

JENN BULLARD

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Seduce

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Edited by Amber Nicole

Cover Art by Nerd Sisters Design Group

Formatted by Epitaph Formatting

Published by Jenn Bullard 2023

*This is for everyone that has had to fight for their happily ever after. I
promise the fight is worth it.*

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Foreword

Seduce is book two in a Forbach Villain's Duet. It is where we find her happily ever after, but please know she and her harem will have to work for it. This is Silla's story, where Cinderella is the true villain, and a retelling. This is a dark reverse harem story, so please tread carefully. Your mental health is important.

This story is set in a contemporary setting, but there are fantasy-like aspects. I promise I know how birth control works!

Content Warning

Seduce is book 2 in a Forbach Villain's Duet and contains triggers of suicidal thoughts and attempt, non con/SA outside of the harem, branding, somnophilia, forced golden shower outside of the harem, grooming, violent death, blood play, forced voyeurism, knife play, graphic murder, past child abuse, and ptsd.

If these topics, or any other dark themes bother you, then this book may not be for you. For a complete list of triggers, please email Jenn at jennbullardwrites@gmail.com.

Prologue

“Why do you think you’re special enough to do whatever you want?” Cinder hisses as I’m dragged through the castle. Zachary spilled his guts to Lana while he was shitting his brains out, which is how I find myself in the current predicament.

I spent the six hour drive back into the main city hogtied in one of her cars. I don’t know where she’s taken anyone else. I spent most of that time spiraling in the trunk because of the small space, and my muscles are sore now as they force me to walk, after cutting me loose.

“The prison is too good for you! Guards, take her down to the dungeon, and flay the skin from her bones.”

“Cinder! Why are you doing this? You know what, do your worst, but leave the others alone,” I cry. I have no pride, nothing to hide, my step-sister knows they’re important to me.

Scoffing, she turns to face me. “Dear sister,” she croons, nails digging into my cheeks as she grips me. My breath is out of control, the room is spinning, and I know I’m in deep shit.

Cinder is done playing with her food. “I’m going to punish them for touching what should have been off limits. Fucking you isn’t their crimes, it’s trying to protect you from me, and giving you basic comforts. My guards instructed the Warden to open Section B to them for their pleasure, and they

were denied!”

Cinder is drawing blood with her sharp nails as she screeches at me. The guards surrounding her just watch dourly, wondering when they’ll be able to begin their torture. “It’s up to you all if she lives or dies after you’re done whipping her,” she says, releasing me as if my skin burns her. “The dungeons are too far below ground for me to hear her, and blood is so messy...”

Cinder’s lips twist as she contemplates her options. The guard holding me upright digs his fingers into my arms, and the sting of pins and needles in my legs helps to ground me after being tied up for so long.

It hurts like a bitch, but I’m holding onto it all so I can chase away the panic filled demons nipping at my heels.

I can survive everything for thirty seconds at a time. Even if it lasts longer than that, I can focus on small periods of terror and torture.

“Lana,” Cinder calls, and she comes running. I swear she was waiting for my step-sister to pay attention to her. Wrapping her arms around Cinder’s waist, she snuggles into her.

Smoothing Lana’s black hair, Cinder hums under her breath. “I’ve missed you, darling. I’m facing a dilemma. Do we want Silla scarred forever, raped for hours...? What is a suitable punishment?”

Lana peeks up at me, her teeth flashing savagely. “Queen Cinder, she should be whipped for attracting your displeasure, but not be allowed to scar. You may need all of that creamy, beautiful skin one day. As for the other, you can’t rape a whore if they’re wet and willing. I played a bit with her, and she’s delicious.”

Cinder wraps her hand around Lana’s throat, and I realize she wanted to make my step-sister jealous. Gods, their relationship is so odd. “You touched her?” she asks Lana, ignoring all of us.

Her rule is bloody within the castle walls, so no one says anything, and not a whisper of it leaves this place either. The rest of the kingdom lauds her

as a kind queen, but I know the truth. Cinder is a disgusting human being who enjoys watching people break.

“I did,” Lana gasps as her oxygen is cut off. Moaning, she writhes against Cinder’s body. Ugh, they’re going to fuck on the floor. “You taste better, my Queen. I need you to smother me between your thighs so I can get thoroughly reacquainted with the taste of your sweet pussy. May I suggest they pipe in our new prisoner’s screams into your bedroom for us to enjoy?”

