, riling up a new will to fight within me.

I can do this. Grandmother wouldn't have picked me if she didn't think I was capable.

"You're right." I take a deep breath. "But I can't do it all alone."

"No one is expecting you to. We're all here. We all have the same cause."

"Then help me take the first step." My shoulders pull up tall, and I feel the calmest I've felt in years. "Where's the best place to start?"

"We save Little with a blood transfusion, then we go find the motherfuckers who killed your Grandmother."

CHAPTER 23

The Wolf



“You should be resting,” Hood says. I hear the rubber base of his crutch thudding against the wood floor as he shuts the door, joining me in Little’s room.

“I would, but I can’t.” Not looking back at him, I fold my arms over my chest, staying in my seat. “I’m not the only one who is tired. Red and Rider need rest too.”

Two days after the explosion and the transfusion, Red kept himself awake to the point of exhaustion. He refused to leave Little’s side unless he was checking on Hood, who is thankfully now on his feet—sort of.

Hood will need a crutch for a while, as his leg was badly injured, thanks to a decent-sized beam slicing it open.

Rider worked himself half to death, boarding up the holes in the dining room and getting the kitchen semi operable again.

Safe to say that in some way, shape, shape, or form, we’re all banged up.

At least mine was partially a choice. The transfusion did leave me feeling spent, but at least the choice to donate blood was mine. And thankfully I have enough energy to watch Little sleep as his vitals continue to grow stronger.

“I can sit there just as easily as you can.” Hood stands beside me. “Get some rest and let me keep watch for a while. I’m restless after so much sleep.”

Looking up, I raise an unamused eyebrow. He's still hiding his face like I haven't seen it.

"What?"

"I *do* know what you look like, you know."

He sighs, shifting more weight onto his crutch. "Dammit," he grumbles, and it's the most human reaction I've heard out of him.

A tender spot threads through my chest. "Hood—"

"Don't." He sounds fatigued. "Don't tell me it's not that bad, because that's what Rider and Red say too, but it doesn't take the scar away."

"Nothing will ever take the scar away." My tone softens. "But I wasn't going to say it wasn't that bad. I was going to say it suits you, and it's proof that you're stronger than what hurt you. I was going to encourage you to embrace it."

"Embrace this?" He yanks his covering down, and it's the same handsome face I saw the other night. The only difference now is I'm seeing two piercing eyes to go along with the look. Scar or not, Hood is one beautiful specimen. "Why should I. *How* can I?"

"You have to accept it," I say, careful not to stare at the scar. "It's going to be there forever, and the sooner you don't embrace it, the more of your life it will steal. Haven't you lost enough of it already?"

His mouth parts, but nothing comes out.

"All the hiding you have to do... don't you get tired of it?"

Sorrow coats his icy gaze, and his vision drops to the floor. "I do, but I don't know what else to do."

I force a sincere smile to my tired face. "You can start by reminding yourself that you're a badass and a survivor, and the scar plays a part in your story. It might sound strange, but I think the longer you hide your scar and deny it, the more discrediting you do in acknowledging that you're still alive."

His breathing suspends, and with the small amount of silence, guilt riddles my insides as I think of how harsh I was the other night.

“I’m sorry I called you a coward, Hood.” My throat tightens with each syllable. “You’re obviously not a coward—you’re strong. Never forget that.”

His short dark lashes kiss his golden skin as he takes two slow blinks. “Thank you.” He sounds choked up. “I’ll do my best.”

“That’s all we can do,” I say, almost nonchalantly, looking at Little, hoping not to make the moment heavier than it already is.

“Then let me start now,” Hood says, moving close to my chair. “Let me take a shift for Little and give you a break so you can sleep.”

I can’t help but laugh at the clever way he’s using my advice, and at how it brightens the mood.

Standing to my feet, I stretch out my shoulder blades, now noticing how sore and weak I am. “You’ll never have to tell me to get sleep twice.”

Hood chuckles, wasting no time to plop into my chair.

I move for the door.

“Hey, Bell.” Hood suddenly sounds alert, and it has me spinning on my heel to face him. His brows furrow like he’s deep in thought. “Those fingers of Grandmother’s you found...”

My head pulls back in surprise. “Yes, what about them?”

“I was—” His mouth snaps shut, frowning, then he shakes his head. “Never mind. I’ll tell you later.” Shifting in the chair, he returns his attention to Little.

That conversation isn’t about to take flight.

Completely clueless, I go out into the hallway, a bit baffled that he wouldn’t tell me what that was about, but also feeling

warmth expand in my chest at this new sensation of knowing.

These Huntsmen are becoming more than just a pack of
ruthless men who captured me for information.

They're becoming a sense of home.

Of family.

CHAPTER 24

The wolf



Four days after the explosion, and we're still no closer to finding out who was brave enough to attack the cabin than when it first happened.

And it's not from a lack of effort—Red, Rider, and Hood have pulled out every trick they have for this.

They've contacted their arms dealer, The Toymaker, who supplied shell casings he's gotten a hold of over the years. Over time, he's been able to obtain shells used by Grimm, another group called The Reaper, and even a few people from The Hallows.

All of us have microscopically run the bullet prints to the casings we found against the ones The Toymaker gave us... There have been no matches.

Whatever AR was used, it wasn't used by anyone we've suspected.

Red keeps saying the gun looks customized, but I still can't tell. If it was a knife wound, I'd most likely be able to tell you the type, shank, and length. Guns simply aren't my forte.

Overall, I'm certain we've hit a dead end.

This bomb wire and casing I found outside, however...

The possibility of a new lead feels so promising, there's a thrumming of excitement in my bones.

After taking a long sip of red wine, I reposition the wire under the microscope that's set up nicely in the library and prepare for my second look.

Thankfully, our library is completely intact and untouched by the bombing, so not all our resources were wiped out.

Looking through the microscope, I spot what looks like a maker's mark on the edge of the plastic. There's a distinct cursive shaped 'R,' and I wonder if it's a Rapunzel bomb casing and fuse—a popular type of old-fashioned bomb. The extra-long fuse enables any assailant to plant the bomb and vanish before it goes off.

It makes it easier to distance yourself from the crime scene.

Which to me, if you're planting a bomb in the forest, I'd think you'd want time to get away and hide.

I'm chewing my lower lip, ignoring the general weakness coursing through my body. I've refused to complain to Rider and Red, but the transfusion has left me a bit weaker than I expected.

I stretch out my shoulders, hoping it will help with the fatigue of being hunched over a microscope as I attempt to jog my memory.

There're a few different manufacturers who make Rapunzel bombs—but who are they? And also, who buys them?

I'm so lost in thought, I fail to hear the shuffling of shoes behind me.

“So you saved me.”

I whip around in my chair at the voice of my intruder—Little.

He looks as weak as I do, but he's showered, his hair pulled up, and he's donning all black.

I blink in shock, knowing it's too early in recovery for him to be moving around. A light scowl tugs at my brow. "You should be asleep, or resting—"

"Both of those things are for dead people," he says with surprisingly zero hostility, and he takes the seat adjacent to me.

"You might end up dead if you don't rest," I quip, rather liking this new, less belligerent side of him.

The smallest smirk tugs at the corner of his mouth. "If I don't rest, you can just give me another one of them transfusions."

"Sorry, but that was a one-time thing. I happen to be low on blood, thanks to you guys. You all need to stop liking mine so much and start enjoying either your own or someone else's."

He full out laughs, in a deep baritone voice that causes a smile to crack across my own lips before the noise dies out.

I think he's surprised by my expression. Slowly, his eyes change, becoming softer and filled to the brim with questions.

Little eventually leans forward a margin, resting his elbows to his knees, erasing some of the space between us.

"Why?" he finally asks after a quick study of the perimeter of my face. "After all the shit-talking I did, why would you save me?"

"Because you're important to Rider—"

"*Pfft. Puta Madre.*" He harshly jerks up, resting his shoulders into the seat back so hard it squeaks. "That I don't believe. Rider hates me. He—"

"He was very concerned after he found you," I interject. "You should have seen him that night." My focus shifts to the ground. "He fought for your life in a way only a true leader was capable of fighting. He was going to do anything to make sure you survived."

“But you still helped.” He slowly wags his finger at me. “You can say whatever you want about Rider. If you say he was determined, then sure, I’m certain he was. But the idea of the transfusion came from you.” He arches a naturally straight brow that looks skeptical. “So why? You could have left me to die.”

“I care deeply about Rider.” My heart feels full from the small but honest confession. “And because I care about him, the things that are important to him become important to me.”

“Go on,” he pushes after I stall.

“Saving you was important to him. Finding Grandmother is one of the only things he has driving him right now. If I stand by when I could be helping and watch him fail, then did I ever really care about him at all?”

He blinks in shock, sounding breathless. After a second, he shakes his head. “I wouldn’t have done it for you.” He almost looks remorseful saying it. Almost.

“I know.”

“So you know and do it anyway... tell me how smart that is?”

Part of me wants to laugh at how blunt he is. Little might be prone to flying off the handle, but at least you’ll never be in the dark about how he’s feeling. I like that.

My head tilts, and I quirk a brow. “First, I never said I’m smart all the time. Second, I didn’t do it for you, or to expect a favor out of it from you. I did it because Rider needs you, and I want to help him succeed in every way I can.”

He jostles his head like he can’t believe what he just heard, but I don’t miss the light in his eyes. It’s akin to a glow, and Little looks pleased.

Finally, he looks me dead in the eyes and half grins. “You know, when you got here, I wanted to cut your stomach open and stuff you with rocks.”

“Charming visual.” I nod, amused. I guess if I had to go, that would definitely be one way. “And now?”

“Now...” Slowly, he raises his hand, extending it to me, and I gulp. “Maybe I need to worry about other people who want to eat us and leave us for dead. I think you’ve proven you can be trusted. Shake?” He looks so endearing right now, it shaves ten years off his appearance.

After a second, I extend my hand, clasp it firmly in his, and say, “Shake.”

We both laugh. Little, who seems less pale than when he arrived, flashes his eyebrows up and down, winks, and then says, “Now let’s go find whose taken Grandmother, and put rocks in their stomach instead.”

“That’s a plan,” I say through a growing grin. “I hope you’re a good teacher, because I’ve never put rocks in someone’s stomach before.”

He pats the top of my hand. “There’s always a first, *amiga*, even for experienced pups like yourself.”

CHAPTER 25

Rider



“Understand, guys,” I say, pressing my finger on the tablet until I think the glass will crack. “This isn’t merely a mission involving Bell anymore. This is no longer a situation where we stand by and hope for the best. This is now personal, where all our necks are on the line. We go to Strike Lair and hit it with everything we got.”

“Understood,” Red and Little respond in unison.

As much as I like their eagerness, a flicker of annoyance hits my chest. I glance over my shoulder once more toward the hallway, wondering where in the hell Hood is.

He told me to start this meeting and that he wouldn’t miss any of it.

So much for that.

I laid out our plan twenty minutes ago.

If he makes me waste my breath and give him a breakdown of everyone’s position to overtake Strike Lair, he won’t hear the end of it.

The longer we wait, the more we risk getting attacked again. We need to act quickly.

I examine the plans once more, nodding at how foolproof they seem. “Seem” being the key word, since any great plan can fall through.

But this is our best shot.

Bell, Red, and I will do all the grunt work. The scaling fences, killing anyone who could sound alarms or stand in our way.

Little and Hood will be well concealed yet armed and override any computer systems with Bell's help. We'll have to work tightly and as one, but at the end of it all, I'm pretty sure Bell, Red, and I can plant bombs and wipe out Grimm's most important facility.

Eye for an eye, so to speak—or maybe an eye for a bag of fingers. However you want to phrase it.

Glancing back over to the makeshift table of crates, I can't help but notice that Red is also looking at the door. His expression looks how I feel, a *where is Hood?* type of look.

He raises his eyebrows at me, and I shrug, more aggravation rushing in my blood.

I try to ignore the sensation, smile at Bell, who is sitting comfortably on an old stool by the half blown up fireplace, and carry on.

“Anyway,” I say, trying not to sound annoyed. “We'll need to make sure all the passcodes to the Lair are memorized. Bell will be able to help you out.” I direct my attention to Little. “But in case she gets into a spot of trouble, it's important for all of us to know them, to the point where we can say them backwards.”

Little nods once, and I keep my attention focused on him.

“Bell will draw through blueprints of each door, and what their passcodes are. That way, as we're being tracked, you'll be able to tell which door we're at.”

“Not a problem, Rider. I'll work closely with Bell on it.” Little beams at me, and then Bell, and thank fuck for that. He had a change of heart about her when we needed it the most.

I point to the tablet, noting another issue. “Another thing —”

“Stop!” Hood comes barreling into the dining room, his covering off, a wave of dark hair resting on his forehead. “Stop all of this.”

My nostrils flare. “You haven’t even been here, Hood. How can you tell us to stop, when you don’t even know what’s going on?”

“We got all this wrong,” Hood states.

Red chuckles. “And please enlighten us on how we’re screwing up, all knowing Hood.”

“We’re assuming Grandmother’s dead, Hood says, ignoring Red’s jab. “But I don’t think she is.”

“Okay,” I say, waving my hand as an order for Hood to stop. “I can’t think of anyone who sends the fingers of living people. I think we can rule out—”

“That these aren’t her fingers,” Hood interrupts, simultaneously throwing the bag of fingers onto the crates.

The four of us look at each other in confusion, and then turn to Hood.

“What do you mean?” Red finally asks.

“Something about that tattoo didn’t sit right with me.” Hood points to the bag. “So I ran the prints.”

“And?” I ask, my breath holding in suspense.

“I don’t know whose fingers those are, but they aren’t Grandmother’s,” Hood states. “The prints don’t match.”

CHAPTER 26

Rider



I'm not sure how much time has passed, or for how long we've been staring at these fingers, but I do know this room is locked down with shocked silence.

None of us have spoken a word for several moments now. All we've been doing is staring at the fingers on the crate in a collective blend of disgust and shock.

I curse under my breath, frustration brewing beneath my skin at how twisted this story of finding Grandmother is becoming. Something isn't right.

Red rubs the back of his neck, looking more baffled and amused than annoyed. "So if these aren't Grandmother's, whose are they? And who took the time to tattoo her crow's beak to throw us off track?" He scans around the room, one by one, taking the time to look everyone in the eye. "Clearly, someone wanted us to think it was her."

Small murmurs of uncertainty break out among the five of us.

Little turns to Bell, jerking his head at the fingers. "Grimm known for doing things like that?"

"Not at all," Bell answers, standing to her feet, fully joining our circle. "In all the years I've worked for him, he's never ordered me to send out misleading messages. This isn't his work at all."

All four of us guys frown, mirroring each other's confused appearance.

Staring at the fingers, which are now in the early stages of bloating, I can't fight against the twist of defeat sitting heavily in my stomach. My chest deflates as I finally shake my head in resignation.

"I don't fucking get it," I grumble.

"This is way beyond us." Hood straightens his posture, a somberness straining his features.

"No shit," Red huffs.

Hood doesn't respond to Red, but turns to face me fully instead. "I've been trying not to say this since Grandmother went missing, but I have to now. We're not going to be able to make any headway on this. We need to go to The Hollows."

"*Está de locos!*" Little blurts out, stumbling backward.

"Little's right. That is crazy." Red yanks at the hem of his suit jacket. "Do you know how hard it is to gain access into The Hollows?"

Red's telling the truth. The Hollows might be a great place for information—information that you can't find anywhere else—but unless you're invited, are close to someone living there, or were born there, just showing up at the entrance of The Hollows is like begging to be killed via having your skin filleted.

"I'm telling you. We *have* to go." Hood's wide chest thrusts out with a determination I haven't seen in years. "I heard from our Toymaker that Headless knows what happened. He was too scared to talk to me about it, but Headless is our best shot. I know it sounds like a gamble—"

"A gamble!" Red's jaw goes slack. "That's an understatement. Headless is crazy. Crazier than me." His eyes fly skyward. "How a man, who doesn't show his face, is obsessed with Jack-o'-lanterns, and lives underground, got so many people to fear him is beyond me."

"Either way, we have to go," Hood states, totally unfazed. "We *will* find out what happened to Grandmother if we see

Headless.”

My brows knit in observation. *Hood knows something.*

Hood is a planner. Methodical, but he’s also reasonable. If he wasn’t a million percent certain about this idea, he’d be abandoning it at the first pushback. None of that is happening.

If anything, Hood is pushing this idea harder than a few seconds ago.

“Stop!” I exclaim, raising my hand to silence Red, who is on a verbal roll.

Red immediately falls mute, even though I can tell the order grates against his instincts.

I straighten, standing to my full height, giving Hood my sole attention. “You obviously know something we don’t, Hood. So I’m going to trust you. You get one shot. We go to Headless and try to find out what he knows.”

Red lightly scoffs. *“All we’ll have is one shot.”*

“Mr. Fucking Ray of Sunshine over there,” Hood says to Red. The corner of Hood’s lip flips up as he slides his gaze over to me. “You’re giving my plan the go ahead.”

“Yes, because even though it’s a dangerous plan, it’s the only one I can see that has the possibility of a resolution.”

“We could still attack the Strike Lair,” Bell chimes in.

My mouth can’t help but form a soft smile as I look at her. “That’s revenge, pet, not resolution. If we have a chance of getting to the bottom of what’s happening, I’ll take that risk any day.”

She nods curtly, fully taking my meaning, and nestles comfortably into her seat again.

My point must click with Red and Little as they both hum in agreement. Seems like I’ve gotten everyone on board so far.

“So...” I glance around the room. “We’re going to see Headless, but how do we get to him? Anyone know of a way

to get in without being flayed to death on sight?”

Little’s lips draw in, forming a harsh line, and I can tell he’s biting his tongue. He’s thinking of something, but doesn’t want to say it.

“If we knew someone living in The Hollows...” Red starts strongly, but his voice fades quickly.

“I know someone,” Bell says, leaning forward. “A former correspondent of mine.”

A sliver of hope lightens up the air.

Only to be snuffed out by Hood, who shakes his head, raking his fingers through his thick hair. “It’s not enough to know someone anymore. It’s not talked about often, but The Hollows were bombed a while back by some people who slipped in, saying they’d been invited.”

“You seem to know a lot about The Hollows,” Red says, raising a brow in suspicion and the look matches how I’m beginning to feel.

Hood only briefly tilts his head toward Red, obviously refusing to bite the loaded statement as he acts like nothing was said. “I heard Headless was almost killed. Since then, everyone has been given an individual passcode. You need it to get in and see someone. Give the first and last name of a resident in The Hollows, *and* the passcode, and you’re in without one single piece of skin being shaved from your body.”

Bell groans, the sound filled with disappointment. “Well, fuck... that’s that. I haven’t been in contact with her for years. I certainly don’t know a passcode for her. Sorry, I can’t be of help.”

Fuck is right. I draw in a blast of cold air through my clenched teeth. This sounds harder than breaking through all of Grimm’s bio-locked lairs.

“What about you, Hood?” Red pockets his hands into his fine suit and rocks back onto his heels. His tone is loaded...

He's not going to let Hood off the hook easily. "You seem to know plenty of things. I bet you have a passcode."

"I don't," Hood replies flatly. His jaw grinds together, and it makes me think of a bear trap rusting shut. He's not going to say a word.

"Well, here we are then. All shit out of luck." Aggravation grinds on my nerves at how pointless all of this was. We just wasted time. We'd be better off hitting Strike Lair now. "Moving on—"

"The Witch!" Little interrupts, his tone cracking. He sounds like he's letting out an age-old secret. I didn't think it'd ever be possible for Little to look sheepish, but he does. He drops his head, daring to look up at us through thick lashes. "I didn't want to say this, but The Witch knows someone—a relative. If we can go see her, I'm sure we can get the passcode and the name."

Red lets out a low whistle. "That Witch is bat-shit crazy. The only person who could ever have a halfway decent conversation with her was Grandmother."

"And her daughter," Little states. "If I talk to Greta, I can get the passcode."

I frown, my posture going rigid. "I can see now why you didn't want to mention it."

"Yeah, but I still did." Little puffs out his chest. "I'm not going to let our only plan sink because of who we have to talk to."

"Fair enough." I nod once in concurrence. "So all you have to do is talk to her?"

He grimaces. "It might not be *that* simple."

"Why do you say that?" Hood asks.

Unease takes over Little's features as he shuffles his weight from foot to foot. "The Witch has been offended lately." He shoots me a pinpointed look. "I'm the only one

who's been over there since Grandmother's gone missing. It seems The Witch feels, how do you say... forgotten."

"Oomph." Red winces. "That's a lady you don't want to piss off."

Little raises his brows, basically saying, "*you ain't kidding.*"

"Last time I left," he continues, "she said she'd cook me if I came alone. She's not going to let me over there again unless I bring some company."

"Looks like our plan has been set for us, then." I look around at the team, knowing exactly what we need to do. "Bake some cookies and pack up your picnic baskets, boys and girls. We're going to see The Witch."

CHAPTER 27

The Wolf



“You know if you die on me, I’m going to haunt you, and cut up your ghost into little, tiny pieces.” Red steps into the shower, which I’m occupying, and grabs my shoulders from behind. “That Witch is nuts, so you better stay alive.”

I spin around right into his hold, my body slick from water and soap. “I won’t be dying on you, so save your knife for the next session we have together.” A giggle slips out of me as I observe him. “Your suit is getting ruined.”

I’m expecting a smile from my remark, but there is none—only a smolder lives in his gaze as he pulls me flush to him and fixates on my mouth. “You’re the only woman worth ruining a suit over. Fuck, I’m going to miss you.”

“I’m going to miss you too, Red, even if it’s just for one night.” I wink, teasing him a bit.

Rider decided last night, after further discussion, that Little, himself, and I are going to see The Witch.

I’m an asset because I’m a woman—I’ve heard The Witch isn’t too crazy about men.

Red is staying behind because he hates The Witch. Hood is staying because Hanson, The Witch’s son, and him don’t get along.

“*The less conflict, the better,*” Rider had said. So only three of us are going.

Perhaps I'm underestimating what our visit will be like, but I'm not expecting much trouble. I am going to miss Hood and Red while I'm gone, though. In such a short amount of time, I've come to know them and this cabin as a place of belonging—something I never thought I'd have.

And being in Red's arms only cements that sensation.

My heart races to life, thumping rapidly behind my ears as he cups my face in his hands, staring deep into my eyes. When his lips crash onto mine, I collapse against him.

He keeps his lips on mine and shoves me back into the wall. The cold tile sticks to my bare skin, and I shiver at the delectable temperature contrast to his warm body.

Viciously, he sucks my bottom lip, his teeth digging into my flesh, and I rake my fingers down the back of his drenched suit, furious at him for being clothed.

I want him naked. I want him fucking me, slicing his knife across my hip, threatening to do it to my clit while he's at it.

My desperate whimper reverberates against the shower walls and it's like he's reading my mind.

"Shhh... I know," he hums. "I know what you want, and I want it too, but wait for me."

"Wait?" I huff out, confused, water droplets clinging to my furrowed brow. "Wait for what?"

His gaze slides to the floor. I can't tell if he's feeling uncertain; all I know is that he's far too in control to cave to my questions.

"Stay alive," he finally whispers. "And wait for me. Otherwise, you'll never find out, and that will haunt you more than me dismembering your ghost."

"Red?"

"Promise," he snaps, his grip tightening around my throat. "Promise to keep yourself alive? I don't give a fuck about

what happens to Grandmother. But you—you better stay alive. Promise?”

“I—I give you my word.”

“Good girl,” he coos before brushing my lips with a ghost of a kiss, and then he’s gone.

He’s gone, and I have no answers.

The only thing I know is that I’m going to stay alive and find out what the hell he meant by that.

CHAPTER 28

The Wolf



“**W**hat do you think?” I step out in the custom leather bodysuit Little gifted me, and spin around for Rider. “Think it fits?”

He tosses his head back and laughs. A twinkle in his eye as he licks his lips. “That suit fits too damn well. If The Witch doesn’t eat you, I sure will.”

“Shameless.” I wrinkle my nose at him, loving how he makes my heart flutter. An even bigger smile breaks across my face as I observe the bodysuit myself.

It’s nice to have something that actually fits me after being in men’s clothes for so many days. The black outfit, with its red leather straps and holders on the thighs, back, and arms, is perfect. I can easily stuff knives, guns, arrows... anything needed to make me more efficient for killing.

I tighten the straps under my breasts and bite my lip, giddy. “I guess Little likes me now.”

“Juuust a tiny bit,” Rider says through a chuckle. The playfulness fades, washing into a softness as he studies me. “They’ve all come to respect and accept you, Bell. You’ve made your place here, and you fit in perfectly.”

My heart swells with his words. It wasn’t just me thinking I belong with The Huntsmen. I do—I always have. That must have been why I got that tattoo all those years ago.

It wasn’t because I was looking for Rider—even though I’m thrilled and complete now that I’ve found him. I got this

tattoo because my heart knew my future way before I ever did.

The good kind of tear swells in my eye, as I laugh, smile, and hold my hand out to him. “We’re going to find Grandmother, Rider.”

“We are,” he says confidently.

Warmth spreads through my body as he gently cups my face, tilting it up to press his closed lips against mine.

“We never strayed from our paths, Bell,” he whispers. “We were just following the roads that led us right back to one another. And now that we’ve found each other, we’re going to do it all together, Bell. You and I.”

“Together,” I murmur, my heart jumping after the heat of his touch as he coasts his fingers down my neck. My chest is full and bright, knowing nothing will ever drive us apart again, and I melt against him. “Always together.”

“Always.” He tenderly kisses me once, then pulls away, smiles as he looks deep into my eyes, and says, “Let’s go get Little. We’ve got business to do.”

We leave for the kitchen, hand in hand, unsure of what awaits us at The Witch’s house, but knowing that we can do anything...

As long as we’re together.

The End.

CHAPTER 29

Flood

“**T**hat house.” I lean my shoulder against the frame and shake my head.

A moon beam hits the smokestack of the house of The Witch. You can't see much of it through the dense mixture of evergreen and oak trees. The angle of light makes the bricks on the house look like chocolate. If it were daytime, the siding would look like gingerbread. I think it's the unusual grainy brown color it's painted with. Not certain, though. What I do know is that while Red comes up beside me and watches Little, Wolf, and Rider fade toward the house, I might be drooling. The corner of my mouth feels wetter than usual.

My lips twitch, and I almost laugh. “You ever want to walk up to that house and take a big bite out of it?”

“And crack a tooth? No thanks.” Red holds up an objecting hand.

“Sure looks like candy to me.”

“Ha.” Red tosses his head back. “You know that crazy woman painted it like that on purpose. She's so...”

“Weird?”

“Scary.” An odd smirk works on his mouth. “She has two grown children, but I never see them. Half the time, I wonder if she lured them into that house as little toddlers and ate them.”

I'd like to laugh, but I can't. Not when my trio disappears from sight. I can't see Rider, and strangely enough, it makes me uneasy. If something happens to him while they're visiting The Witch, we're in big trouble. That guy is the only one who can lead with his heart and logic besides Grandmother.

A sudden hard gulp almost gets stuck in my throat. I'm going to choke on fear. An emotion I hate. One I feel way too often, but don't talk about. It's a weakness I fight not to show. But I know my voice is wavering when I speak while staring at the spot where I last saw Rider.

"Let's hope that the insane Witch doesn't decide to cook up Rider and Bell," Red says, his tone tightening. "We need them."

"Yeah." My posture tightens with uncertainty. "We sure do."

I wish Red knew how true his statement is. A thick gulp washes down my throat, and I try to hide the terror climbing up my spine. Looking up to the sky, I pray to anything or anyone that might hear me.

Please don't let anything happen to them. And when we see Headless, please let him forget how I betrayed him.

About Garnet

Garnet Christie loves serving up Alpha male's who are searching for their happily ever after, and paring them up with women who are equally, if not more, reluctant.

When not writing, Garnet is found reading, dancing, and spending too much money on K-pop merch. All the above is achieved by drinking too much tea, avoiding sleep, and eating chocolate. Garnet also adores Italian food and will go to great lengths to hunt down a fantastic plate of Chicken Marsala that comes with a cannoli.

Also by Garnet Christie

Fragments of You

Never Hide Again

Going Dutch

Copperslane

Last

Stay

Again

Devil's Blood

WILLOW MCQUERRY

Devil's Blood



Willow McQuerry

Blurb

I was a ghost. Not literally, but figuratively. No one cared about me or listened to me.

No one until *him*.

I didn't realize I had grabbed the attention of someone whom I shouldn't have been involved with.

It was dangerous. Deadly, even. But it made the lust between us burn brighter.

He wanted me, so he took me as his. Now he won't let me leave his side until I've fallen in love with him.

How could I love someone whom I was raised to fear? How could I face him, knowing he was the same kind who attacked me in a dirty alleyway?

Despite all that, he was the least of my worries because a bigger and worse monster wanted me. This Devil was powerful and craved something I couldn't give him.

Now I had to depend on the man who kidnapped me to keep me safe. But as time passed and disasters happened, I learned he wasn't what I thought he was. Everything I believed was a lie and a delusion.

Would our love conquer my fear of Devils? Could we stay together without dooming me to a slow and painful death?

I guess you would have to find out for yourself.

Trigger Warnings

Stalking

Kidnapping

Somnophilia

Non Con

Dub Con

Cursing

Graphic Sex

Demons & Devils

Gore

Abusive Parents & Neglect

Horror

Mental Illness (Schizophrenia, Depression, Anxiety, Panic attacks, Paranoia, Delusions)

Stockholm Syndrome

Knife play

Dom/Sub (Pleasure Dom)

Forced Orgasms

Graphic assault

Blood & Blood Play

Death

Spanking

Coercion

Needless

Captivity

Cliffhanger

Cannibalism

Mentions of Breeding & Forced Pregnancy

Use of Chloroform

Devil's Blood

No one knew when the Devils came to our world. We only knew that they were dangerous creatures.

They prefer to be alone, not be in groups, but there was the rare occasion to see a small gathering of Devils consisting of three or four. These beings lived off human flesh and blood.

There was no evidence or conclusion on how Devils came to be. Whether they reproduced or came from another realm. But one thing we knew was that their blood was dangerous and could change you into one of them. Devil's blood was life-threatening to mortals. One drop of it, and you were infected. It took weeks to a few months before the change was final. Most humans never made it out alive during the shift into a Devil. 99.9% of them perished when exposed to Devil's blood.

One drop of Devil's blood in your system, and it was guaranteed a death wish.

CHAPTER 1

Sadie



*S*hoot, I'm running late.

The curfew had gone into effect ten minutes ago, and I still had another fifteen minutes before I got home. The sun had set as soon as the curfew was enforced, and I was frantic to get to my apartment before something terrible happened. Knowing my luck, I would get mugged, or worse: a Devil would eat me.

This was what I got for deciding to walk back to my place and not take the last bus after going grocery shopping. Its schedule was over for the night, and it was too late for me to wait at the bus stop.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck,” I whispered and squeezed my books closer to my chest with one hand and gripped the bags of groceries in the other.

I turned my head, searching the dimly lit street for anyone following me. Despite living on the opposite side of the college square in the more upscale area, I still had to go through some dicey parts of the town. Like right now, I was in the part of town to never be caught in after dark. Questionable people infested this place, and there had been some sightings of Devils in the last few days. Police found a man dead with chunks of his neck missing a few streets over. Even though they didn't say it was, the evidence screamed that it was a Devil attack.

I surveyed the area again with wary eyes, staying alert as I walked to my apartment building.

Just a couple more blocks to go, then I was safe.

A can rolled somewhere near me, making my heart lurch into my throat. My breath hitched, catching in my chest as I turned my head toward where the noise came from. I glanced around the area, not spotting anyone. Shadows crept along the faded white picket fence to my right. The house behind it looked abandoned because of the boards nailed over the windows and the front door cracked open.

My heart picked up its pace, pumping adrenaline through my veins faster and making my hands shake.

“They’re coming for you,” a voice whispered.

I stood frozen in my spot, unable to move because I feared being followed. The voices in my head didn’t make it any easier and doubled my panic.

“You deserve it all,” another voice added, not making any sense.

A second can rolled somewhere but didn’t land near me. The metallic sound on the ground broke me from my frozen spell and had me pick up into a light jog. I hugged my books tighter to my chest and curled my fingers harder into the handles of the plastic bags that dug into my fingers.

I didn’t know much about self-defense tactics, but I had heavy books that could easily become a weapon. I’d aim for their head and beat them until they backed off. It couldn’t be that hard.

“I spy with my little eye,” a deep voice sang from somewhere in the darkness.

A whimper escaped me. I whipped my head in the direction where I heard the man singing, not spotting anyone. I searched for him in the barely lit street, but he must’ve been hiding. The little hairs on my neck stood, and goosebumps raised on my arms.

“*Get the hell out of here!*” the tiny voice in the back of my mind screamed.

I swallowed hard and lightly jogged through the street, rushing to flee the area and get home. Before I knew it, I was one block away from my apartment, though it felt like miles because of how scared I was. The last thing I wanted was to fall victim to an attack by a Devil. They were similar to animals and toyed with their prey. *Just like what he’s doing right now.*

My heart thumped painfully beneath my chest, and my breathing quickened. Relief flooded me as I spotted my building as if it was the Holy Grail.

A body crashed into me and I screamed while being pushed to the ground. My skull cracked against the cement and pain lanced through my head and down my spine. Snarls came from the person who body-slammed me. I painfully craned my neck, my eyes widening as I recognized the feral and demonic signs of a Devil. His eyes were all black with a tiny red pupil that stared back at me with hunger. He had shaggy blond hair with bits of twigs and leaves in it. His mouth curled into a snarl, sharp canines bared for me to see. Saliva dripped from his teeth, and he growled again as he twisted me around onto my back.

The Devil snapped his deadly teeth at me, warning me with his words. “Don’t look at me like that. I promise it won’t hurt.” At my horrified look, he snickered. “Who am I kidding? It’s going to hurt a lot.”

My scream tore through my throat, the shrieks echoing in the night as I slapped at the Devil, who only cackled at my useless fighting. He grabbed my hand and squeezed until my bones were about to snap. Pinning my hands above my head, he breathed heavily as he hovered over me and staring like I was the best gourmet meal he’d ever seen.

“Help!” I screamed. Tears stung the corners of my eyes as they slipped free.

This wasn't how I thought I would die. I wanted to live a long life. I only started college this year and had planned to become a singer. Maybe fall in love and have a kid or two. Definitely not die at the hands of a hungry Devil.

He howled, mocking me before sinking his teeth into my flesh where my neck and shoulder met. I screamed, twisting in his grasp, trying to break free so I could shove him away. But his strength surpassed mine and I was helpless. Pain shot through my neck to the rest of my body. I could feel every tooth that broke the skin and my blood flowing from the wounds into his suckling mouth.

"Help!" I shrieked. Tears swam in my eyes, and I could *hear* the Devil sucking my blood. I screamed louder as he tore off another piece of my flesh and chewed before he sucked my blood right from the wound. "Someone! *Please!*"

Black dots popped into my vision, and my screams diminished until I was left quietly crying while the Devil feasted on me. The numbness started spreading through my neck to the rest of my body, and I thanked whatever god could hear me for giving me this moment of peace before I died.

The Devil moaned as he gorged on me.

"Hey," a man said in a monotone voice.

"Huh?" The Devil looked to the side of us, and the person kicked him off me with a force that sent him flying.

I couldn't move much; I could only lie on my back and slowly blink. Blood flowed from my wound and onto the ground beneath me. I could feel the warmth of it trailing under my neck and shoulders, into my hair.

I wanted to see who saved me from enduring a few more seconds of pain before I died. I knew I would die, but I longed to make my last handful of seconds comforting, knowing I got to catch a glimpse of the person who kicked the Devil off me. Painfully turning my head, I watched a man with a hoodie punch the Devil. I heard the sound of flesh on flesh, of his fist meeting the Devil's face from where I was. They had to be

twenty feet away, but I could be wrong because my vision was blurry. I couldn't make out the man, but I could tell he was tall and lean with muscles.

The feral Devil snarled and threw punches just as strong, back at my savior. The Devil tackled him to the ground, and the two grappled at each other, fighting for the upper hand. Even though they rolled on the street as they fought, this unknown man's face was still hidden behind his hoodie.

My vision became blurrier, and the corners began to blacken. Everything started closing in, but I didn't want to lose consciousness until I saw this man's face.

He rolled to the top and punched down on the Devil. Over and over, he hit him until I heard a crack, and the Devil stopped moving. The man panted as he bent over the dead body. His shoulders moved up and down quickly as he caught his breath. At my soft whimper, he turned his head. His face stayed hidden beneath his hoodie, but I noticed the reflection of crimson eyes.

My heart skipped a beat, and my breathing became more shallow.

The unknown man pushed up from the Devil's carcass and stalked toward me. I blinked and turned my head as he stood over me. His face was no longer hidden in the shadows, but my vision had blurred, and I couldn't distinguish any facial features. A tear slipped from the corner of my eye and trailed down my temple. I had wanted to see him so badly but didn't get to in the end.

My tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth; words caught in my throat. I wanted to ask what his name was, but talking seemed impossible.

The man crouched and pinched my chin in his fingers, turning my head to expose my mangled neck. I winced at the shot of pain from the movement, then relaxed as the numbness came back. He released my chin, and I turned back to look at him again. I watched as he pulled something out of his pants

pocket. Whatever he held was long and shined in the light from the street lamp above us.

His red eyes met mine, holding my gaze. He lowered whatever he was holding to my neck; it pricked into my damaged skin, making me wince.

“Sleep,” he ordered.

Darkness bled into my vision, and everything closed in. I tried to stay awake, to continue looking at the man who saved me. But as the seconds passed, it became harder to keep my eyes open.

Death was coming, and I felt a moment of panic. I wanted his name, dammit!

“Tha—” I breathed. The words died on my tongue as I went limp, and darkness surrounded me.

CHAPTER 2

Kai



I watched as the girl fell asleep from the shot I gave her. It was a serum that helped with healing so the person wouldn't die. Death still clung to her, but the medicine would buy me some time to get her to the healer. The Devil that attacked her fucked up her neck into a mangled mess. I preferred her to be unconscious while I brought her to the doctor of my coven. While I wanted her to sleep and not be in pain anymore, I was also reluctant for her to be awake. I didn't want her to memorize the location and for her to return with Devil Hunters when she got better.

Her head slumped to the side as she fell deeper asleep. Her black eyelashes dusted the tops of her cheeks, looking like dark crescent moons.

The girl was beautiful with her innocent hazel eyes that had pleaded for me to save her, and fuckable pouty lips that looked soft to the touch. Her brown hair had chunks of pink in the strands she had dyed recently. She had to have done that because Halloween was right around the corner.

Reaching down, I scooped her up into my arms. Even though she was bigger and softer, she barely weighed anything to me. I carried her princess style with her head nestled in the crook of my arm. Her breathing became shallow, and I heard her heart struggling to beat. The girl didn't have long before she died.

At first, I strode through the street, then as I neared my coven's safe house I broke into a sprint. The woman I carried

in my arms swayed with my every step, and her breaths shuddered out of her.

Fuck. She needed to hold on.

The safe house was a couple of blocks away, and it usually would take me ten minutes to get there, but I didn't have that time.

Using my supernatural strength and speed, I cut the time in half and then kicked the front door open. Ricky jumped and turned his head toward me, his cigarette hanging between his lips.

"Who's that?" he asked as he caught the cigarette between two fingers. Blowing out smoke, he scraped his teeth on his bottom lip and eyed the unconscious girl in my arms. The shithead better not have any ideas about her. She was *mine*.

I held back the growl in my chest from the sudden territorial feelings about the woman. She was nothing to me, but something about her made me want to rip off my friend's head for looking at her.

"Where's Patch?" I asked while I crossed the threshold and kicked the door shut behind me.

Ricky raised his eyes to mine. "In the back." He jerked his chin to the girl in my arms. "She dying?"

"She will if I can't get to Patch," I grunted and walked toward the hall that led to Patch's laboratory.

"When you're done, I've got some news for you," Ricky called behind me.

I strode through the massive home, my heavy footsteps echoing, and finally came to the back. Patch's door was already cracked open, so I didn't have to kick it down.

"I need your assistance," I said as I moved to the middle of the large room and laid the girl on the gurney.

Patch glanced at me over his shoulder, where he sat at a table with multiple computer screens lined on it. There was

something different playing on each one. I didn't know what he was looking at and couldn't care to ask.

The healer fully turned around, showing me his weary face and one Devil's eye that was black with red in the middle. His other eye was a normal human color brown; he was self-conscious of the deformity and didn't like it when people looked him in the eye. He redirected his focus to the dying girl on the gurney.

"Who's that?" he asked as he got up from his chair and crossed the room to her side. He wore his white lab coat today, throwing me off. Patch never wore it because he complained about how restricting it was for his movements.

I pushed back my hoodie and ran my hand through my messy, white hair. "Don't know. Don't care. But she needs help."

Patch furrowed his eyebrows and turned to me with narrowed eyes. "If you don't care, then why save her?"

Fuck, he had me there.

Sighing, I pulled out my cigarette pack and put one between my teeth.

"Just save the damn girl," I grunted.

He huffed and moved back from the gurney. He gathered a few things I didn't know the names of and didn't bother to ask, but I watched him with interest and lit my cigarette. I backed away to let the man work while I smoked. Patch started an IV and grabbed a bag of blood. I knew she needed some blood replaced, but I didn't think she needed that much.

"It's not Devil's blood, is it?" I asked, making sure. The last thing I needed was for this woman to go through the change and most likely not make it. I also didn't need Devil Hunters on my ass since I had just got rid of the last ones that had been sniffing around our place.

Patch glanced at me and deadpanned, "You really think I'll give a human our blood?" He scoffed and shook his head,

mumbling something under his breath as he cleaned the girl's neck. "Get out of here while I work," he grumbled, waving his hand to dismiss me.

Pushing away from the wall I was leaning against, I approached the gurney and searched the girl's pockets, finding her wallet. Color me curious, but I wanted to know her name. Walking out of the room, I waved my hand, still holding her wallet.

"See ya," I called and left.

"SADIE MADISON," I murmured as I read the girl's driver's license. I inhaled my cigarette and blew out the smoke as I stared at her I.D. Her birthday was October 31, 2003. She was turning twenty this month. If it weren't for me, she never would've seen it. She would have been six feet under the ground and rotting.

I finished my smoke and put out the cherry on the underside of my boot.

I didn't know why I saved her. I didn't hold much love for humans because of how ruthless they get with Devils. There were some feral Devils, just like the one who attacked Sadie, but for the most part, we minded our business and didn't bother humans. Clearly, the human investigators didn't like that and formed Devil Hunters with the intent to kill us all.

I stared at Sadie's picture. Her smile looked forced, but her eyes still held some innocence. The longer I looked though, I noticed her eyes seemed more haunted and not so innocent. She had tan skin like she sat in the sun for hours and got some color. The more I gazed at her image, the more I saw that she didn't have laugh lines in the corners of her eyes or along her cheeks. I would have expected a young woman like her to live her best life and laugh. Clearly, she didn't.

I traced my thumb over the picture, still gazing at her image.

“Ready for the news?”

I jumped at Ricky’s voice and looked up from Sadie’s picture.

“What news?” I asked as I slid the driver’s license into the wallet, then shoved it into my back pocket. I crossed the room and flopped on the end of the couch. Ricky took up the other side and kicked out his feet with a sigh.

“You remember that story of wealthy humans offering their virgin daughters to Devils to stay in power in their cities? How the mortals would get a vial of Devil’s blood to use it for god knows what?”

I grabbed my pack of cigarettes from my pocket and shook one of them out. Bringing it to my lips, I caught the end between my teeth and said, “Yeah. What of it?”

I lit my cigarette with my old Zippo lighter; the metal of it snapped after I flicked my wrist to close it.

Ricky grabbed a slice of pizza and leaned his head back as he shoved the tip of the greasy human food into his mouth. He bit off a good chunk and chewed while he looked at his phone in his free hand. I cringed as he ate, not making any faces to show that he hated the stuff.

“I don’t know how you can eat that shit,” I grumbled, and took a drag of my smoke then exhaled.

Ricky grunted. “S’not so bad.” He glanced at me and swallowed his bite of pizza. “But back to the news. I thought it was every generation that a virgin is sacrificed to Devils, but it’s not. Turns out these humans do it every so often to not raise any alarms. This Halloween is the night of a sacrifice, but I don’t know who is getting the girl.”

I turned my face toward him, my eyebrows shooting up to my hairline. “What?”

Ricky grinned, baring his teeth and his sharp canines.

“Yep,” he said, popping the p.

“Are you going to look into it and find out who is getting the sacrifice?” Something about it didn’t sit right with me. It wasn’t any of my business what other Devils did, but something was up.

Ricky took another bite of his slice. I made a face.

“Sure,” he said around his shitty human food.

I pursed my lips and dragged smoke from my cigarette. “Why would a Devil want a virgin sacrifice, anyway?”

“I don’t fucking know.” Ricky chewed loudly and glanced at me with raised eyebrows. “Maybe to get his dick wet, drink her blood, whatever gets his rocks off.”

There were rumors that a virgin’s blood made a Devil stronger. But I called bullshit on that.

I leaned forward and put out my cigarette in the ashtray. “Who’s the girl this year?”

“Don’t know, but I’ll look into the families who give up their daughters.”

I grunted and stood up from the couch.

It’d only been a few minutes since I got Sadie onto the healer’s gurney, and already I was worried. There was something about the girl that interested me. Maybe it was how she gazed at me like I was her fucking god as I walked to her. Or perhaps it was the innocence I saw in her eyes while I injected her with the healing medicine laced with anesthetic. Either way, I wanted to check on her.

“Let me know when you find out more information,” I called behind me as I walked away.

“Yeah, yeah,” Ricky said and noisily ate his pizza.

It was fucking disgusting that he ate human food when he was a Devil. It took a lot of control to not puke after consuming anything that wasn’t flesh and blood. I could eat human subsistence to blend in, but afterward, I’d force myself

to expel it. I didn't think I'd seen Ricky puke that shit up for hours after eating it. The weird fuck.

CHAPTER 3

Sadie



“Is she going to be okay, doctor?” Mom’s voice reached me through the fog I was under.

What happened? Where was I?

I tried to remember the last thing that happened, but nothing came.

I drew my eyebrows together and groaned as I attempted to move; the sound caught in my throat. Sleep tried to pull me back under, but at the same time awareness crept in. I heard the soft beeps of a monitor and felt cool air kissing my skin, making me wonder if I was naked.

Cracking open my eyes, I glanced around the blurry room, blinking rapidly to clear my vision for a better look at where I was. When that didn’t work, I rubbed my eyes with one hand and winced after the simple movement. My neck hurt the most, and the little gesture made it flare with pain.

“Sadie? Oh, thank god you’re awake,” Mom fretted.

I frowned, barely turning my head, and watched her come to my side. She had a mask of concern on her face as she approached. I blinked and noticed the doctor leaving the hospital room to give us some privacy. As soon as he was gone, Mom’s shoulders slacked, and her mask of worry disappeared, replaced with apathy.

I parted my lips, words on the tip of my tongue, but my mouth was too dry to talk. Mom noticed and rested her

manicured hand on my shoulder while still staring at me like I was some poor animal that needed to be put down.

“You were attacked,” she said in a monotone voice. “What did I tell you about walking outside after dark?”

Why did it matter to her? She never cared. No one ever cared about me and my well-being.

She sighed and backed away to sit on the chair next to my bed. Purse in her lap, her posture was rigid. Because of Dad’s status, she had years of training to be a proper lady.

“What?” I croaked, still confused and trying to understand what the heck had happened.

Mute clips flashed in my mind. Me looking into the darkness, and in the next second, a Devil slamming into me. Being knocked to the ground.

I raised a shaky hand to my temple and winced from the pain shooting through my head from the bare touch.

“A Devil attacked you—”

Mom’s words faded as more memories came to me. A Devil grinned down at me as he pinned me beneath him; his black and red eyes gazed at me with deadly amusement. My silent screams filled my head, muffled in my memory. The next thing I remembered was the Devil biting my neck and feasting on me. The memory fast-forwarded to when the Devil was kicked off me and beaten by a blurry man hiding his face behind his hoodie.

“Sadie.” Mom’s voice dragged me out of my horrifying memories.

I swallowed hard and brought my hand up to my neck, brushing my fingertips over the bandaged part of my throat. *So, it really happened then.*

The doctor lightly knocked on the door, and I watched as he peeked his head in. Mom’s mask came back, and she sniffled from a fake cry.

“I’m so glad you’re alive,” Mom cried tearfully. She laced her fingers together and brought her hands beneath her chin as she stared at me with watery eyes. Her act of worry fooled the doctor because he hesitated as he entered the room, giving my mom a minute before he filled me in on my medical chart. “I talked to your father, and you’re coming home to stay with us for a while. I don’t trust you being out and alone for the next while. We’ve already moved your things from your apartment back to our house.”

Mom’s words faded as I zoned out, digesting what she said. My chest tightened, and adrenaline pumped through my veins like poison. I trembled from it and swallowed hard.

I didn’t want to go back to their home. That place was like a prison; I was the ghost haunting the vacant halls, wanting to be seen and heard.

I opened my mouth to say no, but she turned to the doctor, who cleared his throat and interrupted me.

“You’re awake,” he said as his gaze landed on me. I was obviously awake and had been for the last few minutes, but I guess he needed something positive to say before the negative. “You’re a lucky girl for making it out alive. I did some blood work and found no Devil’s blood in your system. Very lucky indeed.” He looked at my mom. “She can leave at any time.”

My chest tightened further, and my shriveled-up heart cracked a little more. It took months to piece some of it back together after I moved out of my parents’ house. My heart was riddled with figurative stitches and band-aids. I didn’t know how much more I could take before it became nothing but broken pieces.

I blinked and glanced at Mom as she spoke with the doctor, her words not registering as I stared at her.

I had no choice once my mother made up her mind. After living on my own for a year and being ignored by everyone in my neighborhood, I was going back to living with my parents

to be ignored there. The only difference was that my father wasn't able to snoop through my things at my apartment.

“DID YOU PACK MY TOOTHBRUSH?” Dad asked Mom.

I picked at the half-eaten food on my plate. Since they had discharged me from the hospital, I hadn't found my appetite. And I was still trying to wrap my mind around having to live with my parents again.

“Yes, honey. I also packed your deodorant and razors,” Mom sighed while she cut her steak.

“What about my favorite tie?” Dad asked, then bit into his asparagus.

Mom giggled. “Yes. But you won't need it for the vacation.”

I raised my eyes and looked at Dad, who sat beside me, smirking, while he gazed at Mom. I turned to Mom; her blonde hair was in a French bun, exposing her small ears and the dangling earrings Dad had bought her for Christmas one year. She had done her makeup, the light pastel eyeshadow, perfect as usual, and had painted her lips red with lipstick. It was one of her favorite matte lipsticks that, again, Dad got her.

“Can I be excused?” I mumbled.

“You set up the Uber ride, right?” Dad asked over me.

Mom looked up from her plate and sighed again. “Yes, honey. They will be here in an hour.”

Dad grunted in response, and they ate their meal while talking to each other and completely ignoring me. I got to listen while they prepared for their vacation that I wouldn't be a part of.

I slipped out of my chair and grabbed my still-full plate. They didn't notice me leaving the large living room for the

kitchen to clean up my mess. I could still hear Mom and Dad's soft voices as I scraped the food into the trash can. I didn't want to waste it and worried about all the homeless people who could have eaten my untouched meal.

"You're a terrible person."

Mom giggled from the living room, sounding the exact opposite of the voice in my head. I blinked and clenched my jaw.

No, I wasn't terrible.

I turned away from the trash and placed the silverware and plate into the dishwasher.

My footsteps were silent as I walked through their million-dollar house and up the large marble spiral staircase to my bedroom. The whole house was still decorated with modern artwork and vases of flowers. It was meant to create a homey feel, but I'd never felt at home with them, or anyone, for that matter.

Silently shutting my bedroom door, I padded through my room, which screamed more my parents than me. My bed was decorated with light-colored pastels and whites rather than the darker shades I liked. My favorite color was dark green, but my mom had scolded me countless times that if I had one more dark shade in my bedroom, she would throw everything of mine away and replace it with things *she* liked. It didn't matter that I was an adult and had a mind of my own; I had to like what they liked.

Crawling onto my bed, I laid on my back, staring up at the canopy of silk hanging over my mattress. My clock ticked in the silence as I stared at the silky material, slowly losing track of time and my sense of self. I focused on my breathing, then the soft baritone of my dad's voice, who sometimes talked too loud. Somewhere nearby, I heard a car drive down the street of the private neighborhood my parents lived in.

Seconds passed that turned into minutes, then turned to hours as I lay there staring, not making a sound. Darkness

filled my bedroom as the sun set. The only source of light was the night light I liked to keep plugged in. After a while, I sat up and glanced around the shadowed room before switching on the lamp beside my bed.

The gentle radiance of the light created more shadows that, once upon a time had scared me. Right now, I couldn't feel any fear. I couldn't feel *anything*.

Red and black eyes popped into my vision, and my breath caught in my throat. My heart stuttered over a beat, and I curled my fingers into the soft comforter beneath me.

It's just a memory. I kept telling myself that, hoping I could believe it because it felt so real. My mind was awful, and god had cursed me with a mental illness that left me haunted most of the time.

Blinking away the memory, I got off the bed and wandered back downstairs to discover it was empty. My parents had left without a goodbye. I checked the kitchen for a note from them and found nothing. It wasn't new to me. This was something they had done all my life.

I was a ghost to everyone. My words and presence didn't matter to anyone.

Would there ever be a day when someone saw me? Would there ever be a person who listened to me and cared to know what I had to say?

"No. I don't think there ever will be," I whispered to no one in the darkness.

CHAPTER 4

Kai



*H*azel eyes lit with excitement and stared back at me. The woman's lips tipped up into a smile and moved with soundless words that I couldn't hear through the beating of my heart and quick breaths. She looked familiar, and I couldn't pinpoint where I knew her from.

"What?" I asked, my voice loud in my head.

Her mouth moved, still curled in a smile, as she reached for me. She stood in a tunnel of light while I was in the dark.

"I can't hear you." I swallowed and took one step toward her, my hand reaching for her.

The familiar woman cocked her head, her light brown eyebrows drawn together in confusion. Her face changed in the blink of an eye; her expression morphed into fear and shock. Her eyes widened, and her pupils contracted. From the haunted look in her gaze, I finally realized where I knew her from.

Sadie. The girl I saved from the Devil.

A heavy presence loomed behind me, and just like how a nightmare went, I slowly turned around, feeling like it took ages. Fast as lightning, the person who stood in the shadows with me snapped their hand out and covered my face. They used strength and quickness as they slammed my head against the nearest wall.

I jumped awake with a snort, whipped my head up, and glanced around the large den in search of the person who

grabbed me. Ricky turned his face toward me from his spot on the opposite end of the couch, a cigarette hanging from his lips. One of the padded earmuffs of his headphones covered an ear. His regular brown eyes watched me with concern.

“Welcome back. ‘Bout time you got some sleep,” he said before he directed his attention to the TV where he played his video game.

I rubbed the heel of my palm into my eyes to chase away the sleep.

“Why’d you let me fall asleep?” I asked, irritated.

“Ahhh, c’mon,” Ricky groaned, throwing off his headphones to the floor. He stabbed his fingers through his messy blue hair in irritation and screamed at the TV, “Fucking kidding me? I wasn’t anywhere near him!”

I sighed and dropped my hand from my face. No matter how much I rubbed my eyes and blinked, I could still see Sadie.

What the fuck was wrong with me? Why the hell was I dreaming about her? She was nothing to me but another human.

You’re fucking delusional, Kai, if you think she’s just another human who you’ll forget about like the others, a tiny voice in the back of my head said.

Ricky stood from his spot on the sofa and lit another cigarette with his hand cupping at the end so no imaginary wind would blow it out. When he realized he still had the first cigarette, he shrugged and alternated smoking them.

I still sat on the couch, staring up at him with bored eyes.

“You’ve been running on fumes,” he said around his cigarettes, inhaling the smoke. Tendrils of it blew out of his nose and from the corners of his mouth. The expression on his face screamed he was tired of my shit. “At some point, you need to sleep. You can’t run from it.”

Grunting, I got to my feet and swept my hand through my messy, white hair. I crossed the room to leave the safe house and visit my home for a while.

“S’fine,” I grumbled and glanced at Ricky over my shoulder. The tall Devil watched me with narrowed eyes, but I still spotted the concern. “Did you find anything out about the sacrifice?”

Ricky shook his head and caught his cigarettes between his two fingers. “Nope,” he said. “But I’ll find out soon enough. I’ve got someone working on it.” He turned away but stopped and faced me again, snapping his fingers as he remembered something. “By the way, we need to stock up.”

I sighed and nodded. “Got it.”

Turning away from him, I left the safe house. A shower could wait while I hunted.

I never killed anyone innocent. I killed the murderers and rapists. I particularly enjoyed killing rapists because they cried for their lives more than anyone else. It always seemed to give me a sense of satisfaction when I made them cry and piss their pants while I cut into their body to save the meatier parts. Sometimes, I thought about raping them to see how they liked having it done to them, but I couldn’t get over the mental gymnastics of me not being any better than them.

Walking down the dark street, I pulled my hoodie over my head, grabbed my mask from my pocket, and hooked it around my ears to cover my nose and mouth. It was black around the edges but had white skeleton teeth painted on it. The mask hid my identity but still gave the ‘*do not fuck with me*’ impression I aimed for.

Devils were the black sheep of society. While there were rabid Devils who killed just to kill and eat, the rest of us lived normal lives. Well, as normal as we could without frightening humans.

Sadie popped into my head again.

Since dropping her off at the hospital after Patch fixed her up as much as he could, I'd been thinking about her often. I didn't want to admit it aloud, but I worried about the girl and hoped she was okay. Thanks to her driver's license, I knew where she lived, but I held back from finding her for the last few days.

As I walked on the sidewalk, my path changed. Instead of heading in the direction to hunt, I took another way that led to the other side of town, where most of the college students lived.

I CLIMBED up the metal stairs to look inside the dark apartment window. The girl must've been asleep already, even though it was seven p.m. Maybe because it was as dark as midnight, she called it early. Plenty of humans did that from the times I had followed them.

Bending down, I peered inside the window. My eyebrows bunched together, and I turned to the other side of the room. It was empty, as if Sadie had packed up and left.

Does she not have furniture?

I bit my bottom lip and played with the piercing in the middle of it. I glanced over my shoulder, ensuring no one was nearby. Turning back to the window, I used my strength to pop the lock as I pushed it up. I bent further to quietly climb through and into the bare room.

Her scent hit me like a brick wall, making my eyelids droop and cock twitch.

God, she smells like heaven.

Even though it was stale, her scent drove me wild with need and made my mouth water. She had a heady smell enhanced with an oil perfume with earthy scents like musk, bergamot, and some wildflower that I couldn't put my finger

on. I closed my eyes and inhaled deeply, holding it in my chest to keep her there forever.

“*Fuuuck,*” I moaned as I exhaled, shuddering. My cock hardened painfully to the point that it throbbed. I had to stop myself from unzipping my pants and pulling my dick out to jerk off until I came, just to find some relief.

The night I found her covered in blood and staring at me with half-lidded eyes, her scent was camouflaged with the tangy copper liquid. So, I never got a good smell of her. But this? God, this could’ve been better than her blood.

Don’t get me wrong, I still want to feast on your flesh, I quietly thought to her. But I want to feast on your pussy even more right now.

Shuddering, I pushed away my quickly spiraling thoughts before I really did jerk off like some prepubescent teen seeing his first cunt.

I made my way through her small apartment, finding that it was completely empty and the girl really wasn’t there, as I suspected. Her scent still lingered but wasn’t as strong, so it had to have been sometime in the last few days she had moved out.

“Where did you go?” I murmured as I glanced around the vacant place, hoping she’d pop out of nowhere and make my fucking day.

A distant scream broke me out of my thoughts. I peered at the still-open window.

I needed to hunt, but afterward, I’d hunt for a completely different reason.

Walking back to the window, I clambered out of the apartment and slid the window shut. After one last glance inside, I climbed over the ledge of the stairs and jumped. The wind blew up my body and made the hood of my hoodie flap as I free-fell. My feet smacked on the ground with a loud *thunk*, and I bent my knees to stabilize myself.

*I'll find the girl and make sure she's okay, and that'll be it.
I'll leave her alone.*

CHAPTER 5

Kai



The next night

IT DIDN'T TAKE much effort to find Sadie. I broke into her apartment's leasing office when they were closed, combing through their files, and found her information. She had listed her parent's address as her last residence and I memorized it.

I waited till midnight before I went to her.

Her parents lived on the rich side of town, surprising me. I didn't know why, but I had expected her to live in a regular neighborhood. She hadn't worn expensive clothes the night I found her attacked by the Devil.

I parked my car off the road and into the woods to keep the vehicle hidden. There was a small forest in this area, which helped me stay on the low.

I jumped over the large private fence that was meant to keep the public out of their private neighborhood. While walking the streets toward Sadie's parent's home, I kept my hoodie up and mask on. Because it was a wealthy neighborhood, cameras were everywhere, and I didn't want them to know who I was and where to find me. The last thing I needed was to have Devil Hunters on my ass again.

Sadie's parent's mansion loomed closer and closer. It was in the back of the neighborhood and the biggest house on the

block. It looked modern and had to have been built in the last twenty years and updated in the last five. Some lights pointed toward the mansion to spotlight certain areas that had decorations. There were pillars in front of the house; stone lions with their mouths open, sharp teeth exposed, sat against the home. It didn't go past me with the meaning behind it.

One of Sadie's parents was in the elite and had power in this city.

The driveway had a half circle in the front that led to the steps to the door, and a driveway branched off to the side where it led to the garage. Trees and plants were sporadically planted in the front yard to give it a lush look and kept their home hidden.

I had to hold back my impressed whistle to not draw attention to myself. But the house really was something else; I'd give them that.

I spotted cameras pointing to the street and catching my approach so I crept to the side and stayed in the shadows to avoid being seen any more than I had to. After checking on Sadie, I'd find a way to erase the times in their feed that I had been there. I wanted to be a ghost and leave behind no trace of my coming and going.

Making my way around the house and to the back, I noticed it was just as lush with trees and a pool with a soft blue light. I imagined Sadie in a two-piece bikini, swimming. Blood rushed to my cock as I pictured all the skin and curves exposed to my hungry eyes. I thought about her stomach, round with stretch marks, begging for my tongue to trace. Her large breasts would overflow from the small top of her swimsuit, enticing me to palm them, testing their weight.

Fuck, I needed to stop thinking about it before I came in my pants. That shit would be embarrassing.

I spotted a door, stepped out of the darkness, and turned the knob, finding it locked. Reaching into my pocket, I pulled out the two paperclips I kept for emergencies. Bending them

into the shape I needed, I worked them into the lock until I heard the telltale *click* of the deadbolt sliding. Slipping the clips back into my pocket, I quietly entered the home and shut the door behind me.

Glancing around, I noticed I was in a large kitchen. An island in the middle had pots and pans hanging from hooks suspended from a hanging rack. On the island table was a sink with a fancy faucet. Off to the side was a knife block with different knife sizes. It was a nice setup, reminding me that these people weren't poor.

I silently made my way through the sleepy home, following my nose as it led me up the spiral staircase to the second floor. Sadie's scent intensified when I reached the third door on the right. Cocking my head, I listened for any sounds that she was awake. When I heard heavy, even breathing, I slowly turned the knob and opened the door. Her scent hit me like a freight train, making all the blood return to my soft dick.

Fuck, she smells so good.

The bedroom was large and decorated with soft pastel colors. There was a canopy above the queen-sized bed where Sadie lay curled on her side under the sheets. I crept closer and cocked my head as I looked her over, searching for any signs that someone had harmed her further since I last saw her. My eyes landed on the patch on her neck where the Devil had taken a good chunk out. She'd scar from it, but I hoped Patch and the human doctors helped with that. I didn't mind scars, but I figured a mortal woman would oppose having marks on her body.

Sadie's pink and brown hair fanned around her head, creating a chocolate and cherry halo. She wore an oversized black T-shirt that rose above her waist. She arranged her leg over the comforter to achieve the perfect warm and cold temperature while she slept. I groaned softly, noticing she wore nothing *but* her t-shirt and panties.

I reached a hand forward, itching to touch her creamy, thick thigh. Her underwear was white, but I didn't give a

damn. She made it look sexy.

Biting my lip, I raked my eyes over her sleeping figure, debating on acting on my urges.

She's just a human. She means nothing to me.

But her scent drove me fucking mad, feeding into my primal need to fuck her brains out.

I wanted to see her without the barrier of clothes. Maybe even bury my head between her legs and lap up her cream.

I raised my eyes to her face, ensuring she was deep asleep.

I can do it. Make it quick and relieve this ache in my cock.

Feeling daring, I gradually climbed on the bed and eased her onto her back. I shuddered as I touched her underwear and slowly peeled them off her. I removed my mask and stuck it into my pocket. Spreading her thighs apart, I got a better view of her cunt. There was a thatch of dark curls on her mound, and her pussy lips were puffy like flower petals. She wasn't wet, but she was about to be.

I held onto her leg with one hand, and with the other, I plunged my fingers between her slit. Circling my fingertip over her clitoris, I watched as she became wet. Spreading her pussy lips apart, I lowered myself onto my stomach and sucked her nub into my mouth.

A whimper escaped her as she rolled her hips in her sleep.

I squeezed my eyes shut, stifling a groan from her little sound.

Fuck me.

I wanted her to say my name but didn't want her to wake up and find me here.

I yearned to hear her moans, not her screams of fear.

I kept my movements slow and steady to avoid disturbing her sleep. Flicking my tongue on her clit, brushing my fingers down to her wet entrance. Easing a digit into her, I reveled in

the tightness of her cunt. After one finger was in her, I added a second and stretched her further.

She whimpered again, her pelvis moving with my mouth as I ate her out like she was the last meal I'd ever have. My fingers dug into her creamy thigh as I kept her leg spread open for me.

"Fuck, baby," I moaned into her mound, gyrating my hips into the bed to relieve the throbbing pain in my dick. I was close to coming and didn't need to touch myself to do it.

I thrust into her quicker; the wet sound of her getting finger fucked filled my ears, driving me into a frenzy. My tongue flicked faster on her clit, which throbbed as she grew closer to an orgasm.

Soft mewls escaped her in her sleep. I slowed down every now and again, building her orgasm to create something bigger. After a few more minutes, I couldn't take it anymore. I was about to explode in my pants as I edged the both of us.

"Come for me, baby," I groaned into her sopping wet pussy. The inner walls of her cunt clamped down on my fingers, sucking the digits further into her, never letting go.

Fuck, it was the hottest thing I'd ever witnessed.

I panted and moaned as I rocked my hips into the bed, creating friction against my erection. I was close to coming, but I didn't want to do it in my pants.

Moving to my knees, I withdrew my fingers from her and unbuckled my belt. I pulled my dick out and moved over her to press my cock on her pussy, fucking between her folds, getting me wet with her cream. I panted as I hastened my strokes, watching her sleep-slacken face as I pistoned between her pussy lips. My balls drew up, and zaps of pleasure shot up my spine, making me shudder. A whimper escaped me, and jets of warm cum landed on her stomach as I came. I breathed harder as I thrust frantically until I was spent and stopped moving.

Sadie had to have taken something before she fell asleep because anyone else would have woken up by now.

I smirked, ideas going through my head about what I wanted to do to her the next time.

Next time? Jesus, chill out, Kai.

I leaned down and captured her lips in a soft kiss, a silent promise passing in the sweet but territorial gesture before I pulled back and got to my knees. Putting my softening dick away, I fixed my pants and stared at the messy girl. Her legs were spread wide, her pussy glistened in the moonlight, and my cum splattered over her mound and stomach.

Fuck, she looked like an angel who fell from Heaven and into Hell, winding up in a demon's bed.

"See you soon, baby," I whispered, moving off the bed. I pulled the blankets back over her body to keep her warm while she continued to sleep.

With one more glance at her, I left her bedroom.

On my way out, I found the footage of me on the camera feed and removed it. I timed the equipment to turn back on after I was long gone from the Madison's home.

When I was out of the house and walking back to the neighborhood's gates, the last hour crashed into me.

I had fucked a woman while she slept. *Shit.* How was I any better than the humans who raped women that I killed? *Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.*

Rage, guilt, and turmoil roiled through me into a chaotic storm, making it hard to breathe. I staggered a few steps and stopped right at the gate. My breathing picked up, and I placed a shaky hand on one of the metal bars, my eyes sightless and wide.

I'm not any better than them.

Sadie's face popped into my mind, her eyes closed, and her lips parted with mewls and moans as I gave her an orgasm like

a hungry wolf needing to prime his lamb.

She liked it. She wanted it.

“She never said that. She was asleep, you fucking asshole,” I whispered harshly.

She would have said yes if she was awake.

I shook my head. “No, she wouldn’t have.”

I was a Devil. Even though my kind could blend in with the humans, we stood out like a sore thumb when hungry and in a frenzy. She would’ve found out and screamed as soon as she saw my red eyes.

Quit being weak and be the monster they want you to be.

I swallowed hard while panting.

I can be a monster. But, I want her. And she wouldn’t want a monster.

“I can kill a rapist tonight to pay penance,” I whispered.

Then visit her again tomorrow night.

“Then I’ll kill another rapist tomorrow night.”

That worked.

Straightening, I swallowed and cleared my throat. I adjusted the mask on my face, then jumped over the gate and strode to my car, hidden in the woods.

CHAPTER 6

Sadie



Light filtered through the lace curtains hanging over my windows. I could sleep another four hours, but I had plans today that required me to get up. Cracking open my eyes, I stared at the red numbers of my clock on the nightstand beside my bed. They were blurry and became clear after a few more seconds.

6:29 a.m.

I had one more minute before the alarm went off.

God, that's torture.

I pushed back the sheets and rolled out of bed. Something on my stomach pulled at the skin and it felt like it was crumbling. I looked down, fingering the clear, caked-on substance on my stomach.

What the hell did I get on me?

Was it icing from a pastry I ate last night before bed? It could have been.

I dropped my hand and silently padded across my bedroom to my attached bathroom. Raising my shirt, I threw it to the floor, not caring where it landed. After I did my business on the toilet, I turned on the shower and stepped under the spray to clean myself.

It took a lot of energy to bathe or shower. I wasn't good about personal hygiene, thanks to my mental illnesses. The thought of having to undress, turn on the shower or bath, wait

for it to heat up, wash my body, and change into clean clothes exhausted me.

Normal people—neurotypical people—didn't understand the mentally ill, or as we liked to call it—neurodivergent people. Neurotypical people complained and scrunched their noses at people who couldn't find the energy to brush their teeth. They'd call us gross while we were hanging on by a thread and one step away from killing ourselves.

Depression is a real thing, Mackenzie. Stop worrying about whether we bathed and focus more on helping us live another day.

The icing on my stomach was a good reason to clean myself today, and I called that a win.

Once done, I stepped out and pulled on my robe, put my soaking wet hair in a towel on the top of my head, and picked out an outfit to wear today.

My parents had unpacked all of my things from the move and put them back in their place, and I was concerned they might've seen my toys. Knowing my dad, he probably had thrown them away and deemed them sinful. It didn't matter that I was nineteen years old; Dad controlled everything because *he* didn't want his family to be perceived as immoral. Dad needed everyone to be proper and play their role as a perfect family because a lot of eyes were on us. He was one of the big three who had some control over our small city—Devil's City—in Missouri. Which was a funny name to call it since it once wasn't a city that was overrun by Devils.

Devil's City was closed off from the rest of the state. There were magical wards that protected the perimeter. They were supposed to keep the outside world from coming in and the Devils out for decades. But the wards didn't do their job. Devils came into our city and attacked people anyway. The wards protecting us became a jail that kept the Devils in with us. We were like fish in a barrel.

I wasn't around for that, thank god. The endless attacks had created Devil Hunters who swore they would protect us. The groups were made up of normal Joe Schmoes, who got tired of seeing their friends and family killed. It was a slow and tedious process, killing Devils, taking decades to weed them out because they hid from humans.

But still, to this day, Devils hid in plain sight and attacked us. Which was why we had a curfew at night. They came out after dark.

I touched the patch on my neck, remembering bits and pieces of the attack. Thanks to my poor memory, I couldn't remember all of it, but I remembered the blurry man in a hoodie who saved me.

What was his name? Where was he now? Would I ever run into him again?

I removed my robe and slipped on underwear.

Wait a minute ...

I didn't remember taking off my underwear before I got into the shower. Did I not put any on last night before bed?

Searching through my faded memories, I couldn't remember, which frustrated me. It didn't matter because no one was here. My parents were on vacation and wouldn't barge into my room while I wore just a T-shirt. So it made sense if I didn't put any on last night.

Shaking my head and sighing, I pulled on a pair of black leggings, then put on a bra before I slipped on one of my favorite Halloween t-shirts. It was an oversized black shirt with small printed dancing skeletons. Some of them were purple, others were white and orange.

I went to the bathroom to do my makeup and brushed my hair. I looked myself over, my expression blank, like I was about to bitch about something.

Some people who had schizophrenia had trouble showing emotions. Most of them had droopy eyes and a slight frown

like everything upset them. I had that look. Before I had schizophrenia, I looked a little happier, but not by much. My family made it hard to find anything to be happy about.

I frowned at my reflection, hating how I looked one small inconvenience away from balling my eyes out.

Turning away from the mirror, I made my way out of my bedroom and downstairs. I expected to see my parents but then remembered they were gone on a vacation I hadn't been invited to join.

It was quiet, and I could hear the clock ticking on the wall beside the pantry door. Sometimes I enjoyed the silence, but I didn't like it right now. It made the hole in me yawn wider, dragging me deeper into its depths.

I grabbed my purse on the end of the breakfast table and slung the strap over my shoulder. At the front door, I slipped on my shoes before leaving to start my errands. It would be a long walk into the part of the city I needed to be at, but I didn't care. I needed the air to clear my head.

The curfew lifted during the day because no Devil would attack a human in plain sight. Knowing my luck, I'd probably be the first person attacked by a Devil during broad daylight. Maybe they'd finish what the last Devil couldn't, and I'd wind up as their afternoon snack.

God, I was so depressing.

CHAPTER 7

Sadie



“... So then she tells me that she forgave him, and now they’re living together,” Sarah said with an eye roll.

Amber’s mouth popped open, and she leaned forward in her seat, her plate of cheesy fries forgotten. “No ... *no*. Please tell me you’re joking. *No freakin’ way.*”

Sarah nodded and stabbed her fork into her half-eaten chicken caesar salad. “Yep,” she said, popping her p. “I can’t believe she would take him back, but ...” She shrugged and stuffed a forkful of the greens into her mouth.

I silently chewed my onion ring, trying not to freak out and worry that it could have been poisoned. I watched my two friends gossip about a girl they knew, but I didn’t. Their conversation faded away as I disassociated because I couldn’t add anything to the discussion. I didn’t know the girl, and I also didn’t like gossiping. It always felt wrong to talk about someone who wasn’t there and couldn’t defend themselves. I wondered how I made friends like Sarah and Amber, who loved to spill the tea about people behind their backs.

“Did you hear about the Devil sacrifice happening on Halloween?” Sarah asked.

I snapped out of my thoughts and raised my eyes to her, then to Amber, who shook her head. Her golden hoop earrings swayed with the motion.

Tucking a piece of curly brown hair behind her ear, she picked up a cheesy fry. “*No*. What the hell is that all about?”

“Right? So get this. I heard from a friend of a friend that every few generations, they sacrifice a virgin to the leader of the Devils to keep them from killing the entire city.”

I touched the bandage on my neck, covering my wounds that were still healing. A flash of the Devil’s face who attacked me popped into my vision. In the next second it was the mysterious man who hid behind his hoodie and demanded that I sleep.

What ever happened to him? I knew he had taken me to the hospital because no one else was around when I was attacked. He saved my life and I couldn’t be more grateful. I wish I had gotten his name and thanked him.

Amber scoffed. “A virgin? *Please*. Who is a virgin these days?”

“They’d have to send the Devil a child if they want a virgin.” Sarah snickered.

My cheeks bloomed with heat from a blush. I lowered my eyes and stared at my plate of onion rings and house sauce dip.

“Do you think the story is—” I started to ask.

“I’d feel bad for the poor girl. Not for being sacrificed, but because her first time will be with a gross Devil. Ew,” Sarah interrupted with a condescending snicker. She stabbed her fork into her salad and brought the leaves covered in dressing to her opened mouth.

I peered at my two friends, cheeks still on fire with the blush and my heart beating a little faster.

“Don’t you think that’s a little mean?” I asked, but Amber and Sarah drowned my question out as they talked.

I slumped in my seat and lowered my eyes to my plate again.

What was the point of having friends if they were besties and left me in the dust? Why did I even try at this point with everyone? No one ever listened to me or cared what I had to say. My parents and so-called friends treated me like a ghost.

If I were to die tonight, would they care?

What if I went mute? Would they notice?

I stayed silent the rest of the lunch, lost in my thoughts and sulking. After Amber and Sarah finished their food, they called it a day. Sarah paid for her and Amber's meal but left me out. I frowned and paid for my food.

"It was great seeing you, Sadie. We'll have to get together again sometime," Amber said as she hugged me.

"Yeah," I mumbled.

"You okay? You didn't talk that much," Sarah asked as she hiked her purse over her shoulder. "You know you can talk to me whenever."

So you can gossip about me behind my back? I think I'm good.

"Just feeling a bit tired today, I guess," I lied.

You didn't let me talk. You spoke over me and ignored me. What do you mean I didn't talk that much?

"I'll see you later," I said and walked away.

I slid my favorite beanie over my head to keep my ears warm. It was colder today than it had been for a few days. October in Devil's City was when the weather dropped, and you had to dress warm. I didn't care that my outfit was a basic bitch style. I liked wearing leggings, sweatshirts and Uggs. Honestly, it surprised me that my friends didn't snicker at my outfit because they enjoyed making fun of other women.

For a while, I thought about whether I should drop them, but I always stopped myself from doing it because I figured I'd be more lonely.

I walked on the sidewalk, shivering as a large gust of wind blew at me. Wrapping my arms over my chest, I leaned my head down to block the wind from getting into my eyes.

The walk home would take a while. I didn't have the extra funds to grab an Uber since I spent it on a meal Sarah said she

would cover if I came out.

That was what I got for trusting people, even someone I called a friend.

My birthday was in five days, and I already wanted it over with. I knew how it would go. I'd wake up, go downstairs to find my parents gone and no note to at least say happy birthday, then I'd go to classes and get ignored there too. The day would be spent wondering if someone would notice it was my birthday. Later at home, my parents would ignore me as usual, flirt at the dinner table, and maybe go to a movie without me. My friends wouldn't send me a happy birthday text, and I'd be left blowing out a single candle in a cupcake I made for myself that I took to my bedroom.

I was pathetic. The voices in my head made sure to tell me that all the time.

An article that I'd read about schizophrenia said that, statistically speaking, people with schizophrenia had the highest mortality rate and died by suicide. The reported rates of suicide attempts were between 18% and 55%.

I would be another statistic if I attempted suicide and succeeded. No one would care.

When I was diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder, my parents still treated me like they'd forgotten I was there. They didn't care to understand my mental illness. When Mom picked me up from the hospital after my attack from that Devil, she never bothered to ask me about it. She put on a nice show in the hospital room, but I was no one once we walked through the exit doors.

Would there ever be a day when someone would see me? I doubted it.

That man who saved me from the Devil should have let me die there. I had already been on Death's doorstep when he came and would've finally been at peace.

I shivered, remembering his touch on my jaw as he moved my head to the side to see my mangled neck. There had been

something soothing about his touch. The tips of his fingertips were rough with calluses, but he held me gently, like I was easily breakable.

I wished I had gotten his name or seen his face.

I had a dream about him last. It was intense and ... god, it was sexy as hell. Even though I couldn't see his face in my dream, I still felt like he wasn't a figment of my imagination and was eating me out. I'd never done anything sexual with anyone, so when I felt his mouth on my pussy, it felt real even though I had no experience to back up.

I shuddered as I remembered the little ball jewel on his tongue that expertly flicked against my clit while two of his fingers worked in and out of me. After I came, he had moved over me, rocking his steel-hard dick between my pussy lips to get himself off. I'd stared up at him, not seeing anything but a blurry shadowed face. But dear god, I had felt his eyes on me, watching every muscle, listening to every soft moan that slipped from me.

My pussy clenched as I walked, my panties getting wet. Now I wanted to get home faster so I could hide in my bedroom and relieve myself, with thoughts of him and the dream.

CHAPTER 8

Kai



I followed Sadie, unable to keep myself away from her. I refused to sleep earlier. Instead, I returned to the safe house to ensure everything was okay. Ricky was still hunting down information about the planned sacrifice, so he wasn't able to update me with anything new.

While I observed Sadie interacting with her friends at the cafe, I found it intriguing but also sad the way her friends treated her. The two women wouldn't stop talking to let Sadie have a word in. I watched as Sadie's face transformed into a mask, where she once showed sadness and a little bit of irritation, into an emotionless facade.

I had to hold myself back from interrupting the get-together to sit next to Sadie, pretending we were an item so her friends would finally talk to her. The girl made me want to pull her into my arms and protect her from the world when I was the one she needed protection from.

I trailed behind Sadie on the sidewalk, staying twenty feet away from her while she walked. My eyes wandered from her now-covered head down her back to her wide hips. My cock jerked as I watched the sway of her juicy ass as she walked. I drooled while I imagined sinking my teeth into one of her asscheeks. It wasn't right to fantasize about eating the girl while also wanting to fuck her. I didn't know which I wanted more. Her flesh or her pussy.

All I knew was that I wanted to mark her, leave behind proof that I had touched her. Whether it be bruises from my

kisses and teeth or fingerprints on her waist as I held her where I wanted while I pounded into her tight pussy. She felt like Heaven, and all morning I had wondered if she was untouched. From her reaction, while her friends talked about a virgin sacrifice, I had a feeling she was.

Bigger women had always been my flavor, and Sadie was perfect. She had large breasts that would overflow from my hands and a chubby stomach that I wanted to squeeze while I held her in my arms at night.

After I went to the safe house earlier this morning, I jerked off in the bathroom while I remembered how she looked with her thick thighs spread and her pussy lips puffy. Fuck, I wanted to sink my cock into her cunt while I indulged my desires and tasted her. But I was glad I didn't because she definitely would have woken up.

Maybe another time I'd fuck her. After making sure she was sedated.

I shuddered. Shit, I needed to stop thinking about her like that. I'd never have a chance with the human woman. We were two completely different breeds. A Devil and a human didn't mix. Nothing good ever came of it. One drop of my blood in her and she'd die.

Humans thought we were all killers when we weren't. It was their hunters who drove some of us to murder them. Like every twisted and evil human, there was a feral Devil who killed just to kill.

I followed Sadie as she tracked across the city. I thought she'd take the route that headed straight back to her parent's home but instead she veered off.

Interesting. What was my little human doing?

Sadie went down a few blocks. The foot traffic thinned until it was just us, and I had to put more space between us so she wouldn't notice me following her. We came to the same street where I had found her when the feral Devil attacked her.

I hid behind a dumpster about twenty feet away, and it gave me a good view of her while peeking around it. I smirked as I watched Sadie stand in the same area she was attacked. But when she looked around with a blank expression, it wiped the smirk from my face. I sucked in a sharp breath and straightened to hide behind the dumpster as she turned her head in my direction.

Her breathing increased, and I heard the loud thumping of her heart. The curse of being a Devil was always being very aware of my prey. Humans were easy creatures to hunt and kill. Their senses were dulled and they were simple-minded. I didn't care for them, but this one interested me. Maybe it was her eyes and how they held the same loneliness I felt. I knew what the dark circles under her eyes meant. Because I had them too. She had issues with sleep, just like I did.

I peeked around the corner of the dumpster when I heard her footsteps walking further away. Shoving my hands in my hoodie pockets, I followed behind her with quiet steps, at times having to hide behind something because she'd glanced over her shoulder. My eyes had a mind of their own again, moving down her back to her ass that jiggled with her strides. I wet my lips and licked the sharp point of my canine tooth as I imagined all the dirty things I wanted to do to her.

I was visiting her again tonight and I didn't care if it's wrong. I wanted her. She was mine.

We were back in a well-populated area where there were other humans and a few disguised Devils. Some of them wore masks like I did to keep their privacy. I nodded to them, and they did the same when we met eyes.

I hid in the crowd, still following behind Sadie as she took her time walking back home. I stopped short when she surprised me by stopping and looking over her shoulder. I quickly stepped to the side and hid behind two people who stood off to the side as they window-shopped. When my little human turned back around and began walking again, I brushed past the humans and trailed behind my girl again.

She was paranoid.

Somehow, she knew about me following her. Sometimes people had the feeling of eyes on them, and Sadie must've caught on that I was watching her.

Observing her made me want to talk to her. I wanted to hear her voice—no, I wanted to listen to her laugh. I'd only heard her when she tried to softly talk to her friends. I knew she had a beautiful voice from the few words she spoke, but I wanted to really hear her. Possibly cry out my name.

I was definitely visiting her tonight. I needed another taste.

My mind played tricks with me, having me hear in my head, a woman's cries and whimpers as she was fucked. My skin tightened as I imagined Sadie's nails digging into my back and the feel of her legs tightening around my waist to draw me closer to her.

"Kai," Sadie whimpered.

I blinked out of my daydream and slowed my steps when I noticed she had stopped walking to sit at a bus stop bench.

That was different.

I would have thought she'd walk all the way home like she had into town.

Take this opportunity, idiot, and talk to her.

Taking in a deep breath, I hesitantly walked toward her, and closed the distance between us. I strode around the bust stop seat and folded myself on the chair beside her, leaning my elbows on the backside of the seat and opened my legs wide to get comfortable. Sadie tensed next to me, and her breathing changed into quick bursts as her nerves got the better of her because of my close presence.

Pushing my hoodie back, I ran my hand through my messy white hair and leaned my elbows on the back of the seat. I peeked at the girl from the corner of my eye and smirked at the rosy tint to her cheeks. I knew it wasn't because of the crisp air right now. I wouldn't think she'd flush like this just from a

little walk, either. The only other time she blushed was the last time she saw me. I didn't know how she could've blushed after getting attacked, but I didn't miss the pink in her cheeks while she gazed at me like I was her god.

Did she remember me?

Silence stretched between us. Even though I was at ease, she sat straight with her shoulders nearly touching her ears with tension.

"Relax," I drawled, making her jump.

I rolled my head to the side to get a better look at her. She shot me a weird look, which was better than the blank expression she gave her friends. I wanted to hurt those girls for making my girl bottle up.

"I-I am," she squeaked.

I raised an eyebrow. "Baby, if I poked you right now, you'd topple over in a heap from how tense you are. I won't bite," I said, my smirk becoming a grin. "I promise."

"I'm not your baby." Pink colored Sadie's cheeks and I had to hold back from chuckling. I loved that I made her turn that shade. I couldn't wait to see her flushed tonight.

"You're right. You're not." I leaned forward and cocked my head as I looked her over, taking my time and ensuring she saw that I was checking her out. I licked my bottom lip and met her gaze again. "But you can be. I'd eat you up and make sure you're always blushing for me like what you're doing right now."

Her eyelashes fluttered, and she slightly turned away, giving me a good view of her bandaged neck. Anger surged through my veins at the reminder of what the feral Devil did to her. Jealousy wasn't far behind it as I wondered what she tasted like.

She would taste like every Devil's wet dream. Scratch that. She could only be my wet dream.

"Go away," she muttered.

I huffed a laugh and leaned in closer. “Baby, you need to work on your fight. I know there’s a brat in you somewhere.” I trailed my fingers on her neck over the bandage. “Who did that?”

I knew the answer, but I wanted her to keep talking. Her voice was soft and unsure, but I knew there was a fire in her. I wanted to be the spark to her flames.

Sadie shrugged her shoulder to move my hand away from her neck. I grinned and trailed the tips of my fingers over the bandages again.

“Give me his name and I’ll take care of him,” I purred.

Sadie huffed and turned toward me, her eyes bright with anger, and her lips turned down in a frown. “Go. Away. Or I’ll scream.”

I bit my bottom lip to hold back from laughing. “Oh, sweetheart, don’t threaten me with a good time.”

Her cheeks turned a brighter pink as she glared at me. It looked like she held her breath while staring at me, possibly looking for something to say. I patiently waited, quietly cheering her on and wanting to know what kind of insult she’d come up with.

“Why are you even wearing a mask? You hiding from the cameras? Go back to whatever back alley you live in,” Sadie snarled.

Okay, so I might have to teach her a little bit about insults and how to make them sting.

I glanced at the tower that had a camera on it. The city’s mayor a couple of years ago demanded that they put in cameras to catch Devil attacks. There were Devil Hunters who got our faces from the cameras, and from there, they hunted us down one by one. I wore my mask to be careful while in public and not become a target for the Hunters, but I also enjoyed wearing a mask because it was my style.

“Just say you want to see my face, sweetheart, and I’ll show you,” I tsked, leaning back against the chair and raising my hips to get more comfortable. She fell for the trap and glanced down, watching me shift before she snapped her eyes back to my face. Even though she couldn’t see my grin, I knew my eyes showed it and she saw it.

“I don’t want to see your ugly face. You’re probably doing the world a favor by covering it,” she snarled, her eyes shining with irritation.

I knew this couldn’t be directed at me. She just went through a shitty lunch with even shittier friends, so she was taking out her anger on me. I didn’t mind. I’d let her punch me, and I’d take it with a bloody smile. Maybe even have rough sex with her and let her scratch the fuck out of me.

I shuddered at the thought, my cock stiffening.

Devils loved feeding and fucking. But if she drew my blood, she’d be a goner, and I didn’t want that.

“Ohh, baby, you’ll be sorely disappointed when you see my face. I have to fight the ladies off me all the time,” I said with a chuckle.

She glared at me and huffed as she stood from her seat. I shot to my feet and stuffed my hands in my pockets while I trailed beside her while she walked away.

Sadie growled—it was cute—and turned toward me with her face scrunched up in anger.

She pushed her finger into my chest as she snarled, “Stop following me!”

I leaned down so our faces were closer and booped her nose. “No.”

She ground her teeth, making me wince but stand strong. Huffing, she spun around to stomp away from me again. I followed, picking up my pace. I quickly walked past her and then turned in front of her. Sadie stopped with a glare as she

leaned her head back to look at my face. I was six foot three; she had to be five foot two because of how I towered over her.

“If you’re a good girl and tell me your name, I’ll show you my face,” I purred.

She narrowed her eyes. “I’m not interested.”

I shrugged, still keeping my hands in my pockets. “But I am. I want to know my wife’s name.”

“Not funny. Leave me alone, or I will scream.”

“Baby, we’ve been through this. Don’t threaten me with a good time. I want to hear what you sound like when you get fucked into next week.”

Her breathing increased and her face flushed. Through my mask, I smelled the faintest scent of sweet arousal coming from her and had to hold back a groan from the intoxicating scent.

“Will you leave me alone if I tell you?”

“Never.” I smiled.

“Then, no.” She pushed past me.

I jogged after her and walked by her side. “Either you’ve never argued with someone and insulted them, or, ... Well, that’s it. I can help you with your insults.”

“J-just go away and forget about me like everyone else does,” she whimpered with a soft cry.

That made me stop. I watched her walk a few steps ahead before she paused and glanced over her shoulder.

I drew my eyebrows together. “Who hurt you?”

“Just leave me alone.” She shook her head, a single tear falling down her cheek before she walked away. I let her go this time while I watched her back. It wouldn’t be the last time I would see her. She just wouldn’t know about my presence. But now I wanted to know who the fuck hurt her so bad that she felt like I would abandon her too.

CHAPTER 9

Sadie



“I ’m home,” I called when I walked into the empty house. I knew my parents were still on vacation, but I had always hoped someone would call back.

I slipped off my shoes and headed upstairs to my bedroom.

The masked man I saw earlier kept popping into my mind’s eye, taunting me. I didn’t know who the heck he was and why he got under my skin so quickly, but he got what he wanted. I didn’t ever lose my cool on people. They didn’t pay enough attention to me to give me that opportunity. But that man knew how to push my buttons.

“Relax,” the masked man had purred.

He had noticed me and struck up a strange conversation. I wanted to face-palm myself because of how fast I got defensive around him. I craved a conversation with someone and to get noticed. Stupidly enough, I got angry with the first person who noticed me.

His eyes were beautiful obsidian jewels that sparkled with male amusement while he watched me like a puppet on his strings. He had shaggy white hair that had to have been bleached that color because no way was that natural. I wanted to kick myself for not taking the bait to see his face. I was sure he was gorgeous under that mask, with a strong jaw, and lips that tipped up in a smile.

I dropped my purse on the floor as soon as I crossed the doorway into my bedroom. I was numb from the cold and

needed to feel something. Maybe I was numb from more than just the weather outside.

Walking into my grand bathroom, I started the water and plugged the tub. While waiting for the bath to fill, I undressed and pulled my hair up with a claw clip to keep it from getting wet.

In front of the mirror, I stared at my reflection. My face had the same blank mask, but my eyes were heavy-lidded and dull-looking. There were bruises beneath them, screaming that I needed more sleep than just three hours. The corners of my lips were tipped down by a scant centimeter. At first glance, no one would see it, but the longer you looked, the more you'd notice.

My dark brown hair was a bit oily and needed to be washed, but it became harder and harder for me to take care of my personal hygiene. Washing my hair seemed like a chore, and I kept pushing it off. Maybe I'd wash it in the bath if I had enough energy to spare.

I turned away from the mirror and lit my favorite lavender and rose candles to create a calming atmosphere. I added a dash of oils to my bath and climbed into the jacuzzi tub.

Today was a bad day with my friends, leaving me feeling empty and unseen. It didn't help that my parents wouldn't ever talk to me. Let alone *look* at me. What was the point of me returning home after the Devil attack if I was going to be a ghost?

"Baby, we've been through this. Don't threaten me with a good time. I want to hear what you sound like when you get fucked into next week."

My cheeks warmed with a blush, and I squeezed my thighs together to dull the throbbing in my clit.

That man ... His voice was smooth and deep. There were times he sounded bored, but the more he talked, the more vibrant he became. His dark eyes sparkled with mirth as he teased me. He had worn a back mask with skeleton teeth

printed on it. It made me a little nervous at first, but after a few minutes of talking to him, it added to his charisma.

I couldn't stop looking at his stark white hair that was messy and flopped over his eyes. He had dark eyebrows, and it made me wonder if he colored his hair like that.

"If you're a good girl and tell me your name, I'll show you my face."

Butterflies filled my stomach, and liquid heat curled in my lower belly and between my legs. I groaned and leaned against the back of the tub, nearly submerging my face underneath the water.

I wanted to see his face but was too proud to give him the one thing he wanted. Looking back, I wish I had given him my name because I was ninety-nine point-nine percent sure he was sexy.

I couldn't believe I had these thoughts about a stranger. I'd never see him again. The one person who talked to me and listened to me, and I blew it because I was too embarrassed and nervous around him.

I closed my eyes and breathed through my nose and out of my mouth. My neck hurt, and I could still feel the phantom pains of the Devil's teeth piercing the flesh. The doctor said I had to keep the stitched wounds covered for a couple of weeks because of how infected it was when I arrived at the hospital.

The blurry man dressed in all black with his hoodie up popped into my mind's eye. I wondered who he was and where he was because I would like to thank him for saving my life.

"He should've just let you die."

"You're worthless and a nobody."

I squeezed my eyes shut tighter, trying to ignore the voices in my head. They didn't say anything that I didn't already tell myself, but it hurt hearing it from them.

I wanted to get out of my funk, so I ran my hand down my breast, stomach then between my legs. The man with white hair popped into my head again, making the dull throb in my clit quicken into a flutter.

What the heck was wrong with me for touching myself while thinking about a complete stranger?

A soft moan slipped from me as I circled the tip of my finger on my swollen clit. Zaps of pleasure shot from the apex of my thighs, up my stomach, and down to my feet.

I couldn't stop myself. I didn't care to because it wasn't often that I masturbated. Thanks to my meds, it was hard to have an orgasm. When I felt the fleeting tendrils of arousal and possibly an orgasm, I slowed the circles.

Another moan escaped me as I dipped a finger into my wet channel. With my other hand, I gently rubbed my clit while I fucked myself with a finger. My toes curled, and my breathing quickened.

I imagined the stranger's face. He said he had to fight off the ladies, so I figured he was attractive. He probably had a sharp jawline, full lips, and a perfect nose. I fantasized about him being here right now, saying something smart, but joining me in the bath.

"Look at you, getting dirty in—" No. That didn't sound right.

I bit my bottom lip, whimpering as I chased my orgasm that teased me as it was just out of reach.

"You need help, don't you? Tell me you want my touch, and I'll give you what you need," the strange man purred.

Keeping my eyes closed, I pictured him leaning against the doorway, arms folded, watching me with male amusement.

"I need you," I whimpered.

He smirked and straightened, pushing away from the doorjamb, and prowled toward me. He stripped off his clothes, showing more of his tattoos that I had seen glimpses of at the

bus stop. My eyes fell to his pelvis, my cheeks warming at the perfect size of his cock. It wasn't too small or too large. It was perfect. He was perfect.

The stranger climbed into the bath behind me and wound his arms around me. He slipped his hand down my body, feeling my silky skin before he spread my pussy lips and began to circle his middle finger on my exposed clit.

"That's a good girl. Ride my hand," he murmured as I rolled my hips. "Focus on the pleasure. Let me make you come."

My breathing became choppy, and my fingers worked harder on my clit. My orgasm was right there, building and for the taking.

My stranger swept my hair over my shoulder to the other side, exposing my unharmed neck to him. He brushed kisses over the skin while he swept his free hand down to my large breast, squeezing the globe. The whole time, he never stopped flicking my clit, patiently working me to my orgasm.

"I can't," I whispered breathlessly, frustrated that I couldn't come.

"You can and you will," he purred. "Focus on how good I make you feel. How my fingers are making your pussy sopping wet."

He was right. I was wet and could feel the slick on my thighs, even in the water. I focused on his fingers, moaning as he slipped two of them into me, stretching my inner walls. After a few minutes of chasing the orgasm, it finally happened. It exploded through me, making me scream as I came.

I panted with my hand still between my legs. Slowly, I cracked open my eyes and squeezed my thighs together, moaning from the dull throb of my release.

Well, I guess this was it. I was certifiably insane for touching myself while imagining a stranger touching me. That I had only met today.

A small giggle escaped me, shocking me with the sudden noise. I recovered from my surprise, and another small laugh bubbled in my chest and escaped.

I really was deranged.

CHAPTER 10

Kai



I was back in Sadie's room in the middle of the night. I brought a special concoction to inject into her. It would keep her asleep while I played with her so she wouldn't wake up and scream when she came face to face with a Devil in a rut frenzy. Even though I loved the adrenaline of waiting for Sadie to wake up while I finger-fucked her, I didn't want her to wake up tonight. I was too desperate and aching.

I watched her face as I pricked her with the needle and pushed the liquid into her veins. She didn't blink in her sleep or stir awake. She continued sleeping, breathing the same deep rhythmic pattern. Once the contents were in her, I set the needle aside and swept back some of her hair from her face while I continued watching her.

Guilt tried to come forth to make me feel bad for my actions. I quickly pushed it beneath the surface, to never see the daylight again.

This was the only way I could be with her. I was a Devil, and she was a human. She'd scream once she saw me for what I was. Her screams would fuel me, driving me to hurt her and eat her flesh.

"This is the only way we can be together," I whispered to her.

I dropped my gaze down her body as I peeled back her sheets. She wore an oversized T-shirt again and panties. I

spread her legs and sucked in a sharp breath when I noticed her panties were soaked.

Did she touch herself before she went to sleep?

I bit my bottom lip, the ball of my piercing on my bottom lip clacked against my teeth.

Doing quick work, I undressed her before I stripped off my clothes and climbed on the bed with her.

I glided my hands on the inside of her thick thighs while I stared at her glistening pussy.

Fuck.

She touched herself before she went to sleep. There was no other explanation for why she soaked her panties, her cream glistening in her pubic hair.

“Your pussy is mine, Sadie,” I vowed with a growl in my chest.

I wanted her to come before I got off. Lowering myself onto my stomach, I threw her legs over my shoulders and swiped my tongue up her pussy lips. I shuddered and groaned from how good she tasted. I caught her clit in my mouth, flicking it with my tongue as I sucked at the same time.

Sadie whimpered in her sleep, her hips rolling against my face. Her movements were sluggish, thanks to the serum I had injected her with. It'd keep her under for a couple of hours.

I pushed two fingers into her wet channel while still sucking and flicking her clit with my tongue. Reaching up with my other hand, I palmed her large breast.

It took longer than usual to make Sadie come. Her walls spasmed around my fingers, and her breathing quickened. I stayed patient while eating her out, driven to make her orgasm. It felt like hours before her walls clamped down on her fingers and her come gushing out of her.

“That’s a good girl,” I murmured as I pulled away. I flicked her swollen clit with my tongue, making sure to use

my piercing in the middle of it against her bundle of nerves.

I swept my tongue up her pussy, cleaning her up before I moved to my knees and carefully rolled Sadie onto her stomach. Settling my hands on her hips, I raised her ass into the air, giving me better access to her.

“I wish you were awake for this, baby,” I murmured. “But I can’t have you. You can’t know what I am.”

I fisted my erection and stroked myself for a few seconds before lining up behind her. The broad head of my dick nudged her wet folds. I sucked in a sharp breath as I slowly sank into her. I didn’t get far because of how tight she was. She had to have been a virgin until me.

“*Fuuuuck, Sadie,*” I groaned as I withdrew just a little before I pushed back in, sinking deeper this time. I did this a couple times before I was buried inside of her, my balls pressed against the back of her thighs.

Slowly, I withdrew before I slammed back into her. I fisted her hair, circling it around my hand to raise her up so she could bounce on my dick. My thrusts built until I was pistoning into her, our flesh slapping and filling the silence. Small noises escaped her in her sleep while I fucked her. Her sounds drove me faster, lust surging through my veins like a blazing fire.

I lowered my eyes, watching my dick slide in and out of her pussy. Her asscheeks clapped, wiggling every time my tattooed pelvis smacked against the large globes.

Sweat built onto my temple and upper lip. I panted while I held back the feral side of me that wanted to unleash on her. I couldn’t do that. Even though I was a Devil and feared by humans, I didn’t want to hurt her. Instead of letting go, I got as close as I could to roughly fuck her.

I dipped my hand from her waist to between her legs in the front. My fingers found her clit, and I rubbed it while I grew closer to my orgasm.

“I want you to come on my dick, baby. Be a good girl and give it to me,” I ordered.

She didn't come right away. I expected as much because of how difficult it was for her to come the last time. But when she came, her walls squeezed on my dick in a painful vice grip. I jerked my hips against her, chasing my orgasm. Right before I spilled my seed, I quickly withdrew from her and stroked my shaft, watching the milky white liquid land on her ass and lower back. I breathed hard, whimpering as I worked every last drop of my cum onto her ass.

When I finished coming, I let go of my dick and breathed hard while staring at her.

“It's not enough,” I whispered.

I rubbed my cum into her skin like it was lotion. I wanted my scent on her. Because I couldn't have her, I still wanted a part of me to always be with her. I wanted every Devil to know she was mine and to never touch her. Only *I* could have her.

Guilt started to creep up on me, but just like last time, I pushed it beneath the surface. I refused to feel bad. When I leave, I'd kill another rapist and harvest his flesh and blood. It would make up for what I did tonight.

I stared down at her ass, which was still in the air. Sadie continued to sleep soundly, not aware of what just happened.

I had taken her virginity.

A smirk pulled at the corner of my lip. *Good*. I would be her first and only.

My softening cock twitched, blood rushing to the organ again. I fisted myself, slowly stroking my wet shaft. The piercings on the underside of my dick bumped against my palm, adding more intoxicating sensations. Beads of pre-cum came from the pierced tip, glistening in the moonlit room.

One more time, then I'd leave.

CHAPTER 11

Sadie



I snorted awake. The corner of my mouth was damp from my drool, and the pillow beneath my cheek was wet from it.

I blinked my eyes open and turned my head to look at the clock on my nightstand.

4:59 a.m.

I had fallen asleep earlier than my usual time. My insomnia was a nightmare, dictating when I could sleep. My psychiatrist prescribed me sleep meds, but they only knocked me out for a few short hours.

My thighs ached, and as I turned over in my bed, my core stung like I had stuck something large into my vagina.

I raised my T-shirt and found that I had no panties on again. I swore I had put some on last night after my bath. Reaching my hand down, I touched the outside of my opening and hissed from the sting.

I didn't think I could pass it off as it was just being in my head. There was no way I could make something like this up.

My heart beat at a faster pace, my mind whirling with ideas about what had happened while I slept.

I was alone. My parents were gone, and I had locked the doors before I went to sleep.

Sliding out of bed, I searched under the sheets for my underwear and came back empty-handed. I turned around,

glancing at the floor, looking for the black cotton panties and not spotting them. I released a shaky breath and looked at my window, seeing it was closed.

By now, my breathing had become choppy, and it was harder to draw air into my lungs.

Did someone break in and have their way with me?

I reached down again, touching my sore vagina, and curled my fingers near my entrance, finding it wet. A whimper slipped past my lips, and I raised my hand in front of me. My fingers glistened with arousal, making my heart race faster. It couldn't have been mine. I refrained from doing anything last night, and I didn't believe I had a sex dream.

"Oh god," I cried softly.

My eyes bounced at everything in my room, searching for the perpetrator who had taken advantage of me.

Wouldn't I have woken up from it? There was no way that someone raped me in my sleep, and I didn't wake up.

My paranoia took root, worsening my thoughts of what could have happened.

"Don't think about it, don't think about it," I chanted as I slipped on some shorts and stormed out of my bedroom.

Tears swam in my eyes, and little hiccuping sobs escaped me as I rushed down the stairs.

"Don't think about it, don't think about it," I said, never stopping as I strode into the kitchen where the video camera footage was.

I tapped on the iPad screen, going back several hours, watching for someone who had broken in.

My hands trembled as I watched the feed, my mouth still moving with the silent words.

Nothing out of the ordinary showed up. Even as I fast forward through it, keeping my eyes on the screen and looking at all of the angles, no one came in last night.

A tear slipped down my cheek, and my chin quivered.

It was all in my head then.

I slowly backed away from the counter, keeping my eyes on the screen that showed the paused video.

If no one broke in, then why was I sore like someone had penetrated me?

Where did my underwear go?

I swallowed around the lump that formed in my throat.

Something didn't sit right with me. Someone had to have broken in and wasn't caught on camera.

As much as I didn't trust them, I should call the police.

I stood in the same spot, hesitating and staring at the screens while thinking about all the messed up things the police had done to me.

I didn't like them because of how they treated people with mental illnesses. Most of the police here in Devil's City were corrupt. I personally knew quite a few of them, thanks to my dad and his high position in the elite.

Dad always had security when he went out in public. Some people didn't like him and tried to kill him.

When I went with him and Mom out in public together, the police officers leered at me and made some snide comments while they inappropriately touched me. My parents weren't looking while they did that, so they got away with it. They said no one would believe me and that my parents wouldn't care.

I fell for it. Never telling anyone what they had done to me.

Still staring at the screen, I decided to take my chances and call the police.

“SO YOU WOKE up with no underwear on and thought someone broke in to steal it?” Officer Johnson said with a long sigh. He looked at me like I was mad and needed to be locked away in the city’s asylum.

I folded my arms over my chest, my cheeks warming with a blush. “You make me sound like I’m crazy.”

He raised a dark bushy eyebrow, not bothering to hide his answer from showing on his face.

Officer Johnson thought I was crazy. I hated that label.

The police knew my mental illness, thanks to my parents telling the chief of police that I was “unwell.” It seemed like my family had no problem airing my dirty laundry for them to get sympathy from other people. I never received any sympathy or show of kindness. Instead, I was othered.

I ground my molars together, trying my damndest to hold back from screeching at the two officers who weren’t helping me. I inhaled deeply through my nose, calming my nerves, and released the breath through my mouth.

“I wish you would listen to me,” I said evenly.

Officer Johnson shrugged his broad shoulders and crossed his arms over his chest. His bulletproof vest made his arms stand further out and didn’t look all that comfortable. I didn’t care and hoped he had pinched nerves and pulled muscles for the rest of his life. What good was he for?

“I checked the feed, and there’s no sign that someone broke in ma’am,” Officer Anderson said as he came to Johnson’s side. Static, then a soft woman’s voice came over their radios. They ignored dispatch as they watched me with boredom in their uncaring eyes.

“Can I at least just make a report? I swear someone came in and ...” I couldn’t utter the words because of how much it upset me. Tears stung my eyes, and the two officers shifted, suddenly uncomfortable now that I was about to sob.

“Take it easy, Miss.” Anderson reached his hand forward, intending to touch my shoulder but stopped himself. His ice-blue eyes filled with sympathy, but it was only momentarily before judgment shined in them.

“Just please ...” I whispered. “Do something.”

“Miss, I don’t mean to be rude about this, okay?” Johnson started, his voice deeper and holding authority. I turned my attention to him, my eyes wide and shining with tears. His lip curled at the sight. “Have you been taking your medicine? I know your father is the city’s legislator, and he had talked about you having ... a psychotic illness. Do you think maybe you’re having a mental breakdown and possibly need to visit the hospital?”

My heart jumped to my throat, and I quickly shook my head. “No!”

The last thing I wanted or needed was to be handcuffed and taken to the psych ward for a week under “evaluation.”

The two officers shared a look with each other before they turned their attention back to me.

I breathed hard through my nose. “No. I don’t need to go to the hospital. I need you to do your job.”

Johnson rolled his eyes, and Anderson turned away, his hand covering his mouth and wiping away whatever he mumbled under his breath.

“Look, if it makes you feel a little better, we’ll check the security office to see if we find something. But right now, there isn’t anything we can do,” Johnson said with an aggravated sigh.

Clearly, these two didn’t want to be here, and there was nothing I could do to convince them that something wasn’t right.

I swiped an angry tear away from my cheek before it trailed further down to my jaw. “Fine. Whatever.”

Johnson rolled his eyes again and backed away a step. “Is that all, Miss Madison?”

“Yep.” I grabbed my elbows with the opposite hands and hugged my arms over my stomach. I averted my gaze from them, no longer able to look at them. “You can go now.”

Dispatch talked over their radios and ended with static before it went quiet.

I felt their stares on me, making the hairs on my arms and the back of my neck stand. I knew they must have been deciding whether to take me to the hospital or not. Everybody always did.

I held my breath and hoped they’d just leave and not take me with them.

“Well, if anything else happens, just let us know. Have a good day, ma’am,” Anderson said.

I released my breath, watching them from the corner of my eye as they walked away. Their footsteps echoed through the hall, and I listened to the front door close.

I stood alone, trembling and my chin quivering.

What was the point of calling the police if they couldn’t do their fucking job?

Once again, I was brushed aside and not listened to. Why did people treat me this way? Why wouldn’t anyone ever listen to me and hear what I had to say?

Seconds ticked by, and I fought back the tears, dropping my arms to my sides and sniffing. Swiping away a few straggler tears, I left the kitchen and went upstairs to my bedroom. Looking around the room, I searched for signs that someone had been here while I’d slept.

I sighed and walked into my bathroom, starting the shower. Steam curled into the bathroom, fogging the mirror and making sweat bead on my forehead. Once stripped out of my clothes I stepped under the spray, closed my eyes and held back the tears that wanted to break free.

Even though the police didn't believe me, I still knew someone had broken in, come into my room and raped me. Why else was I sore like something had been shoved inside of me?

A piece inside of me broke, and I let the tears fall free. They slipped from my closed eyes, mixing with the water as I tilted my head under the hot spray.

CHAPTER 12

Sadie



The next night

“*YOU’RE MINE,*” a husky voice groaned into my ear.

I cracked open my eyes as I woke up.

Darkness encompassed my bedroom. The only light I had was the tiny one at the far side of the room which served more as a fairy light than anything else. The clock ticked each second, my focus homing on it until it became loud in my head.

Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock.

I peered over my shoulder as I still lay on my side.

I was alone.

I scooted back on the mattress as I sat up, my bed squeaking beneath my weight. Bringing my thin sheet up to my chin, I searched through the darkness for the person who had broken in the other night. I knew he had to have been here recently.

Despite being by myself, I had a feeling that he was here not too long before I woke up.

I held my breath, still looking through the dark room. My eyes adjusted, and I bounced my gaze off every object: my

dresser, soft pink lounge chair, some clothes that were piled on the floor.

I stopped breathing momentarily, worrying that this man could pop out at any second. He became my bogeyman, and I was afraid that he'd grab my ankles and yank me off the bed to join him in some monster land.

Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock.

Gathering my courage, I flipped the lamp's switch on the nightstand next to me. I swept my gaze around the room, still searching for a sign.

I sucked in a sharp breath as I spotted something at the foot of my bed, to the left of my feet.

Nervously wetting my lip, I crawled to my knees and leaned forward, the sheet pooling around my waist as I grabbed the neatly folded piece of paper. I gazed at it in my trembling hand for a few long seconds before opening it while holding my breath.

YOU'RE my little slice of Heaven. Your taste is superior to any food or drink in this world, and you feel better than any pussy I've ever had.

You're mine.

Call the police all you want, baby. I do love a good chase before I kill. I'll gift you their eyes for looking at you the way they did.

Catch you later.

MY BREATH HITCHED.

His handwriting was small and choppy. I looked for a signature but didn't find anything.

Of course, he wouldn't leave his name. He didn't want to get caught.

Now I had proof to give to the police that someone really did break into my parent's home and raped me.

I scrutinized the note multiple times, hoping it wasn't real and that someone didn't assault me.

My heart thumped erratically in my chest, spreading adrenaline through my veins like a blazing fire. I felt the familiar knot in my throat when I was about to cry, but no tears came. It was difficult sometimes to have emotions other than melancholy.

I swallowed around the lump in my throat and squeezed my stinging eyes shut.

I wouldn't call the police again. I didn't want to deal with them and listen to them passively tell me I was crazy.

I clenched my hands into fists and gritted my teeth.

They'd more than likely let my parents know about their visit, but even they wouldn't care. I could see their bored expressions as they looked at me while I tried to explain what had happened. They wouldn't listen to me. They never did.

But now I was worried about Mom and Dad ending up dead because my stalker was watching me.

Where was he hiding yesterday when I talked to the police?

So many questions and no answers.

An idea popped into my head, and I knew it would give me peace of mind while I was on my own.

I stormed out of my bedroom and strode down the hallway toward my parents' bedroom. I went straight to their large walk-in closet, searching for the box they kept hidden that had guns in it.

Dad had secured their weapons from me years ago. They were afraid I would one day snap and kill them and the rest of the town. All because of my mental illness which had a demonizing stigma surrounding it. Society deemed people like

me dangerous because they didn't understand the illness. They believed the media that made us seem like we were these unhinged monsters who would drown their kids in a bathtub in a schizophrenic episode.

I searched through my parents' grand dressing room, not finding the hidden box. They must have put it somewhere different, knowing that I knew the last location.

Minutes passed as I looked through their belongings, and with each passing second, my desperation grew.

I had a stalker. He left me a note to taunt me.

I shivered at the thought of him touching me. He tasted me, then raped me.

My heart skipped a beat, and my breath hitched.

I was a virgin before he took it away from me.

"There you are!" I pulled the box out, noticing it wasn't locked. That saved me time from having to find the key.

Slowly, I opened the container. I had expected to see just guns, but there was more in it. Newspaper clippings and old photos.

I grabbed one of the newspapers, reading the headline with the title, *Governor's Daughter Disappears*.

Scrunching my eyebrows, I read the paragraphs about her disappearing on Halloween and her family being unable to find her. I turned the paper over and swallowed when I saw a picture of her taped to the back of it. She had dark hair with matching eyes; her smile was soft and innocent as she stared at the camera that took her picture. I read a line that said she was eighteen when she went missing.

I set the paper down and picked up another clipping with the same information but a different girl. The year marked was in the 40's and the missing girl was nineteen.

My stomach clenched, and by now, my hands were trembling.

Why did my parents have these?

I read the articles again, looking for a reason why my parents would have this hidden in a box. My breath caught in my chest when I realized the last name was Madison.

I bunched my eyebrows together, staring at the old, withered newspaper. My thumb brushed against the picture of the girl who looked back at me with a soft smile.

Shaking my head, I put the papers back into the container and grabbed the handgun. I checked the magazine and saw that it was loaded. I closed the box and pushed it back into its place, then left my parents' bedroom with the weapon.

If the man who assaulted me returned, then I'd take care of the problem myself.

My stomach clenched.

I didn't think I could shoot him. I wasn't a monster like what people thought I was. Maybe if I waved the gun around, then it'd scare him off.

I released a shaky breath and nodded.

It might work. Who wouldn't get scared by a gun?

CHAPTER 13

Kai



Flicking my wrist, I snapped the lighter closed and inhaled the smoke from my lit cigarette. The cherry at the end brightened in the night, the only source of light I had except for the stars in the sky.

I leaned my head back against the brick of the safe house, watching the stars above me wink. They were beautiful, but not as beautiful as Sadie.

That girl had been on my mind twenty-four-seven. I tried everything to get her out of my head. When I indulged in her, I thought it would scratch that itch. But I was dead wrong. Her taste still lingered on my tongue, and my cock wept for release again.

She was driving me mad and intensifying my need to rut her.

It was dangerous to get a Devil's attention. Let alone make one hunger for you, not just for your flesh, but for your pussy. We were tenacious beings, and as much as humans thought we were mindless creatures, we had the same desires they did. We desired comfort, lavish items, food, and sex.

Sadie was like a delicacy to me. Something that I never wanted to stop gorging on.

I groaned as blood rushed to my dick, hardening it until it became painful. My hips moved of their own accord, rising up like I was meeting Sadie's hips as she rode me.

Fuck, I'd love it if that girl bounced on my dick, sultry eyes hooded as she watched me lose myself in her.

Closing my eyes, I rolled the cigarette between my teeth as I rubbed the heel of my palm on my jeans where my throbbing erection was stretching the material.

What was it about the girl that made me wild for her?

Could it be how she looked at me the first time I saw her when I kicked the feral Devil off her? Was it the loneliness in her eyes as she gazed at me with her eyelids hooded, her blood pooling around her? Or could it be because of her scent and how it unleashed my animalistic side, wanting to chase and pin her beneath me?

Whatever it was, she was fucked, and so was I.

The pool's water lapped gently against the concrete sides and the filter softly hummed. It was a calming sound for me, one that I focused on to ground myself. I could see the soft blue light inside of the pool behind my closed eyelids. Cracking them open, I gazed at the water across from me, unable to get the image out of my head of Sadie on her stomach with her ass in the air while I pounded into her virgin pussy. I had tasted her virgin blood when I found it coated on my cock.

I shuddered, groaning as I remembered the coppery taste.

The back door opened, then softly snicked closed. I watched from the corner of my eye as Ricky's shadowed form walked toward me. He lit his cigarette, his hand cupping around the end of it so the nonexistent wind wouldn't put it out. Once he sucked in the smoke, he stuffed the lighter back into his pocket and stood in front of me. His spiky blue hair stood out in the darkness, the pool light creating highlights and shadows in certain places.

"Found out some info about Levi," Ricky said as he sat on the chair next to me.

"Yeah?" I tensed, caught the cigarette between my teeth from my two fingers, and inhaled deeply before pulling it from

between my lips. I blew out the smoke with a sigh.

“Levi was last seen a year ago—”

“I know,” I interrupted.

When I last saw Levi, he had been a hundred feet away from me. I had been so close to wrapping my hands around his neck and wringing the life out of him for taking my sister away from me. He still had her, and that alone infuriated me. I didn't know whether she was dead or alive, but I would find out.

Ricky huffed. “As I was saying, Levi was last seen a year ago when you found where he had been lying low, but I heard from a little birdie that they spotted him in cemetery number one, digging up a grave.”

My eyebrows drew together, and I narrowed my eyes while staring ahead at the pool. I dragged in the smoke from my cigarette and held it for a second before blowing it out of my nose.