Slowly releasing Lana’s throat, Cinder murmurs, “Such a good girl for me. Go strip on the bed. Ask for help if you need it to get into the restraints. No one else gets to fuck you but me, is that clear, darling?”

“Yes, my Queen!” Lana squeals as she runs off, and it’s clear the guards are struggling to keep the smiles from their lips.

“Alright, I need to be somewhere, so let’s ensure Silla has a very unpleasant stay in our dungeon, yes? I want to hear every scream over the speakers in my bedroom as well. I’m going to consider it mood music. I feel as if I need to hear my pretty little step-sister bleed, boys. Don’t allow her to scar, but use her body well,” Cinder says darkly.

The guard holding me pulls me sharply against his body so I can feel his erection, making me whimper.

“Yes... just like that, Silla,” Cinder whispers, and I can hear desire in her voice as her eyes hood. Gods, my terror and pain turn her on.

As the guards roughly pull me away, I fight, scream, and kick. I’m done playing meek and quiet. It’s never really helped me anyway. Just kill me as I struggle, so my worst nightmares never come to pass.

One

GRAYSON

It's as if the last eight months of my life have never happened. I'm staring at a new group of recruits as they process through intake, and take a deep breath. My shoulder and ribs still hurt from a fresh beating before I was dropped off at the doors of Forbach Reform School, but other than that, most of my scars only live in my mind.

Queen Cinder tortured us for eight months in her dungeon. We could hear Silla's screams on the other side of the underground prison, slowly eaten away by the knowledge that we couldn't help her.

Fuck, today is going to be rough, because my compassion doesn't exist anymore. I'm the hard ass that the Queen wants in this camp now.

"Keep it moving!" I bark, scaring a girl who is scarcely nineteen. These assets just keep getting younger, but that's not my problem. The only person who was mostly innocent was my sweet, Dangerous Girl, and I don't even know if she's still alive.

Seven months into our incarceration, the screams went silent. The void of noise was as loud as a gunshot, as the Fucked up Trio, Isaac, and my eyes turned in the gloomy darkness in the direction of where our girl is.

"What happened?" Ayden rasps. His voice is fucked from when they pulled all of his toenails off with pliers last week. He tried so hard to keep from screaming, we all did, since we know Silla can probably hear us as well.

So we hold it in, but it just drives our "caregivers" to hurt us more. So the stifled screams still affect our voices. We're being kept in a large chamber, hung on the wall with chains. Yet, we could still hear Silla's voice as she screamed. It almost became our reminder that she was alive, even though it pains us to know they are hurting her.

"Shit," Andrya whispers. "Please be alive. Gods, if you're there, please

hear me.”

I don't have the heart to tell her that I think they've turned away from us. If we ever had their ears, they no longer listen.

And now we're back. Every day that month we tried to hear a whimper, a scream, anything from the direction Silla was in the dungeon. I started praying for a miracle, because Drizella Tremaine is too bright a light to be gone from this world.

“Warden?” Isaac asks, bringing me back to myself. Nodding, I turn to look at him.

“What's going on?” I ask.

“There's a girl that's fighting the nurse. She doesn't want to submit to the physical assessment,” he says softly. While Isaac has always been the technical point person for intake, I asked him to help me make things run smoothly.

“Explain to her that if she doesn't submit, we will make her and hold her down. It will be decidedly less pleasant.” I sigh. All of our recruits go through a physical assessment, because we don't know what section they'll be placed in. “I can assure her that prison is a lot less comfortable.”

We disappeared in the middle of the night eight months ago, and Queen Cinder replaced us without a thought. I have no idea why we're back here today. Instead, I'm grateful to be out of that hellhole since I'm very sure Silla is now dead.

There was no reason to be strong after Silla went silent. So we stopped fighting, and eventually the guards got tired of torturing us, leaving us alone for several weeks.

Queen Cinder came in two days ago to tell us we'd be returning to our previous posts, and then sent in her goons so we'd be reminded of what could happen if we fucked up. There was no time to ask about our beautiful girl.