Ricky waited for me to say something, and when I didn't, he sighed. “What was he doing in the cemetery? Thanks for asking, Kai. The Devil who saw him noticed his eyes were brighter red with yellow in them. He had a pretty gnarly gash on his face, and he acted like a starving Devil. He must've been so hungry that he became desperate enough to dig up a dead body.”

That wasn't unheard of. Devils ate flesh, whether it was dead or alive.

“So?” I asked and glanced at Ricky from the corner of my eye.

“*Sooo*, someone must've gotten their hands on Levi and starved him.” Ricky flicked his cigarette on the ground and leaned forward with an impatient sigh. “Look, I know you've got something on your mind, and someone has your attention, but you need to focus on Levi to get your little sister back. He's returned to Devil's City, and will feed at some point in

the near future. Which means he'll disappear for however long ___”

I flicked my finished cigarette and stood up. Lacing my fingers together and raising my hands high above my head, I stretched, groaning at the end of it when something popped in my shoulder and back. God, that felt good.

Dropping my arms to my side, I turned toward Ricky, finding him watching me with annoyance, his eyes narrowed. His pierced nostrils flared, and his lips thinned.

I knew my friend had enough of my shit, but that was what friends were for, right?

“Did he leave a blood trail?” I casually asked.

“No.”

I sighed and looked away.

“By the way, I'll also keep looking into which families have been sacrificing their daughters. I think I found a trail, but I'm not sure.”

I nodded. “Good. Thank you.”

I walked away, my heavy footsteps and the crickets chirping were the only sounds in the night as I headed around the side of the building to reach my street bike.

There was a certain human I was aching to visit. It'd only been a couple of hours since I'd last seen her, and that was too long.

CHAPTER 14

Sadie



I cracked open my eyes, sleep fogging my mind. The ceiling fan spun in quick circles, circulating the cool air in my room and giving me that needed white noise.

Something woke me up.

Sucking in a shaky breath, I turned my head as I lay still on my side.

It was hard to see in the dark because my eyes hadn't adjusted to it yet. My heart stopped dead in my chest as I spotted the tall shadowed form sitting on my lounge chair in the corner. Immediately, I knew it had to have been my stalker. Who else would break into my parents' home and watch me sleep?

He tsked, the sound making me shiver. "You're supposed to be asleep. Naughty girl."

I sat up, clutching the blanket to my chest. My eyes started to adjust to the dark, and I saw more of him. He wore all black, making it difficult to make out any features. My heart pounded so hard in my chest that I felt it in my throat. I was scared that he could hear it, knowing how much he frightened me.

"Who are you?" I asked, my voice cracking.

My stalker watched me, hidden in the shadows, not answering my question. He only stared at me, the weight of his gaze making me tremble. I suddenly felt self-conscious from

having his full attention on me. It was absurd that I worried what he thought about how I looked right now.

I tightened my hold on the blankets that I held up to my chin. It created a barrier between him and me, giving me a false sense of security. It was a useless one, but at least it made me feel safe for a moment.

My pulse thundered in my ears, and my breaths became shaky, even a little louder. I couldn't believe he was here.

"You have some nerve coming in here. I'm calling the police." I reached toward my nightstand, where my cell phone sat.

He huffed a laugh that was deep and husky. The sound went straight to my core like electricity shooting through my body. I didn't want to linger on that reaction and ask myself why his chuckle turned me on.

He snapped open a zippo lighter and flicked it, the flame popped up and gave me a view of his mouth and neck as he lit a cigarette. Flicking his wrist, the lighter clicked shut. Blowing out the smoke, he adjusted on the seat, still staring at me.

"Call the police, baby. I've been planning on taking care of those two officers who came here the other day," he said. That voice ... It sounded familiar, but I couldn't put my finger on it.

My heart stuttered over a beat, and my blood ran cold as what he said registered. Officer Anderson and Johnson's faces popped into my mind and how they looked at me with disgust and impatience.

How did my stalker find out about them? Let alone see the whole interaction I had with them?

As much as I didn't like them and hoped both sides of their pillows would forever be warm, I didn't want them to die because of me.

"You don't mean that," I whispered.

He chuckled and sucked on his cancer stick; the end of it grew a brighter red.

Blowing out the smoke, he smoothly said, "Try me."

"They're innocent." They weren't entirely, but I didn't want their blood on my hands.

He laughed again and inhaled the smoke from his cigarette. The weight of his gaze on me made my face and chest tingle.

I just now realized I hadn't gotten out the gun that was hidden in my nightstand drawer. My hands were too shaky to hold it, and I feared that if I reached for the weapon now he would hurt me.

I swallowed hard. He gave off the impression that he could close the space between us before I got the gun out and pointed at him.

My clock ticked, and a car passed by the house. The headlights of it turned, lighting up the room for a split second. That was all I needed to get a glimpse of the man sitting on the chair in my room. His shaggy white hair stood out from the rest of him, then his dark eyes with intricate geometrical shapes tattooed beneath them to make him look like he was permanently tired. Tattoos covered the lower half of his face from his ears down to his jaw and neck.

The man from the bus stop who talked to me popped into my mind. He had the same tattoos under his eyes and shaggy white hair with pieces of it falling over his eyes.

It couldn't be a coincidence; this had to be the same person.

My heart missed a beat, and my world came crashing around me, making it hard to breathe.

"You," I whispered breathlessly.

He caught the cigarette between his teeth and rolled it. All the while, he watched me with male amusement shining in his dark eyes.

"Me," he drawled, his voice husky.

The room became dark again once the car passed the house.

The room felt like it was getting smaller, like there was less air. I wondered if it was possible to suffocate with the terror of being in the same room with him; with him watching me.

“Y-you ...” I swallowed hard and squeezed my fingers tighter around the sheets. “You raped me.”

He tensed for a split second, and if I hadn’t been looking at him, I wouldn’t have seen it.

“That’s also up for debate. You enjoyed it. If I remember correctly—and I have a phenomenal memory—you came on my cock four times. Tell me how that’s rape, baby.”

My jaw nearly hit the ground, and my mouth dried.

So he really did rape me. It wasn’t just my paranoia. The police officers were wrong, and I was right the whole time.

My chest squeezed, and my eyes stung with tears.

“I was asleep! I didn’t consent, you sick asshole!”

If I had any courage, I’d get up and beat the crap out of him. But from what I remembered at the bus stop, he towered over me. He might have been lean, but I noticed the muscles on him and the lethality that dripped from him. Everything about that man screamed that he was a fighter and didn’t ever lose.

My breath hitched as I realized something.

I had masturbated to the thought of him. I had fantasized about him touching me and making me come.

“Oh my god,” I whispered as I covered my mouth with the fingers of both my hands, my breathing increasing until I was gasping for air.

My world began spinning, and I couldn’t catch my breath.

“Easy now, baby. Don’t start hyperventilating,” he cooed.

“Get out,” I whispered. I lowered my eyes and stared down at my lap, trying to pull myself back together. This man had ripped at my loose seams, and I fell apart in his awaiting hands. I didn’t know if I could ever recover from this.

He shifted as he got to his feet and put out his cigarette with the sole of his boot.

“Whatever’s happening in your beautiful mind, don’t let those demons consume you.”

I raised my eyes, our gazes meeting. He sauntered toward the bedroom door, his fingers dragging on the end of my bed as he passed by it.

“The only one who’s allowed to consume you is me. Remember that,” he drawled. He stopped at the door and turned to look at me. Thanks to my night light, he was no longer hidden in the shadows.

Our eyes met, and I burned to ask him a question.

“How long have you been watching me?” I finally asked.

“A while, baby. Someday, I’ll tell you everything. But for now, be a good girl and don’t call the cops. You wouldn’t want me to kill them, too.”

My stomach knotted, and I watched as he left me alone in my bedroom. I trembled, my shoulders rocking with cries I held back from escaping me. I didn’t want him to hear me sob as he walked away.

I hadn’t expected it to go this way. The whole point of having protection was to use it, but I couldn’t even muster the courage to grab the gun. I turned my gaze to the nightstand, eyes wide as I found I was still unable to move.

I didn’t know how much time had passed before I climbed out of bed, silently padded across the room, and out the door.

When I reached the bottom of the stairs, I went straight to the kitchen, where the security footage was. I checked it and found that he had removed the times he came in and out because it didn’t show him entering or leaving.

This whole time, I had been right about my stalker. He had repeatedly violated me in my sleep and claimed that I liked it because I orgasmed.

My breath trembled out of me as I shook with nerves. My stomach churned, threatening to purge the dinner I had earlier this evening.

“Why did it have to be you?” I whispered tearfully. “Why couldn’t it have been somebody else?”

He was the only one who noticed me. Who talked to me, even though I was a grouch to him. I had hoped to run into him again and start on a better foot, but clearly, that wouldn’t happen now.

A tear slipped down my cheek. “Why didn’t you stay?”

I squeezed my eyes shut.

I was so lonely that I’d accept him to keep me company.

What the heck was wrong with me?

CHAPTER 15

Sadie



I gazed at the man before me. Despite not being able to see his face, I sensed something familiar about him. He had a calming effect on me, but I could still discern his lethality. He could embrace me in his strong arms and tuck me against his chest, but at the same time, he could snap my neck with just his pinky.

Looking at his tall, dark figure, I felt he would be the one to comfort me, not harm me.

My chest filled with longing as my feet guided me toward him. He kept moving away with each step as if drifting down a long, dim corridor.

Why was he leaving me?

He cocked his head, the weight of his gaze heavy on my face. He took a step closer to me, able to close a small amount of space between us, unlike what I could do. His large hand slowly reached out toward me, beckoning me to take it. Rings covered his fingers, one of them being the symbol of a Devil. It was a demon's face with horns and its serpent tongue out.

My stomach clenched, and I held my breath as I raised my eyes again to his shadowed face. His scent of leather, spice, and cigarettes grew stronger as he took another step closer to me. I shuddered, breathing him in and clinging to the comfort his smell and presence brought me.

"I don't bite," he murmured. Despite his tone sounding bored, his voice was husky with desire. He observed me with

his piercing gaze, peeling back every layer I had and seeing who I was at the core. A light filtered through, only lighting up his eyes. They were obsidian, sparkling with male amusement as he watched me struggle to speak.

What he said echoed in my head.

I don't bite.

Those words were so familiar. I'd heard it before. But where?

"Come to me," he purred and wiggled the fingers of his outstretched hand.

I stepped closer to the shadows where he stood from my place in the light. I reached a hand out, fingers stretched so I could take his offered one.

Words were at the tip of my tongue. Questions of who he was, what he was going to do to me, and where we were going, but I couldn't speak. My tongue was thick and heavier than any weight I'd experienced. It didn't help that it suddenly felt like cotton was in my mouth, and I couldn't pull all of it out no matter how much I tried.

Something behind him moved before our fingers could touch, and he turned his neck to look at it. A giant claw-tipped hand grabbed his face and slammed his head against a brick wall that appeared beside us.

A scream caught in my throat, and I tried to move toward him, but my feet were cemented to the ground.

"No!" I whisper-screamed.

"No!" I whimpered as I jerked awake.

I breathed hard; sweat coated my forehead and my back, making me feel sticky. My shirt stuck to my clammy skin, where I had to pinch it between my fingers to peel it away. I sat up in bed, running my hand through my hair. I glanced around my bedroom, chasing after my dream which was slowly fading away into nothing but an unpleasant feeling.

My clock ticked, and my fan whooshed in gentle spins.

Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock.

I released a shaky breath and slid out of bed, grabbing my phone and looking at it for notifications.

Nothing.

It was my birthday today, and I had hoped to hear something from my friends.

Mom and Dad came home the night before, lending me an easier night of sleep since I didn't have to worry about my stalker breaking in and assaulting me while I slept.

My legs trembled as I walked into my bathroom. I did my business and threw on a robe before rushing out of the bedroom. It had been causing me a lot of anxiety since the first time I'd woken up with no underwear on.

I padded toward the kitchen, my parent's voices reaching me as they talked to each other. They flirted like usual, and I caught them sharing small kisses as soon as I walked through the doorway. They sat next to each other with their plates of food in front of them.

I cringed at the display and went to the refrigerator, taking the pitcher of freshly squeezed orange juice out. Grabbing a glass, I poured myself a cup and set the pitcher down before I guzzled the drink.

The inside of my mouth was still dry, my throat working around the lump formed in it. My anxiety crept up, inching closer and nearly suffocating me, almost seeming like it came out of nowhere.

The dream I woke up from lingered like a dark cloud hanging over my head. I couldn't remember much from it, but all I felt was a sense of despair and desperation.

I picked up the pitcher of juice and poured myself another cup.

“Slow down, Sadie, and save some for the rest of us,” Mom scolded from her spot next to Dad.

Not a *“happy birthday”* I see.

No kind greetings or anything.

My shoulders slumped, and I lowered my cup on the counter, averting my gaze. I peeked at Dad, who chewed on his food and pushed some of the fluffy scrambled eggs around on his plate. Mom stared at me, eyes narrowed with annoyance.

“Sorry,” I mumbled.

My stalker wouldn’t have been mad at me about drinking some juice. He was obsessed with me. He’d most likely say something smart and sexual.

Jesus, I couldn’t believe I thought about him and what he’d do right now if he heard what my mom said.

“Because he’s the only one who pays attention to me,” a small voice whispered in the back of my mind.

The anger on Mom’s face was wiped away and replaced with a blank look as she stared at me.

I wished she looked at me with love rather than treating me like I was a stranger in her home.

“Do you have any plans today?” she asked.

I furrowed my eyebrows as I frowned.

How could she ask that? She knew how introverted I was. It was rare that I went out.

“I don’t think so. Why?”

“Well, it’s your birthday. Unless you forgot?” Mom breathed out a laugh and shot me a nasty look like I was stupid for forgetting something like this.

I didn’t forget, but I had expected them to.

I shook my head, my cheeks heating from a blush. “I didn’t.”

Dad watched us as we talked. His gaze lingered on me, and there was a weird look in his eye as he stared at me.

Why is he looking at me like that?

My heart sped up, and I backed away a step and glanced at my full cup of juice.

Did they tamper with it? Did Dad add something to the juice, waiting for me to drink it?

I swallowed hard, my breathing picking up until I was nearly gasping for air.

“Get cleaned up. We’re taking you out,” Mom said, her voice as cold as ice.

She didn’t sound excited at all to spend time with me. Why bother?

I swallowed nervously and brought my hands to my chest, my fingers fidgeting together. My palms tingled, and I trembled as I focused on my drink, to the point I felt like I was going mad.

“Sadie?” Mom’s harsh voice broke through my spell.

I blinked and nodded. “I’ll be just a minute.”

Turning away, I fled the kitchen and went to my bedroom with my heart in my throat and my mind spiraling. I closed the door and bent forward, set my palms on my knees and gasped for air while I rode the tide of my panic attack.

CHAPTER 16

Sadie



My room was colder than usual, causing me to shiver. Glancing at my window, I noticed it was open, and my curtains fluttered in the breeze.

Frozen in place where I stood just inside the doorway, my heart missed a beat or two before it started racing and thudding against my chest.

I didn't open my window last night or this morning.

The image of my stalker's shadowed figure and white hair flashed in my mind. It must have been him, because who else would have opened my window?

Swallowing nervously, I glanced around my bedroom, looking for a sign of him. Despite his tall figure being difficult to miss, my paranoid mind worried he was hidden somewhere. I checked the bathroom, closet, and even under the bed and then straightened and stiffened when I noticed something on the mattress. I hadn't seen it at first before I looked underneath my bed.

A small black box was wrapped with a ribbon the color of blood. It sat on the mattress, beckoning me to open it.

It wasn't there when I left.

Swallowing to wet my dry throat, I timidly grabbed the box with a trembling hand. It was black velvet, like the ones used for jewelry and big enough to hold a small necklace.

I bit my lip, hesitating about whether or not I should open it.

What if it was a bomb? Or a trap of some sort?

I was overtaken by my paranoia, causing me to imagine a million scenarios of what it could be and how it could potentially harm me instead of simply opening it and finding out for myself.

“It’s all in my head,” I whispered, trying hard to get a hold of my sanity. “It’s just all in my head. It’s nothing bad.”

Releasing a slow breath, I pulled the ribbon. It fell away, and I slowly opened the lid. A gasp slipped from me as I jerked my fingers away from the box. It tumbled to the floor, and I shot my hands to my mouth to silence a scream that caught in my throat. I scrambled back a few steps from the bed, staring at the black box and the four eyeballs that tumbled from it.

He meant it when he said he’d deliver to me the eyes of those who supposedly looked at me wrong. A sick part of me liked that the cops got what was coming for them. They weren’t good people, and the city was better off without them.

A lump formed in my throat, and my thoughts were everywhere. Guilt squeezed my chest and made my stomach curdle.

Something caught my eye, and I carefully stepped forward and picked up the folded piece of paper that stuck out of the box. Unfolding it, I read the note while my heart beat wildly in my chest.

They shouldn’t have looked at you the way they did. Don’t worry, baby, I believed you when you said you were assaulted.

But we both know you love my touch and that you don’t mean it when you say it’s rape.

I reread the note three times, my pulse thundering in my ears like drums. I could hear his voice through the note, raising the tiny hairs on my arms.

He was wrong. I didn't like his touch because I wasn't awake for it and hadn't consented to him doing those things.

That's a lie, the tiny voice in the back of my mind whispered.

I closed my eyes, inhaling a shaky breath. Images flashed through my mind as I pictured my stalker slipping my panties down and thrusting his cock into me. Did he moan while he used me like some sex doll? Did he whisper how good I felt?

Squeezing my thighs together, I tried to ease the throbbing in my clit.

This was wrong on so many levels, but there was no going back now.

I found my stalker attractive.

I enjoyed having his attention and didn't want it to ever stop.

I held the note in one hand and slid the other between my legs, brushing the backs of my fingers over my pulsing clit. A whimper slipped from my mouth.

"Sadie?" Mom's muffled voice came from down the hall, making me jump.

I quickly gathered the eyeballs and set them in the box. The smooth, soft texture of them had my stomach churning and me gagging. I glanced around, looking for somewhere to hide the box, and ended up tossing it under my bed. Right as I stood back up, Mom lightly rapped her knuckles on my door before she opened it.

Mom peeked her head in and slowly stepped inside with a sheer white dress hanging over her arm. She held a blank expression as she gazed at me, her eyes narrowing as she took me in.

I stopped breathing, afraid she knew what I had hidden beneath my bed.

“What are you still doing in your pajamas? Why is your window open?” Mom asked with a huff. I sighed, my shoulders sagging with relief. She shook her head and waved her hand to brush aside her questions. “Never mind. I brought you a dress I want you to wear.”

I raised my eyebrows and took timid steps toward her. “You haven’t gotten me anything for years.”

“You make me sound like I’m some horrible mom.” The blank look she always gave me morphed into one that held offense. She placed her hand on her chest, feigning hurt and disappointment.

I winced and bit my tongue, keeping myself from saying anything more.

When Mom wasn’t ignoring me, she guilted me because she had to be the perfect mother and wife at all times. She didn’t want to accept that she wasn’t a good parent and that she was as abusive as she was neglectful.

When I didn’t say anything, she sighed and held up the dress for me to look at it. It was beautiful. It appeared to be crafted from the most delicate silk with hand-stitched gems which gave it an otherworldly appearance. It had two finger-width straps and the bottom split into sections that would expose my legs. The dress looked like it was made for a goddess, not some depressed human girl.

“Oh wow,” I breathed, reaching forward and pinching the soft silk between my fingers. “Where are we going that requires me to wear this?”

It wasn’t even noon yet, and she wanted me to dress up like I was going to some fancy ball.

“It’s a surprise,” Mom said with a tiny smile.

I stared at her and the dress for a few more silent seconds before reaching out and taking it from her. “Thank you. I won’t take long.”

Mom nodded, still standing there awkwardly and glancing around my room with a weird look on her face. I held my breath, my heart skipping a few beats as I worried she might be aware of the box hidden under my bed. And also that she knew about my stalker and all my feelings about him. She turned her gaze to me and I held my breath and wondered if she could hear my thoughts. Something flashed across her face that I couldn't read before it was gone.

“I know I haven't been that vocal with you, but you've always been an obedient daughter.”

I tensed and clenched my fingers into the dress.

“Where is all of this coming from?” I asked softly.

Mom stepped forward and cupped my cheek. For the first time in however long it had been, her eyes held kindness as she gazed at me. They flicked between mine as she searched for something.

She sighed and lowered her hand from my face. “You've grown up to be such a beautiful woman. It's sad you've never had a boyfriend.”

I scrunched my eyebrows together and frowned. “You and Dad didn't want me to date, though.”

They told me growing up that I wasn't allowed to see any boys. That if I did, there would be consequences that I wouldn't like. They never said *what*, and that alone scared me.

When I was a teen and not getting my parents' attention and love, I did anything to make them happy. To earn their affection. So I never dated or had sex like all the other kids were doing in high school and college.

Mom's eyes shuttered, and she folded her arms over her chest. “But you never tried, sweetie. I thought you would be like those teenagers who didn't listen to their parents. But you've always been a good girl.”

Good girl. That sounded so wrong coming from her. I was past the point of accepting any compliments from my parents.

All I ever wanted was for them to pay attention to me. To love me and be proud of me.

My stalker's dark eyes, tattoos underneath them to give him a tired look, popped into my head.

Now I was seeking acceptance somewhere else, from someone else.

At my silence, Mom unfolded one arm to brush her fingers to her jaw as she looked at me with sadness in her eyes. She turned away and left my bedroom without another word.

I released a heavy breath, my shoulders slumping.

Turning around, I looked at my bed and wondered what to do with the box of eyes.

CHAPTER 17

Sadie



Disappointment had me retreating to a secluded spot, away from everyone. I wore a black shawl to keep warm in the cool room, and to also save myself from the leering glances of the men nearby.

I never thought that I would spend my birthday at the mayor's home with his friends.

When I came downstairs from my bedroom, I noticed my parents had dressed up too. Mom donned a red dress, her sandy-blonde hair pulled up in a bouffant. Dad wore a three-piece suit and a red bowtie so that he matched his wife.

Familiar faces stood out from the rest. A few of them I'd met years ago, or they were current security details for my parents. They were no better than the corrupt cops who said lewd comments to me.

A shiver went down my spine as I noticed the chief of police was here, too. He had always given me the creeps. Chief Manson never laid a hand on me, but he made suggestive comments when my parents weren't around. I didn't understand what made these men single me out and try to get into my pants. Maybe it was because of my dad's wealth and power; it had them wondering what big money tasted like. Or perhaps it could be because I was the "crazy" daughter who "didn't know what was going on half the time."

Classical music played softly, blending with the hushed voices of everyone who mingled, talking about politics, and a

few about sex.

I stood alone in the corner, holding a flute of champagne that had been offered to me. It was still full because I refused to drink from it. I was paranoid that someone spiked it with a drug or poison.

Watching everyone, my heart cracked a little. I didn't know how much more it would take before it broke completely, so it was actually irreparable. I had hoped this would be a family-only celebration for my birthday, but no. It was more my parents not missing their friends' party while dragging me along with them. Just so they could feel better knowing I came instead of being alone at home. It could be worse. I could be at the house, waiting for a text or call from distant family and friends wishing me a happy birthday.

My parents visited with Mayor Bennet a few feet away from me. The Mayor was stocky and had a full belly and thin legs like a frog. He had slicked his salt and pepper hair back, trying to hide a bald spot near the back of his head. I watched as he chuckled, his stomach bouncing beneath his stretched suit, and he curled his fingers in his thick white mustache that covered his thin lips.

Even from feet away, I could smell the alcohol and cigar smoke on him. In his other hand, which wasn't fiddling with his mustache, he held a champagne flute that was half full.

He turned toward me with a lecherous grin. "Sadie, my beautiful girl." I barely held back the wince, not wanting to offend my parents. I wasn't his girl, but I wasn't about to tell him that. "Happy birthday. How old are you now?"

"Twenty, sir," I said softly.

His eyes sparkled with a sick kind of joy, his mouth falling open with a smile curling in the corners. "Twenty years old!" He laughed a deep belly chuckle. I didn't understand why he was laughing and what he found so funny. "If I weren't married, I'd be chasing away all the boys and making you

mine. I'd spoil you with riches. But I'm sure the missus wouldn't like that if I tried to sugar you up."

I cringed, unable to cover it this time. My cheeks heated with embarrassment as I lowered my eyes, no longer able to look at him. I hated how he looked at me with lust, his beady eyes looking me over like I was some prized possession. I didn't miss the growing bulge in his pants as I stared at the floor.

Mom giggled. "Now, now, John. She's a student who's focused on her classes. She wouldn't have time to date anyone."

"We'll talk in three years," Dad said with a chuckle.

How could they have been comfortable and joke about me like that? They were my parents, for god's sake!

"Excuse me," I mumbled before walking away through the opulent room, my heart racing.

The soles of my black slippers clicked on the marble floor as I strode out of the room, setting my champagne flute on a table on my way. I continued walking until I found a hallway that provided more seclusion. My chest tightened as anxiety rushed through me. I sucked in a breath and exhaled slowly, trying to stop the anxiety attack before it happened.

I'm nothing but a joke and a piece of meat to everyone.

I took deep breaths, closing my eyes and trying to calm my rapidly beating heart. Anxiety crawled up my throat and nearly choked me because of the adrenaline rushing through my veins.

I hated this. I hated my family and their friends. Most of all, I hated this stupid city. I wanted to be taken away from here, to leave everything behind and start new.

My mind went to my stalker and how he easily talked to me at the bus stop. How he flirted with me and made me feel seen.

It was stupid of me to think about him and how he made me feel.

“I have antihistamines if you’d like to take one.” I jumped from the voice that came from behind me.

I spun around, looking at the man in a black and gray three-piece suit. He rested his back against the wall and brought his glass of whisky to his mouth, but never took a drink. His pale blue eyes dropped to my body as he did a once over, checking me out before we locked eyes again. His black eyebrow raised, and a small smirk curled the corner of his lip as he waited for me to say something.

I didn’t recognize him. I’d never seen a black-haired man with blue eyes who looked like he was around thirty years old at these kinds of events. It was always older people who were in their fifties or older.

“Why would I want an allergy tablet?” I asked, still unable to regulate my breathing from the anxiety attack.

“Antihistamines help calm your erratic heart and feelings of panic. I don’t have allergies, but I have chronic anxiety where I have to carry the pills in case of an attack.” He tipped his glass back and he sipped from it this time. All the while keeping his piercing ocean eyes on me.

“Oh.” I didn’t know that.

He slipped his hand into his pocket, pulled out a foil packet, and popped a pill out. With uncertainty weighing on me, I reluctantly took the offered pink pill. At the back of my mind, I worried that it wasn’t really an allergy pill and that it was some kind of poison.

Now that I thought about it, I curled my fingers into my palm and held the tiny tablet.

“Thank you. I’ll– I’ll take it when I get back out there,” I said nervously.

He nodded once, his eyes trained on my face. There was a hint of humor in them, which soured my already sullen mood.

“Of course.” He stepped back, then leaned against the wall, not giving me any time alone. He nibbled on his bottom lip, the corners of it curling up as he held back a smile. His index finger tapped on the lip of his glass as he thought about something. “Who are you here with?”

I had attended enough events and parties to recognize he wanted to know who I belonged to.

Countless times, I’d seen women being claimed as if they were some kind of prize dog. My mom was one of them.

“No one,” I answered truthfully.

I stood there awkwardly, unsure if I should excuse myself to hide somewhere else or stay to cater to his feelings, so I didn’t offend him.

“So what is a pretty girl like you doing here and associating yourself with these old men?” he said with a glimmer of amusement in his bright eyes.

My mouth fell open, and I quickly recovered, not wanting to look like an idiot. Even though I didn’t really want to talk, he was still gorgeous, and the last thing I wanted was for him to see me make a fool of myself.

“I—” I sputtered. “Aren’t you a part of the group because of you being here?”

He smirked and pushed away from the wall. His eyes bored into mine as he peeled back every layer I had, wanting to see what was on the inside. He stepped closer to me and slipped his free hand into his pocket while he swirled his drink, the contents circling on the bottom.

“I’m not here for them,” he said cryptically.

My lips parted, and I glanced past his shoulder in the direction where the party was, then brought my gaze back to his. He observed me with patience and amusement, his lips curled in a smile like he found something funny.

What the heck did he find so amusing?

“Then what are you here for?” Did he break in? Was he a party crasher?

He chuckled and downed the rest of his drink. I watched his throat work, his Adam’s apple bobbing as he swallowed. Lowering the glass, he licked a drop of whisky from his bottom lip. I watched his pink tongue peek out of his mouth, somehow hypnotized by the small movement.

My heart skipped a beat, then two, as he leaned past me to set the glass on the small decorated vanity of mirrors and fake flowers. With him now bent over me, I could smell his woody scent with a hint of copper. My stomach clenched and twisted into knots.

Something wasn’t right.

I carefully took a step back, and he followed with a larger step.

“Such a beautiful girl you are,” he murmured as he brushed his long fingers through a lock of my hair framing my face. He shifted his piercing gaze to his hand, watching in a daze as his fingers trailed through the tendrils before he brought his focus back to my face.

“I-I’d like to leave now,” I whispered breathlessly, my pulse thundering in my ears.

“Hmm.” He caught my chin, his thumb resting in the middle of it as he held my face still. “With you looking as delicious as you are, I don’t think you should go back in there. They’re like wolves, darling, and they *will* eat you up.”

A lump formed in my throat, and my breathing quickened. Tears welled up in my eyes, stinging them. I forced myself to not let them fall free. I didn’t want to give this man the satisfaction of seeing me cry.

“So, what does that make you?” I asked nervously.

He flashed me a smile that was more like him baring his teeth than being genuine. “I’m the crow that picks at the bones of the dead lambs.”

I jerked my face out of his hold and brushed past him. I couldn't bear another second of him touching me and making weird comments.

"It was nice talking to you, but I need to go. My parents are waiting for me," I said, immediately wanting to kick myself for feeling bad that I had to explain why I needed to leave.

I glanced back at him, watching as he stepped back into the shadows that crept around him like they were welcoming him in. It was the oddest thing to watch.

"Go, little lamb. Go back to the wolves so they can feast on you, and I can pick at your bones after they're done," he called, his voice an octave deeper.

I shivered, my breath catching in my chest. His ice-blue eyes lit up in the shadows, giving him an eerie look and making the tiny voice in my head screamed that I needed to run.

Turning around, I rushed back toward the room where everyone still mingled with their classical music playing.

Sweat beaded my temples and tingled above my upper lip. I didn't stop walking until I was two groups of people deep in the gathering room..

My palm tingled with a sting of pain. I looked down, realizing that I had clutched my hand to my chest, holding the tiny pink pill. Swallowing hard, I glanced around the room before I dropped the tablet onto the floor and walked away.

CHAPTER 18

Sadie



Hours had passed, and we were *still* at the party.

Mom and Dad did the typical—they ignored me—while the men who had no business leering, tried to chat with me. Or at least, they tried, but it was all one-sided conversation.

The chief of police stole a few glances at me, his beady eyes roaming my body, lingering too long on my breasts.

After what felt like an eternity, we made our way to a sizable room with a large table capable of seating twenty people.

I sat between my parents, which annoyed Mom more than it did Dad.

Waiters came with oversized trays on their hands, one by one, setting plates in front of everyone. As the waiter placed the plate before me, I gazed at the food, my stomach growling.

On the dish was garlic salmon with seasoned potatoes around it in a beautiful display.

My mouth watered as I stared at it. I peeked through my lashes at everyone at the table. While they ate, Mayor Bennet frowned at me in disapproval.

I picked up my glass of water, brought it to my mouth, and sniffed it, making sure no one had poisoned it. Mom gave me a weird look, but I ignored it as I sipped the water, a small ice chip slipping into my mouth. I chewed on it quietly as I sat the

glass back down. The cold from the ice cube made my teeth sting from how sensitive they were.

“Why aren’t you eating, dear? Is my food not good enough?” Mayor Bennet asked over the small talk around the table.

Everyone went quiet, and all eyes were on me.

My cheeks burned with a blush, and I looked at the mayor before lowering my gaze to his chest, so I wasn’t looking into his eyes.

“Turns out I’m not that hungry,” I lied.

“I had this made just for you, girl,” he spat.

“Honey,” Mom whispered from beside me.

“I apologize, John. She sometimes gets this way because of her mental illness,” Dad said with a defeated sigh.

I frowned and turned to Dad, hurt.

How could he be so cold about it?

An older woman across the table, dressed in a nude-colored dress, clutched her pearls that hung down to her wrinkly, so-tan-it-looked-like leather chest.

“Mental illness?” she exclaimed, aghast. She stared at me with judgment clouding her blue eyes. I could just *hear* what she was thinking about me. They all thought the same things. That I was a “*psycho*” and dangerous.

I slumped my shoulders, bringing them inward to make myself look smaller. Embarrassment heated my cheeks. I detested the fact that they were discussing me as if I weren’t there. I also hated that my parents talked about my mental illnesses without my consent. They always treated me like a freak who should have been put into a circus or a zoo for everyone to gawk at.

Mom sighed; the sound was full of exhaustion as if every discussion about me added weight to her shoulders. This was nothing new for my parents. They treated me like a nuisance,

especially after my mental illnesses were diagnosed. There were times when I couldn't crawl out of bed because I was too depressed, and my mom scolded me about how lazy I was. She had bitched about the clothes strewn over my bedroom, saying I was a pig because of how messy I was.

Other times, when I had a schizophrenic episode, I was told to go to bed and to stop making things up. I couldn't stop what my brain did to me. It was a living hell, and every day was a struggle. My family made it even harder.

And all I ever wanted was their love and attention.

"She has schizoaffective disorder," Mom said, embarrassed.

"I'm right here," I mumbled, my voice betraying me as it quivered.

"What is that?" the rich woman asked, still clutching her pearls.

"How the doctor described it is that she has schizophrenia and a mood disorder. It's either bipolar or depression, and Sadie has schizophrenia and depression," Mom explained.

The older woman blinked, looking at me as if I was some kind of rabid animal that needed to be put down.

I squirmed in my seat, my arms wrapping around my middle. Everyone was looking at me, studying me like a strange alien.

"Aren't people like her dangerous? Is she going to snap and kill us?" a man asked with condescension that was directed toward me. He shot me a dirty look. I wanted to get up and walk out, but I couldn't because I didn't want to further upset my parents.

I wished I had stayed home instead. I'd take being alone over this.

"I'm right here," I whimpered, my voice shaky and tears pricking my eyes.

“I asked the doctor the same thing, and he said people like her aren’t violent. If she were to become violent, something else would cause it; not her schizophrenia. I never believed him, though, because there were times my daughter looked at me with violence in her eyes.” Mom shivered and rubbed her arms.

I never looked at her like that. And if I did, I never thought of hurting her.

Why wasn’t I allowed to have emotions like everyone else? Why couldn’t I get angry without someone screaming, *“See! She’s about to kill us all!”*

The double standards were awful and exhausting.

“I believe it,” a different woman snarked.

“I’m ... I’m right here,” I whispered, a tear trailing down my cheek.

“Does she hallucinate?” Mayor Bennet asked as he leaned back in his chair, his hands resting on his potbelly.

I grabbed my glass of cold water and took a little sip, hoping to calm myself. My hands trembled, and another tear slipped down my cheek.

Mom let out a humorless laugh. “Oh, she does. Sometimes she has endless conversations with someone who isn’t there. I have to watch her, frightened whether she was going to attack me or not because the hallucination told her to.”

Was this how my parents felt? I knew they didn’t care about me, but this stung.

“I’ll never let her hurt you, honey,” Dad promised gruffly.

The men at the table grunted in agreement as if they would hold me down to prevent me from hurting somebody. I’d never hurt anyone.

“I’m not a monster,” I whispered brokenly.

“Eat your food, honey,” Mom said. At first, I thought that was directed at Dad, but when I looked at her with stinging

eyes, she stared at me blankly.

“I’m not hungry.” It was the truth now. I couldn’t hold it down if I ate because of how upset I was.

“Make her stop crying,” the first woman said with a curled lip directed my way.

“I think we’ve waited long enough,” Mayor Bennet sighed.

I drew my eyebrows together and swiped the tear on my jaw away. “W-what?”

Dad sighed and turned to look at me with sorrow in his eyes. “Sorry, honey, but this is for the best.”

“What are you talking about?” My heart raced, and I trembled from the adrenaline pumping through my veins like wildfire.

Mom shifted next to me, and I glanced at her.

“What’s going on?” I asked, confused.

“We’re doing you a favor. You suffer too much from your mental illness, and you’ll soon be released from it. Just think that you’re helping the city because of this,” Mom said as she stood up from her chair and wiped away invisible lint from her red dress.

“What are you talking about—”

I screamed as Dad grabbed me from behind, wrapping his arm around me. He held a cloth to my face that smelled sickly sweet. My heart stuttered over a few beats, terror wracking my body. I struggled against him, trying to get out of his hold, but the longer he held the cloth over my nose and mouth, the quicker my fight left me.

Minutes passed, and my head spun, the edges of my vision closing in until darkness took over.

CHAPTER 19

Kai



I sat outside on the back patio of my home, smoking a cigarette, and staring up at the star-filled sky.

Crickets chirped, and toads croaked, calming my frayed nerves.

The sacrifice was tonight, and something felt off.

All I knew was that a Devil was getting the virgin, but I didn't know *where* or *who*.

I inhaled my cigarette, the cherry at the end of it lighting up in the dark.

My phone rang, and I pulled it out of my pocket as I exhaled the smoke.

"Yeah," I answered, not needing to see who it was.

"You know where the mayor's mansion is?" Ricky asked. I was able to hear the sound of his fingers tapping on the keyboard. His TV was on, and I could hear his video game that he didn't bother to turn down.

"You mean on Farm Road Fifteen and Spruce?" I asked to confirm, even though I knew where he lived. The mayor's home was the only one with it big enough to house an army.

"Yup," he said, popping the p. "That would be the one. I got some info that the sacrifice will take place there. Some little birdies told me it'll be at 11:34 p.m."

I inhaled the last of my cigarette and flicked the butt over the edge as I exhaled the smoke. “Strange choice for the time. Did you find out who the Devil is that’s getting the sacrifice?”

“I thought the time was weird, too. But I looked further into it and couldn’t help but chuckle.”

“Why?”

Ricky snorted a laugh. “Sent you a text. Look at it upside down.”

I sighed and put him on speaker as I looked at my phone. Tapping his name, I opened the text message and turned my phone upside down so I could look at the scribble of numbers on a piece of paper that he took a picture of. I huffed a laugh and rolled my eyes.

“Humans are weird.” I shook my head, still staring at the upside-down numbers that read “hell.”

“They’ll find the Devil wherever they can,” Ricky said. “But to answer your last question, I found out that the Devil is fucking Levi.”

My spine straightened and a muscle jumped in my jaw. I turned my phone back the right way before I rasped, “What does he need the girl for?”

“Kai, I need you to think ’bout that real hard. Remember what I said a while ago. What does the oldest, loneliest, and most fucked up Devil want the most?”

Levi was a fucked up man. Sometimes I thought he was feral, but he was just demented and fucked in the head.

I’d been looking for that asshole for over a year. I couldn’t believe *he* of all Devils was getting the virgin.

I hadn’t been around that long, just a mere thirty-nine years to his thousands. So I wasn’t around for the last sacrifice. But I had heard about all the women that were kidnapped, raped, and eaten. I now could see why. Because Levi was lethal, it made sense then that they would sacrifice a virgin to him. I’d heard rumors that he claimed their blood

made him more powerful. I highly doubted it, but he seemed to believe it.

And the asshole had my sister.

Tonight, I would end this and save an innocent girl while also saving my sister.

“Power and a high,” I answered, flicking my lighter’s top open and closed repeatedly. It was soothing to repeat the action and listen to the metal *clack*.

“Exactly. So, I’m sure the virgin being sacrificed in the next hour will go to him and feed him for the next few weeks.”

I sighed and leaned my head against the cement wall. “Thanks for updating me. Catch ya later.”

“Later.”

After ending the call, I flicked the lighter, then snapped it closed only to repeat the motions.

So many thoughts went through my mind at once that I couldn’t keep track of. All I knew was that I needed to go to this sacrifice when it happened so I could take down Levi.

I would stop at nothing until I had my baby sister back.

Stretching my neck to one side, then to the other, I worked out the kinks. I’d been wound up and tight, unable to relax. Since talking to Sadie, I’d been on edge and craving more of her.

I could still hear her soft voice and her small cry as she begged me to forget her like everyone else did. After hearing her say that, I wanted to punch the nearest person and rip their throats out. It was a good thing I had let her walk away so my anger could recede. I didn’t want my girl to see what I was and know just how dangerous I could be.

Who the hell hurt her and made her think she was forgettable? Who had scarred her so severely that she became this meek, timid woman?

Her friends couldn't be the main reason why, but they were definitely a part of the problem.

I wanted to scoop Sadie into my arms, holding all her broken pieces together to keep her whole. But I couldn't do that for one tiny (okay, big) reason. I was a Devil, and she was a human. She wouldn't understand me. She wouldn't realize that I didn't want to hurt her. I wanted to be the man she deserved to protect her from the rest of the world.

I still want her. I want to see her.

I hadn't slept for god knows how long. Thinking about it, the last time I got a few minutes of shut-eye was back at the safe house, and I had that weird dream.

Sighing, I stood up from my seat and stretched out my arms, feeling something pop in my back. I dropped my arms and slipped my hands into my hoodie pocket as I bounded down the few steps and around my house to my street bike.

Fuck it. I was going to visit my girl.

CHAPTER 20

Kai



The house was empty, and Sadie wasn't there.

I had crept into the silent home, searching for the timid human girl but not finding her anywhere. I found her purse in her bedroom which raised red flags in my mind. That was one item she never left behind when she went out. Though, I didn't spot her cell phone.

Sadie's bed wasn't made, and when I touched it to see if I could feel her warmth, I found it cold. She'd been gone for a while.

I curled my hands into tight fists, my breathing increasing as anger surged through me.

Where the fuck is she?

I looked around the room, wanting to smash the mirror on her vanity because of the fucking clock ticking. Pivoting, I spotted it hanging on the wall near her bedroom door. I stormed across the space, snatching the fucker, and punched it. When it didn't stop ticking, I stuck it again and again. I didn't stop until it fell in pieces to the ground.

Panting, I glared down at the crumbled mess.

My eyes turned red, the Devil side of me came to the surface.

Something was wrong. Sadie never left without her things. This also wasn't like her. She hid in her bedroom for hours, if not the whole night.

My phone rang, and I grabbed it from my pocket. Without looking at the caller's I.D., I answered it.

"What?" I snapped, my voice rougher like I had swallowed rocks.

"You might want to go check out this whole sacrifice thing, bro," Ricky said. His usual video game wasn't playing in the background. Instead, I heard his heavy footsteps echoing wherever he was.

"Where are you?" I asked as I left Sadie's bedroom and strode through the hallway toward the stairs.

"Where you need to be."

I growled. "Quit your riddles and fucking tell me."

"I'm outside the mayor's house, dick. I'm looking at his camera footage, and that girl you brought to the safe house is chained down for the sacrifice. I don't know how you feel about her, but I figured I'd tell you—"

"On my way!" I barked before ending the call.

Stomping down the stairs, I ran through the house, and out the door.

I thanked whatever god could hear me that I had taken my street bike here. It'd get me to the mayor's home faster than my other car.

Sprinting through the neighborhood, I jumped over the fence. After climbing on my street bike, I turned on the engine and peeled out. It would usually take twenty minutes to get to the area where the mayor lived from where Sadie's parents' house was, but I made it in ten.

The mayor's mansion loomed in front of me, the driveway long and curved. There were a few trees here and there, but for the most part, it was flat terrain around his home. Of course, he didn't need the privacy because he was the only house out this way.

Driving up the long driveway, I followed the branched-off section that circled around an oversized naked mermaid fountain near the main entrance. Parking my motorcycle and jumping off, I sprinted up the gigantic steps toward the front door.

“Kai,” Ricky called from behind me.

I ignored him, turning the knob on the door and pushing it open. As I passed the entrance, soft classical music played for non-existent occupants.

I strode through the foyer, glancing at all the paintings on the wall and sculpted marble heads sitting on a table. It was creepy how many heads the mayor had.

Soft chanting came from somewhere ahead of me. I followed it, knowing that it would lead me straight to Sadie.

I kept my footsteps silent as I walked down the hallway and stopped outside a door. It was cracked open, flickering orange light spilling through from within. I gently pushed the door open, peeking my head through it to spy on the humans.

My breath caught in my chest as my gaze fixed on the humans dressed in black robes with hoods pulled over their heads. Black candles littered everywhere, on the tables, bookshelves, and on the ground. The room looked like it was normally a library or office, but tonight it was being used for the sacrifice to Levi.

The humans had formed a circle, blocking off my view of what was in the middle. But I knew. It was Sadie.

I clenched my fists. The anger I had felt from earlier came back, but doubled.

They were going to sacrifice my girl to the most powerful and fucked up Devil. I was glad that I popped her cherry. I was sure they'd freak out and not know what to do if they found out she wasn't a virgin.

I smirked.

One of the humans shifted, giving me the needed space to look past them.

My stomach dropped, and terror rushed through me as I stared at Sadie, who had been placed in the center of a pentagram, black candles on each point of the star. Her eyes weren't open, and I worried they had killed her. When I saw her chest rise, then fall with shallow breaths, my shoulders sagged in relief.

Sadie's wrists were behind her head, pushing her generous breasts up. They'd spread her legs wide apart for each foot to be at a point in the pentagram. My cock jerked because I could see through the thin material of her dress.

The humans had prepared her for Levi to take her non-existent virginity.

I counted everyone in the room, excluding Sadie. There were twelve people. One of them muttered in a different language, sounding like he was chanting. I almost scoffed at that.

I could take down twelve humans. No sweat.

"He's here," a woman gasped.

I stiffened, my eyes widening as the group turned to look at me.

Okay, so there was no sneaking up on them now. I had to work with what I got.

I stepped further into the room, my chest rising and falling in deep breaths. Sadie was mere feet away from me, unconscious and possibly hurt.

If they wanted to confuse me for Levi, so be it. It would work in my favor without having to slaughter them.

"The girl," I murmured as I nodded my head toward her on the ground.

"Yours," a man closest to me said.

I inspected him as I crept closer to the group. He had an oval face, clean shaved, hazel eyes with amber flecks in them that looked familiar to me. His eyes reminded me of Sadie's sad ones, but his held malice. I glared at him, imagining all the things I wanted to do to him for easily giving up Sadie like this.

"She's a virgin, just as you want," a woman said as she stepped forward to stand beside the man.

She had a heart-shaped face, and puffy lips painted with red lipstick. Her moss green eyes reflected in the candlelight. I could see the hatred in them. How she didn't have an ounce of regret for sacrificing a young woman. Blonde hair tumbled over her shoulders from behind her hood, the wavy tendrils reaching just below her breasts.

She looked like a spitting image of Sadie but with blonde hair.

Rage boiled in my veins. I narrowed my eyes, clenching my fists. My lengthening nails pricked my palms. I curled my lips back, exposing my sharp canines.

"Release her," I snarled.

Sadie's father stiffened, his eyes shuttering. Something must have given me away because he glared at me.

"You're not the one we're expecting," he growled.

The corners of my lips curled up by just centimeters, but it was enough for the humans to confirm that I wasn't Levi.

"Seize him!" a woman in the back of the group shouted.

I huffed a laugh and took a step backward as I prepared myself for the fight.

"There's a problem," I drawled.

Sadie's father raised his chin, eyes still narrowed. "And why's that?"

I cracked a smile. "There's twelve of you."

“Huh?”

I brought my hand to my mouth and bit my wrist, drawing blood. “You’ll need more than that to catch me.”

His eyes grew wide, fear flashing across his face. I didn’t wait for them to process what I meant. I swept my hand out, spraying droplets of my blood into Sadie’s parents’ eyes. Her mother shrieked, raising her hands to her eyes as she tried to remove the Devil’s blood.

Sadie’s dad yelled and surprised me when he tackled forward to fight me. I laughed and shot my hands out, grabbing his head and slamming it into his wife’s. Their skulls cracked, and they dropped to the ground.

Two down, ten more to go.

Two hooded humans rushed toward me. One tried to punch me while the other pulled me into a chokehold with his arm. He was a foot shorter than me, so it was hard for him to bring me down. I caught hold of his forearm and bit into his flesh. He screamed as I dug my teeth into the muscle, holding him in place as he struggled to escape me.

Tearing out a chunk of his flesh and muscle, I chewed and swallowed it before I wound my arm behind me and grabbed onto the back of his shirt. I threw the human over my shoulder and slammed him onto the ground, kicking the heel of my foot into his face, then grinning as his head caved in. His brain matter popped out and hit my leg, blood soaking the wooden floor beneath him.

The human who had punched me backed away with wide eyes and his hands up, palms facing out.

“I-I didn’t mean it,” he whimpered.

“Mmm.” I cackled, then bolted forward, grabbing his face and digging my sharp nails into him. He screamed, flailing his arms while trying to push me off him. I jerked my hand back, peeling off the skin from his face like a glove. He was too stunned by the suddenness of it to feel any pain. Yet.

I grabbed his head between my hands and snapped his neck, watching as he fell to the ground next to his dead friend.

Four down, eight to go.

“Jesus, what the fuck is he on?” someone cried behind me.

I turned around, noticing one man had pulled out a pole from somewhere in the room. He pressed down on a button and electricity zapped at the end of it.

Ahh, a Devil Taser.

I tsked, wagging my finger at him, then laughed. “If I hadn’t known better, I’d say you guys have been expecting this entire exchange to go wrong.”

He charged forward, the Taser pointed directly at me. I sidestepped and knocked it out of his grasp right before he could hit me with it. I caught the Taser before it hit the ground and turned it on him, pressing it against his chest. Electricity shot out, the sound loud and made the hair on my arms rise. I didn’t pull away until the human died, and I could no longer hear his heart beating.

I drew back, watching as he fell to the ground. Twisting the Taser in my grip, I used it as a bat to hit the human woman who came up behind me, thinking she could sneak up on me.

The metal *thunked* against her skull, cracking it open like a watermelon, killing and knocking her to the ground.

Six down, six to go.

“Hey Alexa, play Hayloft Two by Mother Mother.” I sucked my tooth and twirled the Taser in my hand.

The song played over the speakers, and I threw my head back, howling in laughter. The humans steered clear of me, waiting for my next move. I’d give it to them. They at least had some self-preservation.

Lowering my head, my laughs died out as I looked at the three humans who were side by side. “I didn’t think there was an Echo in here, but that son of a bitch has one.” As I

scratched my temple, I realized something. I glanced around the room, not spotting him. “Where the fuck is the mayor?”

“You won’t have him,” a woman snarled from the group.

I blinked. Shrugging a shoulder, I sniffed. “Whatever you say, Janet.”

“My name is Margaret!”

“Same difference.”

The small talk was over, and the three humans lost what little self-preservation they had left to rush toward me. I shook my head at their stupidity.

“You must be suicidal,” I grumbled.

One broke away from the group, and I swung the Taser at him. I knocked the air out of him, and he landed on his back, groaning in pain. The second human male pulled out a gun from his robe. Bullets whizzed past me, and I turned from side to side, eyes widening. I grunted as one went through my shoulder, knocking me back a few steps and forcing me to drop the Taser.

I bared my teeth, snarling as I grabbed onto the wound.

“Fucking Devil bullets!” I ground out.

The male raised his chin, a smirk on his stupid fucking face. The woman stood by his side, her hateful eyes full of mockery. I noticed her pearl necklace and suddenly wanted to use it to choke the life out of her.

I grimaced and pulled my hand back from my shoulder, looking at the red tint on my fingers. Lifting my eyes, I glared at them.

“You’ll have to try harder than that to take me down.” That was a lie. Devil bullets were lethal; if they had lodged inside me, I would have been a goner. But the bullet had gone straight through and exited out my back.

I pulled my lighter out of my pocket and snapped it open, flicking it to light the flint. I held the flame to my shoulder,

stopping the flow of blood. A groan slipped past my bloody lips, and I ground my teeth together because of the burn.

“Jesus Christ, you’re fucking insane,” the man whispered.

Closing my eyes, I shuddered from the intensity of the pain. All of my blood went straight to my cock, making it jerk. When the wound was cauterized, I released the lighter and closed it before sliding it back into my pocket. I breathed heavily and opened my eyes.

“And you’re dead,” I uttered.

I dabbed my fingers into the blood on my wound and flicked it at the two humans. A smirk lifted my lip as the Devil’s blood landed into their eyes and mouth.

They screamed, dropping to their knees and grabbing their faces. The woman cried, leaning forward as she scratched at her eyes.

I went toward the woman—Margaret—and crouched behind her. A smile broke across my face as I wound my hands in her pearl necklace and tightened it around her neck. She struggled to get away.

Something about her didn’t sit right with me. I could see this old bitch being cruel to my girl.

Margaret’s choking sounds slowed until she slumped in my hold. I dropped her on the ground and stood up, brushing off invisible lint from my chest.

I strode past the two men who had tried to get my blood out of their eyes and mouth and approached Sadie. The remaining three humans hauled her up, one holding onto her with a knife at her throat. I stopped in my tracks, my heart skipping a beat.

“Release her,” I ordered through gritted teeth.

“You can’t have her.” The human holding the knife to Sadie’s neck jerked his hand, showing that he meant to slit her throat if I got any closer.

“She’s *mine*,” I snarled.

The humans sucked in a breath, their fear tainting their scents. My heart raced, the predator part of me wanting to hunt them before I feasted on their flesh and blood.

“She’s not yours!” the man holding Sadie yelled.

The other two were cowards, stepping away from the bolder one. I scoffed. They were the type of people who would throw others under the bus to save their skin.

“That’s where you’re wrong,” I warned. “Release her, and I’ll let you live.”

Their eyes rounded. The one holding Sadie looked past me toward the dead bodies behind me. The ones still alive wailed as they fought to get my blood out of their system. I loved that I had doomed them to a slow and painful death. They deserved it.

“You mean that?” he asked softly.

“Yes.” I took one step, pausing when he brought his hand higher to Sadie’s throat.

He swallowed hard, and I watched his Adam’s apple bob with the movement. Finally, he dropped the knife from her throat and shoved her forward. I lunged forward, catching her before she hit the ground. My girl didn’t deserve to be pushed like that.

I glared at the man as I hiked Sadie in my arms and threw her over my shoulder. I shot forward, grabbed onto his head, and snapped his neck. The two men whimpered, scrambling backward to escape their inevitable death.

I strode to them, grinning as they tried to run away. Grabbing their hair, I slammed their heads together, cracking their skulls. I closed my eyes, groaning from the stench of death in the room. My stomach growled, demanding that I eat.

Opening my eyes, I made my way back to the doorway to leave. I bent down, grabbed some brain matter from the

ground, and popped it into my mouth. I moaned, closing my eyes briefly as I enjoyed my late-night snack.

I strode out of the room, through the mansion, and to the front door.

Levi was expected to arrive in the next few minutes, and I wanted to get Sadie as far away as possible. She wasn't his to take. She was *mine*.

I knew the Devil wouldn't give up on his sacrifice so easily. Having Sadie with me would lure him in so I could take him out and find my sister.

CHAPTER 21

Sadie



“We’re doing this because we love you,” Mom said.

My tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth, my breathing echoed in my head. It felt like I had taken too many melatonin gummies, and now I was loopy and a little high from it. I swallowed to wet my dry mouth and throat.

“You should feel honored to be gifted to him,” Dad growled as I struggled against him.

Everything felt off, and I couldn’t open my eyes without having to physically open them with my fingers. When I tried to lift my hand, I couldn’t even do that.

Screams echoed around me as I fought against my parents to escape.

My breath stuttered out of me, and the tiny hairs on my arms rose.

“Please, Daddy! Don’t do this!”

“You’re selfish!” Mom shrieked. “You’re a selfish girl for refusing this!”

“No! I don’t want to die! All I wanted was your love!”

I realized the screams were mine as I fought for my life. Dad pinned me to the ground on an upside-down red pentagram. Everyone at the dinner party surrounded me, wearing black hoods that shadowed their faces. Mom shackled my wrists to the ground, then my feet. She kept glaring at me, hatred shining in her eyes.

“It’s not up to you,” Dad snarled. “If you want our love, do this for us. We never asked you for anything. All you’ve done was be a burden on us.”

Dad held a cloth against my nose and mouth again. The same sweetness of whatever he had doused it in made my stomach curdle a second time. I shook my head, attempting to remove his hold. But he held on, and my heart slowed, darkness taking over until I blacked out.

My stomach knotted, saliva building in my mouth while it tingled. I knew I would vomit but I still tried to hold it back. Sweat beaded on my forehead and on my upper lip.

I opened my eyes, but the spinning made me shut them again.

What happened?

After a few minutes of keeping my eyes closed and breathing through my nose, the events from this evening came crashing into me.

I went to Mayor Bennet’s home for my birthday with my parents. They all talked about me, then knocked me out to chain me to a pentagram.

My breath hitched, and I cracked open my eyes. I blinked a few times, not recognizing the room I was in. Someone had placed me on a black leather couch with throw pillows behind my head.

I carefully sat up to not make myself sick, but as I straightened, my head spun, and my mouth tingled with the feeling that I was about to vomit.

God, I hated this feeling. I refused to get sick all over the floor and for someone to find it.

Breathing in through my nose and out through my mouth helped. After a few minutes, my stomach calmed.

The living room I woke up in was quiet. It looked lived-in but neat. The TV across from me hung on the wall and had some dust on the black screen. There were floor-to-ceiling

large windows that looked out to the woods. A blue and red plaid blanket pooled around my waist and down my legs.

Wherever I was, they tucked me in and let me sleep on their couch.

I inhaled, breathing in the masculine scent. The room smelled like leather and cedar.

What happened between me passing out and waking up here? Who brought me here, and what did they want?

I stood up, swaying a little on my feet, before I crept around the sofa, looking for the front door.

My mind raced through a million reasons why I was here and who took me. Maybe my parents changed their minds and moved me here to sleep everything off. The home looked like the owner had money, but not big money like my dad's. I didn't care about wealth as much as my parents did. So, knowing this person's home was most likely expensive, I didn't care.

The scar on my neck from where the Devil tore out a chunk throbbed. I gently touched it and tried to calm my breath as I walked past the large wooden steps that led upstairs.

I had no intention of staying here any longer since I was concerned that the residents might have bad intentions.

My footsteps were light, but my breathing was loud in my head. My legs shook as I silently padded to the front door. I peeked over my shoulder before I opened the door.

No one was here with me.

I couldn't believe they hadn't walked in by this point and stopped me from leaving.

I extended my shaky hand and turned the knob, swallowing hard, my stomach rolling with nerves.

The air shifted behind me, and the hair on my arms rose, along with goosebumps.

Someone stood at my back and was watching me. I knew this because of the tingles on the back of my head.

My mouth flew open, and a scream caught in my throat as they wound their arm around me, pulling me against their chest and covering my mouth with their large hand. They had rings on every finger, the metal clacking against my teeth as I opened my mouth to scream.

I struggled against them, but they held me tighter, not once saying a word. They cut off my breathing as their other hand came around, pinching my nose shut and their other covered my mouth.

My screams died before I had a chance to be heard. My heart pounded painfully against my chest, quickly slowing down as I struggled for air. My lungs burned with the lack of oxygen, and my head spun.

Was my fate to die like this? Smothered by a faceless person who was too cowardly to show me their face?

Darkness dotted into my vision, and everything spun. My eyes fluttered, and I slumped against the person behind me.

The last thing I heard was a deep voice murmuring, “Good girl.”

I CAME TO, sweat stinging my upper lip and my mind foggy.

What happened?

“Good girl.”

I gasped and blinked open my eyes, clearing my blurry vision. My surroundings became clearer, and I found myself back in the living room. The TV was on and softly playing a song I didn’t recognize.

A string of my hair tickled my eyelashes and nose. When I moved my hand, I realized they tied my hands behind my back

and that I was sitting on a chair.

“Wha-?”

A metal lighter snapped open behind me.

I glanced over my shoulder and saw the large man dressed in all black, sitting on the coffee table with one of his boots resting on the edge. I cringed as I noticed his shoes were muddy. He flicked the lighter open, then snapped it shut, only to repeat the action again repeatedly.

“You,” I whispered as I looked up at his face.

My stalker’s shaggy, white hair fell over his dark eyes. He wore the same black mask with the skeleton teeth printed on it.

“Me,” he drawled with a smile in his voice.

I frowned. “Untie me.”

He snapped his lighter shut and reopened it. “Can’t do that, sweetheart.”

“Why not?”

“You’ll try to leave again, and I can’t have that.”

My heart hammered against my chest, my hands tingling from the surge of adrenaline in my veins. I licked my lips. He dropped his gaze, watching as my tongue wet my bottom lip.

“Release me.” I meant for that to come out strong, but it sounded meek.

“No can do.” He leaned back on the table, resting his palm by his side while he continued to play with his lighter with the other. All the while, he watched me with bored, tired eyes. I couldn’t look away from the tattoos beneath them and how sexy they made him look.

My cheeks warmed. I shouldn’t have been having thoughts about him like that.

“H-how the heck did you find me?” I twisted my shoulders, testing the ropes that held me to the chair. I didn’t

know how to escape something like this. The movement pinched the rope on the sensitive parts of my arms and wrist.

Why did I even try? I wasn't one of those badass women in movies who could get away from anything the villain did to her.

He cocked his head, and his eyes wrinkled with a hidden smile. "You're talkative today."

"How can I not be? You kidnapped me!"

"For good reasons."

"And those reasons are ... ?"

"How are you feeling?"

I glared at him. "Why can't you answer my questions?"

"Why can't you answer mine?" he asked with a laugh.

"You're not the one who is fucking tied to a *fucking* chair!"

"Naughty girl with a dirty mouth. I like that." He tsked, eyes sparkling with amusement. Shifting from his position, he lowered his muddy boot to the floor then leaned forward and rested his elbows on his knees, letting his hands dangle between his thighs.

I turned away from him, my neck cramping from looking over my shoulder.

I yelped when he grabbed the back of my chair, whipping it around. The legs of it scraped against the floor, the sound like nails on a chalkboard. My stalker let go of the chair and dropped his arm back on his knee, amusement lighting up his obsidian eyes.

"There we go," he cooed. "They used chloroform on you. There are side effects to it. So I need you to be a good little girl and tell me what you're feeling right now so I can make you more comfortable."

I stared at him furiously, too stubborn to assess how I felt other than enraged.

He cocked his head, his bored eyes sweeping over my face, then down my body before returning to my face. The corner of one eye wrinkled as he smirked. “Aww, don’t be a little brat. I like good girls.”

I clenched my jaw. “It’s a good thing I’m not your girl, then.”

“That’s where you’re wrong, sweetheart. You’ve been mine since I first saw you, and you’ll continue to be mine until I tire of you.” He stood up and circled around my chair, dragging his fingers over my shoulders and chest. After a few more circles around me, he stopped behind me and yanked my hair, forcing my head back to look up at him. “And I don’t get bored with what’s mine. I use it until it can’t be used anymore. It’s a good thing, baby, that you’re flesh and bone because you have a long life ahead of you, and I plan to be a part of it until you take your last breath.”

I bit my tongue to prevent myself from saying anything more to him.

For the first time in my life, someone noticed me. He saw me and listened to my every word. While a sane person would hate this, I soaked up his attention as much as I could.

My heart skipped a beat as he leaned forward while maintaining eye contact. His free hand not fisting my hair, gripped my cheek where he dug his fingers into my jaw, forcing my mouth open.

“Cat got your tongue, baby?” he murmured. The corners of his eyes wrinkled as he smiled.

I breathed hard, not saying a word. A minute passed before he huffed a laugh and released me, only to push against my head. I jerked forward and shot him a nasty look as he came around and stood before me. His crotch was at eye level with me, and I blushed when I noticed the hard bulge against his

thigh. I tilted my head back, peeking at him through my eyelashes.

“I was going to stick around and help you through the aftereffects, but since you’re being naughty, I’ll leave you alone for a while.”

I glared at him, anger burning through my veins and venomous words at the tip of my tongue. I didn’t lash out at him because I was dizzy, and my ears rang. It took me a few moments to finally let his words sink in, and for me to understand.

My jaw slackened, and my eyes widened. “What?”

My stalker and now kidnapper bent at the waist, putting us at eye level. He poked my nose with one finger. “Yeah, you heard me, sweetheart. If you hadn’t been a brat, I would have untied you and let you go through this without being uncomfortable.” He dragged his fingertip over my cheek and booped my nose. “But you’re a naughty little girl and can’t be trusted. I’ll come back to check on you later.”

Before I could say anything else, he straightened and walked away. I turned my head, watching as he went out the door and closed it behind him.

“Wait!” I called, my breathing picking up and my heart nearly hammering out of my chest. “I’ll be a good girl!”

Silence.

I turned forward, panting as adrenaline rushed through my veins. Anxiety built in me until I felt like I was about to burst into tears. My stomach knotted, and nausea rose, my mouth watering.

Oh god, I didn’t want to puke.

My pulse thundered in my ears. A few times, it sounded like it skipped a beat, then two.

I thought about today’s events. How I woke up this morning thinking I would be ignored but ended up being dragged along to the mayor’s home to be dismissed by

everyone. Then I remembered how everyone talked about me at the dinner table, deeming me a monster.

Tears burned in my eyes, and my teeth clenched together. I didn't want to be alone. God, I was so stupid for snapping at my stalker. I didn't care now that he kidnapped me. I just didn't want to go through this alone. Something in me knew he'd know what to do to make me feel better.

"I'll be a good girl," I whimpered. I swallowed around the lump in my throat and squeezed my eyes shut.

CHAPTER 22

Kai



“I’ll be a good girl,” Sadie whimpered for the hundredth time tonight.

I sat on the front steps of my cabin, smoking a cigarette. For hours, I’d been listening to her whimper about how she’d be a good girl for me. Those words went straight to my cock, and I hadn’t gone soft yet.

Fuck me, she was perfect.

I leaned my head back, closing my eyes as I focused on the bite of the chilly wind as it blew against me.

I had brought Sadie to my cabin in the Devil’s Woods that went on for miles just outside of the town. It was perfect for our privacy and an even more perfect way to prevent her from escaping me. She’d need me to get out of here. It would also work well whenever she found out that I was a Devil. I didn’t want to tell her for a while. Maybe warm her up to me, fall in love, and maybe she’d even be knocked up with my kid. Something that would tie her to me, stop her from leaving me.

I wanted her. Even though it went against the laws of humanity for me to be with Sadie, I couldn’t care anymore. She was mine, and I would be the only man she’d ever have. No other dick would bury itself in her tight pussy.

My cock jerked, and I shuddered as I pictured myself positioned over Sadie, her thick thighs wrapped around my narrow, tattooed waist. I could feel the memory of my dick slowly sliding into her virgin pussy and just how tight she was.

I wondered what sounds she would have made if she had been awake.

I groaned, closing my eyes for a second as I rubbed the heel of my hand over my jeans, feeling the outline of my erection.

“I c-can’t take any-any more,” Sadie cried from the other side of the door.

Her pleas dragged me out of my fantasy and brought me back to this moment.

I opened my eyes and flicked my finished cigarette. It landed on the gravel path that led to the porch.

The poor girl had been crying for me to come back for a while now. I was sure the side effects of the chloroform were long gone, and she was fine. But the girl sounded like she was being tortured.

I thought she enjoyed being alone because she locked herself in her bedroom.

A muscle popped in my jaw.

Interesting.

Sadie’s cry made me turn my head to look at the door behind me. I sighed, pushed myself up, and stomped down the steps.

I needed to patrol before I went back inside. Levi could have been hiding nearby, waiting for an opportunity to take Sadie away from me. I didn’t like using her as bait, but I knew the Devil would come looking for her sooner or later. That meant I could get my sister back.

After walking the perimeter, I would return and comfort my girl.

Sadie

I DIDN'T KNOW how long it'd been since my kidnapper left, but it felt like days. I couldn't catch my breath from the panic; it held me in a death grip. My skin shivered as if bugs were crawling beneath it. I bounced my gaze to every object I could see, paranoid about cameras and my parents' friends coming out wearing the same black hoods.

The water dripping from the faucet in the kitchen or bathroom echoed. It was too fucking loud. Same as the owl which kept hooting, making my eardrums rattle.

For one sane moment, I knew I was about to go into a schizophrenic episode because of how my reality was slipping.

The door squeaked open, startling me. It shut with a click, and I turned my head, watching as my stalker came around and crouched in front of me. He tilted his head to the side, pieces of his white hair falling over his eyes.

“I-I need—”

“How about a shower, hmm?” he asked, his voice pitched low like he was talking to a child.

I didn't want to fight him about it because, yeah, a shower sounded nice.

Swallowing hard, I nodded. Every single thing around us moved like a videotape. Edges of walls warped, trembling in the air and making me quickly blink. My breathing increased, and I focused on my stalker's face and not on everything else.

He raised a dark, pierced eyebrow. “How about a pretty please, sweetheart?”

I gritted my teeth and clenched my fists. “I'm not g-going to beg.”

Something moved behind his shoulder, and I stopped breathing as I watched the dancing blanket on the couch. It waved to a rhythm only it could hear.

“Mm, I make the rules here.” He chuckled.

I looked back at him, my heart thumping in my throat.

His eyes stayed on my face for a second before his gaze roved down my body. I shivered for a whole different reason. His dark eyes didn't reveal where his thoughts were. He withdrew a knife and tapped the tip against my knee when our gazes clashed.

“Now, say please.”

“No,” I ground out. My gaze slipped past him again, but I quickly brought it back to him.

Fuck me, it was difficult to focus. I held onto the edge of sanity as hard as I could.

“Oh?” He moved closer and dragged the tip of his knife along my thigh and under my dress. It took me till this moment to realize that it was see-through in some areas, and he could watch as my nipples hardened into pebbles.

He ran the knife's sharp point further up my thigh, drawing it along the more sensitive, delicate skin at the top of my legs. I tried to squeeze them shut, but my legs being tied to the chair kept them splayed open for him to see between. I wanted the ground to open up and swallow me because I was mortified with how exposed I was to him.

“Well, there are other ways I can make you beg. Would you like to find out, baby?” He tilted his head. The cross earring in his ear dangled just above his shoulder, reflecting the light from behind him.

My heart pounded so hard against my chest that I was afraid he could hear it. Even my breathing picked up as he inched the blade closer to my pussy. I squeezed my eyes shut as it came to my mound, and he eased the deadly weapon between my folds. If I moved the wrong way, the blade would nick me.

“I could make you bleed right here,” he murmured huskily. “I could punish you right now for saying no to me.”

I swallowed hard and squeezed my eyes shut, praying he wouldn't cut me. A gasp slipped past my lips as he flicked the point of his knife against my clit, sending pleasure and pain through me. A whimper caught in my throat, and I curled my fingers into my palms, my chest rising and falling quickly.

“Open your eyes,” he demanded.

When I refused, he pulled the knife away—somehow not cutting me in the process—and stood up.

He tsked. “I warned you.”

I gasped, my eyes flying open as he came before me and sliced the bind at my ankles. After the rope loosened around them, he went behind me. His fingers curled around my wrists, and he yanked the knife between the rope and chair, cutting it away from me. It fell in my lap, and I tensed, readying myself to flee. Before I could move a muscle, he grabbed my arm and snatched me from the seat. The jerk didn't cut the rope around my wrists, which kept my arms behind my back.

“Wha—”

I yelled when he shoved me to the floor, pinning me down. He groaned, then chuckled as he spread my legs apart, my dress hiking up to my waist and showing him the apex of my thighs. My cheeks flushed, and I squeezed my legs shut.

“Ah, ah, ah,” he tsked as he forcefully pushed them apart again and knelt between them.

“If you move away from me again, I'll make you bleed,” he growled.

My eyes widened, my stomach dropping like a heavy stone.

I didn't want to die.

The best thing I could do was accept whatever he would do to me.

I gasped when he spread my thighs further apart with his large hands. He flipped the bottom of my dress up with one

hand, exposing my wet heat to him. I hated that I was turned on by this. His other hand slid on the inside of my thigh and cupped me. He spread my pussy lips apart, groaning as I mewled.

I couldn't stop my sounds, and he clearly loved it.

Our gazes clashed as he rubbed his calloused thumb on my clit, rolling the pulsing bundle of nerves.

My thighs quivered as waves of pleasure pulsed through the rest of my body as he worked me toward an orgasm.

“Stop,” I whimpered. I didn't want him to, but my mouth decided differently.

The corners of his eyes crinkled as he smiled behind his mask. “I don't think you want me to, baby.”

He pinched my little nub between his index finger and thumb. My hips jerked up, a yell escaping me from how amazing that felt. He chuckled and returned to quickly rubbing it, finding the rhythm I needed to come.

My skin became tight, and my breaths came out choppy. Sweat tingled on my upper lip, and I had to bite my tongue to keep myself from uttering a sound. I knew that was what he wanted.

I couldn't believe that my first experience in sexual acts was with him, of all people.

He tsked as if he could hear my thoughts. “One way or another, I'll be making you scream soon.”

He focused on my clit until I couldn't hold myself back anymore. A scream tore through me, and I came. My pussy clamped onto nothing, making me feel suddenly empty and needing to be filled. White glitter popped behind my closed eyes as I rode out the rest of my orgasm. When it ebbed away, I realized he never stopped touching me. He kept flicking my clit, his eyes on me, watching my every move like I was something fascinating.

“W-what are you doing?”

“Mmm, punishing you, baby. What do you think I’m doing?”

He cocked his head and brought up his knife, showing me the blade before he threw it up. It tumbled in the air, and he caught the sharp end between his fingers. My jaw slackened as he lowered the handle between my legs and nudged it into my weeping pussy. I groaned from the stretch, panting as he worked it deeper into me. That didn’t belong there.

Fuck, it was wrong.

My head tilted back in ecstasy, my hips rolling to take more of it. He hummed in approval, rubbing my clit faster and fucking me with his knife.

“That’s it, baby. Take it all like a good girl.”

I whined, arching my back as zaps of pleasure shot through my body, making my toes curl. I felt like I was burning up from how hot I was. I wanted to strip off my clothes and writhe under my stalker’s touch.

“If only you could see how beautiful you look with my knife in your pussy,” he groaned.

I opened my eyes slightly as I felt him shifting and saw him withdrawing a cell phone from his pocket. He pointed the camera at me, then a light flashed as he took a picture with his knife still inside me.

Our gazes met, and his eyes crinkled in the corners. “For memory’s sake.”

A sound between a gasp and a cry came out of me when he frantically thrust the knife in and out of me while he rolled his thumb on my clit. I tried to ignore the wet sounds of my pussy squelching around the foreign object. My face heated with a blush, and I prayed to whatever god could hear that my stalker didn’t judge me for those sounds. It didn’t take much before I came again, and my ears rang.

“Oh, fuck!” I wailed, arching my neck and rolling my hips.

When the high of the orgasm receded, I trembled and opened my eyes. My mouth fell open, and I blinked when he didn't stop stimulating my clit and fucking my pussy with his knife.

"I thought—"

"You thought I was just being nice and giving you orgasms just because?" He shook his head and tsked. "No, baby, I warned you that I'd punish you, and soon you will feel the burn after having too many orgasms."

I screamed as I suddenly orgasmed again. It became painful, making me pull away, but he held me in place. A burning sensation lingered in my clit, and I shrieked, twisting my shoulders and wishing my hands were free to push him away.

"S-stop!" I yelled and shook my head.

"There are too many sick sons of bitches who hit their women. Now, don't get me wrong, baby. I like to add some pain with pleasure. But I *love* using a woman's body against her. The first few orgasms are bearable, but after a while," He chuckled and moaned as I came again around his knife. "It becomes painful and feels like it's burning."

He wasn't lying. I felt the burn and how it tingled in my clit to the surrounding area. He never changed the pressure of his finger as he rolled and flicked it. I couldn't stop the whimpering and moans or how I fought to squeeze my legs together. He was so strong that I knew I couldn't do anything to stop him.

I screamed from pleasure and fear, hoping someone could hear me.

"Scream all you want. No one will come for you," he said with a chuckle.

My eyes rolled into the back of my head as I trembled with another orgasm. It bordered on pain, but pleasure still bled through it.

“Give me one more, and I might stop,” he purred.

He thrust the knife faster into my pussy, and his thumb rolled my clit, which felt like it was on fire. Just the barest touch made my teeth clench. It took longer for this orgasm to build, and when it came, I climaxed, screaming and thrashing my head from side to side.

“That’s my good fucking girl,” he groaned.

I trembled and panted, spent and unable to move. Opening my eyes, I watched as he withdrew the knife from me. I stopped breathing as he slowly pulled down his mask. My breath hitched as I finally got a better look at him.

He had a septum piercing and three small diamonds in one nostril. Tattoos covered the bottom half of his mouth, going from ear to ear. He had a piercing in the bottom of his lip, right in the middle. More tattoos crawled under his jaw and down his throat.

Fuck me, he was sexy.

He stuck his pierced tongue out, the appendage long and pointed, reminding me of one of those characters from an anime show called *Attack on Titan*. Sliding the knife’s handle into his mouth, he sucked on it and cleaned off my juices.

I watched with my lips parted and my heart racing. He was handsome—in a bad boy kind of way. I couldn’t stop staring at the tattoos on his face. They were mainly geometric designs, but a few of them were flowers.

He closed his eyes for a moment as he savored my taste. A groan rumbled in his chest, and my pussy clenched at the sound. Opening his eyes, he met my gaze and smirked when he saw me checking him out.

“Ahh, I told you, sweetheart, that I’m attractive. Am I going to have to fight you off, too?”

That snapped me out of my spell, and I glared at him.

“You wish,” I snarled.

He huffed a laugh and smacked the inside of my thigh. I gasped when he cupped my pussy and ran his thumb up my soaked folds, and circled my clit. I hated how he could easily touch and use my body against me.

“Do I need to punish you again?”

I frantically shook my head. “Please! No more!”

“Mm, that’s what I thought.” He withdrew his hand and looked me over. “You won’t fight me, yes? If I have to knock you out again, I won’t be happy, and you won’t like what will happen.”

I swallowed hard and shook my head. “I won’t.”

He stared at me for a couple more seconds, and after deciding that I was telling the truth, he leaned forward and grabbed me. It took him no effort to drag me up to my feet. He cut the rope from my hands, and I rubbed my wrists where they had pinched the sensitive skin.

I barely moved an inch before he dragged me away from the large living room where he spent however long making me orgasm. I stumbled over a step, trying to keep up with him as he led me up the stairs and down the hallway. He opened a door on the right and brought me into the bathroom.

Releasing me, he went to the walk-in shower and turned on the water. After checking the temperature and finding it reasonable, he grabbed a towel from the linen closet and chucked it onto the counter by the sink.

My eyes widened, and my heart jumped to my throat as he pushed himself up onto the counter and got comfortable. He played with the knife in his hand and arched a pierced brow at me when I didn’t do anything.

“Well, go on then,” he said, sounding bored already.

“You’re not staying in here,” I mumbled. I crossed my arms over my chest, shivering at the icy look he gave me.

“For you to try to escape again?” He let out a harsh laugh. “Not happening, baby. Get undressed and take a shower before

I change my mind.”

Frowning, I turned my back to him.

My shoulders sagged with my heavy sigh. Since I had no other choice, I slipped the dress up over my head and dropped it onto the floor. I peeked over my shoulder at him, catching him watching me with hungry eyes. My cheeks flushed, and I turned away. I rushed into the shower and closed the door behind me, the glass already fogging from the steam of the water.

I took my time as I showered, and he not once complained. After I was done, I poked my head out of the door.

“I need a towel.”

I noticed he had sat down on the floor and leaned against the wall next to the mirror. He had stretched out one of his legs while he bent the other and was picking his nails with his knife.

“It’s out here.”

“Can you hand it to me?”

He turned his piercing gaze to me. Even though it looked like he missed weeks of sleep because of the tattoos under them and how they drooped, his eyes still shone, seeming like he could see right through me.

“Come and get it yourself,” he drawled. His lips slowly turned up in a mischievous smile.

I swallowed nervously and glanced at the towel on the counter that was several feet away. There was no way I could cross the space and cover myself before he saw me naked.

I could just wait in here until he decided to leave ...

“I’m not going anywhere, baby,” he sang out with a chuckle at the end.

I huffed, my neck flushing, and I could feel the heat reaching up toward my cheeks. Covering my breasts with one

arm and my crotch with my other, I crossed the room on my tippy-toes as if that would make me go faster.

He stood up, looking at me with those bored, sparkling eyes filled with amusement and a smirk I wanted to smother away.

Silently, he tipped his head toward the towel, signaling me to take it. I bounded toward him and bent so my stomach covered my core as I snatched the towel and wrapped it around myself. I sighed in relief that it was large enough to wrap around me.

“Do you have clothes for me?” I asked.

He looked at the dress I had discarded on the ground and then back at me with a raised eyebrow.

I followed his gaze to the dress, biting my bottom lip. “I don’t want to wear that.”

“You sure are bossy for the one being here against your will.” He snickered.

I bit my tongue, preventing myself from yelling at him. He wasn’t my family or friend. This man saw me and listened to me. As messed up as this was, he was better than them. Though he still freaked me out, I was scared to be here with him.

Maybe he’d get tired of me and ignore me like everyone else. It wouldn’t surprise me because that was what happened with my friends.

He sighed and nodded. “Right. Follow me.”

I stayed close behind him as we left the bathroom and went into a different room. There was a gigantic bed on the right side against the wall with unmade sheets. Black curtains hung next to the windows. Straight across from us was a desk and chair, which surprised me. He didn’t look like a business type of guy.

I followed him to the dresser, watching him pull out an oversized black T-shirt. Our fingers brushed, and I jerked my

hand away, sucking in a quick breath. I faced away from him as I pulled on the shirt. It reached the bottom of my knees, shocking me at how oversized it was. It couldn't have been *his* shirt because of how slim he was.

My cheeks warmed when I realized I'd never worn a man's shirt. Let alone one of a man that made me come my brains out.

"What's that?" he asked.

"Huh?" I looked up and followed the direction of his gaze. Outside the window, trees swayed in a gust of wind. It whistled against the window, making me shiver.

Before I could figure out what he was asking about, something hard hit me in the back of my head. My ears rang, and dots spotted my vision, then darkness took over as I slumped forward.

CHAPTER 23

Sadie



My head swam as though I'd drunk too much the night before. The back of it throbbed, each one shooting pain through the rest of my body. My pulse thundered in my ears, in sync with the throbbing.

Thump. Thump. Thump.

Gradually opening my eyes, I let the light filter through and blinked a few times to clear my blurry vision.

Furrowing my brows, I stared up at the high ceiling. The walls were wooden with a shine as if someone had coated them with varnish. I turned my head and realized I was lying on a leather couch.

I pushed up onto my elbows and peered around me. Somehow, I'd wound up on the most comfortable couch ever.

What the heck?

A large plasma screen TV sat across from me, the screen displaying Spotify music. "bury a friend" by Billie Eilish played through the speakers. The song's bass matched the painful thumps in the back of my head.

I craned my neck and looked past the sofa.

The chair I had woken up tied to had disappeared. So that was something. Not sure what the heck was going on.

I sat up and peered around the room for my stalker. Something rattled as I moved. I looked down and sucked in a breath when I noticed a metal cuff around my left ankle. A

chain connected to it and pooled on the floor, leading away from the couch.

He chained me after he knocked me out?

I stood up, my legs wobbling from the light-headedness. The side effects of the chloroform had to have worn off by now. But it didn't help that I'd been hit at the back of my skull.

The chain clanked around my ankle as I followed it to where the end was. I breathed heavily, my heart pounding painfully against my chest. I swallowed hard, my eyes trained on the ground as I walked around the back of the couch and through a closed-off room that could be considered a sunroom. The end of the chain led up to the cement wall off to the side.

I tilted my head, looking at the dome above that was all glass. The sun had set, the moon was high, and the stars winked at me.

Lowering my head back down, I approached the cement wall and grabbed onto the hook to which the chain was connected. There was no padlock or anything. It looked like this was a part of this cabin.

“What the fuck?” I whispered. My voice trembled, as tears stung my eyes.

He had knocked me out and chained me like some dog.

I clutched the hook and yanked it. It didn't budge, which, *duh*.

My breathing quickened as I jerked at it again, tears slipping down my cheek as panic tightened my chest.

A mad man who raped me while I was asleep had really kidnapped me. I couldn't believe he touched me and forced me to orgasm what felt like hours ago. Most of all, I couldn't believe I enjoyed it and basked in all the attention from him. I didn't even know his name, for god's sake!

“Oh, my god,” I quietly cried.

“God isn't going to help you, baby.”

I jumped at the deep voice that came from behind me. I spun away, clutching my chest as my heart pounded against it. The chain rattled with my movements, grating at my already sensitive senses.

My captor leaned against the frame, his arms folded over his chest. He still wore his creepy skeleton teeth mask, hiding all his tattoos and piercings. Some of his white hair fell over his eyes, shadowing the obsidian orbs.

He tilted his head to the side, his dark eyes roaming over me, lingering on my chest and bare legs. I squeezed my thighs together, feeling suddenly naked. Maybe because I was. The only thing I wore was his long T-shirt. The soft cotton hugged my curves in some areas, my stomach especially.

His gaze went past my shoulder, where the hook was. My adrenaline spiked through my veins, and I held my breath, waiting for his next move.

He caught me trying to escape. What was he going to do to me? Punish me with orgasms again?

Heat pooled low between my legs, and I lowered my hands, gripping the shirt's material on my stomach.

Our gazes clashed, and he stared at me with an unreadable expression. I'd never met anyone who could have that type of poker face until him.

“Those chains are meant for Devils,” he said cryptically.

My eyes widened, and I took a step backward, then another, until my bottom brushed the cement wall behind me.

The corners of his eyes crinkled as he smiled, male amusement shining in them. “It would take a lot of strength to break them from the wall. I don't think some human woman could escape them.”

“Why do you need chains that are for Devils?” I asked nervously.

Who the heck was this man, and why did he need to chain up those dangerous creatures?

He huffed a laugh. “That’s for me to know and for you to never find out. Are you hungry?”

My stomach took that opportunity to growl. I tightened my fingers into my shirt, hoping to hide the embarrassing sound. From the way his eyes brightened, I knew he had heard it.

“Why are you feeding me if I’m your captive?” It didn’t make any sense why this man would kidnap me in the first place.

He tsked. “You take me for a heartless *captor*, baby. I don’t want you weak and ...” His gaze fell to my chest, then lower. The dark depths filled with hunger as he looked at my body like I was a slab of meat. “Passing out on me,” he finished.

I hugged my arms around my body, hoping it would shelter me from his wandering eyes. That man had made me feel more exposed and literally naked than I had ever experienced. I’d never dreamed of having a boyfriend because I was so hellbent on college and chasing after my family’s love.

He raised his eyes back to my face and arched a pierced eyebrow.

“I’m not having sex with you,” I uttered, not sounding entirely convincing.

He chuckled. “Who said anything about having sex?” He nodded his head behind me and raised his hand, curling two fingers. “Come. Let’s eat.”

I swallowed hard, my cheeks flaming hot.

Even though he said nothing about having sex, his actions proved otherwise. He was okay with raping me in my sleep and forcing me to orgasm. What did he expect me to think when he said he didn’t want me to pass out on him?

I watched as he turned around, giving me his back, and walked away. Sighing, I followed behind him, the chain around my ankle rattling with every step.

“What’s your name, anyway?” I asked as we turned the corner and entered the kitchen. It was an open space room

with large cherry wood cabinets. On the opposite end from where we stood was an island with chairs behind it. I stopped breathing when I spotted the gorgeous floor-to-ceiling window on the back wall. Even though it was dark, the outside light illuminated the trees.

I squinted.

There were fairy lights wrapped around a few tree trunks.

Oh god, this man is living my dream.

The only place with woods as deep as this was near the city's border. It went on for miles, and it was the forest that they warned us to stay away from. Devil Hunters frequented the woods because Devils hid in there with their recent kills. When I was a kid, there were rumors of a portal in the woods, and that was where the Devils came from.

"I don't know if I want to tell you," my captor lazily said. His voice snapped me out of my thoughts. I blinked at him as he gestured to the table as he turned to look at me.

"What am I supposed to call you, then? Master?" I grumbled and folded my arms over my chest, protecting myself from him looking at me.

He arched an eyebrow, and I could just see his smirk through his mask because of the crow's feet in the corner of his eyes.

"I like that." He nodded and slowly stalked toward me. I gasped, taking timid steps away from him. He followed me until my back met a wall, towering over me. His leather, cigarette, and spice scent surrounded me. My heart skipped a beat as he trailed his fingers through my hair, his eyes following the action. "Call me Master. Or even better, Sir. Either way, I'm not too picky with whatever you choose." Our gazes collided, and it became harder to breathe.

I didn't expect him to want that.

My gaze went past him, even though I couldn't see anything but him. He noticed and pulled away from me,

gesturing toward the island table.

“Eat.”

It was then I noticed a pizza box on the table, already opened. My stomach growled, and I covered it with my hands, thinking it would hide the sounds.

I shook my head and looked at my captor. “No.”

He cocked his head, eyebrows raised up to his hairline. “No?”

Swallowing nervously, I nodded.

“Is my food not good enough?”

“Why aren’t you eating, dear? Is my food not good enough?” Mayor Bennet’s question echoed in my head.

My stomach dropped like a cinderblock in the middle of the ocean. I stared sightlessly at my captor, who watched me with confusion in his eyes.

“I’m not ...” I swallowed. “I’m not hungry.”

His eyes glanced at my stomach, and then his eyebrow raised as we locked eyes again. I looked to the side of his face, unable to hold his stare.

“You know what happens to naughty girls who lie to me?”

I shook my head. “I’m not lying.”

He chuckled.

Crap. He was laughing. Not yelling. This wasn’t good.

I trembled and backed a step, only to realize I was still leaning against a wall.

He moved toward me, closing the space between us in less than a second. His forearm leaned on the wall by my head while his other hand skated down my chest, lightly cupping my breast and touching my stomach rolls. I shuddered from the gentle caress, heat pooling low in my belly. His hand slipped beneath the shirt I wore and cupped my pussy.

My lips parted, and a little sigh escaped me as he curled two fingers, running them along my wet folds.

He tsked and leaned closer until we were nose to nose. “So wet for your Sir.”

I shot my hands out, grabbing onto his shoulders to keep myself from falling over. His fingers spread my wetness to my clit, then rubbed the sensitive nub. A shaky moan escaped me, and I widened my legs for him to have better access.

“Mmm.” He nuzzled my ear, his hair tickling my nose. My heart jumped into my throat, and butterflies filled my stomach. This was intimate. Something I never had until him. I should hate it. I should despise him. But I couldn’t bring myself to.

I arched my neck, closing my eyes as he took his time flicking my clit. I whined when he stopped but mewled when he dipped a finger, then two inside me. He removed his arm from beside my head and grabbed my leg, hiking it up to his waist, and held me in place as he fucked me with his fingers.

“You’ll call me Sir.” He rolled his thumb on my bundle of nerves, sending zaps of pleasure up my spine and down to my feet. “As much as you want to think we aren’t on the same level, we are. Let me take care of you. Allow me to make the hard decisions you can’t make. If you’re a naughty girl, I *will* punish you. But, like I said, I don’t hit women. I’ll use your body against you until you can’t stand it and beg me to stop, while you pray in your beautiful head that I don’t.”

My cheeks flushed, and I trembled as my orgasm was about to take me for the ride of my life. As my inner walls spasmed around his fingers, he pulled away and dropped my leg.

“Hey!” I whined.

He chuckled and leaned over me, bringing his coated fingers to my mouth. “Open.”

I breathed hard, staring at the shiny digits. I’d never tasted myself. It always seemed like a nasty thing to do and something I’d be judged over.

I closed my eyes and opened my mouth. He stuck his fingers in, and I tasted the musk from my cum and the saltiness from his skin. I twirled my tongue around them, cleaning him off.

“Mmm. That’s my good girl.” He withdrew his hand and stepped back. “If you don’t want to eat, fine. I won’t make you. But you’re going to bed.”

I glared at him. “I’m not your child.”

He chuckled, making my stomach drop again. “No. But you’re my girl, and I take care of what’s mine. The bedroom is down the hall on the left.”

I stared at him, flustered and aching to come. He watched me with amusement shining in his eyes, and after a couple more seconds, I huffed and walked out of the kitchen.

“Oh, and Sadie?” I stopped and turned to look at him. His eyes still held laughter in them, crinkled in the corners. “You’re not allowed to touch yourself and come. If I find out you did, there will be hell to pay.” He winked. “Night, baby.”

I swallowed nervously and turned away.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

CHAPTER 24

Kai



I sat outside under the stars and moon, smoking a cigarette and fighting off my hard-on.

Seeing Sadie wearing my shirt, her nipples straining against the soft cotton and her legs bare, drove me into a Devil madness. I wasn't feral, but I would be for her. It made sense why that Devil attacked her when he did. She smelled divine and looked like a fucking goddess.

I missed being inside her. But my conscience couldn't take it anymore. I was running out of rapists to kill and store for their blood and meat.

I wanted her more than ever. Every night I visited her, I indulged in her. I felt her warm, tight pussy wrapped around my steel-hard cock. I watched her stomach and tits bounce with every forceful thrust, and her ass jiggled as I smacked my pelvis against it while I fucked her from behind.

But the one thing I wanted the most was for her to be awake while I railed her. I longed to witness her eyes darken, eyelids drooping with lust, and plush lips parted with whimpers and moans.

I wanted to hear her call me Sir.

I shuddered and ran the heel of my hand down my jeans, feeling my hard length on the inside of my right thigh.

Sadie was here, in the spare bedroom, ripe for the taking, and I couldn't do it. It killed me and my conscience, knowing that I had done something against her will.

I was no better than the rapists, no matter how much I tried to convince myself that I was.

I planned to woo her. Make her want me and fall in love, just like how I felt about her. I loved the girl. She wrapped me around her little finger, and I didn't think she realized the power she wielded over me.

I had followed Sadie for weeks, watching and learning more about her every day. But there was still so much to learn about her. Such as, why didn't she want to eat the pizza I got for her? What caused the panic to reflect in her sad hazel eyes?

A wolf howled in the distance.

I puffed on the cigarette, inhaling the smoke into my lungs. The cherry at the end of it brightened in the night.

My phone rang, vibrating in my pocket. The sensation went straight to my cock. I groaned, closing my eyes and enjoying it for a second before I slipped my hand into my pocket, grabbing the cell phone. I hit *accept call* on the screen.

"Yeah?" I asked, not needing to know who it was that called me. It wasn't like I was a popular guy who got calls from people.

"You took the human," Ricky said, sounding like he was done with my shit. I didn't blame him. Even I was done with my shit.

"Mmhm." I inhaled more of the smoke from the cigarette, waiting for him to get to the point.

"*Why?*"

I blew out the smoke and flicked the finished cigarette toward the gravel path leading to the front porch. It landed in the grass, the cherry burning the rest of the cigarette until it would meet the filter and go out.

"Levi wants her, which means he'll come here for her," I answered.

“That’s a good idea,” Ricky said, impressed. “What’s the real reason?”

Damn. He caught me.

“Don’t worry about it,” I drawled.

Ricky heaved a long sigh, bringing a smile to my face. I enjoyed giving that Devil headaches, and I knew right now he had one.

“Do you need backup, at least?”

We all were well aware of how powerful Levi was. The last time I saw him, I had my ass handed to me. But I could say the same for Levi. Even though I wasn’t the most powerful Devil, I was the scrappiest. And Levi got a firsthand experience of how dirty of a fighter I was.

I thumped my head against the wooden pillar that held up the canopy over the deck. I stared at the stars in the sky, unaffected by their beauty. There was only one person who was the most beautiful thing to me. Sadie.

“No,” I sighed. “I’ll be fine.”

“Don’t get too cocky now, Kai. This will be your only chance until the next sacrifice.”

“I’m well aware.”

Ricky huffed. “Doesn’t sound like it.”

I cracked a smile. “Send Nutter and Jag to my cabin. Have them stay close by and keep watch. They’ll know when Levi is here, and they can help.”

“You sure you want those two?” I could see Ricky’s eyebrows rising to his hairline through the phone, making me grin wider.

“You know those two lunatics won’t let Levi get away,” I said with a chuckle.

“Right,” Ricky drawled. “Anyway, I’m on it. Stay safe.”

“Yeah, you too,” I said before I ended the call.

I sat there silently, staring at the stars, before I lowered my head and peered at my phone in my large hand. I opened the photo album without thinking and clicked on the first image. It was of Sadie on her back, legs spread apart, and my cock halfway into her pussy. I swept to the left, bringing up a video of me pounding into her. Sadie's tits bounced with every hard slap of my hips against hers.

I turned up the volume so I could hear my soft groans, our flesh slapping together, and my cock slipping in and out of her wet pussy. Even though it wasn't at the loudest volume, I could still hear the wet sound of her cunt.

"Jesus," I groaned, shuddering and growing hard again.

A faint noise, so soft that human ears couldn't pick up, made me lift my head and look to my left. The curtains in the spare bedroom window fluttered as a certain little human closed them after peeking outside.

I smirked and turned away, looking at my phone again, pretending I didn't just catch her watching me.

CHAPTER 25

Sadie



I laid on my back in the middle of the bed, staring up at the shadowed ceiling fan, spinning in slow circles. That was the fastest it would go, giving little to no wind, and it didn't make any white noise for me to fall asleep. I realized in the last hour that I didn't have my medicine. Which wasn't good. I needed my pills for my schizophrenia and depression. It would help to have them and to also have something to make me fall asleep.

I was too scared to tell my captor about it. That would mean I had to inform him I had a misunderstood mental illness and watch the fear and anger cloud his face as he looked at me.

I had no idea what time it was, but it must have been hours since I came here.

My stomach growled, and my hands clench on my shirt over my abdomen. It felt like it was about to eat itself because of how starved I was. My mouth watered, and my teeth became sensitive from the nausea.

I regretted not eating the food. My stupid mind and the paranoia that held me in a chokehold made it impossible to accept anything from people. It didn't help that he'd kidnapped me. What stopped him from killing me? What was the point of me being here?

Him sitting outside, smoking a cigarette, popped into my head. The window's thick glass prevented me from hearing

anything he said. But when he ended the call, he stared at his phone, not saying anything. He watched something, making my curiosity rise.

I couldn't stop staring at him, wondering what he was looking at. Then I got distracted as I observed his face. He hadn't covered his face with his mask, which piqued my curiosity. Why did he wear a mask? Was he ashamed of his tattoos and piercings?

“Ohh, baby, you'll be sorely disappointed when you see my face. I have to fight the ladies off me all the time,” he'd said with a chuckle.

He was right when he stated he was attractive, and maybe he did tell the truth about having to fight off women.

Jealousy swirled in my stomach. I curled my fingers tighter into my shirt, grinding my teeth together as I imagined him touching another woman.

God, I was pitiful. I didn't want my stalker and kidnapper to see anyone else.

Even though he was attractive, it didn't mean I liked him. Right? I hated him for doing what he did to me. I despised him for kidnapping me. Right?

Is this any worse than living with my parents, who drugged me?

I hadn't stopped to think about it.

What was the last thing I remembered before I woke up in this cabin?

My parents dragged me alongside them to a party that didn't involve me or my birthday. I spent hours there, treated like a ghost, and then they talked about me at dinner. They made me sound as though I was some monster. Dad held a cloth to my face, and I blacked out, waking up in a different room with everyone in black robes. He shoved the same cloth to my nose and mouth, and I passed out. Then I woke up here.

What happened between the party and now?

My stalker had to know. Did my parents hand me over to him?

I had so many questions; the only person I could ask was him.

I released a long sigh and blinked. I'd ask him when the sun rose, and it was safe for me to leave the bedroom. Until then, I stared at the ceiling until I fell asleep.

A DOOR CREAKING WOKE me up.

I cracked open my eyes and turned my head over my shoulder, looking behind me where the door was. It had been opened wider than what I had left it last night. Turning onto my back, I brought the stiff quilt up to my chin as I looked around the dimly lit room, the sun not all the way up yet.

I gasped when I spotted my stalker sitting on the chair in the corner of the room, watching me with tired eyes. He didn't wear his mask, his tattoos and piercings on display. The geometrical tattoos under his eyes seemed darker as if he had bruises from not sleeping. For a brief moment, I wondered if he had trouble sleeping like me.

My heart thumped quicker beneath my chest, causing my breathing to pick up.

I sat up and scooted back against the headboard, hoping the extra distance between us would keep me safe. I knew it wouldn't, but just thinking it did kept me from bolting out of the room.

"How long have you been watching me sleep?" I asked. My voice wavered, and I wanted to hit myself for always sounding weak.

His long legs stretched out and crossed at the ankle. Like all the other times, he wore all black, his jeans ripped up, exposing more tattooed skin. He played with the same knife

he'd used to fuck me. My stomach knotted as I focused on it in his large hands.

Was he going to hurt me? Did he have his fun with me, and now he was going to kill me and bury my body in the back?

"A while," he answered. He tilted his head to the side, his tired eyes taking me in as though he could see beneath the blanket I held close to my chest. His lips slowly curled into a smile, and he chuckled. "You scared of me, baby?"

I sunk further into the pillows behind my back. My heart raced erratically, and my breath hitched. It wouldn't be good if I lied because I knew he could see it on my face.

"Yes," I whispered.

He leaned forward, his arms settling on his knees, his hands dangling between his thighs. He held the knife he had been playing with in one hand and I stared at it momentarily before bringing my gaze back to his face. His stare caused the hair on the nape of my neck to rise, and goosebumps spread on my arms. I couldn't look away from him, scared of what would happen if I did.

"You shouldn't be," he purred. "I wouldn't harm a hair on your body."

A bird sang outside the window, the sound cheery and the opposite of how I felt.

My grip on the quilt tightened until the tips of my fingers stung, and my knuckles turned white.

He stared at me, patiently waiting for me to respond. I didn't know what the heck to say back to that. How could I be anything but scared of him after all he had done to me?

I swallowed hard. "You're more ... more delusional than I am."

The corners of his lips turned up into a slow smile. "Is that so?"

I worried he could see my erratic pulse beating in my neck from where he sat.

My hands trembled, but I refused to let go of the one thing that comforted me.

He leaned back and rested his palms on his thighs before he pushed out of his seat. Flipping the knife, he caught it and slipped it into the holster at his hip. His eyes stayed on me the whole time as he ruffled his white hair on the back of his head and took two steps toward me. He paused when I scrambled back, the chain rustling with the frantic movement.

“I’ve brought breakfast. If you don’t eat it, I will force it down your throat.” He spoke in a monotone voice, his expression held boredom, but I knew he couldn’t be. How he looked on the outside differed from how he acted toward me.

I panted, watching as he left the bedroom. His heavy footsteps echoed down the hall until I couldn’t hear them anymore.

I released the breath I had held for however long and dropped my gaze to my lap.

How was I going to get out of this?

My parents’ faces popped into my head. They probably didn’t notice I was gone; if they did, they didn’t care. Or maybe this was some plan of theirs, and my stalker was the Devil they sacrificed me to.

I needed answers.

CHAPTER 26

Kai



The rattles and clanks of the chain announced Sadie's entrance.

I grinned while I stared down at the magazine from my gun; I was loading it with Devil bullets. I produced a new batch of them last night after watching videos I'd made of Sadie and me. I needed to get rid of my erection, so the best thing to do was keep my hands busy. If I was going to satisfy myself, it would be with me inside Sadie.

She entered the kitchen, gasping when she noticed what I held.

"Don't worry, baby. This isn't for you," I cooed as I peeked at her through my dark lashes.

I had to hold back the groan bubbling in my chest as I looked her over, still wearing my T-shirt. Her feet were bare, and her legs looked kissable. If I crossed the room and raised the shirt, would I find her wet for me?

Sadie folded her arms over her chest, visibly uncomfortable with me looking at her. I was sure my desire to throw her on the counter and fuck her from behind showed on my face. Her cheeks pinkened with an adorable blush. I tried hard not to focus on her blood or the hammering of her heart.

Fear drove Devils. We were predators who enjoyed the hunt. We lost all reason and control when our prey got scared and ran from us.

I wanted to taste her. To drink her blood and not just a sample like I did when I took her virginity. I wanted her blood to fill my mouth and slide down my throat.

My desire for her to be alive and unharmed won over.

“I don’t believe you,” she whispered so softly that human ears wouldn’t have been able to pick it up.

I smiled and inserted the final bullet into the magazine before sliding it into the gun, cocking the first bullet into the chamber, then flipping the safety button.

I nodded my head toward the foot sitting on the kitchen counter across from me. “Eat.”

She turned her stare from me to the food I had grabbed from the city. Traveling back with bags of food and even drinks was tricky, but I managed. I bought her favorite fruit parfait from a coffee shop she had frequented, and then I picked up the regular scramble bowl she always got from another restaurant. I wasn’t sure what she would crave, so I grabbed both for her to choose.

Sadie’s throat moved as she swallowed. She timidly stepped forward and touched the sealed containers with two shaky fingers. Shock flashed across her face, her eyes widening. She swung her gaze to mine, her lips parting in surprise.

“You sealed it?” she asked.

I could see her grappling with an unspoken issue. Sadie wanted to eat, but something was stopping her.

I leaned back in my seat and folded my arms over my chest.

“The pizza wasn’t sealed last night.”

Sadie gasped, her eyes rounding. “How did you—”

“I’ve been watching you for a while, sweetheart,” I interrupted.

I wanted to kick myself from the sullen look that crossed her face. When I watched her with her friends, they didn't leave room for her to talk. They had talked over her, and look what I just *fucking* did.

"I'm so sorry, baby. I didn't mean to talk over you."

Sadie's cheeks turned a brighter red, the pulse in her neck quickening.

Tell me what you're thinking, I silently demanded. Open up to me, and let me heal you.

"It's fine," she whispered.

I shook my head. "It's not. But for what it's worth, I'm sorry."

She stared at me for a couple more seconds before she turned to the sealed food, gently opening the sacks.

"How did you know?" she asked again.

I sighed. "I've watched you ask for sealed containers. You rarely go out to eat. I saw the look of panic on your face when you ate just onion rings for a meal while out. At first, I thought it was because you were afraid of people seeing you eat. But then I noticed you shopping at grocery stores and only getting things that were sealed shut. Nothing that someone could tamper with."

She swung her gaze back at me, eyes glittering with unshed tears.

"The pizza wasn't sealed last night, and I forgot. I didn't touch your food or drinks."

Her eyebrows furrowed. "Drinks?"

I nodded my head to the cups that sat next to me. Sadie turned her gaze to them. I watched her struggle, trying to decide whether she could trust me or not.

"Do you think I would have gone to all that trouble to save you from those monsters you called your parents to bring you here and kill you?" I shook my head and tsked.

Sadie's shoulders tensed.

"Eat, baby. I told you I didn't want to hurt you. You can trust me on that."

She swallowed again and peeked at me before looking at the pistol positioned at the side of the table. A lazy smile spread across my face as I watched her plan to take my gun from me and use it on me.

"If you use my weapon against me," I started. Her breath hitched, and she looked at me with her sad, doe eyes. My cock twitched, and I curled my fingers into my hands, making tight fists. "I can't promise I'll go easy on you for your punishment."

Her pupils constricted into tiny little dots, and her breathing became heavier. Fear rolled off of her, taunting the predator in me.

My dick jerked, and I held my breath, no longer wanting to breathe in her fear. I meant it when I said I wouldn't hurt her. But she was making it hard for me to keep to that promise.

Fuck, her fear smells so fucking good.

Birds sang outside, and somewhere nearby, deer grazed, their hooves tamping on the forest floor.

Sadie pulled out the fruit parfait and the silverware next to it. She hesitated as she took one step toward me, where the seat was, along with her drinks. Her sad eyes flicked between me and the drinks for a moment before she moved forward to carefully snatch the freshly squeezed orange juice with the seal over it and her passion fruit tea sweetened with lemonade.

I allowed her to stand at the island in the middle of the kitchen to eat. What mattered more to me was that she got food in her belly. I knew what it felt like to starve. It wasn't a great feeling.

The plastic of the parfait cup snapped as she removed the top and scooped her spoon into it. I watched her as she ate, taking pleasure that I was feeding my girl. She curled her

shoulders inward, appearing smaller, and tried to close herself off from me watching her. My knuckles turned white as I tightened my fists. I really, *really* wanted to kill whoever hurt her.

Sadie peeked at me from the corner of her eyes while she ate.

It seemed she didn't like that I watched her.

I clenched my jaw, the muscle in it popping. I looked away and stared at my gun off to the side, not wanting to upset her further.

I knew something was different about the girl, but I never knew what it was. She operated differently than any of the other humans. She was soft-spoken and shy. Maybe even depressed because she would lie on her bed for hours staring at nothing.

"J-just go away and forget about me like everyone else."

I ground my teeth together. Red flared into my vision, and I had to close my eyes so she wouldn't notice them changing colors.

"J-just go away and forget about me like everyone else."

Deep breath in. Deep breath out.

Fuck, this wasn't helping.

"Um."

I snapped my eyes open, finding Sadie nervously looking at me. She held her spoon between her and the half-eaten parfait.

"Yes?" I purred, my voice rougher. I tried my best to not let my anger bleed through.

Sadie's tongue peaked between her pink lips, swiping away a tiny smear of the dessert breakfast in the corner of her mouth. She sat her utensil on the counter with a shaky hand.

“You said that you saved me from my parents ...” Her throat worked as she swallowed hard.

All anger dissipated as if she had swiped away the dark clouds over my head. I raised an eyebrow, and the corner of my lip curled up.

“Go on,” I drawled.

“What happened? I ... I only remember the dinner and my ... my dad covering my nose and mouth with a ... with a cloth that smelled sweet.”

The anger that had gone away came back in full force as I remembered Sadie being chained to the floor in the middle of an upside-down pentagram with candles everywhere in the mayor’s office. Her parents and their friends were about to sacrifice her to Levi, and if Ricky hadn’t called me when he did, she wouldn’t be here with me right now.

I popped my knuckle on my finger, bringing myself some sort of relief. When the relief didn’t come, I popped the next one. Her rapid heartbeat wasn’t helping me relax. In fact, I honed in on the sound until it was all I could hear.

“It seems your daddy dearest wasn’t who he said he was. He was corrupt and worked with some very dark entities.”

Sadie’s eyes rounded, and the pulse in her neck throbbed, bringing my gaze to it and I watched each beat. My mouth salivated as my heart’s rhythm matched hers. I imagined how she would feel pinned beneath me, my teeth in her throat, with her blood gushing into my mouth.

“Sir?” Sadie’s timid voice broke me from the spell..

Then it hit me.

She called me Sir.

I snapped my eyes back to her face, nostrils flaring and my cock so hard it could cut glass.

“Your mother wasn’t any better. You were passed out when I found you at the mayor’s home. They were going to sacrifice

you to the most powerful Devil in exchange for them to gain more power and a vial of Devil's blood.”

“What?” she whispered, her breathing became ragged.

I clenched my jaw and fisted my hands, my arms like tight bands against my chest, as I held myself back from jumping over the table and tackling her to the ground. She reeked of fear, playing perfectly as the prey. If she didn't control herself soon, I'd pin her beneath me and my teeth in her neck. I didn't want to do that to her. She'd already been attacked by a Devil and under the impression that we were all bad. If I were to drink her blood, it would be with her consent.

“I know you heard about the tale of someone in this city sacrificing a virgin to the most powerful Devil.” Her friends had talked about it while she went to lunch with them.

I waited for it to click in her beautiful mind. When it did, her eyes widened, and a small gasp escaped her. Her fear spiked, and I groaned, sliding my eyes shut, and holding my breath.

“This whole time ...” Sadie whimpered. “They ... they forced me to stay a virgin because I was going to be sacrificed? To a Devil?” Her last question became a shrill that pierced my sensitive ears.

Her frantic heartbeat thumped loudly in my head. Each beat drove me closer to madness. To become a savage Devil that she feared all of us to be. I could hear her every ragged breath. Maybe it was my breathing. I didn't know for sure.

The Devil side of me rose to the surface. My teeth lengthened, piercing my bottom lip, and my nails grew longer into sharp points.

She couldn't see me like this. She was already scared of me.

I knew from the beginning that we weren't meant to be together. I was a Devil, and she was a human. There was no way we could be together, but I still wanted it. I wanted her, and she was mine. No matter what.

I snarled, jumping out of my seat. The chair skidded behind me, slamming to the ground with a crash.

Turning my back to her, I grabbed my gun and shoved it into the back waistband of my pants. I closed my eyes and kept my mouth shut as I ran past her and out of the kitchen.

I needed to get away from her. One more second being near her and I would kill her.

Once out of the kitchen, I opened my eyes and flung the front door open. It slammed against the wall, and I didn't care. I sprinted across the deck and down the steps, then ran through the thicket of the woods. I didn't stop, not until I couldn't smell her anymore. Not until I couldn't hear her rapid breaths and heartbeats.

The further I got away from her, the less I wanted to hunt her down and eat her.

I didn't stop running until I got to the lake, breaking through the tree line and panting.

I couldn't return to her until I ate something and worked out the need to fuck and feed on her.

My eyes turned brighter red, and the rest of my teeth lengthened. Saliva dripped down my mouth, and I snarled as one word repeated in my mind.

Blood. Blood. Blood.

I leaned my head back, roaring to the heavens. Birds squawked and flew out of the trees, scared of the predator in me.

CHAPTER 27

Sadie



I didn't know what just happened.

One minute we were talking about what my parents did to me, and the next, he freaked and ran out of here like his pants were on fire.

I stood by the front door, shivering from the cold and shock. He nearly ripped it off its hinges.

I squinted as I looked at the door. The top was disconnected. He really did break it on his way out. Oh, my god.

Who the heck had that kind of strength?

A roar echoed in the distance, disturbing the birds in the trees. They flew off the branches they had perched on, the wind in their wings creating a whistle as they escaped whomever made that noise.

My chest filled with dread, causing my stomach to drop like a stone.

I'd bet fifty bucks that it was him.

The sound was filled with pain and fury, which only made me feel worse.

I listened for any more sounds from within the forest and heard none. It was silent, like even the trees held their breath, waiting for something terrible to happen.

Backing away from the door, my foot caught on the chain, causing me to stumble. Flailing my arms, I caught my balance before I could fall.

I released a shaky sigh and awkwardly closed the door as best as I could. I didn't want to let the cold inside. The shirt I wore failed to keep me warm. I wished I had some pants.

I wandered through the large cabin that seriously looked like it was made for a wealthy family and went back into the kitchen.

My half-eaten food stared back at me, laughing that I didn't take the opportunity to fill my stomach. I had no idea when I would eat again. Though my stalker expressed the sentiment that he wanted to take care of me. No one had ever noticed my habits and worked around my paranoia. Not until him, anyway.

Butterflies filled my stomach, and I mentally chased them off. There would be *no* feelings for a man who stalked and kidnapped me. Absolutely zero.

Now that I was alone, I could find a way to escape.

My lonely side begged me to stay, while the other side, who desperately wanted to be "normal," screamed for me to get away from there as fast as possible.

I searched through the drawers and cabinets in the kitchen to cut the chain. When I found nothing, I moved on into the living room. When I found nothing, I went into the sunroom and tugged on the hook, whimpering and holding back the screams that built in me.

These are meant for Devils.

Why in the heck would he have chains for a Devil? Was he a Devil Hunter? I couldn't see that because the few times I'd interacted with them, they dressed in suits and had a tattoo on their wrist to show they were hunters. I didn't see that tattoo on my stalker.

I walked down the hallway toward the bedrooms. One was his, and I wondered if he hid anything I could use in there. Last night, I searched the bedroom I stayed in, holding my breath and hoping I would find something. But I came back empty-handed and in a sour mood.

I peeked over my shoulder, ensuring he hadn't silently returned, and crept up behind me. Turning around, I slowly turned the doorknob to his bedroom and pushed the door open. It creaked on its hinges, making me wince and peek over my shoulder again.

He wasn't there.

I blew out a breath, opened the door the rest of the way, and stepped inside the room.

There was an unmade bed against the wall to the right and a dresser across from it to my left. The room smelled old and like it hadn't been used in years. Sunlight streamed into the window, catching the swirls of dust. The walls were white, not having any personality at all.

His bedroom didn't hold anything that screamed it was him. It reminded me a little of mine at my parent's house. Nothing in my bedroom said, *Sadie*.

I padded across the wooden floor and approached the bed. I crouched down and peeked under it for anything that could have been concealed beneath it.

Empty except for the lint rolls and dust bunnies.

Popping my head up, I moved to my feet and headed to the closet. The door silently opened as I twisted the knob.

Clothes hung on hangers. They were all black except for a few white T-shirts. Shoes lined on the bottom, and I checked in them to see if there was a key.

Nothing.

A familiar lump formed in my throat, and panic tightened my chest.

I was screwed. There was nothing I could use to escape.

There were knives in the kitchen, but I didn't want to cut off my foot like that guy in the movie *Saw*. I liked having two feet, and I knew I couldn't deal with the pain of slowly cutting off my extremity like a feral dog with a leg caught in a bear trap.

What was I going to do?

"To do, to do, to do, to do," I whispered, repeating my thoughts without thinking about what I was doing.

I left the bedroom, softly closing the door with a quiet snick.

Even though I wouldn't cut off my foot, I could still take a knife and keep it in my bedroom. I could form a plan to get him to release the chain on me, then I'd ki—

Oh, god.

I didn't think I could kill him. That would play into the stereotype of my mental illness.

My mind whirled, and my reality shifted. I'd been getting that a lot more lately since not being on my medication.

But what if this was all some sort of sick game? Some test to see if I was the monster they said I was? What if my parents had this all set up where they would take me to the mayor's home, and he and his friends played along with my parents?

Sweat beaded at my temple and above my upper lip, making the areas tingle.

I stood in the living room, staring at the entryway to the kitchen with my heart hammering in my throat.

I couldn't kill him. That wasn't in my nature. And if this was some test, then I would fail.

I would pass the test if I played along with him, never letting him know I knew. I could go home after that.

He could be a method actor, which would explain why he raped me in my sleep.

My stomach knotted at that thought.

I had to pass this test.

Taking a deep breath, I went to the kitchen, grabbed the rest of my food and drinks, and brought them to my bedroom.

CHAPTER 28

Kai



I didn't return to the cabin until late in the afternoon. I took the time away from Sadie to kill a deer, gagging as I gorged on it. Human meat and blood were way better, but I wasn't about to complain. I needed something in my stomach to quench my hunger for Sadie, and the deer was the next best thing. After I couldn't eat anymore, I cleaned the blood off myself, then jerked off while I thought about my girl. I came in my hand, disappointed that my cum was wasted and not deep inside her womb.

I meant it when I said I would knock her up to keep her.

Critters in the woods scattered away as I got too close to them during my walk back to the house. Leaves crunched under my black combat boots.

I heard familiar voices in the distance. There was no mistaking Nutter and Jag. You couldn't mix up Nutter's cackle.

They were here. Good.

The brothers were unhinged and hard to control but great for backup.

Their voices were hushed when they heard me walking. They couldn't have been but a hundred feet away, hidden in the brush and thick foliage.

"Don't let her see you," I warned, keeping my voice low.

They whispered amongst each other before Nutter said, “We can’t have a piece of her?”

I knew he meant that as in *eat her*, but the territorial side of my brain took it as them wanting to fuck her.

Anger lit a fire in my blood, surging through my veins like lava. My canines lengthened and pierced my bottom lip. A drop of my blood beaded that I swiped away with my tongue.

“She’s *mine*. You won’t touch her.”

They murmured to each other again, most likely Jag wanting Nutter to talk for him.

“When you’re through with her, can we have her? We’re hungry.”

“So go hunt a deer or something. But you’re not touching a hair on her body. You hear me?” I growled and stopped in my spot, glaring in their direction. I curled my fingers into my hands, my nails piercing my palms. The bite of pain helped to distract me from closing the distance between us and cutting their heads off.

“Fine,” Nutter huffed.

I turned away, broke through the tree line, and walked toward the front door. As I opened it, I glanced to the right as a sudden gust of wind blew through the woods, shaking the limbs of the trees around me.

I narrowed my eyes and stared through the shrubbery for a few seconds, looking for a figure but not seeing anyone.

The wind died, and everything became quiet again.