“You got it, Boss,” Isaac grunts, walking away. The five of us have changed. I don't think you can live through eight months of torture

unscathed.

We have one of the largest groups incoming that we've ever had. Apparently, we haven't had a new class since we were taken into custody, because no one could handle it. Instead, they muddled through and worked on getting assets graduated into the field.

Our work isn't as easy as it seems, which actually explains why we're back. The Queen of all of Forbach couldn't find a replacement for us.

The next four hours are busy, but soon the inmates all have dinner and are tucked into their rooms. The five of us are tighter than ever after our experiences, a fact I don't think Cinder expected. She's reinstated the budget for FRC, and my room hasn't been touched since I left.

Unbidden, the twins, Sidney, and Isaac are waiting in my bedroom with the unopened bottle of whiskey I had stashed there during what feels like a lifetime ago. It's been waiting to be opened for over a year now. After the five of us were treated to the departing gift of a fresh beating to remember our time in Cinder and her guards' care, we all needed something to numb the pain after a long day. The guards avoided our faces, and the long sleeves and pants hid the rest of the bruises.

Out of the five of us, 'Drya had the worst of it. The guards that weren't beating us pulled her from our chamber, grumbling that their favorite hole is no longer available to fuck. It was another nail in the coffin to our hope that Silla might be alive. Shifting uncomfortably, 'Drya winces.

"What do you need?" I ask softly. She's never begged for mercy, even when it was her screams we heard early this morning.

"To forget," she mutters. "I managed to squeeze in a quick appointment with Patricia for shots of antibiotics, new birth control, and an overall health check. I'm fine, but needed a few stitches. I'm exhausted."

Nodding, I take the bottle dangling from Sidney's fingers, unsurprised that they waited for me. Trauma brings people together, as does loss. Even if Silla isn't dead, she's lost to us. Maybe it would be kinder if she was, all

evidence that I have points to it.

“Should I mention that you shouldn’t be drinking with your antibiotics, ‘Drya?’” I ask drolly as I grab glasses and open the bottle.

“No, Sir,” she says saucily, and I ignore the jump of my cock. It’s been a long time, however my heart isn’t in it. A certain beautiful, sea green-eyed girl used to call me this all of the time, and I think my dick is remembering how pretty of a brat she was.

Fuck, I miss Silla so damn much, for many reasons.

“Retract the sass,” I chuckle instead, pouring whiskey into the glasses. Turning, I pass them out, collapsing into an armchair with a sigh.

“Gods, I guess this is our life now,” I mutter, enjoying the burn of my drink as I take a sip.

“It’s depressing is what it is,” Sidney agrees. Isaac just looks sadly into his drink, and I have to say that it hurts the most to look at him. Today he’s pushed hard to keep the boss/subordinate roles, and I wish I had been able to protect everyone better. I blame myself.

“Why did Queen Cinder do all of this, just to throw us back into FRC as if we were never gone?” Ayden asks.

“I don’t think she realized how important we are to this place. She acted out of anger, deciding that anyone could take over. There’s a mile long docket of information for me to go over tomorrow of do’s and don’ts. The Queen didn’t take anyone new while we were gone, just focused on getting those here graduated and into the field,” I explain, trying to get comfortable. Now that I’ve finally stopped moving, my ribs hurt a lot more for some reason.

“Walking through after intakes, this place feels both empty and full,” Isaac grumbles. “All of my students are gone. We don’t release them all at once for a reason, it’s a damn waste.”

“Yep, and that is the Queen and her insane ways,” I murmur, not knowing who may be nearby. “Who checked for bugs by the way?”

“Me,” Ayden and Isaac say at the same time, making me smirk.

“We’re all going to have to be careful. The only people I give two shits about is you four, the rest can all burn down for all I care,” I tell them. They look at me concerned, but I shrug. “We all cared too much and got fucked over. I never want to take a trip to the castle again.”

The five of us fall into silence as we drink, staring at the ground or the wall. It’s an odd feeling being free but still under the Queen’s thumb.

“Do you think anyone else knows how cruel Cinder is?” Andrya asks.

“The only ones who do probably live in the castle, are dead, or keep their traps shut,” Ayden answers. “Most of the press talks about how wonderful she is. I don’t know about the people in the kingdom itself though.”