I turned away and pushed the door all the way open, noticing the hinge at the top was loose. I peered at the ground, searching for the bolt. After finding it, I pushed it through the hinge and used my strength to put it back together. The metal creaked, and after a loud *bang* of the heel of my hand smacking against it, I closed the door with a soft snick.

“Baby, I’m home,” I called as I glanced around the front foyer for her.

My boots thudded against the wooden floors as I walked to the living room to find her. She wasn’t there. I checked the sunroom, making sure the chain was still intact. I didn’t think some curvy human woman could pull it out, but I still needed that peace of mind.

A smirk lifted the corner of my lip as I saw it was still there.

“Where are you, beautiful?” I called as I followed the chain down the hall and into her bedroom.

Her door creaked as I gently pushed it open. I didn’t see her on the bed, so I entered the room and peered around the mattress. I found her on the floor in the corner with her legs tucked up beneath her chin, and her arms wrapped around her calves. Her shirt had ridden up and exposed her ass and thighs, successfully giving me a hard-on for the third time today.

“What are you doing down there, baby?” I asked as I crouched in front of her, resting my arms on my knees and letting my hands hang between my thighs.

Her sad hazel eyes stared up at me from beneath her dark lashes. She trembled every few seconds like she was cold, or it could be that she was still scared of me.

I reached a hand out to her, pausing when she winced away from my touch.

“Hmm.” Dropping my hand and resting it back on my knee, I sighed. “I scared you earlier, didn’t I?”

She nodded, her eyes glistening with unshed tears.

I cocked my head and rolled my lips as I tried to find a way to tell her I lost control without exactly telling her I was a Devil. If she knew, she would have really been scared of me.

I popped a knuckle, my thumb pressing on the ring on my index finger. When that didn’t bring me relief, I popped my middle one.

“When we talked about me taking you from your parents, it brought up a lot of emotions. I didn’t like seeing you like that, baby. You were so helpless.” There. That was a good reason, and it wasn’t a lie, either.

She swallowed, her throat working from the movement. Her shoulders loosened, and I released a breath, knowing I got her. She let down one wall. Now I needed to get her to take down the rest.

“What ...” She paused as she thought about her next words. “What happened to my parents?”

Pursing my lips, I rested my elbow on my knee to cup my jaw while I gazed at her.

Best to rip the bandaid off in one go.

“I killed them.” I could have said that gentler. Instead, it appeared like I was bored and her parents’ death meant nothing. Well, it didn’t. But my girl was a sensitive soul and deserved gentleness.

Sadie’s eyes widened, and she gasped. I could hear her heart from here and how quickly it now beat. I focused on her sad eyes, hoping they would be the anchor that kept me from going full Devil and killing her.

Control yourself. You don’t want to blow this.

“You killed my parents?” she whispered.

“I did.” And I’d do it again. I’d do anything for her, to always have her at my side.

Her eyes flicked between mine, searching for an answer I’d already given her. She blinked and looked past my shoulder. My shoulders sagged, and an ache filled my chest because I’d lost her attention. I wanted to be the center of her world and always have her eyes on me. But I wasn’t about to demand things. Not yet, at least.

“And the mayor and his friends?” she asked softly.

A slow smile spread across my face, and I popped my ring finger. "I killed them too."

I didn't kill the mayor, but she didn't need to know that. Everything I told her was the truth. But I didn't want to delve into details with her, risking her panicking over it. Already it was hard enough to hold back from tackling her to the ground to pin beneath me. She reeked of fear. The deer I had earlier helped with the hunger and prevented me from killing her. So there was that.

Sadie wrung her hands at the bottom of her shirt. I dropped my gaze to her thick thighs, groaning at how delicious she looked. I had to avert my eyes so I didn't indulge in her. My cock was still hard as steel, but I wasn't about to fuck her. I wanted her to be willing this time.

"Baby, we need to get you a change of clothes, or else I won't be able to contain myself any longer."

Her breath hitched, and she froze, fearing that if she moved a muscle, I'd kill her.

Our gazes clashed, and I hummed as I thought about what to do.

She could wear my clothes, but unfortunately, she couldn't fit into them. It was only a miracle that I had a bigger shirt. If I brought her with me into the city to get her clothes, then I risked her making a commotion or running away. I couldn't have that. But if I left her here while I went into the city, I risked her finding a way out or, worse, Levi finding her.

"Hmm."

"I'll be a good girl," she said softly.

That went straight to my cock, causing it to jerk. *Fuck*, it was hot hearing her say that.

"You'll be *my* good girl?" I purred.

She stared at me with her sad doe eyes, making me want to pull her into my arms and protect her from the pain of the outside world.

She nodded. “Yes.”

“Say it,” I ordered. Even though I kept my voice casual and sounded bored, there was steel in my words, leaving no room for playing around.

“I’ll be your good girl,” she whispered.

I closed my eyes and inhaled through my nose. All the blood in my veins rushed down to my dick, hardening it until it became painful. *Goddamn*. Now I was hungry for a whole different reason.

“That’s right, you’re my good girl,” I said as I opened my eyes. I reached forward and fingered some of her brown hair. A few tendrils had faded pink mixed in them. My chest swelled, and my heart felt like it was three sizes bigger because she didn’t wince away from my touch. “So when I take you to get some clothes, you’ll stay by my side and not make a sound. Yes?”

She nodded. The movement had her hair slipping from between my fingers.

I nodded back and reached into my back pocket where I kept the key to her cuff. The familiar cold metal brushed the back of my fingers, and I grabbed hold of it. I waved a hand for her to give me her foot. She hesitated for a second, but then, like the good girl she was, she stuck her leg out. I put the key into the lock and twisted it. The cuff opened and fell away from her ankle.

I waited for her to get up and bolt, but when she didn’t, I grinned.

“Such a good girl,” I purred.

Her eyes brightened, and a rosy tint colored her cheeks. It was cute on her and made me want to keep praising her, to continue to see this lively look on her.

I stood up and reached down for her to take my hand. She didn’t hesitate as she put her small hand in mine and allowed me to pull her up onto her feet.

I fisted the hair at the back of her head and yanked her head back. She gasped and pushed her hands at my chest, weakly shoving at me, but I didn't budge. I crashed my mouth to hers, slipping my tongue past her lips and tangling it with hers.

She didn't respond at first, but after a few seconds, she melted into me and kissed me back.

I nipped her bottom lip and plunged my tongue into her mouth again, rolling it against hers and along her teeth. She tasted like orange juice and was salty from the food she ate. I didn't mind at all. I'd take tasting human food in her mouth over actually eating that shit. That was when things got hairy, and I had to purge the shit out of me.

Pulling away from the kiss, I looked down at her. Sadie's eyelids drooped, the hazel of her iris darker, and her bruised lips parted from my harsh kisses. She panted as she tried to catch her breath, her hands still pressed to my chest.

Our gazes met, and unspoken words passed through them.

I booped her nose and drew away from her.

Sadie sputtered and rapidly blinked, taken aback by the gesture. All I could do was laugh and take her hand in mine before I dragged her out of the bedroom.

"Time to get some clothes," I drawled.

CHAPTER 29

Sadie



I followed my captor (also known as the man who made me wetter than a slip-n-slide) outside after he gave me some sweats to wear. It didn't fit right, but it was better than riding into town with my butt showing. He passed me some shoes too, so I didn't have to walk into the stores barefoot and get weird looks from people. Because, of course, he didn't want anyone to know I was being held hostage.

I hiked the backpack he had handed me before we walked outside. He explained that my clothes would go in there due to the lack of additional space. Whatever that meant.

The crisp air hit me like a brick wall. I shivered and wrapped my arms around my stomach, trying to secure the warmth in my body.

My strides faltered as he stopped at a street bike and grabbed the helmet that hung from the handlebar.

"Umm," I mumbled. Now I knew what Kai meant when he said he had no extra space to hold my clothes. It was because we were taking a motorcycle the size of a paper airplane. Okay, I was exaggerating, but still.

He turned to me, one eyebrow raised. He had slipped on his mask, leaving me only to see his expressive eyes. I wondered why he needed it, but I didn't linger on that thought because there was a bigger issue here.

"Hmm?" His hum went straight to my core for whatever reason. I chose to not think about that. The sun shined through

the trees, lighting his white hair brighter, and his dangling cross earring reflected the light and winked at me.

I wrung my hands together while I looked at his bike. “I don’t know if I can fit on that.”

I didn’t mind my weight, but I knew when I couldn’t fit onto something. The street bike was slim, and the seat wasn’t large enough for both of us.

He tsked, wagging a fingerless gloved finger at me like he was scolding a child. “Come here, sweetheart.”

I closed my mouth, cheeks flaming hot from a blush. My feet stayed rooted to my spot, unable to move any closer to him.

When I didn’t move, he shot me a warning look. “Get on the bike, Sadie.”

Butterflies filled my stomach, and my heart skipped a beat.

How could he be so confident about it?

I averted my gaze to the ground, my pulse thumping in my throat.

Birds sang, filling the silence between us, and something shuffled in the brush off to the side. I glanced toward it, holding my breath, waiting for some bogeyman to pop out. A rabbit jumped out of the bushes, its nose working up and down.

“I won’t tell you again,” he warned.

I blinked and looked back at him. His obsidian eyes stared straight into my soul. The playfulness in his gaze wasn’t there as he watched me; a silent warning reflected in them. I knew what would happen if I didn’t listen to him.

Punishment by orgasms.

I shivered and shifted my weight onto one leg.

“Will you at least tell me your name so that way I can yell it if I fall off?”

The corners of his eyes crinkled from a hidden smile. His hand holding the helmet dropped to his side as he closed the space between us until he stood before me.

“Baby, you’ll be screaming my name for a whole other reason. I promise you won’t fall. I’ve got you.”

For some strange reason, I believed him. That knowledge had a tingle spread through me from between my legs and heat pooling low in my belly.

I blinked, breaking eye contact first. He gently placed the helmet over my head, securing it to me before he brushed his hands down my neck and arms.

“My name is Kai, sweetheart. Make sure you remember that,” he said huskily.

I watched him walk back to his bike and swing his leg over before settling on the seat. He turned the key in the ignition and gave the engine gas from his handles. The noise from it rang in my ears and made my body vibrate. The space around him became static and like a wavy texture.

My heart thumped against my chest, and I blinked, refocusing on Kai and not on the hallucination.

I walked across the small space between him and me and carefully straddled the seat behind him. He held an arm out to help me, his hand grasping the back of my thigh, making sure I was seated before he grabbed my hand and placed it on his chest.

I sucked in a breath, my heart beating a million miles a minute.

This seemed so intimate and like I shouldn’t be touching him. But I couldn’t stop. Didn’t want to stop.

I wound my other arm around him, holding onto his chest and stomach as he peeled out. Dirt flew behind us as we raced down the road, heading back into the city.

With the helmet on, it helped mute the loud wind and engine, making it bearable for me.

Loud noises triggered me and seemed louder than they actually were. For whatever reason, it didn't apply to music when I had my headphones on. Everyday sounds made it seem like my head was between two speakers blasting at full volume.

Trees whipped past us as we barreled down the dirt path. I got dizzy from how fast we were going and had to squeeze my eyes shut, my fingers digging into Kai. If I could, I would rest my cheek against his back, but it was hard to because of the helmet.

He was so warm and soft in some places and firm in others.

I should hate him. I shouldn't be clinging to him like this, not after what he did to me while I slept. But the lonely side of me ate up every second of his attention. He talked to me, listened to me. He never talked over me – except for that one time when he apologized – or pretended I didn't exist, just like my parents did.

I jerked forward against Kai, the wind dying. A shiver ran through me, my body catching up to the temperature difference.

I opened my eyes and noticed we were parked on the side of the road in the inner city where the wealthy shopped.

Anxiety coiled in my stomach as I dreaded getting off the motorcycle. I didn't want to stumble off and fall.

Kai waited for me, and after taking a deep breath, I swung my leg over and hopped on my foot while dropping the other. I shivered, curling my hands against my chest.

Hands grabbed my helmet and raised it off of my head. Kai's bored eyes met my scared ones before setting the headgear on his bike's seat. He lifted his black hoodie over his head, revealing the inked skin on his stomach and chest as his shirt rode up.

My breath hitched from the sight, and my thighs clenched together.

“Take off the backpack and arms up,” Kai ordered.

I opened my mouth to protest and tell him I wasn't a child but stopped when he arched a dark, pierced brow. I snapped my mouth shut, unhooked the straps from my shoulders, dropped the bag to the ground, and then raised my hands over my head.

Kai settled the hoodie over my arms, gently eased my head through the hole at the top, then rolled the rest down my body. I let my arms fall to my sides and looked down at my chest, staring at the hoodie. It was a little snug, but it reached past my waist and kept me warm from the crisp fall weather.

I raised my eyes, taking in Kai's appearance. He wore a black V-neck shirt. It exposed tattoos on his chest, the ink crawling up his neck and under his jaw, disappearing behind his mask. His arms weren't bulky, but he had muscles in them. They were covered with tattoos, too; the top of his hands were decorated with colorful designs, along with his fingers.

Was there any place other than the top half of his face that wasn't covered in ink, save for under his eyes?

Kai tucked his fingers under my chin, making me look into his tired-looking eyes. My heart sped up, and I curled my hands to my chest, a soothing habit I did when I was nervous.

“Save the eye-fucking for when we're alone,” he murmured while he rubbed his thumb over my bottom lip. His eyes darkened and flared with hunger as he stared at my parted mouth.

This is all an act for him, I reminded myself. My parents are working with him to test me.

“Clothes,” I reminded him softly.

He blinked, the desire in his eyes long gone now. Kai dropped his hand from my face and gestured for me to move in front of him. I took timid steps past him, and he walked beside me.

“Remember,” Kai said soft enough for only me to hear.
“Be a good girl and stay by my side. I’m the least of your
worries while here.”

I raised my eyebrows and peeked at him.

Whatever the heck that meant.

CHAPTER 30

Kai



We visited a few stores. Whatever made Sadie's usual sad eyes spark with interest, I paid for. Every time, she looked at me curiously. I knew she must have been thinking about where I got all the money, but I wasn't about to tell her.

We went inside a little boutique that was a hole in the wall. We walked through the store, my eyes zeroing in on the lingerie. One specifically. It was a sexy lace bra that was practically see-through, paired with a high-waisted thong made of the same material. I imagined my girl wearing that, the underwear sitting high on her wide waist, accentuating her curves.

Saliva pooled in my mouth, and all the blood in my veins rushed to my stiffening cock.

"Try that on, baby." I pointed at it, grabbing her hand and leading her to it.

"Wh-what?" she gasped, her cheeks turning pink.

I grabbed a bra that looked about her size and the matching thong, then shoved it into her hands.

"Put these on," I demanded.

Sadie sputtered, and I guided her to the dressing room, which consisted of a small space with a purple curtain that closed it off. Mercifully, it was placed in the back, and there was a wall that granted more privacy. I sat on the end of the fake leather sofa, stretching out my legs and arms.

“I want to see you in these. Try it on, baby, then come out and show me.”

“I can’t just come out wearing underwear!”

I heard her shift in the dressing room and knew I had won. She was undressing, and it took every bit of my control to not fling the curtain open and join her in the closed-off space.

“You’re right, sweetheart. I don’t want anyone to see you. Only I’m allowed to lay my eyes on your perfect body. Let me know when you have it on, and I’ll come in.”

She sputtered again, stuttering over words that didn’t make sense, and I didn’t care to ask what she was trying to say. I just grinned.

For what seemed like forever, I sat outside the dressing room, listening to her breathing, her heart thumping fast inside her chest. If I listened closely enough, I could hear the blood rushing through her veins.

Shit. I need to feed soon.

While we were here in the city, I could swing by the safe house and grab a bite to eat. Yeah. That sounded like a great plan.

“Kai,” Sadie called. That one word coming from her held uncertainty and made me slowly blink at the curtain, raising an eyebrow. As if she could see my expression, she continued. “I ... I don’t know about this.”

The store’s bell rang; the sound was a background noise that I ignored.

“Don’t worry. Whatever you’re thinking, don’t believe it. Are you ready?”

“Umm.”

I pursed my lips and tapped my fingers on the sofa’s edge. “Do you need me to help you?”

Please say yes.

“How can I help you, sir?” the girl up front asked the person who walked in.

“I’m looking for a girl. Have you seen her?” a man asked.

I stiffened, my ears perking from that familiar voice. I couldn’t put my finger on it, but I had a bad feeling.

Tapping my finger on the back of the sofa, I kept up the facade that I was relaxed. I leaned to the side, peeking around the corner of the wall to the man who stood at the counter where the girl was. He wore a business suit, one of his hands in his pocket and the other holding a picture he showed her.

“Mm, she does look a little familiar,” the young woman said.

She looked my way, and the man followed her gaze. Our eyes met.

My blood turned into ice, and the hairs on the back of my neck stood.

Shit. Fuck. Oh, this is fucking great.

“Is she back there with him?” he asked while still staring directly at me.

I slowly turned away, leaning against the couch for a few seconds before I stood up. I tried to remain calm as I whipped the curtain aside, revealing Sadie still wearing my shirt but no pants. She yelped, covering between her legs with her hands and twisting her legs together.

“W-what are you doing?” she whisper-yelled.

“Things came up, and we’ve got to go, babe,” I said as I grabbed her arm and yanked her out of the dressing room.

“Wait! I need to finish getting dressed!”

I dragged her to my side and into the hallway that led to the emergency exit. Thank god the wall was here and prevented the Devil Hunter from seeing us.

“We don’t have time,” I said, keeping my voice neutral.

“I don’t even have shoes on,” she whined.

I pushed the door open, and a blast of cold air hit us. For a second, I regretted that I couldn’t let her get dressed, but then it was gone, and the need to protect her and save my ass came to the forefront. Keeping her and staying alive was my number one priority.

“Hey!” the Devil Hunter called from behind, his heavy footsteps quickly thudding as he chased after us.

“Don’t look at him,” I warned Sadie as we ran.

She didn’t listen and peeked over her shoulder, giving the bastard a perfect view of her face.

“Naughty girl, I’ll be punishing you later for that,” I tsked.

In a swift move, I swept Sadie into my arms and carried her as I used half my Devil power, sprinting and putting distance between us and the Hunter.

“What’s going on?” Sadie whimpered into my throat as she clung onto me, her arms wound around my neck.

“Later,” I grunted.

Loud pops sounded behind us, and the few people in the area screamed as the Hunter shot at us. One whizzed past my shoulder, making me squeeze Sadie closer to me in reflex. The bastard wanted the girl, but he was willing to shoot at us? Fucking idiot.

I turned down another block, giving me a few seconds to lose him. People jumped out of my way, cussing at me and telling me to watch it. I didn’t feel a second of remorse.

There was a parking garage on the right, and I turned into it. My rapid steps reverberated across the garage as I hurried up the levels until I reached the very top. I breathed hard, slowing down until I came to a brisk walk. I spun around, making sure the Hunter didn’t follow.

“Kai, what the heck is going on?” Sadie asked, curling her fingers deeper into my back. I shuddered at the bite of pain.

The wind whistled around us, making me hold Sadie closer against my chest to protect her from the chill. I lowered my eyes to her and carefully moved her in my arms, where she straddled my waist with her legs wrapped around my waist.

Jesus fucking christ, it feels good.

Her hot pussy pressed against my pelvis, distracting me for a moment.

“I need you to hold on to me tight, baby.” I rested one hand in the middle of her back, and my other arm scooped under her bottom to hold her close.

Sadie trembled against me from the chill in the air and, most likely, from shock, too.

“How are you not out of breath?” she asked softly.

“I work out,” I half-lied.

Frantic footsteps echoed in the garage, and I cursed under my breath.

I turned around and walked to the end of the level, stepping onto the ledge.

“Hold on to me,” I warned her again.

“We’re seriously not jump—” Sadie screamed as I leaped over the edge. The wind blew under us, flapping our hair around our heads, some of hers whipping into my eyes. Sadie’s arms around my neck tightened until she was choking me.

My feet barely touched the ground before I raced through the street and turned the corner to circle back to where my street bike was. I dropped her onto the front of the bike. I removed the backpack from my shoulders and dropped it to the ground as I helped her with the helmet.

“What’s going on, Kai?” Sadie asked again, fear trembling her voice.

“Just an old friend who doesn’t know how to take no for an answer,” I lied again.

I secured the helmet on her head, then climbed onto the motorcycle behind her. I kicked the gear after starting the ignition, twisting the gas handle, and peeled out.

Traffic was hell, but it would help me out with losing the Devil Hunter. I looked over my shoulder, seeing him slowing down, then he stopped running after us.

Good. But when there was one, there was more.

I turned forward, dashing through the lanes and weaving around cars. Sadie didn't make a sound, but I knew she wasn't okay from the smell of fear rolling off of her. I didn't know how to explain this without her knowing I was a Devil.

Tires screeched behind us, and I looked, baring my teeth at the black SUV racing after us.

"Fucking assholes," I ground out and grabbed the gun tucked behind me between the waistband of my pants.

Sadie tensed against me, her muscles rigid and her spine straight.

Throwing my arm out behind me, I turned my head and aimed my gun at the tire of the car. I pulled the trigger and snarled when I missed. Turning forward, I swerved past another car, waiting to turn back around until the road cleared again.

The Hunters whipped around the slow car I passed and sped up until they nearly hit the back wheel of my street bike.

Gunshots exploded behind us, bullets whizzing past our heads.

Sadie screamed, the sound muffled from the helmet on her head.

I still couldn't believe those fucking idiots wanted my girl, but they still shot at us, risking to kill her. Jesus, fuck.

I turned down another road, almost crashing into the backside of a slowed-down red minivan. I jerked to the left

and swerved to the right when an oncoming car came from the opposite direction.

I glanced around, looking for the Hunters, and when I didn't spot them, I sped up and went down the path that would take us back to my cabin in the woods.

Just as I thought we were in the clear, loud pops rang from somewhere behind us.

I grunted, jerking forward from the force of a bullet hitting my back. Heat seared through that area, pain shooting to the rest of my body, stealing the air from my lungs.

I gritted my teeth and twisted in my seat while still holding onto the grip of the street bike to keep us going straight. The Hunter's black car barreled down the road after us. I pulled the trigger, this time hitting the tire. It hissed, the air escaping it and *thumped* against the pavement. The SUV swerved to the right and crashed into another car.

I turned back around and raced down another street to lose any stragglers who could have been following. When no one shot at us or followed, I turned down the road that led to the woods.

CHAPTER 31

Sadie



When we arrived at the cabin, the sun had set and shadowed the area.

“Don’t touch me,” Kai snapped as he shot off the motorcycle after parking it in front of his home.

His hands shook as he removed his mask and shoved it into his pocket.

I paused, my arms still stretched out to help him.

“You’re bleeding, though,” I whispered.

I swallowed nervously, a lump forming in my throat.

What took place back there scared me to death. I thought at any second, I’d get shot and die. Worse, I was so worried that Kai would get killed. I didn’t want him to die. Just thinking about it made tears sting in my eyes.

What the heck was all of that about? Why were people coming after him?

Was it part of the test, and Kai was method acting? Did those people attacking us have a connection to it? So many questions, and he wouldn’t answer anything I asked.

Kai spun around, facing me with his eyes narrowed and violence reflecting in the dark depths.

My breath caught in my throat, and I timidly stepped back.

“I’m aware that I’m bleeding,” he seethed.

“What happened back there? Who were those people?”

Kai stripped off his shirt and tucked it into the waistband of his black jeans. All of his tanned, inked skin was on display. He turned his back to me. I gasped at all the blood and the hole where he had been shot. Tears stung my eyes, and I stepped toward him.

“I’ll be back.” He shot me a warning look. “If I find you’re gone ...”

He didn’t need to say anything more to that threat. The message was clear. He’d punish me once he found me.

I didn’t like this side of him. He was so cold and mean to me, making me curl my shoulders and wrap my arms around my middle.

“I can help you,” I suggested softly as I took another step toward him.

He shot back, putting more space between us, and bared his teeth at me.

“Stay the fuck away from me!” he hissed.

I stopped. A tear slipped down my cheek and hung on my jaw.

His face fell, regret flaring in his eyes. It didn’t last long before he smoothed his expression into a stony mask.

With one final look at me, he strode away into the woods. I watched as he disappeared into the shadowed brush.

I shivered as a chilly gust of wind blew at me. Kai had forgotten the backpack of clothes at the boutique, which left me with only the large T-shirt on. I had slipped on the lace bra and underwear he wanted me to try, but I was having second thoughts about showing him.

Stay the fuck away from me!

My stomach knotted, and my heart shattered a little.

I had no reason to get hurt over the words of some man I didn't know. Especially a guy who worked with my parents to make me act out in violence. What if what happened earlier was a part of it? What if they had wanted me to grab the gun and shoot them?

I could just hear my parents and even the mayor saying, "*See! We were right. All schizophrenics are dangerous!*"

My breaths became quicker, and a cold sweat broke out on my skin

I didn't know how much time had passed as I stood there in the chilly air, hoping Kai would return. My nerves went haywire, and I trembled from the chill in the air and the fear that still lingered in me. Maybe I was in shock. From what I gathered, it occurred after a traumatic event.

My head spun, and the ground shifted beneath my feet like I was sinking into quicksand.

"*Over here,*" a voice rasped.

I blinked, looking in the direction I heard it. Nothing.

I squinted as the bushes rippled like it was going at two different speeds. One side was slow, while the other was fast.

"*Time to go to the affair,*" another voice whispered.

My breathing picked up, and I moved one foot in front of the other, heading to the porch. I needed to lie down. Possibly cover my head with the blanket and hide away from the world until the hallucinations left me alone.

Leaves being crunched under heavy footsteps made me gasp and turn toward the sound. It was now too dark to see, making the noises in the woods scarier. No one was there.

I turned back and went inside, my legs trembling. Warm air hit me, and I leaned against the door, squeezing my eyes shut.

My mouth moved with silent words that repeated in my head.

Stay the fuck away from me!

CHAPTER 32

Kai



Sweat beaded on my forehead and upper lip, my breaths harsh as I ran through the woods toward where Nutter and Jag were. I heard their hushed voices and followed them.

Sadie's sad eyes widening after I told her to stay away from me burned into my brain. I would never forget how she looked at me like I had ripped apart her favorite toy in front of her. God, I was such an asshole. But I didn't want her to touch me and get exposed to my blood.

Fear coiled in my stomach and turned my blood into ice.

Twice in one day, I came close to losing my girl. I didn't know which one scared me more. The Devil Hunters killing her, or my blood. The latter made me want to rip out of my eyes and tear out of my heart. So I would say my blood touching Sadie frightened me the worst.

My back burned from the Devil bullet that had lodged into my muscles, and not exiting out the front. I was lucky because had it gone all the way through, Sadie would be dead. The bullet was made to lodge inside a Devil because it released a serum, spreading like poison.

The bullet would eat me from the inside out. I had to remove it before it caused any more damage.

My legs trembled as I worked to stay upright. I wanted nothing more than to fall to my knees and curl up in a ball on

the ground. But I couldn't do that. I had a reason to keep moving.

"Shh, shh, someone's coming," Nutter hushed Jag.

"It's me, idiot," I gritted out as I broke through the foliage and into the area where the brothers had set up camp. Two red tents were beside each other, a small fire across from them. The brothers sat around the campfire, holding sticks over it as they cooked some meat.

The two Devils turned their heads in my direction. Nutter looked confused, and Jag stared at my hands. I raised them, breath halting as I noticed the red covering them. Fuck, Sadie had been so close to being exposed. I shivered at the thought.

"Whatcha doin' out here?" Nutter asked as he scratched his temple.

I gasped for air, my lungs burning from the exertion and pain that pulsed in my body. I dropped to my knees between them, my head falling between my shoulders.

"I need you to dig out a bullet," I breathed.

"Say what?" Nutter asked, shock evident in his voice. Jag shifted and grabbed something from his other side. I looked at him, watching as he twisted off the cap of a vodka bottle.

"Levi found you?" Nutter asked.

I stuffed my hand in my pocket, grabbing my cigarette box and lighter. I shook out a cigarette and caught it between my teeth before lighting it. Closing my eyes, I groaned from the slight relief of the nicotine. There weren't a lot of human things that I enjoyed. Their food tasted like sawdust on my tongue. But their booze and cigarettes were fire.

"No." I dragged in another inhale of the smoke.

Jag handed me the bottle of vodka. I grabbed it and tipped my head back, gulping it down. It burned down my throat to my stomach, but I didn't care. Jag held his hand out, and I handed it back over to him. The silent brother knelt behind me.

Nutter crouched before me, staring at me, perplexed, as he grabbed his dagger and handed it over to his brother. “Then who shot you?”

I hissed through my teeth from the burn as Jag poured the alcohol on the wound.

“Sorry,” Jag murmured.

“Just get the fucking thing out of me,” I said through gritted teeth.

The quiet Devil didn’t waste another second. He dug the knife into my wound. I clenched my teeth together, my back molars grinding. I breathed through the pain as Jag fished for the Devil bullet. The serum in it was already going through my system. If it stayed any longer, I was doomed to die. I couldn’t leave my girl. She needed me.

Nutter sat there, watching me with concern and confusion.

When I thought it wouldn’t end, I felt the bullet pop out.

I released a harsh breath and slumped forward.

“Who shot you?” Nutter asked again.

I raised my head, meeting his eyes.

“Devil Hunters.”

Nutter tensed, and Jag muttered a curse from behind me.

“I took the girl into the city for some clothes. A Devil Hunter asked about her, and I had to get her away.” I swallowed to wet my dry throat and straightened my back. I ran my hands through my white hair, realizing I was smearing my blood in it. Fuck. I needed to wash myself, to remove it before I returned to Sadie.

My eyes drooped, and my heart slowed down, almost too slow.

“When there is one Hunter, there are more,” Jag mumbled.

Nutter nodded his head. “They’re like cockroaches.”

I hissed from the bite of pain in my fingers. I looked down and flicked the cigarette away from me. Fuck. I'd forgotten about that.

"How ya feelin'?" Nutter asked. He most likely noticed the change in my heartbeat and breathing.

"Like shit," I croaked.

I needed to get up. Right now. But my body didn't want to listen to me. I sagged forward and fell face-first into the dirt and leaves.

"Shit. The Devil bullet is gettin' to him. You still got that ___"

My ears rang, and everything closed in on me. I turned my head, my breath shallow and my vision blurry. Sweat coated my forehead and my back. I blinked, then blinked again as I stared at the tree that formed into Sadie.

"Sadie," I murmured.

Hands grappled at me, and darkness descended.

CHAPTER 33

Kai



“K ai.”
Sadie?

I couldn't open my eyes. No matter how much I tried, they were glued shut.

My chest ached from the tightness in it. I thought I lifted my hand to rub my knuckles on my sternum, but nothing happened. It was like there was a disconnect between my brain and the rest of my body.

“Kai.”

There it was again.

Sadie's soft voice dragged me further out of the darkness. Wherever she went, I would be there behind her, following her. My girl was stuck with me.

“Kai.” Sadie's voice cut through my thoughts, her voice firmer as she called out to me.

“Mmm.” I couldn't speak, my vocal cords were not working, and my mouth was firmly shut. My tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth, and it felt like someone had sown my lips together.

“Open your eyes, Kai.”

I can't, baby. For whatever reason, I'm not able to. Help me.

Something gently touched my face, fingers dragging over my cheek and forehead.

“Is the antidote not working?” Sadie asked.

Huh? Antidote?

My head buzzed, and noises came into focus. Crickets chirped, and an owl hooted somewhere nearby, grating at my nerves.

What the fuck was happening?

“His heart is still beating.” Sadie’s sweet voice became deeper, more masculine.

“Might take a minute.” Another voice, but I couldn’t put my finger on who it was.

Where was Sadie?

Come back, I begged. Don’t leave me.

A memory popped into my mind, sending me to a time I thought I had left behind.

“Come back!” I wailed as I ran down the street, gasping for air and chasing after my dad’s car.

He’d left with his things, packed them in his beat-up Chevy, and driven off without saying anything to me. Confused, I stood to the side as I watched him get into his car.

“Please don’t leave me with her!” six-year-old me screamed.

Tears pooled in my eyes, slipping down my cheeks and dangling on my jaw. They blinded me, making me lose sight of the Chevy that turned into a tiny dot in the distance. My toe caught on a rock, and I stumbled forward, crashing onto the ground. I scream-sobbed, moving to my hands and knees, snot hanging from my nose.

Blood filled my mouth. I realized I had bitten the tip of my tongue. Mom and Dad taught me to never expose my blood and to always clean it up before anyone could touch it. I

swallowed the coppery liquid, sniffing through my clogged nose. I blinked back the tears and raised my head. Some of my hair fell into my eyes.

Dad was gone.

All I had left was my mom, who never talked to me, and my baby sister who Mom gave all the attention to. It was Dad who fed and clothed me. He made it seem like he was always angry with me, even then. I didn't know what I did to deserve it. I just wanted to be loved. To be seen and held.

I stayed on the ground like that for what seemed like an eternity. A cow mooed, and I turned my head, noticing the neighbor's cows were at the fence line again, chewing on grass and watching me with interest. Dad never liked it when I played with them. Mom never noticed or cared.

Swallowing another glob of blood, I stood up and patted the dirt off me. I raised my trembling chin, gazing at the road in the distance. Cicadas rattled, and a cow shit, the sound wet as it dropped to the ground.

I glanced over my shoulder, staring at the small farmhouse where we lived. I didn't want to go back and live as a ghost that Mom was mad at. But I had no other choice.

Some day, someone would love me. I'd love them right back and make sure they knew it. I didn't ever want to be treated like this again, and I wouldn't ever ignore them.

Someone smacked my cheek, bringing me out of the memory.

I groaned, and with maximum effort, I opened my eyes.

Two heads hovered over me. Their faces were blurry, but my vision eventually cleared.

“Thought you were a goner,” Nutter said.

Jag looked at him with annoyance before he lowered his gaze to me, a gentler expression on his face.

“What happened?” I croaked.

“The Devil bullet about killed ya. But Jag had an antidote. Thank the gods that he’s the smartest out of the two of us. Even a little paranoid, he is.”

My eyebrows drew together. “You just carry around an antidote?”

Jag huffed and moved away from me. I rolled to my side, groaning from the shot of pain in my back.

“How long have I been out?” I asked as I rolled onto my back again, too sore and tired to stand up.

Nutter counted in his head. “Three days.”

I blanched. “Sorry. I must have lost my hearing because of my standoff with the Devil Hunters. You couldn’t have possibly said three days.”

Nutter gave me a confused look and scratched his temple. “Uhh. I did.”

I groaned and closed my eyes. I slipped my hand into my pocket, finding my case of cigarettes and lighter. After lighting one up and inhaling the smoke, I opened my eyes.

“And the girl?” Please don’t tell me she ran off or Levi snatched her away while I was gone.

“Safe. Though she keeps talking to someone. I don’t know who. Couldn’t find them as I peeked in the window.”

I sucked on the cigarette, holding the smoke in my lungs before releasing it. “What?”

Nutter shrugged and sat down beside me. “Don’t know what to tell ya. Maybe she’s gone mad like me and my brother here.”

That earned a glare from Jag from his spot next to the campfire.

Well then. I guess I better find out for myself who was there.

I flicked the finished cigarette and groaned as I sat up, running my fingers through my messy hair.

“Well, boys, it was nice seeing you, but I’ve got a date with a girl at home,” I sighed and got up.

Nutter looked up at me with his eyebrows furrowed. “You’re leavin’ so soon?”

I scoffed and shook my head, chuckling under my breath. “Of course, I’m leaving. Thanks for everything.”

If what they said was true about Sadie, I worried that she might have lost some of her sanity. Next thing I knew, she’d be walking around naked, not that I’d complain. It was the next best thing aside from her wearing my T-shirt.

I stiffened.

Fuck.

She needed clothes, and I left it back at the store. I knew that backpack full of clothing was long gone now.

I sighed, long and hard. I should go into town and get her some clothes to replace them.

“See ya,” I called as I walked away.

CHAPTER 34

Sadie



Days had passed, and Kai hadn't returned. I would say that I was worried, but I couldn't because that would mean that I cared about him. How could I care about the person who kidnapped me? The one who was working with my parents to pressure me to become the villain they wanted me to be?

Memories popped into my mind of when Kai took me shopping. He kept his posture loose and seemed relaxed and couldn't care less, but his eyes had shined with hunger as he looked me over. And whenever he stared at me like that, my stomach filled with butterflies, and warmth flooded between my legs.

I thought about how he kept me close to him while we ran from that man at the boutique. How Kai made sure he was careful with me when he pulled me into his arms and dropped to the ground. I didn't know how we survived that fall.

I shouldn't have these types of feelings for my stalker. But I couldn't stop fantasizing about him while he was gone. A few times, my hand slipped between my legs, fingers brushing my pulsing clit, and I imagined it was him who was touching me.

I picked at my nails as I stood before the front door, debating about leaving.

It'd been four days, and he hadn't returned. After he yelled at me to stay away from him, I believed it was only for a few

hours, but now I thought it may be forever.

Was I that bad that even my stalker got tired of me?

"Nobody wants you," a voice whispered.

A lump formed in my throat, and the back of my eyes stung with tears. I shouldn't cry over him and how he hurt my feelings.

It hurt though, what he said and what the voice just spoke.

Of course, no one wanted me.

No one cared about me.

I was nothing but a ghost to everyone.

The front door swung open, and I gasped as I watched Kai enter the home. He'd dressed in different clothes but had the same grungy look. Black v-neck shirt, black ripped-up jeans with black combat boots. He had on a leather jacket, giving him a bad-boy vibe. Which he played off very well. And as usual, he wore his skeleton smile mask, which disappointed me because I wanted to see his face.

I backed away, curling my hands into my chest and trying not to freak out.

"You're alive," I whispered.

He closed the door behind him, cocking his head, and stood several feet away from me, his eyes slowly roaming over me. I clenched my thighs together from his full attention, and his pupils dilated with lust as he returned his gaze to my face.

"I am," he drawled. "And I missed you very much while I was gone."

My cheeks warmed at his confession.

He took one step toward me, and I took one back. Something sparked in his eyes that I couldn't read, which worried me. He walked me backward, closing the space between us until my back met a wall, and I had nowhere else to go.

Kai caged me in as he rested his hands on the wall beside my head. He watched me with tired eyes, his tattoos enhancing the lethargic look.

“Why are you wearing shoes?” he rumbled softly. “And you better not lie to me.”

I swallowed nervously. “I-I just ... I wanted to wear them.”

He arched a pierced eyebrow. His eyes never left mine, and his breathing stayed deep and even.

“Is that so?” he drawled.

I shakily nodded. “Yes,” I squeaked.

“You promise you’d be my good girl,” he purred.

My eyes widened, and I raised my hands like I was about to touch him but stopped when he dropped his gaze to them like it offended him. I lowered my hands and tucked them behind my back. Kai raised his obsidian eyes and stared at me, making me squirm in my spot.

“What ... what is this about?” I whispered breathlessly.

Kai moved in closer. His spice, leather, and cigarette scent made my head fuzzy.

Staring at him up close, I changed my mind about his mask. While I enjoyed seeing his face, his mask intrigued me the most. It made whatever the game was that we played more fun.

“Undress,” he ordered casually as if he were talking about the weather.

My heart somersaulted, and I gaped at him. I immediately shook my head, not thinking about it.

“No,” I gasped.

He raised his black pierced eyebrow again, his eyes sparkling with male amusement.

“You’re going to tell me no?” he said, still sounding bored.

I trembled in my spot, fidgeting my fingers from behind my back as I stared up at him. After a few seconds, I had to look away, unable to take the heaviness of his gaze. Kai tucked his knuckles under my chin, forcing me to look at him again.

“Do you want to please your Sir?”

“*You can call me Master or Sir.*” Kai’s words from when I first woke up echoed in my head.

My stomach clenched, and heat pooled low in my belly.

“Am I in trouble?” I whispered.

“Mmm.”

He didn’t say yes, but he also didn’t say no. So I had no idea what the heck was going on.

Kai pulled away, dropping his hand from under my chin. He gazed at me for a few more seconds before he turned around and walked away. My mouth dropped open, and I watched him disappear around the corner. I didn’t know if I should follow him.

After a few silent minutes, he returned with black rope and a sparkle in his eye.

“Where did you get that?” I asked.

The corners of his eyes wrinkled with a hidden smile. He unrolled the rope and held it in one hand, gesturing for me to move with the other.

“Undress,” he said firmly.

Do you want to please your Sir?

Oh god, I do. I wanted his attention so badly. I had been denied any affection for all my life that I would take it from whoever would give it.

I kicked off my shoes first, then raised the black t-shirt I borrowed from Kai’s room above my head and threw it to the ground. That left me in the lace underwear I had left the

boutique in. Kai's eyes flared, dropping to my chest and lower. He devoured me with his gaze.

I unhooked the bra in the middle of my breasts. They spilled out as the lace slipped down onto the floor in a whisper. I soaked up every second of having Kai's eyes on me. I thought I would have been more nervous than I actually was. Feeling like a sexy goddess, I slid my panties off, and they pooled around my ankles. I stepped out of them and waited for my next order from him.

He lifted his gaze back to my face. My nipples pebbled, and I stopped breathing for a moment. His eyes hooded, and there were a thousand little words reflecting in them that didn't need to be said. I'd never felt more beautiful than I did then.

“Kneel.”

A blush worked up my chest, neck, and cheeks as I slowly lowered myself to my knees.

“Such a good girl.”

My stomach flipped at those four words. I didn't think he knew how much that meant to me and the effect it had.

Kai crouched in front of me and wrapped the rope around my body. I kept my eyes on his face as he turned me in his grasp and lowered me to lie on the wooden floor. He knotted the rope quickly and efficiently until I couldn't move anything but my head. He had tied me in a position that left my legs spread apart to nestle his hips and my arms pinned against my lower back.

Once he finished, I was on my belly, flat on the ground with my cheek to it.

A finger dragged down my back and to the curve of my bottom.

“Fuck, baby,” Kai murmured.

He brushed his finger over my asscheeks, making goosebumps rise on my arms, and my nipples pebbled tighter.

“You look gorgeous, all tied up for me to play with.”

I gasped as he picked me up like I weighed nothing and hooked the rope into a ring above us that I didn't realize was there. He suspended me in the air, and I swayed, my face pointing to the ground and legs spread wide open for him to do anything he wanted to me.

Kai ran his hand over my butt cheek again. His palm cracked against my ass, stinging from the spank. I yelped and tensed, breathing hard from the pain.

“You ready for your punishment?”

CHAPTER 35

Kai



Sadie was already wet, her arousal dripping down the insides of her thighs. Her musk filled the air, tempting me to throw all caution to the wind and sink inside her. I shuddered, rubbing my hand over the front of my pants, holding myself back from coming in them.

She did this to me. Everything about her made me lose control. But most of all, I wanted to lose myself in her.

“Why ... why am I being punished?” Sadie whispered, so unsure and yet ready to please. I liked this side of her.

I caressed my hand along her buttocks, fingers trailing between her crack. My fingertips brushed the tight virgin hole. Soon I’d be filling it. I wanted to strip away any purity that was left of her. She’d be baptized in my cum and covered in bruises from my touch. One day, she’d look at me with sultry eyes and not in fear. But I had to take it one day at a time.

Sadie sucked in a breath from my barest touch of her tight hole.

I raised an eyebrow and smirked.

Noted.

I lowered my fingers, rubbing them between her wet folds and circling her clit. She mewled so prettily under my touch. I swept my fingers back up, smearing her arousal over her pussy lips and slit.

“You don’t remember what you did?” I asked and tsked.
“Naughty, naughty girl.”

Her breathing became heavier, louder, inciting a thrill in me. Good. I was glad she enjoyed my touch. Her body knew she wanted me. It was just her beautiful mind that needed to catch up.

Sadie tensed, trying to move in her binds, but the rope held her in place and all she could do was ripple her muscles.

I smacked her pussy, her juices smearing onto my hand. Sadie yelped, tensing underneath my hand. She couldn’t fool me. I felt her core throbbing beneath my fingers, her clit fluttering like a heartbeat.

“Think *really* hard,” I drawled.

“I ... I can’t remember!”

I adjusted the rope, dropping the front half of her so her ass stuck into the air.

Perfect.

“I don’t believe you. But don’t worry, I’ll make you remember if what you say is true.”

I glided my fingers between her wet folds again, then spread her labia to expose her weeping hole and clit. A growl built in my chest as I looked at how perfect and beautiful she was. Looking at her cunt, I could feel the memory of her squeezing on my dick as she came. It wouldn’t be long before I got to feel that again.

I removed my mask and slipped it into my pocket before I leaned forward, latching my mouth onto her mound. My tongue swept from bottom to top, swirling the tip inside her entrance.

Sadie cried out, tensing beneath my touch. Her breaths became ragged as I tongue-fucked her.

I spread her asscheeks apart, making more room for my head to nestle between her thighs as I ate her out like she was

the first meal I'd had in years. I was a starving man, and only Sadie could ever fill me. My hot breaths fanned against my face, my tongue lashing at her with loud slurps.

Her moaning and screaming my name was music to my ears.

This was what I wanted.

Sadie's needy sounds and begging chipped away at my guilty conscience. I'd been running from it since I first had her while she slept. No amount of killing rapists washed away my sins. But right now, with Sadie coming apart beneath my tongue, I knew she would forgive me.

I gently prodded my fingers outside of her opening. Sadie panted, relaxing into my touch. I smirked into her mound, spearing two fingers deep inside of her. She stretched around me, her walls convulsing. She was close, but I knew she needed a little more time and effort. For whatever reason, my girl had issues with coming. But she won the lottery for having me. I was tenacious and wouldn't stop until I made her orgasm multiple times.

I wasn't big into the BDSM community, but if I were to label myself, it'd be a pleasure Dom. Something about controlling a woman's orgasm and making her come her brains out did it for me.

"I-I ... oh god! I'm about to—I'm coming!" Sadie screamed. Her inner walls slammed down on my fingers, and convulsed, attempting to suck me deeper into her warmth.

I groaned into her, never stopping my tongue as I flicked the tip against her clit. The ball of my piercing hit her just right, and more of her juices gushed out onto my awaiting tongue.

"I can't!" Sadie pleaded. "No more! It's too sensitive!"

I sucked her clit into my mouth, my teeth gently nipping the bundle of nerves. That earned me a beautiful throaty groan from her, her pussy clenching on my thrusting fingers.

I could do this for hours, and I planned on it. What Sadie did back there while we ran from the Devil Hunters made things a little trickier. They now knew Sadie was with me. They didn't know me personally and that I was a Devil, but it wasn't hard to miss a tall, tattooed guy with white hair. Anyone would know something was up if he ran from a Hunter, especially with a missing girl.

Sadie came apart for a third time, panting and wailing.

I kissed her pussy once, twice, then licked her from the bottom to the top, swirling the tip of my tongue inside her. "Do you remember what you did?"

She trembled in her confines and panted. "N-no. I swear I don't remember."

"Hmm." I swiped my tongue up her folds again, taking my time as I lapped up her cum. I caught her clit between my teeth, my tongue gently flicking it.

"I—Ah!" Sadie sobbed as I hummed on her sensitive bundle of nerves, sending her into another painful orgasm.

I moved away from her and withdrew my fingers from her wet channel. Her cum had covered my hand; my tattoos looked darker and glistening in the light. I closed my eyes, groaning as I stuck them into my mouth, cleaning her off.

"Fuck, baby. You taste so fucking good." I opened my eyes and pulled my fingers out, looking her over and noticing all the blood had rushed to her head from her position.

"Please!" Sadie begged as I cupped her cunt, curled two fingers between her folds, and rubbed her swollen clit. "I can't take it anymore!"

I chuckled. "I thought you wanted to please your Sir?"

She whined, her pussy pulsing as she got closer to her next orgasm. I grinned, pleased that my patience had paid off. When she finally had one orgasm, the rest were a piece of cake.

"I do," she sobbed.

“So you’ll tell your Sir what you did and how sorry you are.”

“I can’t remember, Kai. I have a bad memory because—ah!”

I slapped her pussy. The crack sounded wet, and I was sure that worsened the sting.

“Sir,” I corrected.

“I’m sorry Sir,” Sadie whimpered.

Her breathing turned shallow, and I stood up to fix the ropes, jerking them in the original position so her head wasn’t pointed down.

I knelt behind her, eye level with her beautiful pussy. I cupped her again, curling my fingers and paying attention to her now sensitive bundle of nerves. Her thighs trembled, and her breath came out short and choppy.

“That’s a good girl,” I murmured. I watched as her pussy pulsed as she grew closer to her orgasm. “So beautiful.”

Sadie groaned deep in her chest, holding her breath as she orgasmed.

I listened to her heart race like a drum in my ears. The Devil in me focused on it, repeating one word in my head.

Blood. Blood. Blood.

I bit my bottom lip, my piercing catching between my front teeth. Sadie’s sobs brought me out of my trance.

“You have a bad memory?” I asked.

That was something new. I thought I had learned everything about her, but clearly, I was wrong.

“Yes!” she sobbed.

I pinched her clit between my index finger and thumb. “Then I’ll remind you what happened.”

Standing up, I pulled the strap from my belt and unbuckled it. I walked around until I was in front of her. My hands were

steady as I unbuttoned my pants, then slid the zipper down.

Sadie looked up at me with shining, sad eyes. Her lips parted as she tried to catch her breath.

I pushed my pants down to pool around my thighs. My cock jutted out, the tip wet with precum. I fisted myself, squeezing at the base, shuddering from how good it felt. Sadie watched with desire lighting up her eyes. I put on a show for her, slowly stroking myself while watching her.

“Three days ago, we went shopping. You promised me you’d be my good girl. I got you clothes, spoiling you with anything that made your beautiful eyes sparkle with interest.

“I risked getting caught having you out in public because I’m not a good man, baby. If people found me, they’d kill me and take you to do whatever their sick minds come up with.”

I raised my eyebrows at her, ensuring she understood what I meant when I said they’d most likely rape her before they killed her. Sadie’s eyes widened, her blown pupils constricting with fear. The gravity of the situation started to weigh down on her. Good. I wanted her to know just how close I was to losing her.

I stepped closer to her, stroking my erection, then pressed the pierced and engorged tip against her lips. Her tongue peeked out, gently licking the underside of the head. I groaned, closing my eyes for a second before opening them. Without me having to tell her, she readily opened her mouth, welcoming my shaft into the warmth. I groaned and fisted her hair, holding her still while I slid more of myself into her. Her teeth scraped against my shaft, and I sucked in a breath, zaps of pleasure shooting up my spine.

“When I took you from the mayor’s home after I killed everyone, I knew the risks. When I took you out in public, I risked someone seeing you and taking you from me. When I saw the Devil Hunter, I knew we were in trouble. Then he asked about you. That was when I knew I had to get us out of

there without him seeing you. When we ran, I warned you to not look at him. And guess. What. You. Did?"

I grabbed a fistful of her pink and brown hair, twisting it around my hand. My lips curled as she looked up at me with regretful eyes. I withdrew half of my cock from her mouth, then slammed it back in, shoving my dick down her throat. Sadie lurched forward, her shoulders shaking as she choked on me. She made beautiful gagging sounds as she tried to breathe around me. I wasn't small, so I could imagine she couldn't breathe.

I felt a moment of pity that this was her first time sucking a cock. I didn't start soft, working her up to being able to deep throat. But as usual, I liked to rip the bandaid off.

The piercings on the underside of my dick clacked against her teeth, her tongue curling on them.

I fisted my hand tighter into her hair, pulling some strands close at the scalp. Beads of sweat dripped down my back as I fucked her throat. Saliva dripped from the corners of her mouth, a few strands sticking to my pelvis as it met her lips. She was my good fucking girl for taking all of me like a goddamn champ. I pulled out, my hard cock slipping from her mouth, and she slurped, noisily gasping for air.

I stripped off my shirt and threw it to the ground. Fisting myself, I stroked my wet shaft and stared at her.

"Gods, Sadie, you look fucking beautiful like this."

"I'm sorry," she whispered, tears in her eyes.

I raised an eyebrow. "You know what you can do to make up for it?"

"W-what?"

"Suck my cock and make me come. You'll drink every drop, and then I might forgive you."

Her rosy cheeks turned brighter as she gazed up at me. Her hazel eyes darkened, and I could see the need to please me in her gaze. I didn't know who hurt her in the past and starved

this girl of attention, but I'd be damned if I didn't give her all of mine. I had promised myself when I was a kid that I wouldn't ever treat someone I loved the way my pieces of shit Mom and Dad did.

"Yes, Sir," she whispered.

That went straight to my aching cock, making it jerk in my grasp. I groaned and moved forward, brushing the pierced tip to her lips.

"Then please your Sir."

She opened her mouth, tongue out, and sucked the head. Needing more of me, she leaned in, straining her neck to pull more of my cock into her mouth. I pulled her hair back into a makeshift ponytail in my hand so I could watch her.

"Just like that, baby." I hissed when she scraped her teeth along my shaft. My balls tightened, and I panted as she sucked harder on me.

Sadie was a bit sloppy, and clearly, she didn't know what she was doing, but that made it all the much better. It was *me* who was teaching her how to give a blow job. It was *me* tainting her *purity* with my perversion and sins.

My fragile control snapped when she looked up at me through her dark lashes, eager for my approval. I slammed my hips against her face, forcing all of me into her throat. She gagged, saliva dripping from her mouth and down my balls. I wasn't gentle as I fucked her face, and Sadie took it like the good fucking girl she was.

She made little noises, mewls, and more gagging as I divulged in her. My balls drew up, and I whimpered as zaps of pleasure raced up my spine.

"Ready, baby?" I didn't wait for an answer since she couldn't say anything at the moment. I groaned as I came. Hot spurts of cum shot into her mouth and down her throat.

"That's my good fucking girl," I growled as she swallowed every drop, her throat squeezing around my dick. I pulled out

of her mouth, my throbbing cock slipped from between her lips and bobbed between my legs.

Sadie closed her eyes, swallowing the rest of my cum, then panted as she opened them to look at me with hope shining in her hazel orbs. She wanted to hear more praise.

I knelt in front of her, caressing my hands over her body and palming her large breasts that were squeezed together by the rope.

“I forgive you, baby. You’re my good girl.”

Her eyes brightened, and her lips parted at my praise. I cupped the back of her head and leaned in, brushing my lips against hers. Her breath shook against my mouth as we kissed, our tongues tangling together.

I pulled away, tucked myself back into my pants, and buckled them.

“Let’s get you out of this.”

CHAPTER 36

Sadie



After Kai took me out of the rope's tight confines, he carried me into his bedroom and big spooned me on his bed underneath the sheets. I couldn't keep my eyes open because of how exhausted I was.

While we lay there, he held me against his chest, his fingers stroking my stomach. I shivered, loving every second of him touching the bigger parts of me.

My breathing deepened, and sleep dragged me away from the waking world. The last thing I heard was Kai whispering something.

“Sleep, sweetheart. I've got you.”

I slept like the dead, and when I woke up, I expected to see him sitting on the chair in the corner, watching. But he wasn't there.

I climbed out of his bed and pulled on a T-shirt I found in his closet. It smelled like him, wrapping me in its embrace and making butterflies fly in my stomach.

After using the bathroom, I searched for him, craving more of his attention.

My stomach cramped, and I covered it with my hands, wincing from the pain. I staggered a step before I came out from the hallway and into the living area. A song played through the speakers at a low volume. It was a catchy tune, and my lips quirked when I looked at the title.

It seemed like Kai had the song “If I killed someone for you” by Alec Benjamin on for a reason.

“In here, gorgeous,” Kai called from the kitchen.

My stomach flipped, and my heart skipped a beat. A little smile crept to my face, and I padded across the room, my feet quietly slapping on the wooden floor. I entered the kitchen, where Kai sat atop the island counter, his legs dangling over the edge. Like always, he wore all black, torn-up jeans and boots. Did he ever wear anything different?

He grabbed something from beside him and brought it in front of him. My lips parted, and my eyes rounded as he held a green and black cupcake with a lit candle in the middle of the puffy frosting.

“Make a wish,” he said.

He got me something? A blush worked its way to my cheeks, and I took a timid step toward him, then another, and found myself standing before him. I gazed at the cupcake in his hand. It had little ghost sprinkles, and the green and orange wrapper said *Happy Halloween*.

“What is this?” I whispered.

He reached a hand out and tucked strands of my hair behind my ear. “Consider it a late birthday gift.”

I raised my eyes, our gazes clashing. My heart skipped a beat from the look of sincerity in his dark eyes.

“No ... No one has ever ...” Tears stung in my eyes, and I swallowed around the lump that had formed in my throat. “I’ve never ...” I couldn’t finish the words without sobbing.

Kai’s eyes hardened, and a muscle jumped in his jaw. “No one?”

His voice came out rough and deeper, holding a threat of violence. I knew it couldn’t be directed at me, and that made more tears sting my eyes.

We stared at one another, and when I didn't answer and could only stare at him, he closed his eyes and inhaled through his nose, then slowly out of his mouth. He opened his eyes. This time they were softer and didn't hold anger. He raised the cupcake higher.

"Blow out the candle, baby. I don't want wax going into your cupcake."

I rested my hands on his thighs and was about to snuff out the flame, but he held up a finger to stop me. "Make a wish," he ordered gently.

I closed my eyes, unable to think of anything to wish for. The only thing I had wanted in the past was for someone to see me. To hear me. And I finally got that. Kai came into my life, and as twisted as it was to admit, he made it better. He made me want to keep living another day. I didn't care anymore that this was a test. I was falling for him.

I pretended to make a wish and opened my eyes as I inhaled, expanding my chest, and blew out. The flame from the candle went out in a puff, smoke curling in the air above where it had been.

Kai pinched the candle between two fingers and pulled it out of the frosting. He held out the cupcake for me to take. Our fingers brushed as I accepted the treat from him, peeled the paper from under it, and took a small bite. I couldn't contain my moan of delight as I ate the vanilla cake. My face tingled from the feeling of eyes on me. Our gazes clashed. My breath hitched as Kai watched me with awe.

"What?" I asked, suddenly self-conscious.

The corner of his lip curled into a smirk, and he huffed a soft laugh. "You didn't turn down the food."

I drew my eyebrows together, trying to understand what he meant by that.

He rested his hands beside him on the counter and leaned forward so our faces were closer. His lips curved into a boyish grin, making butterflies flap like crazy in my stomach.

“You didn’t eat anything that wasn’t sealed. I watched you struggle to accept food from people.” He cocked his head, his smile falling, and a wrinkle formed between his eyebrows as he scrunched them together. “Why is that?”

“She’s an embarrassment, honestly. But she’s our daughter.” Mom’s hurtful words echoed in my head.

I swallowed hard and broke the stare to look down at the half-eaten cupcake in my hand. My appetite disappeared, and I couldn’t force myself to continue eating it. I set the sugary treat on the counter and brought my hands between my breasts. My heart raced, pounding painfully against my tightening chest.

I didn’t know if I could tell Kai. Everything had been going great, as messed up as that was with my situation. But I didn’t want him to leave me because he knew about my mental illness. He’d be just like the others, looking at me with disgust and assuming I was a killer.

But this is a test, Sadie. He already knows.

My breathing became choppy, and paranoia gripped me in its claws, dragging me beneath the surface.

He knows. He knows. He knows. He knows.

“He knows, he knows, he knows, he knows,” I mouthed, a tear sliding down my cheek.

Kai slipped down from the counter and wrapped his arms around me, crooning like a boyfriend would for his girlfriend. Was that what we were? I shuddered from his touch and jumped forward, closing all the space between us and wounding my arms over his shoulders. I breathed in his scent. Leather, spice, and cigarettes. I soaked up every second of his attention, touch, and time.

I didn’t want to lose him, not after everything and finally having hope for a better life.

“Where did you go?” he whispered into my hair.

“What do you ... what do you mean?” I mumbled into his chest.

“When I asked about your aversion to accepting food, you left me. Where did you go?” He caressed his hand down the back of my hair. I shivered, my breath hitching, and goosebumps rose on my arms.

I swallowed hard and dug my fingers deeper into his back. His smell comforted me and gave me the needed courage to tell him.

He already knows, and I don't care.

“I ...” My heart pounded against my chest, and I worried he could hear it. My legs trembled with nerves, and I sucked in a breath and released it. “I have schizoaffective disorder.”

I held my breath, waiting for him to judge me. To comment on how dangerous I was and asked if I would kill him. Everyone else did.

This was why I was here. He was testing me on behalf of my parents.

His arms squeezed me closer to him, and he leaned back so he could look at me. Our gazes locked, and I tried my best to not buckle beneath the weight of his stare. I wanted to look away in shame, but something in his eyes told me it would be okay, and I believed it.

“What’s that?” he asked, moving my hair away from my face.

The way he soothed me, babied me even from how he touched me, made me want to curl back into him. I didn’t realize just how starved I was for affection. God, I was falling hard for him.

“It’s schizophrenia and a mood disorder. Which is bipolar or depression, and I have the latter. What makes me not accept food from people is my paranoia. It’s a part of my schizophrenia symptoms. I’m always scared of people trying to poison my food and drinks.”

I couldn't stop talking, wanting to explain myself before he could say something hurtful.

"I don't know what made me accept the cupcake from you. I didn't worry about you trying to hurt me for whatever reason. Something about you calls to me and makes me feel safer than anyone else in my life."

He wasn't the one who held a cloth to my face. Nor was he in the room where everyone wore hoods over their face while they chained me to the floor in the middle of a pentagram.

My cheeks flamed with a blush, and I internally scolded myself to stop talking. Kai stared at me, listening to my every word with a blank look. I couldn't read his expression, and I wanted to kick myself. I worried he was thinking to himself that I was crazy and that I was a monster. He was probably trying to figure out how to get rid of me now.

"I know it's silly. I don't control my symptoms and never know when it will happen. There are times I can eat food that isn't sealed." Kai watched me. My pulse thundered in my ears, and I screamed in my head to just shut up, but everything was coming out of me like word vomit. "I'm rambling, and I'm so sorry. I don't want you to think I'm some monster and take me back to my parents. I can't go back." My voice cracked at the end of my plea. Tears spilled over and tracked down my cheeks.

Kai moved like the speed of light because one minute I was rambling, and the next, his hand caught my jaw, and his lips descended on mine. I whimpered, eyes wide and hands shooting to his shoulders. It took me a second to realize what was happening. I closed my eyes, melting into him and kissing him back with everything I had.

Our teeth knocked together as we got completely absorbed in each other. He swallowed every little sound I made, greedy for them. I lost my breath as we devoured each other, our tongues fighting for dominance. He won and plunged his tongue in and out, replicating a different organ I so badly wanted inside me.

I wanted Kai to fuck me.

He pulled me in closer, one hand on my back and the other cupping my breast. I mewled, arching into his touch, silently begging him for more.

He roughly squeezed me, groaning into my mouth as I grew bolder with my touch. My hand slipped down his chest and cupped his erection outside of his pants. He groaned, sending shivers through me and pebbling my nipples into tight peaks.

“You better know what you’re doing, baby, because I won’t stop what you’re starting,” Kai warned softly with maddening kisses.

I breathed hard as he peppered kisses along my jaw and down my neck.

“I want you,” I whispered, shocking myself at my admission.

Kai groaned into my throat. His hands slipped down and grabbed my ass, lifting me up until I wrapped my legs around his waist. He rotated us and sat me on the counter, spreading my legs apart so he could tuck himself between them.

He pulled his head away from my neck, only to slant his mouth over mine. I plunged my fingers into his soft hair, pulling at the ends so it stung his scalp. He growled into my mouth, his teeth nipping my bottom lip. Because of his reaction, I gathered that he enjoyed a little pain with pleasure. Since being here with him, I learned I liked it too. When he had spanked me, I thought I was going to come just from that contact.

Kai fisted my hair and yanked it until my head jerked back. I gasped, opening my eyes to look at him with parted lips, and panting.

“Say it again,” he rasped.

I buried my fingers into his shoulders, holding onto him as he held me here on Earth. I was sure I would float away if I let

go of him. His eyes hooded, his gaze dropping to my bruised lips as I licked them.

“I want you,” I breathed. This time it came out easier. I didn’t recognize my voice because of how husky it was.

He groaned and smashed his lips against mine, his tongue plunging into my mouth. Our teeth knocked a few times, and I didn’t care. He could bite my tongue, and I would enjoy it. Just having his touch and his attention made me high.

His hands came between us, his belt buckle snicked open, and I heard his zipper come undone. Kai ended the kiss, leaning back and pushing a hand in the middle of my chest to make me lie down on the counter. He grabbed my waist and jerked me forward.

“This will hurt, sweetheart. But I promise I’ll make it feel so fucking good.” Kai lined the head of his erection outside my entrance, and in one powerful thrust, he surged deep inside me.

I screamed, tossing my head back and raising my hips to take him deeper into me. Pain shot through me from the sudden invasion, but his fingers touched my clit, rubbing on the swollen bundle of nerves, creating pleasure. I mewled underneath his touch, throwing my hands behind my head and grappling to hold onto something as he pistoned his hips against mine.

Our flesh slapped together, my pussy squelching around his thick erection. The tip of him rubbed against a spot I thought wasn’t real. My eyes rolled into the back of my head.

Kai shoved my shirt up my chest to pool around my neck. He grunted as he hammered into me, still rubbing my clit and working me toward an orgasm. I felt the beginning tingles of it and knew I was close.

I said his name like a prayer, begging for things I didn’t understand.

“Fuck, baby. You take me so well.” Kai roughly squeezed my bouncing breast and tweaked my sensitive nipple. “It’s like

you were made for me.”

I nodded, delirious and lost in the throes of passion and lust. “Yes! Yes, yes, yes, *yes!*”

Something rang and broke through my hazy mind. I opened my eyes, panting and looking at Kai’s waist, where the sound came from.

Kai snarled and reached into the pocket of his pants.

“Fucking cock-block, Ricky,” he seethed, never stopping his hips as he slid in and out of me. He answered the call. “Yeah?”

My jaw dropped, and I quickly bit my bottom lip from making any noise. The sounds of him fucking me didn’t stop. I feared this Ricky person could hear it on his end.

I covered my face with my hands, arching my back and pushing my ass closer against him.

Kai reached forward, snatching my hands from my head, and shot me a warning look.

He tensed as the person on the other end said something.

“Can you send it in a text? I don’t want to leave the girl here alone,” he said, his voice even and not sounding like he was fucking someone.

A moan slipped from me, and I covered my mouth, my cheeks on fire with a blush. Kai smirked and pinched my clit between his fingers, knowing fully what he was doing.

“Come for me,” he mouthed.

I came on demand. My inner walls clamped down on him, pulsing and drawing him deeper into me. His nostrils flared, and his hand tightened on the phone he held to his ear.

“*Fuck,*” he groaned. I didn’t know if it was from pleasure or a response to Ricky’s words. His jaw clenched, and a muscle popped in it. He grabbed my leg, hiking it up higher until it hooked over his shoulder and stroked deeper inside and against my g-spot.

My eyes rolled into the back of my head, and I orgasmed again, holding my bottom lip between my teeth to not make a sound.

“I’m on my way.” Kai ended the call and threw his phone to the side. He seized my waist and began to pound the fuck out of me until it became painful but pleasurable. He grunted with each thrust, his hips staggering, and warmth flooded inside me as he came.

I panted, and he pulled out of me, his erection throbbing and glistening with my cum coating it. I couldn’t sit up, and he helped me. His mouth descended onto mine, his tongue plunging between my lips and tangling with mine. The kiss didn’t last as long as I wanted it.

Kai leaned back and stared down at me with hooded eyes. “You won’t leave.”

I knew it was intended as a question, but it came out as a statement. The warning was clear in his voice. If I left, he would punish me.

“I’ll be a good girl,” I said, repeating what I had promised the other day.

His eyes widened, then hooded as he looked me over. He brought the piercing on his bottom lip between his teeth.

“You’ll be *my* good girl?”

I smiled, my heart leaping into my throat. “I’ll be your good girl.”

He leaned forward, kissing me hard and fast before he stepped away and fixed his pants. I shifted, groaning from the feel of his warm cum dripping out of me. He dropped his gaze between my legs, his pupils dilating and his nostrils flaring. I watched as he fought himself to not touch me. I wanted him to again, but it sounded like something important happened that he needed to go to.

“Stay inside and don’t answer the door for anyone. I’ll be back later,” he said before disappearing through the doorway

to head to the front door.

I jumped down from my spot and followed behind him, watching as he opened the door and peeked at me over his shoulder before he left. Cool air hit me, then stopped as soon as the door closed. I shivered and brought my hands to my chest, fidgeting with my fingers.

“Don’t be gone for days again,” I whispered.

CHAPTER 37

Kai



I shoved the front door open to the safe house. Ricky's head popped up from the couch, the TV was on, and his video game was in the middle of a battle scene.

"Where did you see her?" I asked, getting straight to the point.

Ricky got up from his seat and ran his hand through his blue hair that he hadn't gelled up into spikes.

"I found footage of her in the mayor's home. It was an hour after you left with the human girl."

My stomach dropped like a cinder block, and I stood there, unable to move, as my mind reeled over this new information.

Sissy was still alive. My sister was out there, roaming the streets, and she hadn't contacted me. She left me holding on to the ghost of her, searching for her and intent on killing Levi for taking her.

"You're sure it was her?" I asked, not wanting to get my hopes up. The last thing I wanted was to believe Sissy was alive, then find out she was dead, and that girl in the mayor's mansion was someone else who looked like her. Doppelgängers were a thing.

Ricky stepped around the couch and strode toward me as he pulled his phone out of his pocket. He tapped the screen a few times before he held it out for me to watch.

A security black and white camera feed played. There were four individual boxes with different angles in the mansion. For a few seconds, nothing happened. I waited, holding my breath. Then a girl with long white hair wearing a black tea dress with white lace around the collar walked into the room where the sacrifice had been. Blood still covered the floor, but the bodies were gone.

My eyes widened, and I held my breath, my heart thumping harder against my chest. I waited for her to turn around and face the camera. Anyone could have white hair. There was such a thing as bleach and box dye. As if she could hear my thoughts, she turned, her eyes raised to the security camera, looking right at me as if she could see me there.

“Sissy,” I whispered.

Her dark eyes stared back at me, and the corner of her ruby-red lips curled into a smirk. A man entered the room, joining my sister and placing his hand on her lower back. He said something to her with a grin, but the video feed didn’t have any sound.

Son of a fucking bitch.

It was Levi.

Sissy turned away from the camera, looking at the Devil with a smile. She said something back to him, then the feed ended, and the screen went black.

I stared at the phone, breathing hard as rage flowed in my veins. It burned through my body, and all I could see was Levi touching Sissy and her, smiling at him as if she enjoyed his touch.

Ricky dropped his hand, carefully watching me as I fought to control my anger.

“We need to stock up again,” Ricky whispered.

I knew what he meant by that. He wanted me to go out and kill someone, to release my rage on them, and not turn it onto someone who didn’t deserve it. Someone like Sadie.

I lifted my gaze to Ricky's face, never blinking. "It's really her."

"Yeah." He swallowed hard, and it was clear he was nervous.

I nodded and stepped away from him. "I'll be back."

I turned away and walked out of the safe house, my anger only getting worse.

Sissy wasn't a captive. She was with Levi out of her free will.

I released my fury on rapists and disgusting humans, unable to restrain myself and becoming increasingly vicious for the next few hours.

I RETURNED to the cabin hours after the sun had set and the moon was high in the sky. Sadie was fast asleep in her room, and instead of waking her up, I entered my bedroom, stripped out of my clothes, and laid on my bed. My girl deserved to sleep, and if I went in there with her, I would be rougher with her than I wanted. She didn't deserve to be treated like a whore that I would take all my anger out on. I'd likely break her as I brutally fucked her.

I didn't plan on sleeping since I refused to do that at all. My body hated me because of it, but it was for the best that I didn't shut my eyes at night. Bad things happened when I slept.

I gazed up at the ceiling while folding my arms beneath my head, just like what Sadie did when I observed her for those weeks when I stayed as her shadow.

Crickets chirped outside. I could hear Nutter and Jag's muffled voices as they fought over something. Most likely booze or food. I couldn't make out what they said and didn't care to try.

Sissy's face popped into my mind. The simmered rage I had worked out when I hunted and killed humans returned, making me bare my teeth at the ceiling. She had looked right up at the camera, knowing that it was there. Did she know that I'd find it? That I'd see her looking back at me? Did she even care about me and stop to think about how her disappearance affected me? I had chased after her for years, dead set on getting her back before Levi killed her.

I didn't know what to do now. Should I keep hunting him down? Or do I stop and accept that she wanted to be with him?

I yearned to go into the city, search for her, and get answers. Despite this, I couldn't leave Sadie alone, even though Nutter and Jag were nearby. I had hoped Levi would come to me, but it had been days now, and he hadn't shown up. Maybe he didn't want his *virgin* sacrifice anymore. He had my sister now.

Fucking hell.

For once, I wanted things to go my way and work out.

The urge to strangle Sissy conflicted with my desire to hug her, bury my face in her neck, and ask why she did this. Why she left me behind and strung me along with breadcrumbs for clues on how to get her back.

I stared up at the ceiling, my eyelids growing heavy and drooping. I probably should get up and move around so I didn't fall asleep. However, I couldn't bring myself to.

My breathing became deeper, and my eyes slid shut. I fought it but lost. My thoughts were clouded by sleep, and I fell into its embrace.

Copper filled the air. I breathed it into my lungs, tasting it on my tongue. It was old blood.

I snapped my eyes open and sat up, inhaling the delicious scent. A sound between a groan and a growl erupted from me as I breathed the perfume of blood again into my lungs.

Blood. Blood. Blood.

My canines extended, and my heart thudded against my ribcage. I breathed hard as I shot off the bed and followed the scent. It led me to Sadie's bedroom. For a moment, I worried something happened to her. But my hunger clouded my mind, and I went inside her room.

I panted as I watched her like a predator would for his prey. She slept peacefully under the quilt, laying on her back, her pink and brown hair splayed around her head like a halo. One of her legs was outside the blanket, tempting me to lick the inside of her thigh.

The scent of blood came from her, luring me closer to her and hardening my cock.

I climbed onto the bed, throwing the sheet off of Sadie, and knelt between her legs. She wore nothing but a shirt. *My* shirt. My dick jerked, and I groaned. Closing my eyes, I breathed in, moaning from the smell of her blood.

I opened my eyes and carefully parted her legs, staring down at her bloody pussy. Her inner thighs were smeared with blood, and the bed beneath her was stained.

My eyes turned red and yellow, my teeth aching to sink into her. My fingers curled into her knees as I held onto them, my sharp nails digging into the tender skin and pricking it. Blood beaded to the top, and I looked at one knee, panting as I stared transfixed at it.

I wanted it. I *needed* to feast on her.

I needed to *drink* her blood.

I surged forward, lowering myself onto my stomach and latching my mouth onto her bloody cunt. My tongue swiped up her coated folds, curling the tip of my tongue onto her clit. I squeezed my hands on her thighs, holding her legs apart.

A growl vibrated in my chest.

More. I needed *more*.

I licked my tongue up her folds again, then dipped it into her pussy, drinking more of her blood. It filled my mouth,

sliding down my throat and into my stomach. It wasn't enough to satiate me. It only made my stomach growl and my mind shout to take more.

Sadie whimpered, rousing from her sleep as I feasted on her while nuzzling my nose onto her swelling clit.

"H-huh?" Sadie mumbled, her voice thick with sleep.

I didn't answer because I was too focused on my feeding frenzy. Fuck, she tasted like how I imagined. When I had tasted her virgin blood on my fingers, it wasn't enough to make me lose all control as I did now.

Sadie's blood coated my tongue and throat. I tried to be careful with my teeth, so I didn't bite her, but the more I fed, the faster I lost all control.

"Kai," Sadie gasped, her hands flying into my hair and pulling at the strands. I snarled at the bite of pain in my scalp, nuzzling my face further into her weeping pussy. She grew wet, her arousal mixing with her blood. God, it tasted even better now; musky and metallic. Sex and food. Pure and sinful.

I ran my tongue up her slit again, cleaning the blood I hadn't gotten when I started. Snarls escaped me, my mind spinning as I lost the little threads of control I had. The Devil in me became more prominent, taking over.

I didn't want to scare her. She meant everything to me. She was the object of my desire and obsession. My love for her burned in my veins. I didn't want to lose her after she learned I was something humans feared. But I couldn't stop myself.

I dragged her clit into my mouth, suckling and nipping it. Sadie cried out, bucking her hips and grinding against my face.

"That's it, baby, ride my face," I growled, my voice hoarse and deeper.

"Kai," she yelled as I worked her closer to orgasm.

I moved my head to the side, catching my nails between my teeth, and bit them off to make them blunt. I turned back,

flicking my piercing against her throbbing little nub. My fingers prodded the outside of her weeping and bloody entrance, then plunged inside, stretching her to take me.

Sadie bucked her hips, mewling and whimpering my name. Her inner walls spasmed around my fingers, and I knew she was about to orgasm. I flicked my tongue faster on her clit, thrusting my digits hard into her, her pussy squelching around them. It was like music to my ears.

“Come for me, baby,” I ordered.

She trembled, her fingers entwining in my hair, and, like the good girl she was, she fell apart and came. I moaned, breathing heavily against her as I withdrew my fingers and stuck them into my mouth. I closed my eyes and swirled my tongue around the digits, cleaning off the blood and cum.

It wasn't enough. I needed more.

Flesh. I want her flesh.

My dick jerked beneath me. I ground my hips against the bed, creating friction against my aching erection. I was about to spill myself right here.

Snarling, I shot up to my knees and yanked her to me, her legs wide open. Sadie's eyes rounded as she looked at my face, seeing now what I was. The pulse in her neck beat fast. My gaze latched onto it, and I struggled to not lunge forward and bite her throat.

“Oh my god,” she whispered. Her voice quivered, and fear clouded her sad eyes.

“I won't hurt you,” I said hoarsely.

“You're a Devil,” she cried as she twisted in my hold. I held her down, not wanting her to leave me.

“It doesn't matter what I am,” I snarled. My fear of her knowing what I was and how we didn't belong came to the surface. I knew we weren't meant to be together. She was human, and I was a Devil. I could kill her with my blood alone. But I didn't care. I wanted her. *Needed* her.

Sadie screamed at the top of her lungs, fighting against my hold. My sensitive ears rang from her shrill cries, but I didn't let up my grip on her.

"It does! You're going to kill me!" she shrieked.

I grabbed her shoulders and shook her, baring my bloody teeth. "I won't hurt you! You're *mine!*"

She shook her head, tears running down the corners of her eyes to her temples. "I hate you!"

I froze at her outburst, teeth still bared at her.

She didn't mean it. I saw how she looked at me earlier, how she gazed at me with love evident in her eyes. She was scared, and I understood that. I'd be scared, too.

I promised to get her to look at me with love again. Even if it meant I had to keep her here with me against her will.

Sadie wiggled, her pussy brushed against my thigh. I dropped my gaze between her legs, watching as her blood dripped down her ass. I breathed hard, my cock bobbed, and precum beaded at the tip.

"I need you," I whispered huskily.

"I don't!"

I couldn't fuck her against her will. Not again.

My chest tightened, and my heart pounded against it. I stared at her, begging in my eyes for her to let me touch her. She looked at me with a terrified look, teeth bared, and her chest rising and falling with quick, frightened breaths.

I snarled and threw myself off her, storming out of the bedroom. I didn't bother putting on any clothes as I rushed outside. Sadie wasn't safe with me in this condition. The Devil side of me wanted to ravage her. Consume her and feast on her flesh and blood.

The further I ran, the less I wanted to kill. To fuck. But my cock still ached, needing to bury itself in Sadie's sweet, bloody pussy.

With me being away from her, I worried that she'd be in danger from Levi. Nutter and Jag were nearby, keeping watch, and I felt a semblance of peace as I sprinted away from the cabin, not stopping until I couldn't smell her anymore.

CHAPTER 38

Sadie



I gasped for air as I sprinted down the dirt road that led to the city.

After Kai had left, I squeezed into his sweats I had found a while ago that I had stashed in my room. I pulled on one of his hoodies. It was a bit snug, but it didn't matter to me. I didn't have shoes and couldn't care less; I'd take the pain of gravel and rocks digging into the soles of my feet over, sticking around at Kai's cabin, waiting like a sitting duck for him to kill me.

Something bugged me about all of this, and it wasn't just because he was a Devil. It was something else. Something deeper.

The moon was at its highest peak, stars winking down at me. Crickets chirped, jarring my already frazzled nerves. Nocturnal animals stared through the shadowed trees on both sides of me, scaring me each time I heard them rustling.

Sucking in a breath, I slowed down until I stopped and leaned forward, my palms on my knees as I tried to breathe normally again. Sweat beaded on my forehead and upper lip, tingling the areas and making me rub my mouth against my shoulder. I shouldn't have worn a hoodie because of how hot I was. A chilly night in the fall be damned.

"He's a fucking Devil," I breathed under my breath.

Raising my head, I looked at the trail lit by the stars and moon. My eyes adjusted to the dark a while ago, making it

easier to see where the heck I was going. I would have enjoyed the view if I had not been scared and running for my life. I always dreamed of exploring the outskirts, having never left the city.

A wolf howled in the distance. Chills erupted through me, causing my arms' small hair to stand. I straightened and released a harsh breath before I began walking again. My steps were quick, my breathing becoming harsher as I rushed to get as far away from the cabin as possible.

If you run ... Kai's warning echoed in my head.

If I ran, he'd kill me. That was what he was going to say, but he never did. I thought he meant he'd spank or punish me with more orgasms until they became painful. I was an idiot for thinking otherwise.

"He's a Devil, he's a Devil, he's a Devil," I whispered, unable to stop repeating the words.

A second wolf answered the first one, and they howled together.

"Crap, crap, crap." I picked up my pace, lightly jogging and holding my breasts as they bounced with each stride.

Something rustled in the brush twenty feet away from me. I shrieked, my heart jumping into my throat.

Please don't be Kai.

A raccoon crawled out, her babies holding her back as she slowly crossed the road. She turned her head, stopping in the middle of the path and staring at me. Her eyes reflected in the light as she looked at me, determining whether I was a threat.

I stood still, holding my breath and hoping to whatever god could hear me that she didn't attack me. That was the last thing I needed.

After what seemed like hours, she turned and pranced the rest of the way across the road and into the brush on the other side.

I released my breath, my shoulders slumping.

“Thank god,” I breathed.

“You’re not supposed to be out here.”

I shrieked and spun around, my hands flying to my chest as if it would stop my heart from pounding painfully against my ribcage.

A lanky man leaned against a tree, his arms folded over his chest. He had shaggy black hair, pieces sticking out like he ran his fingers through it one too many times. His eyes were narrowed, and a scowl pulled his thin lips down.

“Who ... who are you?” I asked breathlessly.

He sucked his tooth and pushed away from the tree, dropping his arms to his side as he took one step, then two, toward me. “Nutter.”

I nervously stepped back and frowned. “Did you just say your name is Nutter?”

He lazily grinned. “I did. And my brother there is, Jag.”

I stiffened and spun around, yelping and jumping ten feet in the air. Jag stood a foot away from me with a scowl on his face and his bulky arms crossed. He had sadly blond hair that he swooped to one side, exposing the tattooed and shaved side of his head. Jag was covered in tattoos and looked angry like someone had pissed in his cheerios.

Jag said nothing, just stood there glaring at me.

I swallowed nervously and turned back to Nutter, my breathing picking up. “Listen, I don’t know what you want, but I don’t have it. I’m just trying to get back into the city.”

Nutter threw his head back and howled in laughter. I winced and brought my hands to my chest, trying to hold myself together. The lanky man sniffled and swiped away tears from his eyes and wagged a finger at me.

“You’re funny. I like you,” he said with a chuckle, then sniffed again. He sobered and shot me a warning look. “But I

can't let you go to the city.”

My stomach dropped. “Why not?”

Beefy arms wrapped around and smashed me against a muscular chest. I screamed and wiggled against the hold. Jag held me still, not allowing any room for me to escape.

Nutter shook his head and closed the small space between us. “We’re the least of your worries, human.”

Human?

My eyes rounded, and I stopped breathing. “You’re—”

“Devils. And you’re not supposed to be out here. Especially alone. Someone’s looking for you, and what he has planned ain’t pretty,” Nutter said.

Jag shoved me toward his brother, and Nutter grabbed my arm, then the two brothers dragged me down the unpaved road back to where I had come from.

“No! I can’t... I can’t go back!” I cried and dug my heels into the dirt, wincing from the pain. “I don’t care that Kai is looking for me. He’s going to kill me!”

Jag scoffed, and Nutter snorted a laugh. He turned his head, shooting me an amused smile. “You’re funny.”

“I’m not trying to be funny! Let me go!”

“You ain’t telling jokes?” Nutter asked seriously.

“What? NO!”

He scratched his temple with his free hand. “Huh. Well, either way, you’re funny. Where’s Kai anyway?”

My mouth fell open, and I stared at him with wide eyes. My feet dragged over the ground, and I tried to keep up with them as they rushed me toward the cabin where my doom awaited my return. Every second we got closer, the more my heart raced, and I couldn’t breathe.

“I thought he sent you,” I said, confused.

Nutter sucked his tooth. “Huh. Well, after we drop you off back at the cabin, we’ll go searchin’ for lover boy.”

“Lover boy?” I sputtered.

Nutter shot me a sly smile. “Don’t think we haven’t heard you two messin’ ’round.”

My cheeks warmed with a blush, and I dropped my gaze. I stayed quiet as they dragged me for what seemed like forever until we came to the cabin.

A tight lump formed in my throat, choking me. I knew I was about to have an anxiety attack because I couldn’t catch my breath and felt like I was about to throw up.

“Get the chain,” Nutter ordered as he opened the door and hauled me inside.

“Wait! No!” I begged, shaking my head. “I won’t run away again. I’ll be good!”

“You had your chance, human, and you blew it. Now hold still.”

Nutter grabbed the chain’s cuff from Jag and knelt before me while Jag held my shoulders to keep me in place. Nutter reached out to grab my ankle, but I jerked it away. He scowled and huffed, reaching for me again, but I kicked at him.

“Hold still, human,” he growled.

I shook my head and kicked out at him again. The Devil snarled and hooked his arm under my legs, knocking me to the ground. I screamed from the shot of pain in my tailbone. I was too distracted from the injury to fight Nutter as he locked the metal cuff around my right ankle.

“There,” Nutter said and got to his feet. He stared down at me while resting his hands on his hips. “Now stay put while I go look for Kai.”

Tears stung my eyes as I looked up at the brothers who retreated from the front of the home and out the door. Jag was

the last to leave and shot a glare at me before he closed the door behind him.

I sat on the floor, gasping for air as my anxiety became a panic attack. My chest tightened, and my world spun around, everything becoming too loud. Tears slipped down my cheek, and I ugly cried while trying to catch my breath.

Something knocked in the kitchen, and I swiveled my head to look at the doorway that led to it.

My breathing evened, but the fear didn't go away. If anything, it worsened. I waited for another noise, and when I heard a glass hitting the kitchen counter; I got up and shuffled to the doorway.

The chain rattled behind me, grating at my frayed nerves.

I flipped on the light as I entered the kitchen and stopped breathing.

At the counter, Kai stood shirtless, only wearing his ripped-up black jeans, pouring himself a glass of whisky over ice. He didn't acknowledge me as I stood there, watching the muscles in his back ripple with his movements. Kai set the aged bottle to the side and raised the glass to his mouth, hesitating for a moment before he sipped the drink. He made a face before lowering the glass back on the counter.

I took a step back, then stopped when he turned his head, glancing at me from the corner of his eye. My breath hitched at the forlorn look in his gaze.

"Nutter and Jag are here to keep you safe," he mumbled.

I stood there, watching him as he blinked and turned away. He placed his palms on the counter and dropped his head forward, his white hair falling over his face. Seeing him struggle, even hurt, made me want to go to him and hold him.

But he was the very thing that tried to kill me.

"*I* brought you here to keep you safe," Kai growled beneath his breath.

I swallowed hard and picked at my nails as I watched the man I had fallen for struggle with his demons.

Kai had said that he killed my parents after they tried to sacrifice me to a Devil. I believed this all to be some test, but why would my mom and dad work with a Devil? They were close to Devil Hunters and the city elite. Nobody liked Devils. Not humans, anyway. What good would working with Kai do for them?

Kai turned his head toward me again, eyes narrowed and baring his blunt teeth. “I would *never* hurt you, Sadie.” He pushed away from the counter and spun around, his hands fisted by his sides. “Don’t you get it? I will fucking kill for you! I *have* killed for you and will continue to fucking annihilate everyone who hurts you.”

I jumped at his outburst and stepped backward but stopped when he gave me a nasty look. My hands and legs trembled as I tried to stand my ground under the pressure he caused.

Kai stormed toward me, closing the distance between us in three long strides. I retreated, my back meeting the wall. He invaded my personal space, his chest heaving and teeth bared at me. I leaned my head back, looking up at him as he towered over me and caged me in with his hands on either side of my head on the wall.

“Say something,” he demanded.

I swallowed nervously. “I was—” I cleared my scratchy throat and touched my neck where the scar was from the Devil who attacked me. His gaze dropped, watching as I brushed my fingers over the still-sensitive scar. “I was attacked by a Devil, and it took a human to save me. How can I trust you won’t hurt me?”

Looking back, there were times he had fled while we were together. It had been so sudden and left me confused. Now I knew why. I tempted him and his insatiable hunger for blood. He wanted to hurt me, so he ran away.

My heart skipped a beat, and I brushed away the hopeful thoughts that started to bloom in my mind.

There was no way we could be together.

Kai's nostrils flared, and his chest rose and fell quickly as he glared at me.

"You ate ... drank my period blood, Kai." My cheeks warmed from embarrassment. I enjoyed it when he went down on me. I didn't realize then that I was on my period until I saw it on his lips. By then, I noticed his eyes and teeth.

Kai didn't budge. He continued to scowl at me, not telling me what he was thinking. I had expected him to lose control again. To pin me down and eat me, but this time in a bad way.

I lowered my eyes and shoved at his chest. "Let me go."

He didn't move as I pushed him again. He was like a brick wall, unmovable.

"You think it was a human who saved you?" he asked, finally breaking his silence.

I peered up at him through my eyelashes. "What do you mean?"

He stepped away, dropping his hands to his sides. "Go to bed, Sadie."

My heart constricted, and my stomach churned at his use of my name instead of calling me baby like he always did. I hated that, and I hated these conflicting emotions and thoughts.

I swallowed hard, watching him as he gave me his back and went to his glass of whisky.

"Be a good girl now and do as you're told," Kai said flatly, his back turned to me. His voice was devoid of all emotions. He had shut down on me.

Maybe it was for the best.

There was still a part of me that wanted to please him. To earn his affection and attention.

Jesus, I was so screwed up. My parents really did a number on me, didn't they?

I stepped away from the wall and left the kitchen, the chain rattling with each step. I went straight to the bedroom I'd been staying in, kept the door cracked open for the chain, and crawled onto the bed, staring at the ceiling.

CHAPTER 39

Sadie



I was going to do what I had been afraid of not doing this the whole time. I would play the role of the monster everyone made me out to be.

It was well past two in the morning; the cabin was silent, and I hadn't heard Kai moving around for several hours. I listened to him retreat to his bedroom and shut his door with a soft snick.

I swallowed nervously as I took slow, careful steps so the chains didn't rattle. My breathing was shallow and a little choppy because of my anxiety. I gripped the large kitchen knife in my hand, my knuckles turning white.

I could hear Mom in my head, scolding me and telling her friends how awful and embarrassing I was.

Fuck the test. I couldn't be here anymore.

That meant I had to kill the man I loved so I could go back home to my boring and depressing life. I'd pack my things from my parent's house and find somewhere else to live. Somewhere where their control and money couldn't touch me.

Kai's bedroom door was cracked open. I held my breath as I gently pushed it a little wider so I could squeeze through the space.

His room was dark, but my eyes had adjusted, so I could see everything. His windows were ajar, curtains fluttering in the chilly fall breeze. Kai lay in the middle of his bed, arms

behind his head and eyes closed. A thin sheet pooled over his naked waist, the delicious tattooed v right there for me to see.

My clit throbbed as I stared at him naked on the bed, reminding me of all the dirty things we did together. I let a Devil fuck me. I wasn't sure not many people could say that.

My hand tightened on the knife. I didn't know if I could do this.

What other choice do I have?

I quietly made my way to the side of his bed, breathing through my mouth to keep it silent. I flinched as the chain rattled, hoping Kai wouldn't wake up.

His chest rose, then fell in deep breaths as he continued to sleep.

I bit my bottom lip and eyed the bed, calculating how to do this.

Did I stand over him and stab him? Or should I crawl over him and pin him beneath me while I killed him? I knew he would wake up by the first slash. So it would be logical to restrain him under me so I could continue stabbing him until he died.

A tear rolled down my cheek, and I carefully climbed onto the bed and over him. The chain rattled, and I stared at his face with wide eyes, praying again to a god I didn't believe in that Kai wouldn't wake up.

He quickly inhaled as if he were having a nightmare. After a second, he settled.

I had my knees on each side of him, my bottom right over his pelvis. My cheeks flamed hot as I noticed he was hard underneath the sheet. How I didn't notice that before was beyond me.

He looked peaceful sleeping. Though his tattoos under his eyes made him look tired. His long black lashes dusted against his cheek. Kai's chest moved up and down in steady, deep breaths.

Thank god he was a heavy sleeper.

A lump formed in my throat as I stared down at him.

I didn't want to hurt the only person who saw me and gave a damn about me. I didn't even want to kill him. Kai had won my heart and broke it when I learned he was a Devil.

He's a Devil, I reminded myself. He doesn't care about me. They don't care about anything but blood and flesh.

Taking a deep breath, I raised the knife, holding it in the air for a few seconds before I slammed it down.

Kai's hand shot out, grabbing my wrist to stop the blade before it penetrated him. I gasped, my eyes widening and my heart lurching into my throat. He rolled us over and pinned me beneath him in the next breath while still gripping my wrist. The chain around my ankle rubbed against my other leg, which made this position uncomfortable.

Kai tsked, his obsidian eyes twinkling with amusement. "Naughty girl."

I yelled when he twisted the knife out of my grasp and threw it to the side. He used his knees to push my legs apart for him to settle between them. His erection jutted out and rested on my pelvis.

I pushed at his chest, and he chuckled, grabbing my wrists with one hand and pinning them above my head. He inhaled through his nose, groaning in pleasure as he looked down at me.

I breathed hard, angry tears stinging my eyes.

"Very naughty girl. That earns you a punishment," he drawled with a smirk.

I opened my mouth to insult him, but he swooped down, smashing his lips to mine. A whimper slipped from me, and I fought against his hold as he plunged his tongue past my lips and into my mouth. He tasted like smoke and whisky.

I arched my neck, squeezing my legs around Kai's narrow waist, drawing him closer to me. We both groaned, his tongue tangling with mine. He moved to his knees to rip my shirt off me with one hand. I gasped when he tore down the sweats I had borrowed, revealing my pussy to him.

I was still on my period and had no feminine products to use. So I was sure I was covered in my blood.

I held my breath, waiting for him to lose control like he did the other night.

Kai stared at me with hooded eyes and parted, glistening lips.

He fistled his erection, the tip wet with precum. My stomach somersaulted as I watched him stroke his cock. Our gazes clashed. A flush worked its way up my neck to my cheeks as he put on a show, touching himself while staring at me.

“You want to be a bad girl? Fine, be a bad girl. But that doesn't mean you are absolved from the repercussions.”

He looked back down at my bloody pussy. I watched as his control almost snapped. His eyes flashed red and yellow, his lips curling in a snarl.

Right when I thought he would bury his face between my legs, he leaned over me, guiding the tip of his cock outside my entrance. I screamed as he speared into me in one powerful thrust. He stretched me beyond what I thought I could take. Kai wasn't small. He was as thick as my wrist, and it would have helped if he had prepared me.

He buried his face into my neck, groaning into my ear, sending shivers through me. His hips pistoned against mine, our flesh noisily smacking together as he brutally fucked me.

“You're not allowed to come,” he whispered, his lips curled into a smile as I whined. “Good girls get to come. You're not a good girl.”

I shouldn't have wilted at his words. It shouldn't matter if he wanted me to be a good girl, but here I was, wanting so badly to earn his praise and approval.

"I'll be a good girl," I whimpered.

He pushed himself up, his free hand resting beside my head to hold himself up. Staring down at me, he smirked as he pistoned into me, each one pushing me further up on the mattress until my head hit the headboard.

His pelvis ground against my throbbing clit, giving me the needed friction to orgasm. My toes curled, and I whimpered as I held back from coming.

"I can't," I whined, shaking my head.

"You can and you will."

He caught my lips with his, kissing me with fervor. I met his hips with mine as he stroked deeper, harder into me. I raised my legs higher, wanting him from different angles and hoping he would rub the secret spot inside me. And oh, he did. He fucking did.

My eyes rolled into the back of my head, all sanity and words gone. I couldn't hold back. My orgasm was right there and became painful as I tried so fucking hard to be a good girl.

Kai peppered kisses down my jaw, and his teeth caught my earlobe. He groaned into my ear, making me shudder again. His lips curled up in a smile as if he knew what his sounds did to me.

"Kai!" I screamed, trembling from the force of my oncoming orgasm. "I can't... I can't hold it back!"

"Don't you dare fucking come," he snarled as he pulled back to glare at me.

My eyes rolled into the back of my head, and a long groan spilled from me as I orgasmed. My inner walls spasmed around him, drawing his dick deeper inside me, and never wanting him to leave.

“Naughty, *naughty* girl.”

I panted, trembling through the echoes of my orgasm. Kai pulled out of me and flipped me over like I weighed nothing. The chains rattled and he growled as he leaned over, snatching something from the nightstand. The cuff of the chain fell away and it slipped down the bed and onto the floor with a loud *thunk*.

“That’s better,” he snarled, raising my ass into the air and cracking his hand against my asscheek. I screamed, arching my back and clawing at the sheets beneath me.

“I’m sorry!” I wailed, my pussy clenching around nothing.

“I don’t think you are,” Kai drawled. His palm connected with my asscheek again. The crack echoed in the room.

“I’m so sorry Sir!”

He spanked me again, harder this time, and the sting zapped at my clit. I panted, moaning into the bed and wiggling my ass for more.

“You like that naughty girl? You like being a brat for your Sir?” His palm cracked against my other asscheek.

I nodded, unable to lie any longer. “Yes!”

He knelt behind me, the head of his erection lined with my entrance, and thrust into me. We both groaned. He became brutal with his movements, fucking me like he hated me. I took everything he gave and begged for more.

I wanted to be punished. I almost did something I really didn’t want to do and would have regretted it. A world with Kai wasn’t a world worth living in.

I loved him so much that it hurt.

“Please!” I begged.

“Please, *what?*” He slapped my ass and spread my asscheeks apart, exposing my forbidden hole to him.

“Let me come!”

Kai fisted my hair and yanked it back, forcing me to look at him over my shoulder. He glared at me as he pounded into me, never slowing down.

“You thought you could kill me?” He grunted and forcefully pushed deeper into me, hitting my cervix. I cried out, arching my back. “You were dead set on ending my life? After all, we have been through, baby?”

I shuddered at his use of my pet name. My inner walls tightly clenched around him, and I held back the orgasm that threatened to take me.

He pulled out, spinning me around and onto my back. I howled as he shoved himself back into me, hiking my leg onto his shoulder so he could stroke his pierced tip against my g-spot.

“Look at me,” he snarled.

I opened my eyes, deliriously gazing at him as he fucked me.

“You think a *human* saved you?” he spat.

He bared his teeth that lengthened, his eyes turning crimson. My heart skipped a beat, and my stomach flipped. Seeing him turn into his Devil form scared me but also turned me on. And he knew it. He felt me clench around him tight as a fist.

I arched my neck, pushing my hips against his. He leaned down, pressing his lips to my ear, and he groaned, knowing full well how that affected me. I clenched on him again. He smiled.

“It wasn’t a fucking *human* who saved you, baby.” His voice was an octave deeper, and menacing. “It was *me* who kicked that feral Devil off you. It was *me* who brought you to my healer to save your life.”

My eyes widened, and I tried to look at him, but he kept his face buried in my neck, groaning as he grew closer to his

own end. His hand came between us, flicking my clit and pinching it.

“Now, for once tonight, be my good fucking girl and come.”

I screamed as I orgasmed. Glitter popped behind my closed eyes, and my pulse thundered in my ears. Kai whispered praises to me, and seconds later, he groaned as warmth flooded into me, his dick throbbing as he came.

“No more,” I sobbed, rocking my hips against him.

“Liar,” he said with a smile in his voice.

Even though he went soft, he stayed inside me, rubbing my clit until I came again. He rolled us to our sides, still staying inside of me.

I panted, trying to even my breathing and not sound so out of shape. Sweat coated my face, and I was sure my hair was sticking out everywhere.

I felt eyes on me, and I opened mine, finding Kai watching me with a boyish smile. He looped his arm around my thick thigh, hiking it up higher on his waist so he could push his soft cock deeper inside of me.

“It was you?” I finally asked.

I never saw the man who saved me. Just that he was hidden in the shadows and he wore all black. I remembered seeing red eyes, but I thought it was all in my head.

Kai looked over my face, searching for something before answering. “Yes.”

I couldn't keep my eyes open anymore. Sleep started to take over from how worn out I was.

“You saved me,” I mumbled.

Kai kissed my nose and pulled me closer into his arms. He played with my sweaty hair and held me.

“Go to sleep, baby. I'll be here when you wake up.”

“Promise?” I whispered. Before I could hear his response,
I was out.

CHAPTER 40

Sadie



“You don’t happen to have tampons, do you?” I asked from my spot at the counter. It was a stupid question to ask a Devil, but it didn’t hurt to try.

I sat on the kitchen stool at the table, swinging my chain-free legs back and forth as I picked at my breakfast with my fork. Kai made me scrambled eggs, sausage, biscuits, and toast. He explained it wasn’t hard to mess that up.

Kai walked into the room, shirtless and wearing his ripped-up black jeans again paired with his combat boots. Stunned by my question, he stopped walking and raised a pierced black eyebrow.

“I don’t. But I know how to fix your problem.” He licked his lips and dropped his gaze as if he could see between my legs through the table I sat behind.

I scrunched my nose. “No.”

He gave me a boyish smile as he strolled toward me, setting his gun down on the counter. I stiffened, surprised that he even had that on him.

“Why do you have a gun?”

“You don’t want me to eat you out?” he asked, deflecting my question.

I blushed and looked away, tucking a piece of hair behind my ear. Kai chuckled and came around the table, standing

behind me. He dipped his head, brushing his lips against my neck, scraping his teeth against my pulse.

My breath caught in my chest, and I turned my head, giving him more access to me. He kissed my neck, his hand cupping the front of my throat. It was a gentle touch, his hold on me not tight to choke me but firm enough to make the message clear.

My life was in his hands, and he thought I was precious enough to stay alive.

What made him not want to kill me? He was a Devil, after all. I thought they were mindless and always hungry.

“Not while I’m on my period,” I whispered, not sounding convincing at all.

“Mmm.” Kai scraped his teeth on the delicate skin, his hand tightening on my neck. “I’m a Devil, baby. I live off of flesh and blood. You don’t want to feed me?”

My lips parted, and I closed my eyes as his other hand trailed down between my breasts outside my shirt. I gasped when he slid his palm down my stomach and cupped my pussy. Thanks to him ripping the sweats I wore last night, I didn’t have any pants on. Two of his fingers curled, rubbing between my wet folds.

“Kai—” I breathed.

He cut me off from my objections as he caught my lips with his. It was a languid kiss as he took his time with me while circling his fingers outside of my entrance, then spreading the wetness to my clit, then back down. I moaned as he thrust two fingers into me, slowly pushing them in and out. I widened my legs to give him more room, a mewl slipping past my lips and into his mouth.

The kisses slowed, and Kai smiled against my mouth. He drew away, eyes hooded and lips swollen. I whimpered as he withdrew his fingers from me and brought them to his mouth. My eyes rounded as he stuck his bloody digits into his mouth, his hungry eyes on me the whole time.

“Kai.” I didn’t know whether I said that out of passion or disgust.

He smirked and pulled his fingers out of his mouth, the digits now clean.

“I’ll get you some tampons and some clothes. Go take a bath and relax. I’ll be back.” He booped my nose and stepped away from me with a grin.

My cheeks warmed with a blush as I noticed the large bulge straining against his pants. I slid off the seat and padded out of the kitchen, peeking over my shoulder and catching him staring at me as I walked away. I smiled and faced forward, walking the rest of the way to the bathroom with a silly grin on my face.

I RELAXED IN THE BATHTUB, knees bent, bubbles floating around and covering the water’s surface.

This was exactly what I needed. My cramps were killing me, and I felt gross from not washing for several days. I couldn’t believe Kai hadn’t said anything about my personal hygiene.

My cheeks warmed, and I bit my bottom lip.

Kai was the one who saved me from the Devil. I thought I was going to die that night and screamed for someone to help. I had feared that, like always, no one would listen to me. Then he came to my rescue. The last thing I remembered was wanting to see his face and know his name to thank him.

So this whole time, he knew this and didn’t tell me.

Hurt swirled in my stomach and made it cramp. I squeezed my eyes shut, covering my abdomen with my hands.

I wished he had told me sooner. Maybe things would have gone differently if he had. Perhaps I wouldn’t have reacted as I did when I learned he was a Devil.

A loud bang came from somewhere inside the home.

I opened my eyes, looking at the closed bathroom door with scrunched eyebrows. Did Kai slam the door shut? Was he angry at me?

I didn't hear Kai leave while I got the bath ready. I assumed it was because he wanted to make sure I relaxed before he left.

My chest tightened as anxiety suffocated me.

Did I do something wrong?

There was another bang, glass shattering.

I jerked up, stumbling out of the bath and throwing on the robe.

Another loud bang, then grunts.

I carefully opened the bathroom door and crept down the hall and down the stairs. Flesh pounded on flesh, and grunts made their way toward me. I stopped breathing as I crept toward where the sounds were coming from.

The kitchen.

“Kai?” I whispered nervously.

I timidly stepped past the doorway into the kitchen, freezing in terror.

Kai held onto the stranger's black shirt, using his other hand to punch down into the back of his head. He grunted with each punch, and the man groaned, struggling against him to get out of his grasp.

I covered my mouth with my hands, backing away from the doorway with wide eyes.

What the heck was going on? Who was that?

Kai turned his head, shock flashing across his face. “Sadie, go hide!”

I stumbled backward, my legs trembling. “Who is that?”

The man in his grip took advantage of Kai being distracted and hurled out of his hold. He whipped around and hooked his arm over Kai's neck, bending him over, and under-hook punched his face.

“Kai!” I screamed.

An arm curled around my middle, yanking me against a hard chest. Lips pressed to my ear as a hand came around my head, holding a cloth to my nose and mouth that smelled sweet.

“Hello, little lamb,” the man behind me whispered.

I slumped in his hold, my head fuzzy and darkness enveloping me.

“*Sadie!*” Kai screamed.

To Be Continued

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Thank you Tara for editing this book and making it into its best version. You're awesome!

If you're still reading this, thank you. Also, your hair's on point and your ass looks great. Slay the day away!

Also By Willow Mcquerry

•[Lured into Darkness](#) || [Dark Paranormal Romance Standalone](#)

•[We All Have A Hell - Book 1](#) || [Dark Paranormal Romance](#)

•[Don't Pray](#) || [Dark Paranormal Romance Standalone](#)

Dark Romance

•[Tainted Love](#) || [Dark Mafia Why Choose Romance](#) [available on kindle vella]

Dark Paranormal Romance

•Satan's Priest - A Dark Halloween Paranormal Romance Standalone (October 31, 2023)

About Willow

Willow is a schizophrenic romance author whose mission is to include mental health representation in all of her books. It doesn't matter if the mental illness is a big part of the plot or if it's an added small detail, she wants to end stigma one book at a time.

Thanks to her mental illnesses, she is able to come up with alternate realities and create love stories out of them. Writing dark romance has been a form of therapy for her to work through her trauma and the voices in her head.

Willow lives in the midwest, right in tornado alley. She spends her days taking care of her sassy bird, Flip, while squeezing in writing when her bratty feathered friend isn't attacking her keyboard.

Tell Me You're Mine

G.N. WRIGHT

Tell Me You're Mine



G.N. Wright

Author Note

This is not your typical love story and Jacob is not a hero.

This is a pitch black romance filled with triggers so please proceed with caution.

This story includes obsession, stalking, being kept in captivity, somnophilia, non-con, dub con, praise, degradation, blood play, weapon play, rope play, graphic violence, child sexual violence, child sexual assault, child rape, incest, murder, and other dark themes that readers may not find tolerable.

Please note in regards to the child sexual assault and rape, this in the FMC's past where she was raped by her father and his friends, the scenes are not on page, but are mentioned throughout.

You will read actions of physical, mental, and sexual abuse, and see the effects of both PTSD and anxiety. This is a story showing how someone can choose to repair their trauma using their body, and letting it be used by others in order to heal themselves.

If none of the above is to your liking then this story is not for you.

If you would like any further details on any of the above then please reach out to me to discuss before reading.

Prologue

JACOB



Watching her sleep has become an addiction of mine. Just seeing the gentle way her eyelashes flutter against her cheek, the rhythmic rise and fall of her chest, and the tightening of her silky-smooth thighs. It gets me hard as fuck every single time, and the anticipation of seeing her tonight is burning through me as I silently walk down the hallway towards her room.

It's late tonight, later than I'm usually here, but it took forever for her to fall asleep this evening, which isn't unusual. I watched from my cameras as she paced for hours, first checking the doors and the windows were locked, then making herself some tea, chamomile of course, and then finally reading a book until she fell into a deep slumber. That was my cue, using my key to slip in through her door quietly, then locking it behind me to keep her usual monsters at bay.

When my hand closes around the handle of her bedroom door, I swear I can feel the stress of my day just melting away completely. That's what she does to me, just being near her makes me feel alive, fills me with purpose, and forces me to be just the kind of man she needs. I push inside, letting the darkness around her consume me and my desires. In here there is just me and her. There is no outside world trying to keep us apart, no moral code telling me this is wrong, and no one in my way trying to take what is mine.

It doesn't take long for my eyes to adjust, even with the heavy drapes blocking out any traces of the moon. The night

light she can't sleep without helps, and as always, I let my gaze drag along every inch of skin she has on display. She is wearing one of my favorite sets of pajamas tonight, a cute pink pair of shorts with matching crop top, that has little strawberries printed sporadically on each. There is just a tease of lace on both of them that is oh so tempting, especially when I know she will be bare underneath. She's like a siren locked away in an ivory tower of her own making, inviting yet unattainable, well, not to me.

Not anymore.

I can still remember the first time I saw her. She was so beautiful and broken, so consumed by her trauma, but so willing and desperate to find a way out. It's what drew me to her in the first place. She became an addiction, an affliction really, one that captivated me like no other had before, and soon she was all I could think about. It's why I watched her, followed her, became obsessed with her, noting everything she did until I found a way in. Learning her routine was hard at first, she was very fickle, but it didn't deter me, if anything it just made me want her more. I watched, waited, dedicated every second of spare time I had to pursuing her until she was the only thing I saw.

Now here I am, fixated on my imperfect little doll, drinking in the pale white of her skin against the stark sage green of this week's bedsheets. Her wild, silver hair is fanning wide across her pillowcase, an escaped lock tumbling forward across her cheeks as usual. I don't hesitate, reaching out gently to tuck it back behind her ear, just like I do every other night. She subconsciously leans into my touch, a contented sigh slipping past her lips and forcing my cock to strain against my zipper. I don't just want her, I need her, and soon she will be completely mine.

For now, I settle for this, glimpses of her life from the shadows, watching and waiting for the perfect moment to strike.

Biding my time.

Just as I have that thought, she stirs, rolling onto her back and letting her legs fall apart. I have to bite back a groan as I bring my fingers down and run them up the length of her bare thigh, relishing in the goosebumps I leave scattered across her skin in my wake. She wants this just as much as I do, her body calls to mine, even in sleep.

When I press my hand against her cunt, she gasps, tipping her head back and baring her neck to me as if tempting me to take a bite.

Soon my love.

Soon I will take everything you're offering. It's what I adore about her, she is so responsive, so needy, so desperate to be mine. It's why I keep my touch light, just a gentle pressure pushing against that sensitive little nub that hides beneath. As always, my touch is hard enough to arouse her, but light enough not to wake her, and it makes her gasps turn into gentle moans. Those sounds, sounds *I* am forcing from her are like a goddamn symphony to my ears, and I have to swallow my groan as I think about making her scream for me.

I keep up my rhythm of gentle little circles against her begging cunt until her moans turn breathless. Doing it just enough to push her to the very edge and then I stop, just like always, never making her come. She will do that for me one day, but only when she pleads with me for permission, until then, it's my turn. I take my time undoing my belt, my eyes never leaving her as I reach inside my pants and grasp my thick length. I don't even need to stroke it, not right away, it was already rock solid from just looking at her, it won't take me long to get there tonight.

Positioning myself at the top of her bed, I pull my cock completely free and give it one smooth stroke. A bead of precum is already at my tip, as I place it just above her face, barely touching her mouth. I can feel the softness of her breathing against my crown with every inhale she takes, and all I want to do is plunge deep into her throat and feel her choke around me.

So fucking perfect.

My eyes scan to her bedside table where I know I will find a bottle of her favorite moisturizer. Releasing my cock, I reach for it, pumping some into my hand before taking a few more long, steady strokes, imagining it's her hot, wet mouth wrapped around me and not just my fist. I move up and down my length, flicking my thumb across my crown on the upstroke, groaning when her lips part even further and I can feel the teasing heat of her mouth.

My cock throbs in my fist, precum leaking all over her lips, and the sight of it has me moving my fist faster and faster. Pushing the tip against her parted, waiting lips I silently beg for more. She jolts slightly, the movement pushing her tongue against my dick slit, and I have to reach out and grip the headboard to stop myself from gripping her cheeks and fucking her face completely.

I don't let her movement stop me, I know from experience how much she can handle, how much is too far. Yet given my dick hasn't had any action other than this in over a year, it's taking every ounce of willpower I have not to climb on top of her and fuck her hard.

I want to claim her, and show her exactly who she belongs to.

I want her trembling, weak, fucking marked by me and me alone, until I erase anyone who came before me.

Using my grip on the headboard to steady myself, I push into my fist and against her lips even more, relishing in her breathy, slumber filled moans, and wondering what she will sound like when she screams my name. My eyes scan the room, taking in her lace bra hooked on the wardrobe door, her dirty towel on the floor by the hamper, and her perfumes scattered across her dresser.

So enticing.

So inviting.

So like my imperfect little doll that I feel that familiar tingle at the base of my spine.

My fingers tighten around the wood, my hand moving faster as I get closer and closer to climax. Then when I flick my eyes back to her and see her mouth almost around my tip, her skin shining with sweat, and her hair draped across her pillow, I am sent straight to hell. I rut into my hand, stroking myself harder until cum shoots from my dick in thick, long ropes, coating my hand and her skin in a perfect display of affection.

Once I catch my breath, I take my time spreading my cum across her lips with the tip of my cock, like I am an artist and she is my masterpiece. Then when I tuck myself away and admire my work, I turn breathless as I look down at my little doll. She looks so fucking good covered in my cum, and I can't stop my hand from reaching out and smearing my release even more into her skin. I imagine what she would do if she woke up, if she found me here, if she flicked open her eyes and then her mouth and sucked my cock to the back of her throat.

I have to swallow my moan at the images I am planting inside my own head, but it won't be long before they are a reality. I take a step back, grabbing the moisturizer from her bedside table and tucking it into my pocket before I leave. Another gift to add to my collection.

When I reach the door, I pause, hesitating as I look over my shoulder at her. Before I can stop myself, I am moving back towards her, leaning down, and pressing my lips to hers that are still laced in my cum. Her taste with mine? Fucking perfection, and it won't be long until I will have it forever.

See you soon my little doll.

CHAPTER 1

Alora



“I had that dream about the man in my room again.” I keep my focus on the windowpane, watching as the scattered rain drops cascade down in their escape, as I let my admission hang in the air between us.

It’s October, almost Halloween, so it’s not unusual for it to be raining, not at this time of year. Yet for some reason I feel unusually warm. The dream of the man in my room chased me awake in the early hours again, and just like always, my heart was pounding out of my chest at the thought of someone being in my room. My breathing staggered, my lips left salty, and the nape of my neck and chest wet from the sweat it caused. I swear I could feel him as if he were still there watching me, lingering in the shadows, and waiting for my next slumber. It’s always the same, and where I used to wake up scared and panicked, now I find myself seeking comfort in his false presence.

“That’s what? The fourth time this month?” Dr. Baines’ voice slices through my thoughts, glancing down at the notepad in his lap before bringing his weighted gaze back to his patient sofa where I’m sitting.

“They are getting more frequent,” he adds, his tone as calm and cool as it always is, yet still assessing me in that way shrinks always do.

As therapists go, he’s the best I’ve had, and I should know, I have been frequenting sofas like this one since I was barely a teenager. That’s the sad reality of a trauma-filled childhood,

not just bouncing around in facilities and group homes, but also therapists too. I had to go through multiple ones before I found him, yet with everything I have been through, I still find it hard to open up to him, no matter how much I want to. Not for his lack of trying of course, but I have just always found it difficult to speak to people, especially about my past.

When I don't bother responding to him, keeping my focus on the dull fall day, he continues, "We've talked about how recurring dreams often signify unresolved trauma, Alora, so given your background it's not unusual for this to be happening."

I scoff.

Unresolved trauma.

That's just fancy therapy talk for, 'your reality is so fucked up so why not your dreams too.'

"Or maybe I really am just crazy," I say, turning back to him with a smile he doesn't return.

"You are not crazy, and you know I don't allow the use of that word in my office," he gently reminds me, and I almost apologize. The old me would have, the one that was scolded, beaten, and left helpless almost every night. She did nothing but apologize, but Dr. Baines has been teaching me that I don't have to be sorry for surviving.

Surviving is the gift we never ask for but are burdened with anyway. I never wanted to survive, but here I am, despite my father's best attempts, and then some of my own. My body is a canvas of scars, of just how many times I have survived, and my brain is still a mess of how much I wish I hadn't.

"What was the man doing this time?" Dr. Baines asks, steering us back to my dreams, and I close my eyes as I put myself back there in my room.

I can remember it so vividly, recalling every detail as if it was the most real thing in the world. The soft touch of his fingers against my skin, the smell of his cologne wrapping around my nose, and the sound of his pleased grunts in my

ear. He isn't the first man to ever come into my room against my will, but he is the first with a gentle touch.

The others didn't offer the same restraint.

"He was standing by the side of my bed, watching me." *Touching me*, I add on silently in my head, and my legs shift. I can still feel his feather-light flicking between the apex of my thighs now, and they tighten at the thought. I recall how real his touch felt against my skin, as the pads of his fingers stroked me until they were almost touching my...

"Just watching you?" Dr. Baines interrupts, pulling my attention back to his, and my eyes snap open at his question as he ruins my train of thought.

Which is probably for the best. As fantasies go, one about a strange man sneaking into my room at night isn't one I should focus on. Not when I already hold so many real-life memories of the same thing, except none of those included my pleasure, or my consent.

I feel his gaze watching me closely, like he can read every thought running through my mind, and I wonder how much that fancy PHD really works. Yet still I remain tight-lipped, returning his assessing glare as he awaits my answer. As usual, when it doesn't come, he pushes me.

"And how does he make you feel, this man who is watching you while you sleep?"

"Scared," I answer honestly, as my mind flashes with images of my childhood, but then another word comes to the forefront.

Aroused.

"Like I said, given your background, that's a completely normal response." He writes something on his pad as he says that, a comforting smile pulling at his mouth as his eyes look back at me. "You're stronger than you give yourself credit for, Alora, we have done a lot of hard work together here, you should be proud of what you have achieved. I know I am."

I return his smile because he's right. Just because my dreams are making me question things morally, doesn't mean it should affect my real life. "I am," I reply. "Proud of myself I mean, but what if I felt more than scared?" I know I shouldn't ask, shouldn't push this, not when he's right, and we have been making really good progress, why should I try and change that? But the words are out before I can stop them. "What if it didn't feel wrong?"