“If anything, it’s a well kept secret,” Sidney mumbles. “The woman is vile, and her bedroom activities are more gruesome than anything that we’ve ever taken part in.”

Andrya snorts, covering her mouth as we chuckle. It’s nice to interact outside of our own personal chamber in the dungeon. We may not be free, but this is better than being tortured repeatedly.

“The guards said she requested our torture sessions be played over the speakers of the royal bedroom,” Andrya tells us. “She has been cranky because Silla hasn’t been screaming for her. Do you think...?”

“I don’t know, Sweetness,” Sidney sighs, running his fingers through her hair as she leans into him.

So many unanswered questions. It makes my blood run cold as to why Silla was screaming, knowing why the guards dragged Andrya out of our cell.

SIDNEY

Because everyone entered intake on the same day, we are jumping right into orientation today. This is usually one of my favorite days, but my dick isn't even excited. It looks as if I'm going to be taking a hands-off approach to classes this Section.

"Yay, first day," Ayden says sarcastically.

"Is your dick broken too?" I ask as I climb onto the stage.

"Yes," he groans. "How are we going to teach this?"

"The way we did when we had our girl," Andrya says softly as she moves to stand by us. "We'll direct, discuss, and make them practice on each other. Punish and reward accordingly."

Reaching out, I squeeze her fingers. Fuck, working here is a constant reminder of Silla. Clearing my throat, I nod.

"To the Fucked Up Trio wreaking havoc in her honor," I whisper as assets start to walk in.

Sighing, the twins nod. "To her," they mumble.

"Alright, fuckers, get a move on!" I roar, smirking as they all startle. My girl, my little love, isn't here to reign me in anymore.

May the Gods have mercy on this Section's souls, because I sure as fuck won't.

"The Queen is looking for soldiers filled with cunning, wit, and the ability to suck souls out of their marks' bodies through their mouths, pussy, and assholes. None of you are going to make the cut," I begin, rubbing Andrya's skin before letting go of her hand. "We are your worst nightmares, but also your saviors, because we're going to teach you how to stay alive."

The assets are appropriately scared shitless, so I snap my teeth at them. I may as well enjoy terrorizing them since there's so little joy in my life now.

All hail the Queen.

AYDEN

Part of my duties now are to talk to the Queen regularly. It was never a regular thing, but over the last month, she's scheduled weekly meetings.

"Hello, Queen Cinder," I greet her as her face comes up on the computer screen. I always remember the time she told me Lana was coming to the reform camp, and should have realized the end was near then.

"Your lack of enthusiasm wounds me," the Queen sighs, pushing her blonde curls over her shoulder. She's dressed differently than usual today in a navy blue, thin sheath nightgown and robe thrown over it.

Do not think about why she's dressed like this, or you'll lose your lunch.

"It's always a pleasure to spend time with you, Your Majesty," I amend, relaxing as her eyes light up.

"I lost track of time, so I threw something on," she explains, shifting a bit on her feet so I can see her bed. Two naked bodies move on the mattress, forcing me to blank my expression.

Queen Cinder enjoys oversharing on our calls, and it's a nasty habit that I despise. I don't need to imagine who she's fucking.

"It's no problem at all," I murmur, waiting for her to get on with the reason for this week's call. The last four weeks have already been interminable.

"How are my pretty little whores progressing?" she asks cheerfully. *"Will they be ready to enter the field in the next five months?"*

"Yes, Your Majesty. Potions, fighting, and fucking exercises have all been going well. All of Section B is excelling, and we've only had three deaths due to stupidity on their part," I disclose. I send her auditors a report when we have a death, but I don't know if she's actually seeing them.

"Eh, it's not our fault if they're too stupid to live," the Queen coos at me.

The woman reminds me of a silly twit talking to her dog, which is essentially what I am. I'm her living, breathing pet that has to do as she says.

Needless to say, I drink more these days. Glancing at my pinkie finger, I'm reminded of the promises I've made by the scrolling words tattooed there: Trust or die.

Two days after we walked through these doors, I made everyone pinky swear that we wouldn't kill ourselves. Not through alcohol, poison, or dumb decisions. The five of us have survived Hell on Earth, we have to survive this place too. Even though my shaving razor looked very inviting yesterday.