His pen halts, his eyes holding my gaze as his silence pushes me to say more, but once again, when I don't, he goes on. "Then tell me how it felt, take me to this dream. You're in your room, and this man is watching you, and you're not just scared. What else are you feeling?"

My fingers dig into my palms, his stare unwavering as he waits to dissect every word I say. Taking a deep breath, I lick my lips as I respond, "It's not just fear that grips me when I find him there. I mean yes it's there, but there's something else, something more." I can feel the sweat gathering at the back of my neck as I recall how the man from my dream made me feel.

My thighs are pressed together so tight in an attempt to satisfy the ache now building there, and my teeth sink into my bottom lip as I try to think of the best thing to say that doesn't make me sound crazy.

"My skin feels hot to the touch, so much so that the man must feel it, my breaths are labored, gasps almost, and there is a fire burning in the pit of my stomach," I say slowly, and I swear Dr. Baines doesn't move an inch as I talk. He's a smart man, I'm sure he understands what I'm getting at, and I'm also sure he is thinking of what to say that will keep the trust we have built between one another.

It took me a long time to trust a *man* after what happened to me.

Yet I don't wait for him to push me, this time I push myself to say the words. "He touches me," I admit, my heart now smashing against my ribcage. "His fingers trail up my

legs and then he touches me.” I swallow thickly, hurtling towards the edge of something, as I recall the fictional man in my room and how he made me feel. “I don’t know what it means, I just know I feel, I don’t know the right word, anxious, exhilarated, violated, intrigued, like I am climbing a mountain maybe,” I add with an awkward laugh as I bring my stare back to him.

Dr. Baines clears his throat. “I think the word you are looking for, Alora, is aroused.”

I practically flinch when he says it, despite my just thinking it. “No,” I instantly deny. “He’s a stranger, an invader, a monster in my dreams, I was not aroused,” I lie, ignoring the throbbing in my center now.

“You know it’s okay to be aroused by those kinds of things, just because you didn’t have a natural introduction to sexual experiences growing up, doesn’t mean these kinds of thoughts and fantasies aren’t okay.” His voice remains firm, commanding, yet gentle as he tries to make me believe him, despite what I was taught growing up.

I replay his words over and over in my head. I know he’s right, but knowing something and believing it are two different things, yet still I ask, “And how would they be okay? How can I experience this feeling, safely?” I feel stupid for asking him, I mean what twenty-five-year-old woman doesn’t know how to explore her own fantasies, but Dr. Baines knows my trauma, my boundaries, and the fact I’ve never pushed them.

This is a safe space here with him.

“There are many things you could do,” he starts slowly, making one more note on his pad, and then placing it on the side table next to him. Then he leans forward, resting his elbows on his knees and linking his fingers together as he talks to me. “You can read stories, watch movies, confront these feelings in a safe manner, and explore your body in the same way.”

My eyes widen a little at that last part. Is he suggesting what I think he is?

“You could also find someone who is interested in exploring these kinds of things with you, setting limits with them, but still enjoying yourself and what you like. Finding someone you trust and doing it together.” His stare is unwavering now, his dark eyes boring into mine, and I shift in my seat at his words.

“Doing it together,” I almost whisper, then cough out a laugh. “Yeah, I’m sure everyone wants to fuck the crazy girl who murdered her father,” I choke out, and his jaw tightens.

“Alora,” he sighs my name like a prayer. “We have talked about this; you are not crazy. You went through something traumatic, something that was not your fault, and then you decided to act.” Words he has said a hundred times before, yet still they mean nothing to me.

“I’m a *killer*,” I respond, and I swear I see a flash of anger in his eyes now.

“No, you’re a *survivor*,” he snaps back. “You went through some of the worst things imaginable and you survived. It’s time to fight now, as much as you did then.” His words are paired with the beeping of his watch, signaling the end of our session, and I take a relieved breath as he relaxes from his rant. “We’ll pick this back up next session,” he says, grabbing his notes from the side table and jotting something down again.

“Can’t wait,” I drawl sarcastically, and his pen halts as I stand, his stare dragging up from my feet until he can meet my eyes.

“Think about what I said,” he commands, holding my gaze. “There are plenty of ways to explore your needs, most of which can be done from your own room.” A blush begins to creep up my neck at his suggestion and all I can do is nod in a daze, as I turn on my heels and stumble from his office, not even saying goodbye to him or his assistant.

I like Dr. Baines. He is a good therapist, he helps me, but I leave his office thinking he might be the unhinged one, because I'm pretty sure the only thing he just prescribed me, was to go home and find some pleasure.

But how do I find pleasure when all I've ever known is pain?

CHAPTER 2

Alora



I'm still thinking about Dr. Baines' words two days later when I am working my shift at the coffee shop. I've worked at Hot Beanz for almost two years now and the owner, Jen, has always been kind to me. She didn't question me about my almost blank resume the day I came in here, or push me about the fact that I didn't have any references. I guess she took one look at me, and the pitiful bag of my only belongings, and decided I needed to catch a break in life. She doesn't know anything about my past, except for the fact that I don't like talking about it. I can't, it's too hard to relive the trauma, and thankfully she and my other coworkers have come to understand that.

It's Halloween today, which means the morning rush is filled with pumpkin themed requests and orders of Jen's homemade skull cookies that were a huge hit for us last year. That's what I should be focused on, making people's drinks and restocking the cabinet with goodies. But it's not because it isn't just Halloween for me, it's also the anniversary of the day I murdered my father.

My father was an upstanding member of society, he had friends in all the right places, and was doted on for being left widowed by my mother. On the outside he was seen as a caring father, handsome, charming, perfect. So perfect in fact, that none of those people that doted on him would have ever suspected that he ruined me so completely.

The house I grew up in wasn't filled with love and safety, there were no fairytales, or imagined happy endings on my part. I didn't spend my days riding my bike or playing with dolls. No, the only thing I knew was pain, and how to cover up my father's lies. My entire childhood was cold, cruel, barbaric. It was filled with hate, brutal force, and sights no child should ever bear witness to. And let's not forget the men, so many men.

It started small at first, just little dinner parties my father would host, dressing me up in my best party dresses that made me feel like nothing but a princess. He would tell me to sit in his friends' laps and they would tickle my side and tell me jokes I didn't understand. I thought it was fun, I thought I was safe, I thought my father would protect me. Afterwards I felt confused, dirty, violated, like I should have known better. It wasn't until I started therapy that I realized feeling stupid was wrong. I wasn't supposed to know better, I was just a child.

I suffered in silence for almost five years. Five years of men and parties, and my father loving me in a way no man should ever love a child, until one night when I was fourteen, I just snapped. I knew by then that it was wrong, that dads weren't supposed to touch their daughters in that way, that they weren't supposed to hurt them, to let their friends fuck them, and I wasn't going to let it happen one more night.

Halloween is always a night for monsters to come out and play, but what people didn't realize is that I was living with a monster who wanted to play every night. Who hunted me, ripped me apart, and then fed on the pieces of my pain until I was nothing but a shell for him to use as he saw fit. He never saw it coming, never suspected I would ever fight back. I mean, why would he? I was his perfect little girl who obeyed his every word.

Until that night of course.

What I remember most now is the blood. There was so much blood, more than I imagined could ever fit inside a human body, and more than I could have ever controlled. It

was everywhere, it sprayed across the kitchen island, poured over the floor, and coated every inch of skin I had on display after he ripped off my costume in disgust. I can still remember the evil glint in his eye, the one that told me that he would make it hurt, just the way he liked. The one that told me if I didn't stop him that it would be me who would end up dead, just like my mother.

It was that thought that had me reaching for the knife. That terror that had me kicking and screaming as I stabbed it into his body again and again. One strike for every man he had ever let into my twin bed, and more for all the times he had been there himself too. By the time the police arrived I had collapsed from exhaustion and all I could focus on was his cold, dead stare as it bore into mine.

I wish I could say that was the last time he ever hurt me, that from the moment he died he took all that pain and torture with him, but that would be a lie.

Those eyes still haunt me.

I still see those men as if they are here now, and I still remember the silver of the blade as I stabbed my father repeatedly and painted it red. My pain didn't die with him like I thought it would, and the suffering he forced upon me is still wrapped around me like a vine I can't escape.

After his death I was sent to a mental health unit for troubled teens. My father's money and connections still suffocating me even with him gone, and I stayed there until my release when I turned eighteen. The day I left that place I had nothing, no money, no clothes, no prospects, and my social worker wasn't much help. All she did was get me a spot in a halfway house and obtain me some ID to help me find a job. I was only there a couple of weeks when the first man showed up with his threats. And when one turned into three, I did the only thing I could do.

I ran.

I ran and I never looked back, not wanting to live in my father's shadow ever again.

That was seven years ago now, and still my life is controlled by the ghosts of my past. Yes, I have a job now, co-workers I would consider friends, and a small house I rent that I still call my own, but he is always there, existing in the background of my life and reminding me I will never be free. The only love I have ever known is tainted in abuse. The only touch I have ever felt is dripping in pain, and the only freedom I have ever been allowed was the moment it took to kill my father.

That's why a fire was left behind by Dr. Baines' advice, and every single time I try to distract myself, all I can think of is those lingering words left between us.

'There are plenty of ways to explore your needs, most of which can be done from your own room.'

I'm not naive, I know exactly what he was implying, what he thinks I should do, but how can I explore my needs when I don't even know what they are?

Just as I have that thought, the bell above the door jingles, signaling another customer, and I reach for a fresh coffee mug from the rack in preparation. When I raise my head ready to offer them my perfectly practiced smile, I freeze completely. A man strides towards the counter with nothing but the type of confidence that can only come from growing up with money and getting away with the worst of crimes, and how do I know that? Because he isn't just any man, he is one of the men from my bedroom.

Jeff Reacher.

"Large coffee, black," he commands, his eyes not even looking up from his phone as my world falls apart before him.

I'm not sure how much time passes, but when I don't respond, his eyes flick up, and I see interest flash across them before they move to recognition. Having my mother's face and

my father's eyes is a curse I am forced to battle with every day.

“Well, well, well, what do we have here,” he starts with a cocky drawl, his eyes now moving over my entire body in a way I am all too familiar with. “Little Alora Parker, you sure did grow up nice,” he adds, and I remain frozen, the only movement available is my throat as I swallow down the bile threatening to escape.

I'm so distracted that everyone else around us falls away. I hear the ding of the bell, more orders being passed to Imogen who is working alongside me, and Jen calling from the kitchen that more cookies are ready, but all I can see is him. His face above mine, his body pinning me down, his hands touching me in places I've never enjoyed.

His eyes flick back down to his phone. “Wait until I tell the others where you have been hiding, Cooper is here in town with me,” he grins, his fingers flying across his phone, and the fear that grips me makes me feel like that same innocent nine year old who attended that first party in her princess dress.

When he fixes his gaze back on mine, he pockets his phone and stares at me. “Did you miss me?”

Four words and I am back in my childhood room, his hot breath against my little neck as he took what was offered by my father. The mug in my hand slips, shattering at my feet, and all I can do is back away, my eyes never leaving his, and his smile getting wider with every step. He always got off on my fear.

Jen rushes from the back to assess the commotion and I don't hear what she says to me, I barely feel her comforting touch on my arm, but I do see his eye roll, his stare moving from me to her. It's only then I am released from my panic.

“Imogen make him a black coffee to go,” Jen orders, and I can feel both of their stares as she moves quickly and quietly to do as she says, and when Imogen slides it towards him, Jen adds, “It's on the house, now leave and don't come back.”

Jeff smirks, slowly taking a sip of his coffee and groaning out loud. “Mmm, tastes just as sweet as I remember,” he purrs, holding the cup up to me in cheers. “I’ll see you soon, Princess Alora.” Then he turns and walks towards the door, the queue of people behind him parting to let him through, just as a hooded figure darts out in front of him.

I don’t move an inch until he has disappeared from sight. Then I watch as Imogen dashes to quickly clean up my mess, and Jen appears in front of me and steers me towards her office until we are isolated and alone.

We sit in silence until she eventually sighs, “I know better than to ask what is wrong, Alora, but I just need to know if you’re okay?”

Am I okay? How many times have I been asked that question? The police officers asked me that night, the doctors at the girls’ home asked it daily, all my therapists tossed it my way during every session, and every single time I gave them all the same answer.

“I’m fine,” I reply weakly, and I have to clear my throat to try and put some more force behind my words to make them believable. “Really, I’m fine.”

Jen stares at me and I know she isn’t buying one second of my bullshit, but again she sighs, “Why don’t you cut out early? Head home and get ready for tonight, you’re still coming right?”

The Halloween party across town at her boyfriend’s club, I’d almost forgotten. She has been begging me for weeks and I finally relented the other day and agreed to go. I want to tell her no, I want to run home and lock myself away, or better yet, run from this town he found me in and never look back, but instead I find myself nodding and she squeals.

“Yayyyy, we are going to have the best night, and I promise you will forget all about whatever just happened out there.”

All I can do is offer her a smile and a nod, but if there is one thing I know for sure, it's not that easy to forget your worst nightmare.

CHAPTER 3

Jacob



Killing for my little doll wasn't on my agenda today, but now here we are. A predator hunting his prey. I was just at the coffee shop to get a glimpse of her, to feed my ever-growing addiction, but then I saw her. The fear in her eyes, the tremble in her body, the hundreds of memories she desperately tries to suppress rushing to the surface, and I knew she was in trouble.

For once my eyes didn't stay on her, they moved to him, watching him, assessing him, and then I knew. I saw the way he looked at her, heard the way he spoke to her, and those words, those fickle little words that hold so much meaning.

Did you miss me?

Alora's past is no secret, not if you know where to look, and of course I do, but I was happy to let her past stay just that, her past. She already took care of her father alone, and there was no concrete evidence that anyone else was involved in her abuse, except for a few whispers in our society here and there. Of course, I know more than most, but I never had any names, any faces.

Until now.

Of course, men like him never see their downfall coming. I'm sure Alora's father was blind to it until she plunged a knife into his gut, and his little friend here is the same. Striding from the cafe and sipping from his to-go cup with glee. His fingers tap obnoxiously across his phone screen, and I use the

software on my own to mirror his device to mine. I read his texts to another man named Cooper, alerting him to his findings. They share a laugh, reminisce about the good old days, and plan to relive them.

I don't fucking think so.

I follow him all the way to a parking garage, wait for him to unlock his car, and then the needle is in his neck before he can even open his door. I stuff his body in the back seat, silently praising the expensive addition of tinted windows, as I mildly wonder how many young girls he has fucked back here behind his wife's back. Then I make quick work of disabling his GPS system, climb behind the wheel and hightail it out of there. I've got big plans for tonight, and I won't let this little detour derail them.

This needs to be quick, clean, and relatively painless, and I laugh as I head out of the city. I am going to rip his fucking insides out and use them to choke him to death. Like I said, quick and clean. Then I will make it back to the city just in time to play with my little doll.

By the time we make it to my place, my new friend is rousing from his slumber in the back and spitting expletives like some sort of commoner. *Disgusting*. I waste no time in killing the engine, exiting his car, and flinging open his door to drag him out. I'm even nice enough to let his head bang against the metal and the concrete on the way down. I'm a gentleman like that.

I take pleasure in his flailing limbs, and in his realization of how fucked he is as he tries and fails to be in control of them. Of course I ignore his pointless questions, they're always the same: Who are you? Why are you doing this? Do you know who I am?. They are never inventive and oh how it tires me endlessly.

Dragging him to the modified guest house takes mere seconds, his weight no real obstacle for me. Despite his large frame, I have more than enough experience in this area, even if

it has been a while. Then I fasten the shackles around his wrists, and those smug eyes from earlier are nowhere in sight.

“Who the fuck are you?” he spits, struggling against his restraints, as I retreat to my special table to prepare my tools.

It’s been far too long since I have been standing in this spot, I’ve been too captivated by Alora, yet at the same time it feels like I have never left. Killing is something I learned to enjoy, but then I met my little doll and realized there was something I enjoyed a lot more.

Her.

I admit, I thought about killing her at first, putting her out of her misery, and fulfilling my own selfish needs, but as I was watching her something changed. The need to hurt her turned into something different, something I still don’t understand, but I will soon. I just need to take care of him first.

“The real question is who are you?” I muse out loud, and when he opens his mouth to reply, I hold my hand up to stop him. “Oh, my question was rhetorical, Mr. Reacher, I know exactly who you are, and what you’ve done, and that’s your problem.”

Confusion mars his face, but it quickly turns to fear and despair when I walk towards him brandishing my combat knife. My early career spent in the military has served me well over the years, it’s what set me on the path I am on today, and now I am going to enjoy using everything I have learned on this piece of shit today.

“Tell me, Mr. Reacher, did you miss me?” The question has barely left my lips before I am plunging my knife right into his stomach with as much force as possible, relishing in the deep guttural roar of pain that pours from his throat.

His blood coats my skin and his screams assault my ears, yet I feel like I am high on his agony. I stare into his eyes and see thoughts of his filthy memories of his time with her. Thoughts of him playing with my little doll that have me dragging the knife across his gut and opening him up

completely, until his organs start to bulge out. It's fucking beautiful. I use my free hand to grip them and pull on them sharply, and I'm not surprised that the piece of shit passes out. I stupidly forgot to shoot him with some adrenaline to prolong my fun, but it's no bother, I must be quick anyway.

Just like I planned, I pull on his guts until they are spilling across the floor, and then I wrap a section of his long intestine around his throat until his breath disappears completely. I don't stop until I know he is as dead as her father, and then still I go some more. By the time his body is completely limp, my clothes are drenched, and I make quick work of fetching some souvenirs for my little doll, before I drag his body into the tub in the corner and fill it with acid. In a few hours he will be nothing, just like he made her feel.

I stay and watch for a while, and as dusk grows closer, I head into the back room for a shower, tossing my clothes in the burner on the way. I've got a party to attend after all, and I can't be late.

Oh, and masks are mandatory.

CHAPTER 4

Alora



The entire club is heaving with people, slick with sweat as they grind their costume-clad bodies against one another in drunken bliss. I don't know why I'm here; I hate Halloween, I always have. I didn't need a holiday to see the monsters that danced in the light, I saw them in the darkness of my bedroom almost every single night.

I was fourteen when I dressed up for the holiday for the first time, and well, look how that turned out. Yet here I am, orange and green lights flickering and flashing across my Day of the Dead costume. An homage to my mother and her heritage, before my father took it all away just like he took everything else. My costume is also fitting for him. The Day of the Dead is to celebrate the life and death of family and friends, and there is nothing I want more than to celebrate the death of my father, no matter how sick and twisted that might sound.

My father gave me everything. I look like him, I still have his last name, and let's not forget about all of the trauma he left behind. Yet, knowing I took something from him that he could never take back is what keeps me going every single day. It's why I adjust my mask, the only actual requirement of this Halloween-themed masquerade I have been forced into, and continue on my quest to find myself a drink. I texted Jen to let her know I have arrived, but the signal isn't the best and it seems she hasn't gotten my message yet.

So, I head to the bar and order myself something called a Black Magic Margarita, which despite its color and stupid name, is surprisingly delicious. Sipping it slowly, I survey the array of patrons trying to enjoy their night and bask in the irony of everyone wearing a mask as if it's something new. I mean, aren't we all wearing masks? Don't we all hide our true selves from the world until a select few discover the true beast that lies beneath?

It's with that thought at the forefront of my mind that I make my way onto the dancefloor to lose myself in the hoards of drunken revelers. I keep my drink close to my chest, my hand always covering it, and start to sway my hips to the beat of the music, my eyes roaming constantly in search of my friends. Sweat pools at the base of my spine as my heart starts to thump in time with the song, and I tip my head back, losing myself in the mindless act of drinking and dancing as I sway and spin along with everyone else.

Growing up like I did, you learn to be able to assess your surroundings quickly and quietly. It's why I know the second someone's eyes hit me and never leave. I can feel their stare as if it's their fingers against my skin before I even bring my head back down. Goosebumps skate along my arms as my stare shifts subtly, flicking across anyone in my vicinity, until I land on someone in a dark black mask on the other side of the dance floor, leaning casually against a wall.

I can't make out what they are supposed to be dressed as, but from their tall muscular frame, I presume them to be male. They are wearing a black hoodie and dark jeans as far as I can tell, and their eyes remain fixed on mine as I assess them in return. I'm used to men and their stares, it's not something that usually affects me, but tonight is different. This man is looking at me like he knows me, like he has every one of my secrets in his possession and is ready to use them against me, and after what happened at the coffee shop today, I am feeling more unnerved than I usually would.

What if it's him?

Seeing a man from my past impacted me more than I care to admit, but I thought if I just used my techniques from therapy that I could forget about it, about him, and what he did. Yet the man behind the mask could be him, or even Cooper. He did say he couldn't wait to tell him that he'd found me. What if that's exactly what he did?

What if he waited for me to finish my shift earlier? I don't live far from the coffee shop; he could have easily seen me leave and followed me home.

What if that's how he knew where I would be tonight?

What if he wants to take from me again?

Hundreds of questions go to war in my mind as a thousand memories assault me from within, and I start to feel that same pressure in my chest that I felt when I was a child, and my bedroom door would crack open. It didn't matter if I pretended to be asleep, or screamed until my throat was raw, the outcome was always the same. This man watches me like he knows that, like he knows everything I have endured, and what I did to escape it.

Not wanting to leave myself vulnerable again, I blow out a slow breath, finish the rest of my drink, and casually start to move backwards through the crowd away from him.

That sickening feeling only grows as the eyes of the man in the mask continue to track my movements, as he lifts off the wall and starts to follow me through the crowd. His stare drinks in the black fishnets I am wearing, and the fluttery black skirt around my waist that pulls in tight. I finished my outfit with a capped sleeve corset top that cups my breasts snugly, a choice I am now regretting as his lust-filled gaze licks against my skin.

I haven't changed much since I was fourteen, so despite my mask, I am still easily recognizable, especially with my silver-like hair, and from the look in his eyes, he remembers me just as much as I remember him. Trusting my gut, I turn my back on him and push through the crowds to escape, my

eyes scanning the people around me in search of Jen, or anyone else that could save me, but I should have remembered the lesson I learned when I was just a child.

The only person who can save me, is me.

A rough hand grabs me, pouring ice through my veins as I desperately try to escape, my heart now hammering against my rib cage. I don't even turn around as I rip myself away from them, yet now I feel hands everywhere. They're touching me as I pass, and in my state, I can no longer separate the good from the bad, as my own hands begin to sweat. My breaths start coming in quick pants as I knock people out of the way, my eyes looking for the nearest exit in this new hell I have found myself in, and when another hand grips me, I whip around ready to fight with everything I have left within me, but there is no one there.

Well, that's a lie, there are plenty of people there, but the man in the mask is gone. My head whips around in search of him, but he's nowhere to be found, as if he were never there at all.

What the hell?

Maybe I'm finally going crazy, because I can't find any trace of him no matter where I look. I even back myself against a wall and scan my surroundings again, inspecting every mask and costume in my wake until I come up completely and utterly empty.

I'm not sure how long I stand there fixated for, but it's long enough for my heart to stop racing, for my mind to clear slightly. Maybe there was no man in a mask, and my fucked-up brain is just making me see things that aren't there. I give the room another once over, but when I still can't find any trace of him, I turn to leave, only to bump into someone towering over me.

"Alora," they purr in recognition, their voice muffled by the mask as their fingers gently curve around my elbow.

I barely hear my name though as I stare at the mask, the same mask I saw before, and I know I was right.

They're here, they found me.

"Get away from me," I demand, ripping my elbow from their hand, and attempting to get away.

"Alora, wait!" The man calls, a voice so familiar I can barely stand it, and when I feel them reach out again, their touch just grazing against me, I pick up my pace.

I'm almost at the door when they grab me again, pulling me into their hard body and gripping me tight, and just like that I am nine years old again, fighting to be a child in a world filled with monsters. Except I'm not a child anymore, I stopped being a child the first night my father touched me in a way he shouldn't have, and I won't be a victim, not again. I focus my mind and think of the countless outcomes that could occur, but only one thought is truly at the center of my mind.

Tonight is the night I kill again.

The man's free hand reaches up to pull off his mask, and time seems to stand still as everyone else around us falls away. It doesn't matter which of them it is, I'm ready to fight, but when the mask falls away and reveals his face, I blink back in shock and confusion.

"Dr. Baines?" I ask, my voice trembling, and barely loud enough to be heard over the music as I stare at him in confusion, and it's only now I notice he isn't wearing the same clothes as the other man in the mask.

His honey-colored stare clashes with mine, looking at me with nothing but concern in his eyes, as once again his touch lingers around the curve of my elbow. When I don't say anything else, he leans down to bring us closer together so he can be heard. "Alora, is everything okay?"

Just as he asks that I get the feeling of being watched again, and even though I can no longer find the man in the mask from before, I know he's there, I know he found me, and all I can do is shake my head. I think Dr. Baines asks me

another question, but I don't hear it, not as my body begins to tremble in fear, not as he pulls me in close and starts leading me outside, and not as his touch is the only thing keeping me grounded.

My heart is racing as I try to focus on putting one foot in front of the other, my head whipping round to see if anyone is following us, but Dr. Baines holds me tight against him, forcing me to stay with him. By the time I realize we have stopped, I find him staring at me with nothing but worry, as I struggle to catch my breath and it takes everything in me to remain upright. He watches me closely, taking note of every hitch in my breath, and the moisture that clings to my eyelashes threatening to escape.

“Deep breaths, Alora, in and then out,” he demands smoothly, mirroring what he is asking of me, and forcing our gazes to remain locked. “You are safe, you are free,” he starts, repeating my safe words that we've practiced a hundred times in our sessions, until I can finally stop shaking.

“Dr. Baines,” I gasp, holding his eyes as I do what he asks.

“Yes, Alora, it's me, are you okay?” His voice is gentle and calm, soothing in a way, and the tears I was holding back start to fall freely.

“No,” I choke out, letting myself feel vulnerable for just one second. “I need to get out of here,” I add, flicking my gaze up and down the sidewalk and noticing he has walked us away from the club a little, but I can still hear the deep bass thumping from inside.

There are people still lining the street waiting to get inside the club, and others spill out of the exit I presume we just came from, already completely intoxicated and ready to call it a night. There are masks everywhere, multiple ones like the one I just saw, and the one in Dr. Baines' hand, and I can barely breathe as I think about them watching me. The other man in the mask could come out here any second and find me.

Could be watching us now and waiting for me to be alone, and I am just waiting here like bait.

I have to get out of here.

“Are you here alone?” Dr. Baine asks, his stare following mine towards the club before it comes back to me and awaits my answer.

“Yes, no,” I start, stumbling over my words, which he seems to be happy with. “I was looking for my friends, but I didn’t find them yet, but—” Panicking I blurt, “I can’t stay, I *really* need to leave before they find me.” Something in my stare or my voice must break any restraint he had, because his entire demeanor changes. A soft smile gracing his lips as his eyes soften completely.

“Then let’s get you out of here.” He uses that touch on my elbow to guide me down the sidewalk as if he already knows where he is going. “I can give you a ride, my car is right down here.” He doesn’t wait for any response as he leads me down a side alley to a sleek, dark, sports-type car.

When we reach it, he opens the door for me, waiting until I have slid inside until before he closes it quickly. Then he heads to the back of the car, checking the trunk before walking to the driver’s seat and climbing inside himself. He tosses the mask he was wearing on the center console, as I fidget with my hands in my lap.

“Where to?” he asks, and I open my mouth to respond but then freeze.

Where am I going to go? If Jeff followed me home earlier that means he knows where I live, and probably told Cooper too. They both know what I did to my father, what I’m capable of when pushed, but I also know what they are capable of too, and what if they want revenge? Payback for what I did to someone they considered a friend. What if they have been searching for me all this time, and him coming into my work today wasn’t a coincidence?

What if this isn't the first time he saw me? Maybe he was biding his time and waiting for tonight because of the significance of what it means for us both, and because he failed to get to me at the club, he is just going to go to my house and wait for me there instead? No, I can't go home, it's tainted now they know where I am, but where does that leave me?

My silence lingers until Dr. Baines asks, "Do you need me to call someone?" And that question only makes more tears come because who would I call?

My mother is dead, my father is dead, my family has nothing to do with me, and I never exactly made any lifelong friends in the mental health unit I was placed in, or the group home that followed. I've kept everyone at a distance because closeness is accompanied by questions, questions that I can't and won't answer, and being alone always feels right.

Until now.

"I don't have anyone to call," I admit in a whisper, and I know he won't judge me, he knows far worse things about me than the fact I'm alone. Yet he is looking at me like he wants to help me, like he can.

"How about I just take you home then, what's your address?" He pulls up his GPS ready to type it in and panic floods my system.

"No!" I snap a little too loudly. "I can't go home, it's not safe." Dr. Baines nods slowly in understanding, like he knows me, like he sees me, and suddenly his car feels just like his therapy sofa. Inviting and calm, and like all my dark and bloody secrets mean nothing to anyone but me.

"Okay, Alora, is there anywhere you would feel safe right now?" His question isn't meant to be cruel, it isn't meant to cause me pain, but it does, because how sad is it that in a world the size of ours, there isn't anywhere I feel truly safe.

Except as I have that thought I realize that here in his car, my heart is no longer pounding out of my chest, my breathing

is no longer labored, and my hands are no longer shaking. I look at him to find him already watching me, that worry and concern still evident in his stare, as he waits to help me after already coming to my rescue without even realizing it.

“I feel safe with you,” I admit, even quieter than before and a soft smile touches the corner of his mouth again as if that’s exactly what he wanted to hear. “If you could just drive me away from here and I can check into a hotel on the other side of town or something,” I add in a shaky voice, just so desperate to put distance between me and my past, and Dr. Baines nods again in understanding.

Here in this car, the only monster out to get me is me, and it’s a monster I can tame, just like I have many times before. I know I need to leave, that this place won’t ever feel like home again, and right now with no other choice, I will have to let Dr. Baines be the one that helps me escape. My mind starts rushing through plans, of the people I will miss, and what I am going to do next.

“Don’t worry, Alora, I know the perfect place for you,” he reassures me with a steady smile, and all I do is nod, as we pull out of the alley and drive away into the night, leaving all my past behind me.

CHAPTER 5

Alora



The drive is silent as we make our way through town with nothing but our breaths for company. Dr. Baines doesn't tell me where we're going, nor do I bother to ask, I don't need to, I trust him. Instead, I focus on the feeling of safety that curls around me like a blanket, as if I am home and sleeping in my bed and none of this night ever happened. A feeling that feels so similar to me with him by my side, yet I can't put my finger on why. It's like my whole body is on high alert to my situation, yet my mind tells me I am safe here with him.

As therapists go, I am going to miss him, and knowing that I must leave this life that I have created for myself stings more than I thought it would, but how can I stay? They found me. Maybe I should tell him, and ask for his advice. Maybe he has a good recommendation for where I can go next. I wonder if he is well traveled, if he will think I am overreacting about what happened tonight, but it isn't just tonight. It's everything. My life is never going to be mine when I am always running from my past, but I can't stop running and let it catch up with me.

"Day of the Dead?" he asks, finally breaking the silence, and I turn to him and focus on his words, as he tips his head towards my costume and the mask now in my hand. I nod and he smiles. "Very clever, Miss Parker," he says with a grin, and I almost return it because I know he knows.

We've had many sessions where he has reached deep inside of me and plucked out my innermost darkest secrets. Dr. Baines knows the significance of my costume, what this day really is for me, what my attire truly means, and for just a second, I feel truly seen.

That feeling soon turns sour, and festers at the vulnerable side of me that knows not to trust anyone, that reminds me that everyone has their own secrets, desires, so instead of returning his smile, I snap back, "Don't psychoanalyze me."

His grin only grows, his eyes flicking between the road and me, lingering on the latter as if he could do this drive with his stare on me the entire time as he purrs, "I wouldn't dare do such a thing, we're off the clock tonight." His eyes move back to the road, and I can't help but watch his hands as they flex tightly around the wheel, as if his night is only just starting instead of ending.

"And you're the Purge, right?" I ask, no longer able to endure the silence in the car any longer, as my eyes flick down and inspect the mask he tore off his face earlier. It's only now I am realizing what it is, and why it was such a popular choice tonight, but I can't help but think it doesn't suit him at all, so I ask, "What? Was Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde taken?"

His laugh is deep and loud, catching me off guard and lighting me up from the inside out, as once again his eyes return to mine. "What are you trying to say? Do you believe me to be so wicked, Miss Parker?"

I shrug. "I think you are already fully aware of my feelings towards most men," I reply casually, not wanting to dive too deep into my trauma, but avoiding it only makes it worse. Yet just like when I am sitting across from him on his office sofa, Dr. Baines always knows just what to say.

"Well rest assured, Alora, I am not *most* men." He says the words casually, like they mean nothing, but the tone in which he says them suggests they mean everything, more than I could ever possibly know, and for the first time ever I truly take him in.

Tall, dark, handsome, I'm not blind. It has always been obvious that Dr. Baines is an attractive man, he oozes that confident, powerful finesse that most men strive their entire life for. Clearly he is successful at what he does, but when you only ever see someone in the same room, in the same chair, it's hard to think of them in any other way. Yet now as I watch him, I see it more than ever. From the way his long fingers flex around the wheel, and the smooth way he controls the car, to the sharp line of his jaw, and that dark twinkle in his eye as he smiles at me. A smile that is usually hidden by his glasses, but not tonight. Yes, there is something about him, and he is definitely very attractive.

"How much did you have to drink tonight?" he asks abruptly, pulling me from my appraisal of him and I frown.

"I had one drink, why?" I reply instantly, confused as to why he would even be asking, it's not like I am acting drunk.

His eyes flick between me and the road again, but I keep my stare on him and note his fingers tightening around the wheel. "Because usually when someone looks at me the way you are it's because they want something, something I'm very sure you don't want." His voice trails off as if he was going to add in the word 'yet' at the end but stops himself.

Embarrassment burns through me and my cheeks heat as I drop my stare into my lap, as the words that I haven't been able to stop thinking about for days rush through me. And it's with those in mind that I clear my throat and whisper, "I thought you told me to explore my needs."

His foot presses down on the gas a little as we reach the edge of town, and another silence lingers between us for so long that I think he isn't going to answer, and the conversation is over. I give him my shoulder, turning my head out of the window to focus my attention elsewhere, but then he asks, "And did you?"

I hate how fast I turn back towards him as he speaks, but suddenly the air between us is thick and I can't help but ask in return, "Did I what?"

Once again, his stare collides with mine as he says, “Did you explore your needs?” His question stuns me, and all I can do is stare at him with my mouth open, as he watches me. “No point going shy on me now, Miss Parker, I already know all of your secrets, what’s one more?” I open my mouth to respond, but nothing comes out, and all he does is laugh, his bravado nothing like what I’m used to. “Not to worry, the night is still young.”

Still, I don’t respond because for once I have nothing to say. This is nothing like the man I am usually accustomed to, which I suppose isn’t too surprising, it’s not like we can share a joke when I am trauma dumping all over his sofa. But if I wasn’t mistaken, I’d say he was being completely playful with me, maybe even flirting, but no, that can’t be right, can it?

I mean I’m not one of those women who isn’t aware of the appeal I hold to the opposite sex. Unfortunately, I have been aware of that since I was a child, and it didn’t diminish as I got older, I guess I just never expected that kind of attention from *him*. Dr. Baines has been nothing but professional within our sessions, always making me feel safe and comfortable, but right now we aren’t in session, and though I still feel those things, I also feel something else, something I’m not sure I’m allowed to even feel.

Before I can bother to come up with a response, or even try to think to change the subject to more neutral territory, he cuts into the silence once more, completely throwing me for a loop. “We’re almost there,” he says smoothly, as if our last conversation didn’t occur, steering the car onto a quiet dirt road that looks well used. “My house is just down here.”

Shock flows through me as I register his words and what they mean. He’s taking me to his house. That is not what I expected at all when he said he knew the perfect place for me, and I’m not sure it’s even appropriate given our professional relationship, but right now I don’t really have a choice, and I suppose it is better than using my name and card to check into a hotel. I bet he realized that too, it’s probably why he brought me here.

My eyes move back out the window as I take in the long path of thick trees that pass us by, wondering what type of home he has. It's quiet, so quiet that all I can hear are my thoughts, and I can't see any other buildings or people around, and when we get deeper into the woods, I spy a tall black fence up ahead of us. Dr. Baines slows down the car and opens his window as he pulls up next to a keypad. He reaches out his arm and taps in a code and then the gates ahead of us slowly start to open. I knew he had money, it's obvious in the way he dresses, and even more so in the car he drives, but this is something else entirely. Something completely unexpected.

We continue the path through the trees until they start to part, revealing a huge black cabin, with a wrap-around porch and a guest house to one side, then a lake with a deck and a boat to the other. It's beautiful, like something out of a magazine, and I'm not sure I have ever been anywhere so serene in my life. Dr. Baines directs his car into a space by the front porch, killing the engine quickly and getting out to open my door for me.

I don't even thank him because my jaw is wide open as I take in the beautiful piece of land he has here, and I can't help but feel envious that someone gets to call this little slice of heaven home. My head turns in every direction and so does his, as if he is also looking for something. What? I'm not sure, but I am too fixated on taking everything in to even ask. He closes the door behind him, and I hear the lock click into place as he guides me around the car with that gentle touch on my elbow again, and for the first time since I saw the man in the mask earlier, I feel like I can breathe again.

We move towards the front door together and finally I find my words. "Thank you again for this, Dr. Baines, you have no idea how much I appreciate it." I feel like once we get inside, I can fully calm down and explain my situation to him, and I know he more than anyone will understand and want to help me.

His smile is both sweet and wicked at the same time, if that is even possible, as he stares down at me in delight. "Oh,

Alora, I would do anything to keep you safe, don't you see that?" He reaches up and tucks a hair behind my ear, and I freeze a little at the unexpected contact as he adds, "And please, we're not on the clock tonight remember? Call me Jacob."

His name has barely left his lips before the hit comes and darkness descends.

CHAPTER 6

Jacob



Captivity. Most would agree it's a dark and ungodly thing, that it's inhumane, wrong, yet what they won't tell you is that sometimes it's necessary. Sometimes an animal is too wild, too free, and sometimes they are even too coveted. People want them even when they shouldn't, and they take them without ever thinking of the consequences, and the only way you can save them is to capture them and keep them for yourself.

That's what brings me here now with my little doll. Too many people have already had her, hurt her, ruined her, and here I am picking up the pieces just to keep her intact. I've bided my time for long enough and let her roam free, but now she belongs to me, and I won't ever let her go again. I won't let the monsters of her past get their claws back into her, they've already done enough damage, and now it's time I repair what they broke.

Dragging her unconscious body from the front steps towards the small guest house, I relish in the fact that I didn't have to hunt her down. For once she came to me. There was no following her home, no stalking her like prey, no watching the cameras and waiting for the perfect moment to strike. No, instead she ran towards me, caught like a deer in headlights, searching for someone to save her, and there I was. I couldn't have planned it better myself, and now I get to have more fun than I ever imagined.

I drag her until I reach the chains I installed against the back wall, and then make quick work of fixing them around her wrists, before standing back and admiring my work. Some of her tights have ripped thanks to me moving her, and there is mud staining her skirt and cheeks, but she has never looked more perfect. I reach out and drag my thumb across her chin, just envisioning all the fun we are going to have together, and my cock hardens at the thought, but I step back and focus on what I need to do first. After all, we have an unexpected guest we must attend to. So, once I double check that she is secure and comfortable, I make my way back to my car and pop the trunk, smiling down at the limp body inside.

Tonight is going to be fun.

Cooper Williams is an esteemed businessman, just like his buddy Jeff, it's no wonder they ran in the same circles as Alora's father. Their disappearance will make major news no doubt, and I can't wait to hear some of the theories they come up with in regard to what happened to them. They'll never know that justice was brought to them in the name of the little girl they ruined, but I will, and so will she.

I get him in the same place I had his little friend earlier today, smiling as I restrain him knowing that they will never find what's left of him, and then move my focus to my weapons. Like his friend, his death will be bloody, but not quick, no, I have far more time on my hands this evening, and my little doll deserves only the best. An encore she will remember forever.

Taking my time to get him perfectly in position, I move my focus to my weapons, swapping out some of what I need from what I used earlier, and adding in some delightful little extras, until finally it's show time. Then I move to fetch the hose, turning it to cold, and spraying it over my little doll, startling her slumbered state back to life. Her entire body jerking as her choked scream fills the room, much to my utter delight. She looks even more perfect with water dripping down her skin and nothing but panic in her eyes, and when she

brings that wide-eyed little stare to mine, I see confusion stain her brow.

“Dr. Baines?” she coughs out, not yet noticing our friend hanging to her left, but all I hear is that name, the one that draws a line between us. The one that says she could never be mine, that we are wrong for one another, and I feel that familiar burning rage pulse through me.

“I told you to call me Jacob!” I bellow, losing control of my temper for just a second, and she flinches away, making the chains keeping her here clank together.

The noise draws her attention as her eyes instantly drop to her wrists, slowly taking in the thick metal wrapped around them. I watch as she examines them meticulously, twisting her arm from side to side as if she can't quite believe what she is seeing. Her head begins to shake, her shoulders trembling, as her mind tries to make her deny what is right in front of her. Quick, panting breaths start to fall from her lips, and excitement burns through me as those petrified eyes come back to mine. She isn't looking at me in the same way she normally does, there is no trust or connection there, in fact, she is looking at me as if she has never seen me before, and what do I do? I let her see me, the real me, the one who is no longer patient and willing to wait for what I want. Instead, tonight is the night I take it all.

“I, I,” she stutters out, shaking her head in disbelief. “I don't understand.”

The fear in her voice has my cock leaking beneath my jeans, so fucking perfect, and as I close the distance between us, she presses herself into the wall behind her to try and get away from me. “I've waited a very long time for you, Alora, and after tonight I get you all to myself.”

I grip her chin tightly between my thumb and forefinger and push her head to the left so she can finally realize we are not alone, and I watch as her eyes widen when she takes in the masked man hanging from my ceiling.

“Oh my god,” she chokes out a cry, tears now spilling down her face as she darts her eyes between the two of us. “You’re one of them,” she sobs. “I trusted you; I thought you were helping me, but you’re with them.”

Anger floods me again at her accusation and I drag her face back to mine, my fingers biting into her pale, milky skin, no doubt leaving a black mark. “Insult me like that again and I will take you over my fucking knee,” I spit, trying and failing not to imagine doing just that. “I’m nothing like that, I’m not here to hurt you, I’m here to protect you,” I add, using my thumb to swipe a tear from her cheek. “Surely you can see that.”

She watches in a mixture of fascination and confusion as I suck her tears into my mouth from my thumb and groan. “I knew you’d cry so pretty,” I whisper, taking in every inch of her tear-stained face, and imagining how good it would be to shove my cock in her throat and make her cry even more. “You’re so fucking perfect for me.” Our eyes remain locked until she looks almost lost in me, but then I straighten back up and take a step back.

We have business to attend to before we have our fun after all, and I plan on making it the best night of our lives.

Giving Alora my back, I head towards my table of weapons and pick up the discarded rag from the corner, dousing it in smelling salts, before moving back towards our mutual friend and finally ripping off his mask.

“Cooper,” my little doll whispers, and I’m not even sure she’s realized she said it out loud, but I watch a hundred memories of what he did to her flash across her face, and all it does is spur me on even more.

I shove the rag under his nose and watch in excitement as his body jerks awake, a loud groan ripping from his chest, as he jolts around against his chains. When his eyes finally focus, I see that beautiful mixture of fear and confusion that always consumes the people I bring to this room, and all I can do is smile as he realizes his newfound fate. Clearly, he is smarter

than his friend because no threats fall from his lips, and instead he looks almost regretful, especially when he looks at her, which was another mistake on his part. No one gets to look at her but me, and now I am going to ruin him slowly and deeply, just like he did her.

“Alora,” he forces out in a confused whisper. “Alora Parker? What?” he trails off, lost in his confusion as I step between them and sever his line of sight to her.

“Don’t you dare speak her name,” I warn him quietly, unsheathing the knife from beneath my jacket. “You don’t even fucking look at her, she is here as my guest and gets to watch what I am going to do to you, but you don’t fucking talk to her.”

His eyes are wide and afraid as he takes me in, and not once do they try and look past me as he asks, “Who are you?”

My smile is feral now as I respond, “Who am I?” I laugh, shaking my head as I erase the distance between us, and grip one of his shoulders to keep him steady. “Why, I am your worst fucking nightmare you miserable cunt.” I slam the blade right between two of his ribs, so it hits the bottom of his lung, and rejoice in the scream of pain that turns into a choked gargle as I rip the knife back out.

He slumps against his chains almost instantly, and I back away to allow my little doll to watch him bleed. She is staring at him in shock, as if she can’t quite believe what just happened, what I just did, but she forgets how well I know her. I see parts of her she has never shown to anyone, parts she hasn’t even discovered herself yet, and I want to be the one to help her. I want to rip her open and let all her secrets and desires drown us together, until the only life raft she has is me. Granted, she doesn’t really understand just how well I truly know her, how long I have been watching her, waiting for her, but tonight she will. Tonight, I will show her every part of me, and every part of her, and come morning the men who hurt her will be nothing but a distant memory, and she and I will live on forever.

For a few moments the two of us just listen to the sounds of him choking on his own blood, like it's a symphony of our love for one another, and when he starts to quieten down, I stab him again. And again. Picking strategic points on his body every time, prolonging his suffering, and pushing her satisfaction and payback, until blood pools between us. Only then do I pause, admiring my work, admiring her even more. Her entire body is shaking, sweat coating her neck, her hair damp against her forehead, as her chest moves heavily up and down.

"I imagine your father died rather quickly," I start, breaking into his pained groans, and snapping her stare to mine. "I read the report on his death, you really did excellent work on him, Miss Parker," I muse, wiping off some of Cooper's blood onto my jeans. "Sixty-seven stab wounds they counted," I say with a smile, as I recall the information I read about her Halloween night of horrors. "God, it makes me hard just thinking about it," I admit with a savage smile.

"I am nothing like you," she replies with a shaky voice. "I killed him to protect myself, but this," she trails off, shifting her gaze back to Cooper, and I can fill in the words she wants to say.

This is wrong.

This is torture.

This is sick.

This is twisted.

I can hear them, but she doesn't say them, because she can't. She doesn't think this is wrong, and yes it might be torture, and it might be sick and twisted, but she is enjoying every fucking second of it.

"Jeff died quickly too," I push on, not bothering to let her continue. "I couldn't take my time with him today like I wanted to, not when I had a special date to get to." I wink at her knowingly and her frown only deepens. "Oh yes, I killed him, my little doll, I sliced open his gut and choked him to

death with it. It was quite beautiful, I wish you could have seen it, but no matter. What I do with him,” I nod my head towards our guest. “Will be even more spectacular.”

Tears stain her cheeks once more, but her eyes look more alive than ever. “You’re killing them for me,” she says, but not in question, more like in disbelief, and my shoulders drop as I stalk towards her.

I tilt her chin up, forcing her to look at me, as my now bloody thumb caresses her lips. “There isn’t anything I wouldn’t do for you, Alora, don’t you see?” I drag my hand down until it closes around her neck, leaving a delicious red path in my wake, as I squeeze ever so gently. “You own me, I’m yours, tell me you’re mine.”

Her mouth parts as if on instinct but no words come, and I have to push aside the disappointment that floods my chest. But it’s okay, soon she will see, soon she will understand.

I bring up my other hand, the one still holding the knife and force it against her cheek. “Can you feel his blood against your skin? Feel how I made him hurt for you, feel how I am turning him into nothing like he tried to do to you.” I use my grip on her neck to force her eyes to him instead of me. “Look at him, Alora, look at how weak and pathetic he is, look how easily he bleeds. He is nothing, he is just blood and bones like everyone else, he has no power, not in here with me, and certainly not in here.” I tap the knife to the side of her head, and her eyes come back to me. “He is nothing, and you are everything.”

I’m not sure if she realizes she is even nodding, but I watch her absorb every word I just said as she whispers back, “I am everything.”

Three words have never sounded so good and I smile as I say, “I want a list, love. I want the name of every man who has ever hurt you and I will take out every single one of them until there isn’t a single name left.”

Her eyes widen in fear as she shakes her head, refusing to give them up, but it's no matter. I'll get them soon enough. My cock is straining against my jeans, begging me to fuck her right here in his blood, but I will never let him see her like that again. So first I must take out the trash.

“I'm going to end this, Alora. I am going to make him suffer, make him pay, and when I'm done, you won't ever have to worry again about the monsters of your past coming to find you, because I will kill anyone who ever tries to hurt you again.” I reluctantly let go of her neck, then take a step back, bringing up the blade in my hand so I can brandish it between us. “Now, would you like to play with me, my little doll?”

CHAPTER 7

Alora



My head is throbbing with pain from where I am guessing he hit me, even more so with the shock and confusion of this whole situation as I stare at him, his question hanging in the air between us. I thought I knew him; I thought I could trust him, I thought I could tell him my secrets and they would be safe with him, that I would be safe with him. How could I have been so wrong? I know men like him, I was forced to grow up by men like him, so why didn't I see it?

The blade in his hand shines beneath the dull overhead light, the blood on the floor reflecting that same light as he watches me and waits for an answer. My eyes flick back to Cooper, he's hanging on by a thread, his shallow, choked breaths loud in the silence left behind by Dr. Baines' question, but all I can focus on is his blood. It's everywhere. His clothes, his skin, the floor, all of it stained with the pain that the man in front of me wielded down against him, and why? Because he hurt me. I guess I should be flattered, but the look in his eye tells me he didn't do this to protect me. No, it's because he wants to own me. He might think he is different from Cooper, and Jeff, and my father, but I can tell from the look in his eyes he's just the same. A crazy, fucked up man with too much power, and they don't just want what they can't have, they take it too.

I need to get out of here.

My mind runs a thousand miles a minute as I try to come up with a plan to escape, and I can't do anything in these

chains, so I must be smart. I think about everything he just said, about the look on his face as he said I own him, there wasn't just need there, there was obsession, and maybe I could use that to my advantage. An idea starts to form in my head, and I force myself to breathe in and out slowly to try and calm myself down enough to talk, and only when I think I can do it do I open my mouth.

"Yes," I start on a shaky whisper, before taking another deep breath. "Yes, Jacob, I want to play with you."

His name sounds foreign on my lips, but there's a deep groan that rips from the back of his throat as my words roll over him, and I swear I see his entire body shudder. Before I can register anything else he is already erasing the space between us and gripping my wrists between his hands. I watch in anticipation as he fumbles in his pocket until he produces a key. Then he is unlocking my restraints without another thought and helping me stand on shaky legs.

My body feels tired and weak, but I have been here before, I know what I must do. I let my eyes meet his as I whisper, "Do you think he deserves sixty-seven or more?" His eyes light up in excitement, as he buys into me being on his side, and when he brings up my hand and pushes the blade into it, I must force myself to keep a blank face.

"Give him everything you've got, my little doll," he purrs, closing my knuckles around his knife.

"Thank you," I nod, taking a subtle step towards him. "I will." Then I plunge the knife into Jacob's shoulder, trying and failing to hit his heart, but I don't stick around to check out the damage.

I'm running, fleeing the small house, only pausing on the threshold for a second as I weigh up my options. *The car.* I throw myself against it, begging for it to be unlocked, but of course it isn't. *Fuck.* My eyes scan the grounds again and I spy a boat bobbing by the dock, but I don't know where the lake leads, and I doubt I will be fast enough, so on foot it is. I run,

throwing myself into the tree line by the path we drove down to stay out of sight, but still be able to know where I'm going.

“Aloraaaa!” His growl bellows through the trees as he calls out my name, and my entire body responds. “You can run but you can't hide, my little doll,” he adds, in a pained shout, the sound already getting closer.

Twigs break beneath my feet, as branches snap against my face, the wind whipping into my skin like a cold, harsh attack, but they are welcome in comparison to what fate awaits me back there.

I don't stop.

I can't.

If I stop, I die, I just know it. So, I ignore the pounding in my head, and the pain in my lungs as they beg for air, and I just keep running.

I am breathless as his voice shouts out again, “There isn't a place in this world you could hide from me, there isn't a line in this world I wouldn't cross for you, and there isn't anything I wouldn't do for you, except for letting you go. You're mine, Alora.” Every word is like a bullet into my back, each one of them louder and closer than the one before, as tears spill down my face.

When I finally spy the gate up ahead, I launch myself at it, not caring about the pain of the metal as it slams into my skin. No, the only thing that matters is getting out of here. Of course, the gate is locked, and no matter how hard I pull, it doesn't budge. I'm going to have to climb it. It's easily as tall as the house I just fled from, but I have no other choice. I need to get out of here.

Reaching up, I grab onto the bars and heave myself up, running on nothing but pure adrenaline as I hear the crunching of branches getting closer behind me. He's coming. I climb onto a bar and then another, not pausing to look back, so the grab on my ankle comes from nowhere. One minute I am heading up towards the top, and the next I am descending back

down, being tossed to the ground by a rough grip on my hair. And before I can even try to move, he is on me, his firm body against my back, pressing me further into the dirt.

I taste a mixture of blood and mud on my tongue as I fight against him, but it's no use, he's too strong. Even as he brings one of his hands up to brush some of my hair out of my face. "I knew you would be so fun to play with, Alora, feel how much it turns me on to hunt you down." He pairs his words with a thrust of his hips, his thick erection digging directly in between my ass cheeks, as I try not to scream and continue to thrash. "Keep fighting, love, it only turns me on more." He leans down and licks up my cheek, tasting the moisture of my tears and groaning in my ear.

"You sick bastard," I spit out, throwing my head back and smashing into his nose, but he barely even reacts.

No, instead he pulls back, flips me over, and then presses me back into the earth until we are nose to nose. "Did you think you could escape me, my little doll?" he breathes, forcing my legs apart and settling himself between my thighs, his cock rutting against my pussy with every roll of his hips. "Did you think this would stop me?" He frees one of his hands and swipes it across the bloody shoulder where I implanted the knife. "I'm not your father, Alora, I won't let anything stop me from making you mine, not even you." He shoves his blood covered fingers into my mouth, pressing down on my tongue until I am choking around them. "Taste my pain, because soon the only thing this throat will know is my pleasure."

Any rebuttal I might have had dies on my tongue as soon as he pulls his fingers out, and I turn my head to the side and cough and splutter up the blood he left there. I don't even get a chance to catch my breath before he is tossing me around again and hog tying my limbs together. I twist and squirm, but nothing helps, and before I can even take another breath, I am face down in the mud again and being dragged away from the only escape I could have hoped for.

By the time we make it back to the house I can feel cuts and bruises all over my body, and when he unties my limbs from one another I move to fight again, but this time he grabs me by the throat, cutting off my air supply.

“I can’t breathe,” I gasp, desperately trying to escape his murderous embrace.

“If I wanted you to breathe you would be,” he says, choking me even harder, as he uses some of the rope to fasten it around my neck. When his fingers finally release me, the restraint is a welcome reprieve, even as I try to move and find that I can’t.

The rope now connects my wrists to my ankles and runs up around my neck and through a fixture in the wall, keeping me in a sitting position. I can’t move at all, not without choking myself. Maybe that’s the only option left, and as he takes a step back and runs his bloodied hands through his hair, I half expect him to put me out of my misery here and now, but instead he moves his attention back to Cooper.

“Everything I do is for you,” he mutters, using the knife I stabbed him with to cut through my abuser’s clothes, stripping him completely. “They came for you, and I stopped them. I helped you, I watched you, I protected you, why can’t you see that?” Once Cooper is naked, Dr. Baines moves to stand behind him and shifts his focus back to me. “You think I don’t know you, Alora, but I do. I know the power you hold, the freedom you crave so badly, and here I am ready to hand it to you on a plate, and what do you do?” He plunges the knife through Cooper’s shoulder in the exact same spot I stabbed him. “You throw it all back in my face!” he roars, and fresh tears burn at the back of my eyes, because despite all his fucked up crazy and everything he has done to me, I can’t deny what is right in front of me. Yes, he hurt me, but he is killing them, or at least I think he is.

“Jacob,” I whisper, my voice trembling, but he pauses instantly at the sound of my voice. Staring at me with pleading eyes as if he is dying to hear what I have to say. “Did you

really kill Jeff?” I ask quietly, desperately trying to stop myself from falling apart in front of him, ironically using the breathing techniques he taught me against him.

At my question he pulls the knife from Cooper’s shoulder, who is either already dead, or unconscious from the pain because he doesn’t even flinch. Not that Dr. Baines even notices, no he is too busy discarding his knife on the table and moving towards the fridge in the corner. When he comes back there is cooler in his hand and he is already reaching inside before I can ask what’s in it.

“The hands that touched you,” he starts, tossing two bloodied fists at my feet, and if I could recoil I would, as I stare at them in distress. “The tongue that tasted you.” Another blood coated thing joins the others and bile burns the back of my throat. “And the cock that fucked you.” He throws one final body part beside the others and tosses the cooler to one side, as he kneels next to me. “I took them all from him, after I took his life, and now they belong to you, my little doll.” His hands are dripping in blood as he brings them up to stroke my cheeks, but I don’t move, not this time. “Look at you, do you have any idea how fucking perfect you look covered in their blood?”

My lips quake as I part them and whisper, “I’m also covered in yours.” I’m not sure why I say it, but it’s the only thought that flashes through my mind, and his eyes darken in response.

“No need to flirt with me, love,” he groans, painting my lips in red, and when I try to move this time, the rope tightens even more around my neck, and he smiles. “I’m already hard as fuck, and we still have stuff to finish here before we go to bed.” When he steps back this time there is a coldness left behind in the pit of my stomach, but he doesn’t notice.

Instead, he moves back towards the table, retrieves some tools and then I watch silently as he stabs Cooper sixty-seven times, each time in the name of the childhood that was robbed from me. Before removing his hands, his tongue and finally

his cock, until there is no mistaking he is now dead. But it's still not enough. Dr Baines then slits his throat, carves out his heart and tosses it at my feet along with the remains of Jeff, and all I can do is stare in relief.

They're gone, they're dead, I'm free. Well, from them at least.

CHAPTER 8

Jacob



Tears flow down her cheeks as she watches me work, and by the time I toss the heart, to sit beside the rest of what's left of two men that had a hand in ruining her, I think she finally understands. There isn't anyone I wouldn't kill for her, and I won't let anyone hurt her again. Her face is stained in a mixture of emotion and death, and she has never looked more perfect, not even when she is sleeping. Her eyes flick from the organs, to where Cooper still hangs in chains, and I swear I see the weight of his now dead presence lift off her shoulders.

I move towards her, brushing the trash aside with my feet as I reach for the rope around her neck, and pull it until her eyes move to mine. "They took from you, so I took from them. I took their freedom, their pleasure, and their life." Every single word is paired with a caress, my hands exploring her freely as she stares up at me blankly. Her snow-colored skin is now a mixture of pink and red, making her so breathtakingly beautiful. "Look how safe I make the world for you, my little doll," I purr, stroking my hands down her neck and chest, relishing in the beat of her heart beneath my palms.

Her mouth parts as if she wants to say something, but all I can focus on are her blood-stained lips. I can still remember the way they looked in her sleep every night, parted and puckered, even in her state of relaxation. I can remember how her hot breath felt against my shaft, how her mouth caressed the tip of my cock. The way I'd mark her as mine with my cum even as she slept, and now I get to keep her forever.

So, I look at her, drinking in her perfectly marred skin, and the bright silver of her hair, now dark with mud and blood. My cock is heavy against my zipper as I think about all the ways I want to play with her, and I know it's time. Time to push her limits, time to explore her needs, time to get her to see what it will be like living here with me. I want to hear her moans, feel her pussy tighten around my dick, know what it sounds like when she screams out my name.

Night after night I snuck into her room and danced around the edges of her pleasure, only ever truly seeking my own, but now she's here, she's mine, and I can do anything I want with her. It's why with her mouth parted I don't hesitate. I grip her neck, pulling her until she is strained against the rope, and then I slam my lips to hers, slipping my tongue into her mouth before she even tries to fight this thing between us. She responds instantly, lost to the shock of my intrusion, as her tongue flicks out against mine, meeting it stroke for stroke, but then my resolve breaks and I groan into her hot, needy little mouth, and she freezes.

I feel her entire body tense and squirm as she tries to fight me off, tries to deny that she wants me as much as I want her, but then my little doll remembers how tough she is. I feel the first graze of her teeth against my lips, and I imagine how it will feel when that is my cock, right up until she bites down on my tongue so hard that she draws blood. My pained grunt slips out against her lips before I rip my mouth from hers and pant to catch my breath.

Her chest rises and falls rapidly as she glares at me in triumph, but she doesn't realize who she is playing with. I thought I had shown her the beast that lurks beneath my skin, but apparently, she wants him to come out and ruin her even more. It's why I keep my eyes on hers as I reach down to her waist and shove up her skirt, revealing her laced-covered pussy. She tries and fails to snap her legs closed, to get me off, but she doesn't know that not even a locked door and a deep slumber could stop me before. When I want something, it

becomes mine, no questions asked, and she will not be the exception.

“Tell me you’re mine,” I demand, reaching beneath her skirt and ripping her underwear in two until her cunt is free for the taking.

“Never!” she spits, as she continues to thrash and fight, all the while my cock leaks beneath my jeans, begging to come out and play. I laugh, reaching out to grip her throat once more, my thumb circling the pulse point there as I spit onto the fingers of my other hand and shove them between her thighs. “No, please,” she begs, and it sounds just as sweet as I expected it would, and with a mixture of saliva and blood, I tease the line of her cunt until it feels moist against the pads of my fingertips.

Then I push them past her lips in search of her clit and she gasps, her entire body starting to quiver as she chokes out, “I said no,” she pants out in a half groan as I slide one of my fingers deep inside her.

“I heard you,” I grit out through my teeth, glancing down to watch my finger slowly sink inside of her again. “But do you know what else I hear?” I ask, bringing my thumb to her clit and pressing down until she gasps again. “The sound of your heart, it’s racing.” I tighten the hand around her throat as I lean down and speak the next words against her mouth. “It’s pulsing against my hand, just like your sweet little cunt is.” She tries to shake her head, then bite her lips, but it still doesn’t stop the breathy moan that I pull from her throat.

“Oh god,” she cries in utter defeat, not even realizing that her hips are starting to meet the movement of my hand, especially when I add another finger inside of her, and press harder circles against her clit.

“There is no god here, Alora, just me, the man who would do anything in this world to make you happy.” I fuck her with my fingers, pushing her closer and closer to the edge, as her eyes flick over to Cooper’s dead body and widen in nothing but awe and delight as I bring my mouth to her ear. “Do you

want me to stop?” I ask, letting the silence after my question linger, so she can hear the wet slap of my fingers as they fuck her pussy hard and fast. “No, you don’t want me to stop, do you?” I tease, my thumb rubbing her harder and rougher. “You want me to fuck you with my fingers just like this, don’t you? You want to look at the dead pieces of the men who hurt you and come as you cry out my name in thanks for taking them away for you.”

“Oh god, stop, please let this end,” she cries, and it’s almost pathetic how desperately she lies, as her pussy tightens around my hand, and her body quivers beneath me.

“Stop?” I ask with a laugh, pulling back and dropping my forehead to hers until our eyes lock, and our lips almost touch as I talk. “There is no end for you and I, Alora, I don’t exist without you, everything I do, everything I am, it is all yours.” I force my lips to hers once more, and when I pull back, she is still staring at me in a mix of fear and wonder. I let my own eyes drop, as I add, “I think you can take another finger.”

I don’t wait for her response, just add a third finger to her cunt and let the rasps of her pleasure roll over me as I finally claim her pussy as my own. How many nights did I imagine this? How many times did I watch her sleep feeling completely desperate to fuck her raw? And now she is dripping against my fingers as I make her moan in disgust and delight.

“Dr. Baines,” she grits through her teeth, desperately trying to not feel her pleasure, and I bite back a growl in the back of my throat at the sound of that name. Something she notices instantly, and when I move to pull away, she drops her head to mine and pleads against my lips. “Jacob,” she moans “I think, I think I’m going to...” she trails off, not wanting to say the words, not wanting to admit the effect I am having on her body.

“That’s it, love, give it to me, don’t hold back, enjoy their pain, feel your pleasure,” I coax, fucking and rubbing her

pussy, as I press our heads together, and keep our eyes locked in an intimate stare.

She looks scared. Aroused, yes, but also petrified. Scared of me, of us, of everything we could become, and it's with that thought in mind that I push her over the edge completely. Her climax crashing through her, making her entire body convulse, her slender neck strains against the frayed ropes as she tosses her head back, exposing her throat to me. I use a grip on her chin to keep her in place, trailing my mouth along the column allowing my lips to feel every moan and vibration as she falls apart beneath me.

Fucking perfect.

Only once I have completely wrung out her pleasure do I stop, retreating my dripping fingers and bringing them straight to my mouth where I suck them dry. She tastes sweet, innocent, pure, just completely and utterly like mine, and I close my eyes and groan as I lick her clean from my skin. God I can't wait to bury my head between her thighs and drown myself in her, worship at the altar of perfection that is Alora Parker, but all in good time.

When I open my eyes, she is watching me, her stare blown out in a lust-filled daze as if she can't believe I just made her come. Before any other thoughts or feelings can run through her, I move onto my knees and reach for my belt and zipper, unleashing my rock-hard cock and stroking it instantly. I hear the sharp intake of her breath when I pull myself free and the sound of it is almost as thrilling as her stare dropping to take in my thick length. I stroke it up and down and groan as she gasps again, completely focused on my pleasure and it takes everything in me not to come instantly.

“Do you have any idea how many times I have fucked my fist just thinking about you, Alora?” I ask, not really searching for an answer, and still her stare doesn't break. “No, why would you? But soon, my love, soon you will see just how much I need you.”

I'm so turned on, and with the taste of her still fresh on my tongue, and the sight of her thighs spread wide, her cunt still dripping, it's not even going to be a minute before I am exploding. I fuck my fist hard staring at every inch of exposed and bloody skin she has on display and imagine just how soon I am going to get to sink inside her wet heat. My balls tighten as my orgasm races towards me and I beg, "Tell me you're mine."

Her eyes dance up to mine and her mouth opens as if she is going to say it, but I know she won't, she's not ready. Instead, she sighs almost silently, "Jacob." And it's enough to send me completely over the edge.

I come hard, spurting thick ropes of cum across her bare thighs and pussy until I am breathless, while still slowly stroking my cock as it softens. Once again, her eyes drop to my satisfied (for now) dick, emotion staining her face as she starts to shake her head. My thumb captures the tear that escapes her eyelashes before it can dance its way down her cheek, and when her body starts to tremble for a different reason, I move to tuck myself away, and cut the ropes restraining her.

"Come on, love, it's been a busy night and you need some rest." I gently untie her, then scoop her bruised and bloodied body into my arms and start making my way over to the main house. I will have to come back and deal with Cooper, but she is the only thing that matters right now.

It's raining heavily when we make it outside and we get drenched just from the short walk between the two buildings, but my little doll doesn't even notice. No, her eyes are still focused on me, even after she dropped her head to my shoulder, which I'm not sure she even realizes she did, but I noticed, of course I did. The feel of her arms around me, the weight of her in mine, her hot breath against my neck, all of it sends me completely crazy as I lead us to her room.

When we arrive a buzz of excitement shoots down my spine. This is it; this is the moment I have been waiting for,

searching for, this is the moment I have dreamt about for over a year, and now I am finally making it happen. I open the door without setting her down, but once we are inside and the door is securely closed behind us, I let her stand on shaky legs. The silence is infuriating, but I know she needs to take a moment to come to terms with what just happened between us.

Her eyes dart everywhere, fear and wonder on her face as she takes in the room that is almost a mirror image of her own. There are a few differences of course, I couldn't get it to completely match, but it's close enough. All the souvenirs I stole over the last year certainly add to it, but I don't think my little doll likes it as much as I expected.

"What," she gasps, trailing off, her head whipping in every direction. "What is this, I don't understand?" She is fully crying now, but when I attempt to take a step towards her and soothe her, she snaps her arms up. "Don't come near me," she warns, anger lacing her tone, and I hold my own arms up in defeat, retreating towards the door as she spits, "What the hell is this?"

I let her survey the room a couple more times, all of it so familiar yet new at the same time. Of course, the windows are fake, and the walls and doors are reinforced with steel to ensure she can't slip out, but apart from that, I think I have done a great job. Clearly, she just needs some space to take it all in, so I open the door and slip out, but not before saying, "This is your room, Alora, welcome home."

The slamming of the door muffles her screams, and I wish I could retreat to my own room and watch her on my cameras but that will have to wait a while. I have a mess in the guest house I must clean up first, then I can come back and play with my doll.

CHAPTER 9

Alora



I jolt awake and find myself curled up in a ball on the floor by my bedroom door, my eyes flickering beneath the harsh overhead light, and for just a few seconds I close them again, letting myself escape from the nightmare I am waking from. As my nightmares go, that was by far the craziest, and I am thankful it's over. I uncurl my body, straighten my legs, and enjoy the cracks of relief that dance up along my spine. My body is stiff and aching, and I can't remember how I ended up by my door, but sleeping on the floor is not for the weak. Allowing myself a few more seconds of silence is what alerts me to the pounding in my head, yet when I bring my hand up to press against my temple, I wince from pain on the outside too.

My eyes snap open, and it's only when everything truly comes in to focus that I realize everything is off. This isn't my room. Well, it is in the sense that it is almost identical to my actual room, but I'm not at home. I sit up instantly, plastering my spine to the back of the door, and survey my surroundings as my nightmare becomes my reality once more.

Everything that happened last night comes rushing back to me. The coffee shop, Jeff, the club, the man in the mask, Dr. Baines, Cooper, all of it blurring together as one, as I recall how I got here. He killed them, Dr. Baines killed them, he took them, he took me, and then he killed them, and now I am going to be next. I spent what felt like hours searching this room after he left me here last night, looking for a way out or anything that could help me escape or be used as a weapon,

but there was nothing. I searched and searched until I eventually fell asleep, I guess.

Now I am looking again, and it's insane that this entire place is a mirror image of a space I created, where I felt safety and comfort. Well not anymore. I will never be able to look at my bedroom the same again, that is, if I ever see it again. I stand up, ignoring the ripped Halloween costume I'm still wearing that reminds me too much of the night I murdered my father, and start to slowly look around the room again. The bedsheets are the same ones I have at home, the dresser is the one I built myself, though this one looks a little sturdier, and it's lined with products that decorate my own. All of them are my preferred brands, and it's only when I look closely that I realize some of them are used, and it's the same ones I am missing from home that I thought I'd misplaced. Bile rises in the back of my throat as I begin to question how he even got them in the first place, and my eyes dart to the door that I know leads to the ensuite.

I rush across the room and make it to the toilet just in time for me to empty my stomach contents into the bowl, which is already running on nothing since I haven't eaten since before I went to the Halloween party. There are no windows, so I have no idea what time it is, how long I slept for, or how long I've even been here, and the thought just makes me throw up even more. Once I am sure I'm done, and there isn't anything left to come up, I flush the toilet and turn to the sink to wash my hands.

My gaze collides with the mirror and my eyes widen in shock as I take in my appearance. My usual light, silvery hair is stained dark with a mixture of blood and mud, and vomit churns in my empty stomach again as I think about who the blood belongs to. My face and arms are covered in more of the same, but there are also cuts and bruises blackening my skin, and flashes of running and trying to get away cross my mind.

I turn on the faucet and start rinsing my hands as other images burn into my mind. I watched him kill Cooper. No, I watched him torture Cooper, and worse, he wanted my help.

Not because of what he did to me, but because he already knows that I am capable of doing the exact same thing he did. I mean, he gave me the knife and I didn't hesitate in stabbing him, yet still he was looking at me like he wanted my every secret, touching me like I was his and his alone.

A shudder wracks through my body as I think about how he touched me, as I think about how he touched himself. It was dirty and disgusting, yet it was also wicked and thrilling. He made me feel things I didn't want to feel, things I didn't even think I was able to feel, yet he knew. He knew what I needed, and he took it from me, just like he took everything else, and instead of continuing my battle against him, I came on his fingers like nothing more than a common whore.

What the hell is wrong with me?

A dry heave escapes me once more as I think about how hard I came, but then my traitorous thighs clench as I recall the way he tasted me from his fingers. Shaking my head in an attempt to rid myself of those thoughts, I give up on washing my hands and instead strip out of my dirty clothes and climb into the shower. Maybe I can wash away his sins along with my own.

The water cascades down my body and I drop my head, watching the red and black mix together before it disappears down the drain. The tears fall before I even allow them to, and soon I am once again curled up in a ball on the floor, praying that the water washes me away too. I'm not sure how long I stay like that, but it's long enough for the water to run cold, and by the time I am rinsing away my own shampoo and body wash, the temperature is freezing, and my body is back to shaking.

I brush my teeth, ignoring the presence of my favorite toothpaste and mouthwash as I rinse them both, and then I head back into the bedroom and pull out some clothes. I make sure to pick something that covers the most skin, opting for leggings and a sweater with a sports bra underneath, before securing my hair into a bun. Just as I am placing the last pin in

my hair, I hear the bolted door being unlocked, as if he was watching me and waiting for me to be done.

My back hits the wall on the opposite side of the room before the door has even fully swung open, and Dr. Baines is greeting me with a wide smile. “Good morning, Miss Parker, I trust you slept well,” he purrs with a smirk, as if he knows exactly how I slept, and I hate how his voice still comforts me.

“I want to go home,” I demand on instinct, knowing full well that if he ever lets me out of here that I am going to run and never look back.

“You look beautiful this morning,” he praises, ignoring my command completely, and holding his hand out towards the door. “Would you care to join me for breakfast?”

I stare at him in confusion, wondering what kind of mind games he is trying to play with me, but the longer I stare at him, the more genuine his offer looks. I have no idea what is going through his head. Unlike him I don't have any fancy PhDs under my belt. It's only then I wonder if he is even a real therapist, regardless, he knows me a lot better than I know him, and he is going to use that to his advantage.

Powerful men are all the same. It doesn't matter what their motives are, what they fantasize about, wielding their strength over women is their favorite sport. I just have to find out how *Jacob* likes to play the game and just hope that I survive in the process. His offer lingers between us, and it sparks an idea in my head. Maybe this is what I need to do, maybe I just go along with what he wants until I can try and get away. I can pretend, I have been doing it since I was a child, and I'm nodding before I even realize it, and his smile turns into a full-blown grin.

“Excellent,” he beams, moving towards me and holding his arm out for me to take, as if he is a perfect gentleman.

Before last night I thought he was, it was the sole reason I got in his car in the first place. That and the fact I thought there was only one psychopath after me. I almost laugh, how

could I have been so stupid? I force myself to suppress my flinch as I loop my arm through his and allow him to lead us towards the door together.

As soon as we leave the room my eyes devour everything in sight, tracking the other doors in the hallway, the windows at the end, and the view of the lake and the boat as we reach the stairs. When we get to the bottom, Dr. Baines releases my arm and gestures to where he has already set the table, complete with a bunch of flowers, and I force myself to smile. Yet as he walks away towards the kitchen, to check on a couple of pans that are sitting on a low heat on the hob, I remain frozen.

I really try not to let my panic consume me, but he is just acting so normal, as if nothing weird or criminal is occurring here, and when I flick my eyes towards the front door, I notice the bolt across it isn't locked. I am running before my mind even tells me to do so, but just as my hand bends around the handle ready to pull, my body is slammed against it in full force.

Pain lashes through me as his grip finds my hair, and his muscular frame curls around me. His breath is hot on my neck as he pants, "You disappoint me, my little doll." He buries his face in my hair and inhales deeply. "It looks like we will have to start things very slowly," he seethes, anger coating his tongue, and when I turn my head, I see darkness in his stare.

Before I can ask what that means, he is spinning me, tossing me over his shoulder, and then dropping me into one of the chairs around the table, securing my wrists behind my back. Then he parts my thighs and secures my ankles to two of the chair legs, leaving me completely defenseless again. When our gazes meet this time I see the darkness still there, yet as we stare at one another it slowly fades and his soothing smile reappears.

"Do you have any idea how perfect you look just offering yourself to me like this?" He reaches out to smooth my hair back before letting his fingers trail along my chin, down my

neck, and along my chest until he can cup one of my breasts roughly. His thumb starts to move meticulously across my nipple until it hardens, and only then does he say, “Tell me you’re mine.”

The four words slam into me as I recall him saying the same one’s last night over and over. Images of him fucking his fist storm to the front of my mind, but I quickly shut them out and swallow the silence that follows his words.

When I don’t respond or react, he pulls his hand back and sighs thickly. “You really need to start paying attention to what is happening here, Alora.” He gives me his back as he heads back to the kitchen area, and I sigh a breath of relief as he begins to plate up some food.

I already have marks around my neck, wrists, and ankles from where he restrained me last night, but it doesn’t stop me from pulling against the ropes as hard as I can without him noticing. I only stop when he turns back my way, and in an effort to keep his focus off my attempts, I ask, “What is happening here?”

Dr. Baines finishes plating up the food and then comes back over, placing it in front of me, before choosing a seat directly next to mine. “What’s happening here is that you’re mine now.” He says the words matter of factly, but then laughs. “Well, actually if we are being honest, you have been mine for a long time now.”

As he says that he leans across the table and grabs a remote, and when he clicks a few buttons a projector screen starts to descend from the ceiling, and once it’s down he presses some more buttons and brings up a video feed. It’s of the room he was keeping me in, no, no wait, it’s of my room, my actual room at home and there I am in the middle of the bed fast asleep. Goosebumps coat my skin as I watch my bedroom door open up slowly and sleeping me doesn’t even flinch as Dr. Baines crosses the room and watches over my sleeping form.

Horror pulses through me as I watch him watch me, and when he comes to stand behind me and leans down to whisper, “I told you, my little doll, you’re mine and I’m never letting you go.” I realize just how in over my head I truly am.

I am never getting out of here.

CHAPTER 10

Jacob



My gaze is torn between the digital version of her and the real version of her, the latter a lot more appealing in this moment as she stares wide-eyed at the screen. I can see a thousand questions burning there on the tip of her tongue, but it's the rapid way her chest heaves as she watches me unbuckle my belt. The angle of the camera offers the perfect view of my cock being unleashed and stroked between my fist, just like I did before her last night. It thickens in my slacks now as she becomes entranced with the little game of cat and mouse, she didn't even realize we were playing.

“Look how peaceful you slept, my love, how calm and comforted you are by my presence, by my pleasure.” I reach down and trail my fingers back to her breasts and cup them both. I don't even think she notices the gasp she lets slip, her eyes too trained on the screen, as I jerk myself against her sleeping mouth. “Do you have any idea how many times I watched you like this? How I was right there taking my pleasure, just so desperate to give you yours.”

I cup her tits harder, pulling at them roughly and becoming annoyed at the fabric in my way. Dragging her chair backwards, her gaze still not breaking from the screen, I stand in front of her, reaching into my pocket for my knife, and use it to slice through the material of her sweater, exposing her chest. Her tits are pushed together deliciously in a tight little sports bra that zips up the front, and I can see her hard nipples straining against it.

My mouth goes dry at the sight, and I can't stop myself from reaching out and unzipping the bra until her tits spill out completely. Only then does her gaze snap to mine. "What are you doing?" she gasps, her chest heaving now, her tits teasing me so completely.

"I'm going to make you feel as good as you make me feel, my love," I breathe, my thumb teasing at her hard nipple, before I lean down and lap my tongue against it, groaning at the sweet taste of her skin as she gasps. "I'm going to taste you, fuck you, fucking break you apart until you are begging me to stop." Her body begins to shake at the same time she subconsciously arches her back as I pull away. She wants this as much as I do. I reach up and turn her head back towards the screen. "Watch me come, while I make you feel good, my little doll."

I don't wait to see if she obeys, just bring my mouth back down to her nipple and lick and suck like I am dying and she is what I need to survive, which might be pretty accurate. I can't survive without her. She has become something I rely on so deeply that it's the only reason she is still alive, because I can't survive without her. I suck her and bite her tit furiously, relishing in the moans she tries and fails to keep concealed. Her back continues to arch, pushing her flesh further and further into my mouth until she is moaning without fear, and only then do I move to her other breast.

My tongue flicks against it rapidly, circling and caressing it with every back-and-forth motion until she is squirming against the ropes restraining her. When I pull back, her pleading gaze plummets to mine as she pleads, "Jacob, please." I replace my mouth with my thumb and pinch and squeeze until tears are gathering in her eyes.

"Please what, my little doll?" I ask sweetly, needing to hear her beg for me, but she smashes her lips together and just pushes into my hand, hoping I will just give her what she needs. "Ah ah," I warn, pulling my hands away and watching her slump against the back of the chair, her stare moving back

and forth between me and the screen. “If you want it, Alora, beg for it like a good girl.”

I can see the denial right there on the tip of her tongue, but then I brush my thumb lightly across her nipple again and she jerks, the first word being choked past her lips. “Please,” she begs. “Please, Jacob, please make me come.”

A wicked smile spreads across my mouth as her words flow through me. “Why, I thought you’d never ask,” I tease, pulling back and using my knife to shred the ropes restraining her, lifting her from the chair, swiping the table clean, and throwing her down on top of it.

I push her body until her head can hang off the end, forcing her to stare at the videos that play on loop of me sneaking into her room and claiming her while she sleeps, then I make quick work of ripping off her leggings and underwear. Only then do I climb atop the table, knife still in hand, and bring my mouth back to her tits, licking, flicking, and sucking until she is almost breathless beneath me. Yet I don’t stop there, I part her thighs and settle myself between them, my cock painfully hard as I bring the butt of my knife handle to the center of her pussy lips.

When I press it down in search of her clit, her head snaps up towards me, desperately trying to see what I am doing to her. There is both panic and pleasure in her stare. She hates that she wants this, and right now she hates me even more, but only because of the pleasure I am bringing her. I circle the knife against her clit and her eyes roll as she drops her head back down, letting out a deep, unrestrained moan that goes straight to my dick.

“Yes, that’s it, Alora, be a good girl and tell me how good I’m making you feel, beg me to let you cover this knife in your cum.” I keep up the rhythm of my mouth and hand, forcing her to feel good and basking in every moan that slips past her lips.

“Oh god, yes, please don’t stop,” she prays, and I use my free hand to reach up and grip her hair, forcing her stare back to mine.

“I can’t stop,” I tell her as soon as our eyes are aligned. “From the very first second I saw you, Alora, I haven’t been able to stop.” Her body shakes beneath me, her orgasm hurtling towards her as I continue to tease her clit with the bottom of my blade. “Your beauty, your power, your grace, all of it calls to me, like you’re a siren and I am the one fated to fall for your song.” I feel her pussy leaking against my fingers, the knife becoming slippery in my hand as she moans at my words, but I don’t stop. “I crave everything about you and all I want to do is make you happy,” I tell her, moving the knife faster and faster as she begins to fall over the edge. “Now tell me you’re mine,” I command.

“I’m, I’m,” she stutters, falling over the two words as they are breathed out between moans, and I hold out to hear her say the words I am desperate to hear. “I’m... coming!” she screams instead, exploding beneath me, and I watch in fascination as she falls apart beautifully, covering the handle of my knife and fingers in her sweet juices, until she is panting and completely spent.

My cock is screaming at me for relief, so I toss the knife to the floor, climb up her body until I can position myself below her tits, then I free my aching dick into my hands. I stroke it roughly as I lean down and spit onto her chest and use my other hand that is covered in her cum, to make her nice and wet and slippery. Only then do I release myself and force my cock between her tits. I use my now free hands to grip the material of her sports bra and pull it tight, closing her tits around my length, and then I let go of the beast inside of me.

I fuck her tits, hard and fast, rutting between them like an animal in heat, and groan at the instant relief it brings me. When she lifts her head back up, I can feel the heat of her warm breath teasing my crown, and I am plunged back to the many nights spent in her room feeling just that. This is what I dreamed of so many times, having her, touching her, fucking her, owning her, and now she is spread out beneath me watching me fuck her tits like my perfect little doll.

“See what you do to me, Alora, how fucking mad with need you make me?” I grit out through my teeth, and when she licks her lips as if she is as desperate for a taste of me as I am for her, I almost lose it. “Look at you, so fucking perfect, you’re gonna look so fucking pretty painted in my cum.”

Her stare doesn’t waiver as she watches me fuck her, eyes wide with pleasure and anticipation, like she can’t wait to see me come undone for her, and it makes me beg her, “Say my name, love, tell me who is fucking these pretty little tits.” I pair my words with a rough squeeze of my hands, pushing her tits even tighter around my length and forcing the zipper to graze against her sensitive nipples.

“Jacob,” she moans on instinct, giving in to my demands and I groan, her eyes jumping to mine, and we stare at one another as she asks, “Are you gonna come for me now?”

Fuck. Her words are my undoing, as I snap my hips even faster, the zap of pleasure shooting down my spine and out of my dick as I unleash myself onto her. “Yes, Alora, yes my love, so fucking good,” I praise, rolling my hips until every last drop of my cum has spilled onto her tits and mouth.

Then I reach down and spread my cum across her lips, forcing my thumb into her mouth and moaning again when she instantly swirls her tongue around it and sucks it clean. And like a mad man possessed I don’t stop there. I move down her body, licking my release from her skin and trailing it down her body until I reach her swollen little cunt. Then I spit my own cum directly onto it before licking and sucking it clean, forcing her to writhe against me once more.

Fuck, she tastes even sweeter than I thought possible, especially when she is mixed with the taste of me, and I suck at her clit until she is screaming out my name on another orgasm, her body going limp on the table. “That’s it, fucking drown me in your pleasure, my love, I want to fucking die tasting this sweet pussy.”

I pull two more orgasms from her until she is crying and begging me to stop, her thighs and my face drenched in her

pleasure, and when I pick up the knife to cut the ropes completely off her wrists and ankles, she doesn't even flinch. Then I scoop her into my arms, ripping off the remains of fabric from her clothes, and cradle her to my chest as I carry her back upstairs, whispering sweet nothings into her hair.

When I place her into bed, she is already half asleep as she whispers, "Is this what you meant by exploring my needs?" Her eyes are sated, her face satisfied, but I still see the regret lingering there.

She came. She came so many times that even after licking it up, her cunt is still dripping now, but she is still confused. Most people who have experienced trauma like hers always find it hard to understand pleasure. They want it, they need it, they desperately want to take it, but always on their own terms, yet she would have never asked for it, not without being pushed.

It's why I crouch down beside her and bring our faces close together as I reply, "I'll give you everything you need, Alora, all you have to do is let me."

My words linger in the air between us as she nods slowly, her eyes dropping closed as I pull the blanket over her naked body and cover her up. She falls asleep almost instantly, looking completely peaceful and at ease for the first time ever, and when I brush back that escaped strand of hair, the same one as always, and she leans into my touch, I know I need to keep her forever, or die trying.

CHAPTER 11

Alora



My thighs are still slick with a mixture of my cum and his, and I swear I can still feel the phantom beat of my heart racing from the pleasure he wrung from my body. My mind is reeling from how I went from trying to escape, to falling apart in pleasure beneath him on the dining room table. I didn't fight, I didn't try to stop him. In fact, I begged him, pleaded with him to make me come. And what did he do? He listened. He pulled orgasm after orgasm from me like it was nothing, like my body was a fiddle only he knew how to play.

For years I thought I was broken, that the men from my room ruined any chance of pleasure I could ever have. I thought my father not only took my childhood but my future too, yet clearly I was wrong. Dr. Baines took me, and took from me, but he also gave me something, something I never thought possible, and I don't really know what to do with that.

I know I shouldn't be here, that normal, sane men don't kidnap the women they want and bring them home. The rational part of me knows this is wrong, that I shouldn't want to be here, that he is dangerous, and I should get as far away from him as I can, but then there is the other part of me. The one that put up with years of cruelty and abuse, the one that had man after man come into her childhood bed and take things that weren't theirs to take. The one that finally had enough of the torture, rape, and abuse, and plunged a knife into her father's gut repeatedly just to get him to stop. The one that stabbed another man not even twenty-four hours ago and

then came on his fingers that same night, and again just this afternoon.

That part of me is sitting on my shoulder like a devil, whispering at me to stay, to not fight back, to just lay back and take the pleasure Dr. Baines is so desperate to give me, but then what does that make me? A hypocrite? A whore? The same helpless little child that put up with all the men my father sent? Just the thought has tears gathering in my eyes as I turn onto my side and force myself not to cry. I'm not so different from him, I'm just as fucked up, so why not fall into the pleasure and forget about my pain?

Just as I have that thought, the door creaks open softly, barely making a sound as it closes behind him, as if he has done it a thousand times before. It should scare me, it should petrify me, so why is there excitement curling in the pit of my stomach?

His footsteps are so heavy on the floor that now I am hearing them, I can't believe they ever went unnoticed. But they did. So many nights, so many videos, so many times he watched me sleep and fucked his fist at the sight of me. It should disgust me, it should send alarm bells ringing through my head as I try to work out how to stop him, how to escape, but I remain still.

Should I be scared or flattered? I was always sleeping when he came to me, therefore I couldn't give or rescind my consent, and when he started touching me earlier I begged him for more. My mind is so fucked up and broken that I want more even now, knowing how wrong it is.

Am I the problem, or is he?

I'm guessing it's both from the way my thighs tighten in anticipation of what he is doing here now. My body's reaction is so fucked up, my mind's even more so, because I want this, I want him, yet I also know this isn't right. Just like when I was a child, I know this is wrong, but I am not doing anything to stop it. I've been lying here for ages, just waiting for him to come back instead of looking for ways to escape, and now he's

here all I can think about is what is he going to do next. It's why I pretend. He told me to explore my needs, and even though his hands hurt me, they brought me even more pleasure . So, I keep my eyes closed tight and wait to see what he came for.

His touch is gentle as it brushes against the bottom of my calf and starts to drag slowly up the length of my leg, lingering at the curve of my hip. Then it drops into my waist, slipping past the curve of my breast and coming to rest atop my bare shoulder. Goosebumps instantly break out against my skin, and I swear I can hear the smile in his voice as he purrs, "I've watched you sleep over a hundred times, Alora, do you really think I don't know when you're awake?"

A heat creeps up my neck at his accusation, yet still I keep my eyes closed, waiting for him to strike. If I don't ask for it, beg for it, and just let him take it instead, then maybe I won't feel as bad inside. A thought he slashes through as his fingers pull on my shoulder until I fall onto my back, my eyes scrunched tight in denial.

"So, my little doll, wants me to play with her," he purrs, slowly tugging down the only barrier between him and my naked body. "That's okay, I've waited a long time for you, Alora, what's a little longer?"

A cold breeze skates along my skin as the bed sheet falls away, and I feel the bed dip as he climbs on top of it, but without opening my eyes I can't tell what he is doing. Not until I feel the heat of his presence right next to my head, and I hear the telltale sign of his zipper. Images of his cock flash to the forefront of my mind, of how he stroked it, of how he used it to fuck my tits, and I think about what it looks like here, now, what it would feel like inside of me. Then I feel the thick head press against my lips, his fingers brushing against them as he brings his hand up and down his length and hisses.

Is this what it was like when I was sleeping? His cock right there for the tasting, but never quite making it to where he really wanted it. As if reading my mind he moans, "I fucking

love you like this, Alora, sleeping so sweetly yet yearning for a taste of my cock.”

His words have me swallowing a lump in my throat because he’s right, I can feel fresh arousal pooling between my thighs and my tongue itches for a taste of him. I know it’s wrong, that it’s disgusting and dirty, but it’s also exciting, freeing, my own pleasure right there and all I have to do is take it. It’s why I open my mouth, it’s why I stick out my tongue, it’s why I circle the end of his cock and invite him inside, and then relish in his throaty gasp.

“*Fuckkkkk*,” he drags out the word on a long groan and it shoots straight to my core, as my eyes flick open and lock with his. His stare is like molten lava as it holds me hostage, his cock pushing along my tongue as he guides me into sucking him to the back of my mouth. “That’s it, love, look at you, sucking my cock so sweetly, you’re fucking perfect,” he praises, and I can’t help but moan around his length which only makes him fuck my mouth even harder.

“This mouth plagues my dreams, occupies my nightmares, crowds my fucking life with fantasies of fucking it.” Every word is gritted out as if he can barely concentrate on anything but the feel of my mouth. “Every time you sat on my sofa in my office, I thought about spreading you out across it. I wanted to chase away all your demons and replace them with something new, something more. I wanted to touch you, taste you, fuck you.”

With every snap of his hips I am mesmerized, taking in the long, lean lines of his body as he writhes above me. He isn’t wearing a shirt, and for the first time I am seeing him in a way I never have before. Intricate tattoo designs cover his torso, which is also marked with scars that I can’t help but wonder how he got. My eyes move to the bandage on his shoulder, the one hiding the wound I gave him. Does it hurt? Has he done this before? Taken someone? It’s a thought that shouldn’t sting, but it does, and I’m sure he could unpack why.

“Your mouth is so wet and hot, my love, fuck,” he curses, before ripping out of me, and then pulling me down the bed as if I weigh nothing. Then he is straddling my face and fucking my mouth hard and fast as I struggle to choke him down. “So pretty when you cry for me,” he preens, thumbing at the tears that stain my cheeks, as I hollow them out to try and accommodate him.

I feel the long length of him with every roll of his hips as his cock pushes in and out of my mouth on repeat, and I wish I could beg him to stop. I wish even more I could tell him to keep going, but as if he can read my mind, he moves even faster, claiming my mouth as his own, and all I can do is take it. Take it and love it, and something in my stare must tell him just that.

I suck him earnestly, taking as much of him as I can, and his entire demeanor changes. “Fuck, fuck,” he yells, right before I feel his salty release paint the back of my throat before I drink it down.

I have barely swallowed before he pulls his cock from my mouth, shifts down the bed, and slams his lips to mine, no doubt tasting his salty cum traces still on my tongue. And I kiss him back, caressing my tongue against his and feeling my entire body heat as his hands start to stroke against my skin everywhere. The kiss is fire and ice, war and famine, heaven and hell, I know it’s wrong, that he will destroy me whatever way I let him, but I can’t stop.

Then his mouth is on my neck, licking and sucking until I am breathless and ready to beg. “Jacob,” I gasp, and his teeth sink into my skin, tasting and sucking until my hands find his hair and I pull at the thick strands making him groan once more.

“Look at you,” he says against my skin. “You’re my perfect little fuck doll, aren’t you?” His teeth graze my nipple and I practically shoot off the mattress, but his hands find my hips and he slams me back down. “You want me to take from you, don’t you? You loved it when I fucked these pretty tits,”

he pairs his words with the lapping of his tongue against them, before dragging his mouth down my body. “You adored it when I feasted on this desperate little cunt and made it mine.” His tongue licks the seam of my pussy, and my thighs drop open without pause. “That’s it, love, open yourself up for me, open yourself up for my cock.”

He drags his length up and down, coating himself in my arousal as I beg him, “Please, Jacob, please.”

“Please what, Alora? Please fuck you? Please make you come all over my cock?” he teases his words with the stroking of his cock against my most intimate area.

“Yes, yes, fuck me, please fuck me.” I’m a mad woman, completely and utterly crazed with the need for pleasure, with the need for him.

Clearly I need a new therapist, because the last one taught me nothing. Well, that’s not entirely true, he taught me that my body is capable of pleasure, and now I never want to feel the pain again.

“Tell me you’re mine,” he commands simply, and my eyes meet his as he smiles. “Tell me you’re mine and I will give you everything you need, love.”

I open my mouth to say the words, to scream them, but something stops me, that nagging part deep inside of me that reminds me I shouldn’t do this, and I know he sees it, because he sees everything. Yet his smile doesn’t fade, instead it turns cold and wicked.

“It’s okay, my little doll, what you won’t give, I will just take anyway. You’re mine either way.”

CHAPTER 12

Jacob



Using my grip on her hips I flip her over onto her stomach, bringing my palm down hard across her ass cheeks and burning with need at the red mark I leave behind, and the yelp that escapes her throat. Then I pull her ass into the air and drop down to begin feasting on her once more. Licking up from hole to hole, not leaving one part of her untouched, as my tongue explores every inch of her until she is dripping on my face. She pushes back against my mouth, and I hope she can feel my smile against her skin as I shove two fingers into her pussy and press my thumb against her tight back hole.

“Jacob,” she gasps at the intrusion, and I swear I could listen to her say my name forever, until it’s the very last sound I heard.

I fuck her with my hand, pushing my fingers deeper every time, until her moans are a mix of pleasure and pain, just how I like it. Then I pull back, line up my cock with her pussy, fist a hand in her hair, and then do what I have been waiting almost a year for. I slam into her roughly, knocking her face first into the mattress and holding her there as I fuck her hard. Letting the sounds of her muffled screams, and the wet snap of my hips against her ass spur me on even more. Her cunt is unlike anything I have ever felt, hot, wet, tight, fucking perfect, and I know I am going to use her until she can’t walk.

“This, Alora,” I grit through my teeth. “This is what I’ve waited for, what I’ve yearned for, what I have been desperate

to give you for months and months.” I slow my thrusts, dragging my cock out of her so she can feel every inch of me, before slamming back inside. “I want to make you feel good until you can’t see, can’t breathe, can’t feel anything except for me.”

It doesn’t matter that she just sucked my cock dry, and looked fucking perfect doing it, I can already feel that tingle of pleasure in my balls as they smack against her. With my cock buried deep in her cunt, and my hand fisted in her hair, as her hips meet me thrust for thrust, like her body was made for me, this isn’t going to last as long as I’d like.

“Touch yourself,” I command, and I hear a muffled exclamation against the pillow, but I just fuck her harder. “I said touch yourself, Alora, take your pleasure like I told you to do.” Yet still she doesn’t move, so I use my grip on her hair to drag her backwards up towards me until her spine hits my chest and my mouth finds her ear. “You wouldn’t want to make me angry, would you?” I ask, grinding into her greedy little cunt as she trembles in my hold. “I don’t think you’d like me when I’m angry,” I add, and I swear she smiles.

“I don’t think I like you now,” she gasps out, slamming her hips back to meet my every thrust.

“Oh, I think we both know that isn’t true, love, I can feel you dripping down my cock like a dirty little whore.” I bring my free hand to collar her neck, enjoying the rapid thrashing of her pulse against my fingers. “Now touch that greedy pussy and make it come on my cock like my sweet little doll.” She drops her head back against my shoulder, the same one she stabbed me in, and I drag my tongue across her neck as she moves one of her hands between her thighs. “That’s it, play with it nice and good for me.”

“Fuck,” she curses at the contact, and a thrill shoots through me as the curse falls from her lips. “Oh my god, it feels so good,” she adds in a whiny moan and it’s the sexiest thing I’ve ever heard.

I drop more kisses to her neck as I purr, “I thought I already told you, there is no god here, Alora, just me.” I certainly feel like a god fucking her, owning her pleasure so completely that it drives me mad with even more need. “Tell me, love, how does my cock feel inside of you? How wet is your cunt as it drips on your fingers and begs for more.”

With every one of my words, she moves her hand faster, rubbing her clit even harder until I feel her start to constrict, squeezing my cock like a vice I never want to escape. “Yes, yes, yes, don’t stop, right there, I’m coming, I’m coming.” Her words pour out on a long moan, and I feel my own orgasm incoming as I release her hair and shove her back into the mattress.

Mounting her, I rut into her as fast as possible, enjoying every tightening of her pussy along my cock, as it slams in and out until I am spilling inside of her on a long groan. Then I collapse on top of her, the heat and sweat of her skin as welcome as my own, as we both try and catch our breath. I’m not sure how long we stay like that, but only when my cock is completely soft, and empty do I move off of her. Rolling onto my back and bringing my hand up to my chest as a deep ache flows through it.

“Jacob,” she breathes, and I turn to find her looking at me in wonder. A sort of satisfied smile tugging at the corner of her mouth, until her gaze drops to where my hand rests and her eyes flare with panic. “Oh my god, you’re bleeding.” I drop my gaze to my chest and find she is right, blood has soaked through the bandages on my shoulder from the wound she inflicted on me, and I wonder how she feels about it now that we are longer in the heat of the moment. A thought that must echo on my face because she whispers, “Do you have a first aid kit?”

Twenty minutes later we are both freshly showered and in my master bathroom where she directs me to take a seat on the chair in the corner. An array of first aid materials are laid out of the counter and she inspects them meticulously, before grabbing a cleaning solution and some cotton and soaking

them in it. Then she leans down and presses it directly onto my open wound. It stings, but the sight of her tits as I look down her top eases the burn.

“Does it hurt?” she asks quietly, and I smirk as our eyes collide.

“It’s not the first time I’ve been stabbed, love,” I reply, and I watch as her eyes dance along the rest of my skin, taking in the multiple scars there and frowning. I wonder if they bother her, if my marked skin of a life I’d rather not discuss is off-putting somehow. But then I see a hint of something in her look that has me adding, “It is the first time I’ve been stabbed by a woman though.” Once again, our eyes meet, and somehow I just know that’s what she wanted to hear. I drag my hand up the arm that is pressed against my shoulder until it can curl around her neck. “I told you, there is only you.”

She pulls away from me quickly, too burdened by my affection and what it means for her and tosses the now red stained cotton into the trash and reaches for the bandages. She rolls some of the fabric out and then looks around for something to cut it with. I purposely stashed the scissors in my pocket for this very moment, for this very test, and when I pull the knife from the back of my waistband and offer it to her, she freezes.

“To cut them to size,” I say innocently, nodding towards the bandages between her fingers, and her hand shakes as she reaches out to take it from me.

I watch eagerly as her fingers close around the handle, mildly wondering if she is going to stab me again, and my cock hardens at the thought. Something that isn’t concealed by my gray sweats, and her eyes drop to where the thick outline is now clearly visible again.

“Aren’t you scared?” she whispers, staring between the blade and my cock, indecision written across her features.

“No, love, just waiting to see if you’ll stab me or suck my dick again, you did such a good job of both,” I say with a

smile, leaning back and parting my thighs.

“If I did a good job, wouldn’t you be dead?” she quips back, and I am seconds away from punishing that smart mouth again. Except trading barbs with her is almost as fun.

“Oh, I am far too obsessed with you to let something as fickle as death stop me, Alora, I thought you knew that.” I don’t let my stare waiver, ensuring she sees the truth in every word.

After a few seconds she brings the knife up and slices the bandage to size as she mutters, “I’m starting to realize it.” Then she drops down to her knees and positions my arm so she can wrap the bandage around it, securing it tightly into place perfectly.

Anticipation is thick in the air as her fingers dance along my skin, checking the edges of her work meticulously, like this isn’t the first time she has tended to bloody wounds. A thought that makes anger course through my veins because I know all too well the wounds her body bears. I’ve seen the scars, both physical and mental, it’s why she’s here, it’s one of the things that drew her to me, and me to her but it doesn’t make it any better. She was hurt, violated, taken advantage of by those disgusting, perverted men, and none of them cared about her, not even her own father. They weren’t like me, they didn’t want to help her, all they wanted was her pain, but I am making her forget about them with her pleasure.

I’m lost in those dark thoughts of the men that hurt her when I feel the first skim of her hand against the length of my cock, and I freeze. I flick my eyes down to her, but she isn’t looking at me, she is staring into my lap, her hand just barely touching the outline of my already pulsing cock. Watching, waiting, practically pleading with me to do something, but I won’t, not this time. I saw her face earlier, saw how desperate she was to pretend she wasn’t choosing this, wasn’t choosing me. She wanted me to be rough, she wanted me to steal from her, just like they did, but I did that last night, this morning, this afternoon. This time, it has to be all her.

“If you want something, Alora, you’re going to have to take it, I won’t give it to you again,” I tell her, and she finally meets my stare.

“I can’t,” she whispers, the two words hitting me directly in the chest, and I push her back and drop to my knees to bring us face to face.

“You are powerful, love, more powerful than you could ever imagine. The things you’ve endured, the things you’ve survived, and look at you, you’re so fucking perfect,” I breathe, pulling her body to mine. “I would ruin everyone in this world for you, or raise hell trying, so you can, Alora, you can.”

Her eyes search mine for any trace of dishonesty, but she won’t find it, and when I open my mouth to speak again, she cuts me off, slamming her lips to mine. Her taste, her dominance, her mere presence consumes every inch of me, from her tongue in my mouth, to her hands in mine. She is mine and I am hers, until the very end.

My hands grip her waist and then I start to rise, lifting her body with my own and storming us into my room until I can fall back onto my bed, bringing her with me. Yet our kiss never breaks, it’s rough and desperate, like we can both chase away our demons with it, and when I reach beneath her shirt in search of her skin, she pulls back and allows me to tear it off over her head. Then she goes one step further and takes off her own bra, baring her chest to me, and when she leans back in to fuse our mouths back together, I almost come in my pants at the feel of her puckered nipples grazing against my torso.

I run my hands up her back so I can tangle them in her hair, deepening our kiss until she is moaning into my mouth. The sound is my undoing, and I move on instinct, flipping her onto her back and pulling up to remove her leggings and my sweats, before falling back between her open thighs and running my cock up her wet center.

“Do you have any idea how weak you make me?” I murmur into the base of her throat, licking and sucking her

sweet skin as I talk. “Do you have any idea how good it felt to have my cock inside you? For me to stretch you open and feel your tight little cunt squeezing me so fucking sweetly.” I tease her entrance with my cock, never pushing inside, yet enjoying every little whimper that falls from her lips.

“Jacob, please,” she cries desperately, lifting her hips and trying to force me to take from her again. My little doll still isn’t listening.

I drop one of my hands down and drag my fingers through her slit, coating my hand in the slick heat of her pussy, she is fucking drenched already. Her clit swells beneath my touch and it takes every ounce of restraint I have to not slam my cock into her sopping hole until she begs me to stop. Instead, I settle for sinking two of my fingers deep in her pussy, giving her no time to adjust before I start pistoning them in and out of her.

“I thought I told you, Alora, if you want something, come and get it.”

CHAPTER 13

Alora



He pulls his fingers from my pussy and moves to drop down against his headboard in the middle of the bed, leaving me empty and wanting. When I tip my head back to look at him, I find him already watching me, waiting for me to make my next move. No, this isn't what I wanted. I wanted him to force me, to take from me, to make me forget wrong and right, and just dance in the gray with him. I don't want to face my desires, my truths, I want to forget, I want the pleasure to erase my pain.

“You want this, my little doll, why are you trying to deny it,” he hisses, fisting the base of his cock and stroking it smoothly, forcing me to turn my body completely to face him. “I am yours, Alora,” he pants. “You make me so fucking weak, so come and take what belongs to you.” Each of his words caresses my skin like a flick of his tongue, and I am moving before I even realize it, but he halts me with his hand. “Ah ah, crawl to me, nice and slow, love.”

I freeze, wondering how far I would go for him, and then almost laugh at such a ridiculous thought. I mean, look at what I've already done. He said there isn't a line he wouldn't cross for me, and I haven't stopped crossing them since the moment I stabbed him. We are both as deranged as the other, and if this is what it feels like to let go of sanity and free fall into another realm of reality, then I am going to enjoy the ride.

“Like this?” I ask, edging ever so slowly forward until I am on my hands and knees at the bottom of his huge bed. His

legs are parted slightly with just enough room for me, and he groans, rolling his fist over the tip of his leaking cock.

“Exactly like that,” he spits, his eyes blazing over every exposed inch of me. “So fucking pretty.”

I silently preen under his praise, moving slowly up the bed and ensuring to sway my hips from side to side as I go, enjoying the dark and wicked look in his eyes as he watches me. When I finally reach his mid-thigh, his fisted cock just below me, my mouth waters in anticipation. I want him everywhere, and I stare at him both mesmerized and desperate.

“What was it you said?” I ask, flicking my eyes up to his with a smirk. “You were waiting to see if I was going to stab you or suck your dick?”

His eyes sparkle in delight at me finally caving to his depraved games. “Don’t start with your smart mouth in here or I will fuck it with you on your knees,” he threatens, and I hate how my pussy clenches in response.

“Is that another threat, Dr. Baines?” I muse, and the fist on his cock halts as he stares me down.

“No, it’s a promise, Miss Parker.” He grabs me roughly, pulling me until I am atop his lap, and I can feel the warm heat of him right beneath me. “Now I’m afraid I don’t have the restraint to be gentle, so please forgive me.”

He’s getting ready to take again, and I can’t help but feel like I failed some sort of test, so before he can move, I reach down between us and fist his cock, settling it at my entrance. I slam down the full length of him before either of us even take our next breath, and he grunts in response as I purr, “I’ve never had gentleness, so I don’t need it now.”

Then we are fucking, hard and wild, with his hands roughly gripping my tits and waist, and mine dug into his shoulders as I ride him. It’s like nothing I’ve ever felt before, being here, taking instead of giving, fucking instead of being fucked. I feel euphoric, like my past and what happened to me is irrelevant, insignificant, like a high I never want to come

down from. His cock punishes me, erasing every man before him, and with every throaty groan that falls from his lips, all I can do is fuck him harder.

My legs are on either side of his, straddling his hips as our fucking becomes frantic. Jacob palms my ass, squeezing it so tight that I know it will leave a mark, as he forces me to bounce on his cock ever harder. The thought sends me wild because I want his marks and he knows it, as if he has crawled inside of my mind and read every thought I've ever had, and not just the ones I have spilled on his sofa. And he isn't scared, he doesn't think I'm broken, he thinks I'm powerful, and he wants me to take the plunge into the unknown with him.

Can I do it?

With his cock inside of me I feel like I can do anything.

I slide down him again and again, burying him deeper inside of me every time, until I'm completely stretched to fit him. And then he hits even deeper, and I gasp, raising back up and coating him in my arousal, before slamming back down to the hilt. "Fuck," he groans, and I can see every part of him ready to unravel, and I know what he needs to hear.

"Take what you need, give me everything," I whisper, and his eyes search mine for any hesitation, but he wouldn't find it, not now.

Then his hand is around my throat, and he is flipping us over until my back hits the mattress, pounding into me from above. "You're such a good girl, Alora, so fucking wet and tight around me, you love being fucked like this, don't you?" Screams tear from my throat, robbing any response to his words as he smacks against my clit with every snap of his hips. "That's it, scream for me, let the whole world hear how hard I make you come."

His words steal my orgasm from me, pulling it from my body before I can even realize it has claimed me. My entire body shakes and jolts beneath him, keeping up his relentless

pounding, as I beg him not to stop. “Jacob, yes, right there, don’t stop, please don’t stop.”

The fingers around my neck tighten, almost cutting off my air supply as he grinds into my swollen cunt. “I haven’t been able to stop when it comes to you since the moment I first saw you. You were so beautiful and broken, and now look at you, so perfect and powerful, taking my cock like it was made for you and milking me dry.”

I don’t think I have ever seen anything as powerful as him, writhing above me like a god, his muscles flexing, and sweat dripping down his chest. His hands gripping my neck and hip, hands that murdered my rapists in cold blood and begged me for the names of the rest, now punishing me in a completely different way.

“Tell me you’re mine,” he demands, those four words becoming so familiar and comforting, yet once again they render me speechless.

Am I his? Can I be?

Our moans and the wet slap of our bodies fills any silence that my response would fill, and before I can say something else, he slams his lips to mine. His lips setting me alight, and his cock sending me straight to hell, and all I want to do is burn for him. Every part of our bodies is molded together as he fucks me relentlessly, like he knows every part of me, like he owns every atom, and when another orgasm starts spiraling through me, he grunts against my mouth.

“Yes, that’s it sweet girl, fucking come for me, ahh, fuck yes.” I explode around his words, feeling every inch of his cock as he slams in and out of me, before he spills deep inside of me with a muffled grunt, his teeth sinking into my shoulder.

His body drops down onto mine, his heavy breaths caressing my shoulder as his tongue laps at the teeth marks he has no doubt left behind, and all I can feel is pleasure. I’m content. None of my demons are clouding my mind, and sick satisfaction curls in my gut when I realize I do feel safe with

him. He slayed my monsters and wants the names of the rest, and if I give them to him, I know he will slay them too.

I know it's fucked up and crazy to even be thinking like that, but I have been on my own for such a long time. Is it so bad to want to share my burden with someone else?

Jacob drags his tongue up my neck until he can reach my ear, then he whispers, "I've bled for you, killed for you, and I'd die for you, Alora, just tell me what you want, and I will give it to you."

A thousand wants rush to the tip of my tongue as his fingers dig into my hips, and I can feel his cum dripping out of me, claiming me, yet when I finally speak all I can say is, "I'm hungry." I feel the defeat in his body as his shoulders drop ever so slightly before he pulls back and smiles.

"Let me just get cleaned up," he sighs, pulling his cock from my pussy and rolling off the bed, heading to the bathroom. I haven't even moved before he is returning with a wet cloth and dipping back down between my thighs. Then just as I think he is about to clean up our mess, he reaches down and uses two of his fingers to gather up his cum and shove it back inside of me and I gasp. "We wouldn't want it to go to waste now would we," he grins with a wink, circling my hole and spreading his cum all around me.

Only once he has finished does he lean down and place a kiss against my lips making me shiver. Just seeing his head between my thighs has me forgetting about my hunger once more as another need starts to curl inside of me again, but he pulls back almost as fast as he came and moves to get dressed. He pulls his gray sweats back on that leave nothing to the imagination, especially not when I know how good he feels inside of me, then reaches into his drawer and pulls out a fresh shirt to hand to me.

I hesitate for a few seconds before taking it, thanking him quietly as I slip it over my head. Somehow, after everything we have done, this feels the most intimate. The shirt is clean but somehow still smells of him, and it wraps around me like a

comfort I have never known, then he is holding out his hand and waiting for me to take it. Again, I hesitate, because I've never held anyone's hand, not for as long as I can remember, and he knows that, we've talked about it in sessions. I told him how sacred it would be to me to do something as simple as this, and here he is once again offering me everything I have never had. Love, security, acceptance, *intimacy*, and without thinking, I reach out and place my shaking fingers in his, entwining our palms until they are molded together.

We head downstairs where he leads me to the same chair I sat in yesterday, and this time I take it without even looking at the front door. Then I spend the next hour watching him as he chops and dices, grills, and boils, until we have a feast of steak, potatoes, and an array of vegetables, each more delicious than the last. The food is amazing, and the finesse with which he cooked even more so, and I find myself wanting to know everything about him. I want to dissect his entire life like he has done to mine until there isn't a single secret left between us.

"I have something for you," he interrupts my thoughts, watching me closely, before rising from the table and moving towards a large box in the corner that I hadn't really paid attention to.

When he places it on the table in front of me, for the first time I swear I can feel nerves radiating off him, and it makes me wonder what's inside, but when I reach out to lift the lid, he places his hand on top of it, stopping me. Then he turns my chair and moves to stand in front of me, dropping to his knees at my feet.

"You already know there isn't anything I wouldn't do for you, Alora, and this is not the end, I just hope we can be in this together now, because I am never letting you go."

Words, simple words that should frighten me, yet they make me feel alive, seen, wanted, and my heart pounds against my ribcage as I nod, turning my attention back to the box. When I lift the lid up, the first thing I see is the top of a bunch

of jars, which confuses me for a second until I reach inside and lift one up. Bile claws the back of my throat as I come face to face with a human heart, Cooper's I can only hope and presume, and when I flick my stare back to Jacob's, he is watching me intently, and I can already see the outline of his cock, thickening again beneath his pants.

The jar doesn't bother him in the slightest, as he leans in and collars one of his hands around my neck. "You are powerful, you are free, and I am going to gift you every one of their hearts in a jar until all of them are dead."

His words are somehow both sweet and psychotic, and for the first time I reach out and touch him, something that startles him slightly, as I place my hand tentatively against his cheek, before placing my lips softly against his, just a gentle peck, before pulling back and getting lost in his maniacal stare.

"I'm ready," I whisper, and his eyes sparkle in delight.

"Ready to tell me you're mine," he asks hopefully, but I shake my head in his hold, and he frowns.

"No," I say softly, rubbing my thumb across his lips. "This gesture is," I trail off as I nod towards the box, struggling to find the words. "It's kind of depraved, and disgusting, but I guess that's just you, and as psychotic as this is," I wiggle the jar, before placing it back into the box. "I'm ready to give you the list," I add, watching and waiting for him to understand.

It only takes a second, and then his entire demeanor changes, his eyes turning black, and the hold of my throat tightening until he steals my breath. Then his lips are on mine, hard and insistent as he owns me, reaching down and forcing me to wrap my legs around him before he is lifting me off the chair and slamming me against the wall.

I don't know if *he* frees his cock or *I* do, but within seconds he is at my entrance and thrusting inside of me, fucking me brutally until I am crying out for more. There are teeth and nails, biting and scratching, kissing, and fucking, touching and claiming until we are both panting out our

release completely breathless, and only then does he smile at me.

“Then let’s go hunting, my little doll.”

Epilogue

JACOB



TWO YEARS LATER

Blood coats her body as she plunges the knife deep into his chest and begins to carve out his heart. Samuel Rhodes, the last name on her list, and the hardest to track down, which isn't surprising given how I'm sure he heard about all of his friends' untimely deaths. Alora and I have certainly had our fun over the last two years. We returned to our normal lives of course. She spends her days at the coffee shop which she now runs with Jen, and I spend mine at my practice, but our nights? Those we spend together, watching, waiting, hunting, killing.

I trained her well. So much so that the last few kills have been all her, while I just stood back and watched like I am doing now. She's so elegant in the way she moves, her skin so bright when it's stained red, and my cock rock hard as I take in every depraved thing she does, until his heart is fisted in her hand. Only when she's done does she come back to me, back from that place, back from those nights. And now they are all gone. Every man that has ever hurt her, ever laid a hand on her, now dead and their remains buried in the wooded area across the lake, and Samuel will be next and last.

We spend the next few hours breaking down his body and removing all evidence of his presence in the guest house before we head out to the dock and take the short trip across the lake. We have done this so many times now that not a word passes between us as we work meticulously side by side. We

reach the part of my land that is most overgrown and pick out a spot amongst his friends, and then I start digging.

There are so many remains here buried so deeply, that I've had to put in extra work burying animal remains on top just in case someone ever looks here. Not that they would, we have covered our tracks perfectly, but I will do everything I can to protect her. Alora also insisted we bury my gifts here, for some reason she didn't think jars of cocks and hearts made good decor choices for our house. Apparently, it's not unique and beautiful like her, but hey what do I know?

Once I am done with the hole, Alora tosses in Samuel's remains, waiting for me to cover it with enough dirt, before adding in the rabbit we brought along with us. Then I bury them both until the hole is filled and the dirt doesn't look freshly dug. Like I said, we are professionals at this point, although I'm not sure what we will do now that every name on her list is crossed off. Yet still my body buzzes with adrenaline and lust as I think about the hot and dirty as fuck sex we are about to have on top of his grave. Just like we always do.

"Jacob," she says suddenly, licking her lips, not caring about the blood stained there. "Ask me," she pleads in a whisper.

"Ask you?" I repeat in confusion, and she nods ever so slowly.

"Ask me," she says again, as she moves towards me and reaches up to curl her arms around my neck. "I know what you want to hear," she adds, and my heart starts to beat wildly in my chest, as I start to realize what she is asking for. "Ask me, demand me like you ruined me, like you saved me, and I will give you everything you've ever wanted."

I erase the space between our bodies, pulling her completely into me until not one part of us isn't touching, as I bring my hand up and curl it around her neck, caressing her pulse point with my thumb as I demand, "Tell me you're mine."

Four words, four words I have said on repeat to her for over two years and not once has she ever truly responded, but now here we stand, in the blood of her last rapist, with no more men to hunt down and kill. There is just me and her, and the future we are going to make together now that we have erased the past.

Alora Parker, the woman I fell for the second I laid eyes on her. The woman who sleeps in my bed every night and sucks my cock every morning. The woman I love, who even when covered in blood feels so good wrapped around me, leans up and kisses me softly, before pulling back.

“I’m yours,” she breathes against my mouth. “From the moment you took me and every moment since, I am yours, Jacob Baines.”

About G.N. Wright

G.N. Wright is a British Indie Author who loves reading, listening to music and spending time with her family.

Also by G.N. Wright

Fairfield U

The Puck Secret

The Puck Decoy

The Hallowed Crows MC

Distrust

Dishonor

Disloyal

Disarray

Black Hallows

Revival of a King

Revenge of a Queen

Rebellion of a Kingdom

Reckless Rebel

Deadly Games at BSU

All best are Off

The Rules Have Changed

Novellas

Tainted Crown

Claimed

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