Swallowing, I force my attention back to the Queen. "Indeed, Your Majesty," I respond, though a little delayed. "Reports all are the same, the assets are working hard, and we're all on schedule."

"*Did your roses survive?*" Queen Cinder asks idly, playing with the neckline of her robe.

"Surprisingly, yes they did," I tell her. I really thought they'd be dead, but the fuckers are resilient.

"*Perfect. There's a very important person in the city who has been asking for them. I would like you to distribute them directly to me. I'll pay you whatever you like, it's not like you can use any of the money anyway,*" she scoffs.

"I need a new tattoo," I blurt out. It's been on my mind for a while, and I need a decent artist. This ink will be going in a very delicate area and I need it done well. I may even ask Sidney if he wants any new ink.

"*Where is this ink going? What will it say? I don't know if I like the idea of your body getting more tattoos,*" Queen Cinder pouts. It's funny because I didn't ask for her permission. I simply need an artist.

"On my big, fat cock," I tell her, watching her pupils blow in desire. I know how to play the game, no matter how repugnant I find her.

"*Oh... my. Really?*" Queen Cinder breathes. "*I suppose that's agreeable. I will connect you to the castle staff secretary that is handling this. I get so*

bored with the details, you know.”

This makes her out to be an idiot, but I will never make that mistake. The woman is incredibly smart.

“That’s fine, Your Majesty,” I agree.

“If I wanted to see your cock, would you pull it out for me?” Cinder asks. *Absolutely fucking not.*

“I don’t believe that would be appropriate,” I deflect smoothly. I don’t want to tell her that my cock won’t get completely hard anymore. Sidney tried to give me a blowjob the other day because I’ve been pent up and crabby, but it wasn’t very successful.

“I guess you’re right. I’ll send an artist out to the camp soon. In the meantime...”

Leaving the video on, she turns away, dropping her robe. “Don’t hang up, Ayden,” she scolds as my finger moves to disconnect. Next the straps of the nightgown drop and she’s climbing naked onto the bed, flashing her pink pussy at me.

It makes me want to gag. I don’t want anything to do with what’s about to happen. Taking a sip of water, I attempt to control my gag reflex. It’s unsurprising to me that I can suck cock without an issue, but this vile woman makes me want to puke into the trash can beside me.

“Lana, wakey wakey...” Queen Cinder coos, and my lips twist in disgust. She can’t see me anymore, too focused on waking her exhausted lover.

“Cinder?” Lana sighs, her arms lifting to hug the Queen. My door opens, and I look over to see who has barged in. The Warden stands there, door ajar, as Cinder begins to eat Lana’s pussy.

“Are you watching porn?” the Warden hisses, making me shake my head wildly. Motioning for him to close the door, my face must convince him to do just that. Coming around the desk, his jaw drops as he sees the other woman in Cinder’s bed rising to sit on Lana’s face. Grayson turns away so that the video camera isn’t picking him up as he shudders violently.

“You came in here, Sir. My office is no longer a sex free zone,” I mutter. Shoving away from the desk, I point to my limp dick. Wrinkling his nose, Grayson clears his throat loud enough for those on the other end of the video chat to hear.

“Your Majesty, I’m afraid I need to pull Ayden away,” the Warden says. Cinder lifts her head, turning fully to show off the juices glistening on the lower half of her face, and perfect tits.

I really think I’m broken now because this all does nothing for me. The woman in front of me is cruel, vicious, and she’d probably make my dick wither away.

“*Oh no. I was going to ask him to fist his cock as he watches us,*” Cinder whines. My fingers dig into my thighs, because I wouldn’t be able to perform, and she doesn’t know I’m broken. She would have no use for me if she knew. Grayson squeezes my shoulder as he bends over to speak to the Queen, his body hiding his hand. Cinder gets jealous over every little thing, and I’m being offered comfort, nothing more.

“I know it’s disappointing, Your Majesty,” Grayson says respectfully. “We are working to make sure your every desire is met at FRC, and sometimes that means we need to work instead of play.”

I’ve never heard this man speak so respectfully. He has been barking and demanding things the entire time he’s been back at the reform camp, and it’s only when we all relax together for the night that he becomes the caring man that I’ve gotten to know. He sure as shit isn’t typically this humoring of anyone, though it’s amazing what eight months being tortured will do to a man.

“*You’re right.*” Cinder sighs. “*Goodbye, boys. Make me proud.*”

Neither one of us has been a boy for years, but we simply nod and say our goodbyes.

“Fuck.” I sigh, leaning back in my chair.

The Warden looks down at me as he straightens, his hand still on my

shoulder. “Has she done that before?” he asks gruffly, and I rock my head from side to side.

“Not specifically like that, but she’ll ask me to recount certain exercises done in class to her. She’s always pushed the boundary of gag worthy conversations, but that’s the first time she’s pulled something like that,” I explain. “I wouldn’t have... Grayson, my dick isn’t even hard. I’m a liability on these calls if she’s going to pull that shit.”

“Why are you taking her calls? I didn’t even know you were talking to her,” the Warden grumbles.

“We all do things we don’t want to,” I mutter. “I used to occasionally take calls with her before, because Andrya can’t control her face about the progress of our Section. Then when we all got back to FRC, she started calling me weekly.”

“I’ll sit in on your calls with her from now on,” Grayson rumbles as he starts to turn away. “Don’t argue with me, I’ll figure out a way to keep the Queen happy. Now that we’re out of the dungeon, the five of us are all that matters to me.”

Slamming the door as he walks out of the office, I’m left blinking in surprise. That’s not how I expected today to go at all.

Two

ANDRYA

I don't want to get up today. We've been here for three months, and the monotony is starting to get to me. Sidney rubs his cheek against my shoulder, his arm loosely around my waist. We started sleeping in puppy piles shortly after we came back to FRC. Even Ayden started joining the two of us, because it keeps the nightmares away. We don't do anything but sleep in the same bed, but it helps me feel safe.

No one can take me away when they're with me, and Ayden has his fingers linked in mine, helping to ground me even in my dreams. My mind recognizes the safety, and for the most part, I haven't woken up sobbing as I remember our time in the Queen's tender care.

The scars lay plainly on my soul, even if everything else healed up well. I still have marks on my hip, but Ayden has a plan for these. He mentioned a tattoo artist that's coming out to the camp soon. My brother figured we'd all get something to act as our therapy. Pain transformed into something beautiful sounds like something I can get behind.

"Morning, Sweetness," Sidney yawns, wiggling down to lay his head on my chest. "So comfy. I don't want to teach today."

"Me either, but at least everything is on schedule for our Section. We have a poisons class today, do we have all the materials for it locked up in the office?" Ayden asks, forcing himself out of bed.

Since some of the plants are lethal, we have to make sure they're out of reach of the populace. Our assets wouldn't attempt to do anything, but just in case, it's easier to err on the side of caution.

"I need to grab some things," Sidney mutters, pushing himself off. "I try to avoid the greenhouse as much as possible. I've given most of my duties to the groundskeepers, but I need to handle my plants."

Pressing my lips together, I stay silent, knowing he used to spend time in the greenhouse with *her*. Fuck, it hurts to even think about Silla, and the fact that she spent her birthday last year in the dungeon as the guards' plaything. Having been in her place, even for just a few hours, scarred my soul. I hope she's at peace, wherever she is.

"Will you be alright out there?" I ask softly. The five of us are living a half-life as we struggle to find our normalcy. The Warden walks the grounds constantly checking on us as he controls the camp with an iron fist. I remember him as a caring giant before, but that softness is reserved for us alone. The assets are scared shitless of him, but it also means there's not any trouble. No fights to break up, undercurrents of tension, and Zachary is no longer here. So why does it feel as if I'm slowly dying?

Sidney merely grunts, leaving the room, and I have to remind myself that none of us are okay.

"I'm going to shower and hope that it helps wake me up," I mutter.

"I'll be in the gym," Ayden says, nodding at me before he walks out in his basketball shorts and T-shirt that he slept in.

And then there was one.

Pulling off my clothes to throw in the hamper now that I'm alone, I walk into the bathroom naked. Ayden will be gone for over an hour, which is plenty of time for me to get my shit together.

Turning the water on to cold, I decide to punish myself. I'm not a masochist, but pain keeps me from my thoughts of how I failed Silla. We were always temporary, but we were robbed of any last good memories together.

Hissing, I step into the water, closing my eyes against the million little icicles hitting my skin. "Fuck, fuck," I groan, washing my hair. I started using jasmine scented hair products to feel closer to Silla once we returned to the reform camp. Maybe that's creepy, but I don't care.

Washing my body, I bite my lip as I touch the Queen's brand on my hip.

The five of us all have them, a continuous reminder that we belong to Cinder. Swallowing hard, it's as if the strength disappears in my limbs as I collapse to the ground. I thought Sidney, Ayden, and I were safe here at FRC from the Queen.

We did what she wanted, turned out new assets for her, until we could no longer abide by her demands. If I'm being honest with myself, it's because we stopped following Cinder's insane requests, and fell in love with her raven haired stepsister. We started giving a shit about someone other than ourselves, paying the ultimate price.

Our freedom and peace.

Fraternization has never been an issue at FRC, but Cinder took offense that we were filling the coffers of the camp on our own. I also think Silla is a sore point for her, so the brand says **traitor**. The five of us received these steaming hot brands on our first night as "guests" of the Queen's dungeon, all in different places.

"I'm so sorry," I whisper as the memories start to crowd in as I close my eyes.

Silla's screams are deeply embedded in my brain after I put her in the vent and sealed it to "cure" her of her claustrophobia. I was so stupid, embroiled in my own revenge scheme, all because I felt embarrassed that she rejected me.

We all knew those were our girl's screams reverberating off the walls of the pits of Hell. Unfortunately, the guards were equally busy with our own torment as they heated our brands.

The intensity of the warmth coming off the iron made me tremble as I fought the guards holding me down.

"If you keep moving I'm going to press this into your pussy, sealing it up forever," Teye growls as he yanks on my hair, making my back arch, despite the table I'm now strapped down to. "It would be a real shame, too."

"Leave my sister alone!" Ayden yells before screaming as the brand

meets his skin. My eyes prick with tears as the screams of the people I care about explode around the room. It doesn't seem right to fight when we're all suffering.

"Okay," I cry, closing my eyes. "Just... do it."

"It's no fun if you don't fight," Teye chuckles. The guards stripped us of our clothing the moment they dragged us into this huge chamber. There's chains hanging from the walls, and it looks like a scene from a horror movie. A giant drain in the middle of the room for blood or water makes it all so much worse. At this moment, I don't know if we're meant to leave here alive.

Lying here, naked, on this leather covered table, it's impossible to tell.

Releasing my hair, Teye's hand drags down my skin, cruelly squeezing my breasts that are pressed into the cold table.

"Such pretty, untouched skin... It would be cruel not to get a taste," he chuckles. Slapping my ass, the noise is muffled by the screams as the guards continue to brand their prisoners. Pushing his fingers into my pussy, Teye groans, even though I swear I'm drier than the desert, unless you maybe count Sidney's cum that may still be inside of me. "So fucking tight too. There will be a day we'll get to play." He sighs regretfully as he holds his fingers inside of me. A firm hand holds my ass down, and I'm confused because I'm fairly sure it doesn't belong to Teye.

And then the brand is pushed down onto my hip, with Teye's fingers still inside of me, where he roughly fucks me with them as he marks me as a traitor.

Gasping for breath, I sob as I remember the last eleven months. I'm not whole anymore, even if I'm going through the motions of life. There's a razor Ayden probably dropped on his last shower, because he tends to shave his face in here. Except, picking it up, it looks brand new.

Frowning, I stare at it. My skin is covered in goosebumps, my teeth are chattering, and yet I'm consumed by the razor. Banging the head of the razor on the ground, the blade pops out. Leaning against the cold tile wall, I watch

it as if it'll bite me. It would be so easy, wouldn't it?

Then maybe I could see Silla again. I miss her so much. My fingers twitch uncontrollably from the cold. I shouldn't do this, I should be strong. Sobbing, I slowly reach for the blade. I'm tired of being brave, living just within the limits the Queen gives me.

I hear someone yell, but I'm fixated on the shiny, sharp metal as I lift it up. The shower door opens, making me jump as my eyes rise up. Sidney looks at me in agony, shaking his head as he climbs in with me.

"No, Sweetness, don't do that," Sidney coos, hissing at the temperature. Making it warmer, he drops to his knees next to me. Somehow, the blade is now at my wrist. Time is moving funny, and I don't know how long I've been sitting on the shower floor. "Please, you can't leave us. We need you."

"Why? No one needs this weak person that I've become," I croak, pressing the blade down to watch the blood bead against it.

"I love you. We all adore you. You're ours, what we went through changed us, but it bound us together too. Please, Andrya," Sidney begs. He's holding his hands tightly within the other as if praying, but I know he's trying not to touch me. I'm on edge, and this blade is sharp as fuck.

"I'm so tired," I rasp. "The memories, the men... I can't do this. I can't live here. I miss her so much..."

"I'm so sorry," he whispers. "We couldn't protect you. We couldn't help her. We failed you both, but I refuse to let you end things like this. You don't know that Silla is gone, Baby."

His words make me angry, and I throw the blade away. Anger is good, it fuels me with fire. "She has to be!" I scream. "If Silla is alive, then she's still trapped with her step-sister. Cinder is fucking evil. Wouldn't we have heard her screaming in the dungeon? There wasn't a single peep from her, Sidney. You can't live in this fantasy world. It hurts too much."

Grabbing me, he hoists me into his lap. My teeth chatter, and I'm sure my lips are blue. The hot water burns, though I'm sure that's due to the change in

temperature.

“Life hurts,” Sidney grunts. “It’s part of being alive. We’re here, and we’re damn well going to live it. You and I, we’re connected, Sweetness. I was finishing up in the greenhouse, and I could *feel* something was wrong. You’ve been in here for ages, and your lips are bluer than death.”

Standing, he holds me as I cry, shivering as the water runs over us. Sidney doesn’t give two shits that he’s in his clothing, still wearing his shoes. Somehow, he knew I needed him.

I thought no one would miss me. No one would notice. I was selfish.

“I’m sorry,” I whisper, hating myself as I bury my face in his throat.

“We all break, Sweetness. Please talk to us. We can hurt together, talk about her, whatever you need. I realized it’s as if Silla never was. She became this ghost, when she was everything to us,” Sidney says. “We’ll all do better, Andrya. I promise.”

“Her birthday is next month,” I tell him, feeling him stiffen. “She spent her last one in the dungeons. What a way to celebrate becoming an adult.”

“We’ll make a cake. She’s not here, but we’ll honor her. Silla was here, we all loved her, and it hurts,” he whispers, tears streaming unabashedly down his cheeks. They mingle with the water streaming from the shower, but I know they’re there.

Brushing my lips against his jaw, I lay my head on his shoulder. “Thank you,” I murmur as he turns off the water.

“Anything for you.” Sidney sighs, water squelching from his very wet shoes as he steps out of the stall.

We’re not okay. And now I know that it’s okay to struggle. It’s not acceptable to give up.

ISAAC

I'm sitting in my office, staring at Sidney in surprise.

“Drya did what?” I ask, eyes narrowing.

“She’s spiraling, man.” He sighs, dropping onto a chair in front of my desk. “I found her on the floor of the shower with blue lips, staring at a razor blade against her wrist as if it was her best friend.”

“Fuck,” I whisper, shaking my head. None of us had an easy time in the dungeons, but only Andrya was violated by the guards. Sidney told me that he’s been sleeping in the twins' room to help her with the nightmares. “What can we do? Why is this happening now? We’ve been back for three months.”

“Silla’s birthday is next month,” Sidney grunts, rubbing his face. “We all miss her, and while a lot of things point to her being dead—”

“We don’t know that,” I deny. I want to say that I would feel if she was gone. It may sound corny, but Gods, that incredible woman can’t have departed from this world. It would be too cruel.

“We don’t,” he agrees. “The truth is we need to help Andrya. Every one of us is trying to stay afloat, but she’s floundering, man.”

“When is the tattoo artist coming?” I ask. “We should all get something done together, cover this godsdamned brand. The Queen never said we couldn’t...”

“That’s true. Usually a burn brand like that has to be well healed. If everyone agrees to drink one of my teas, I’ll make it for us to have before bed. It’ll help promote healing so it’ll appear much older than it is,” Sidney muses. “The tattoo artist is scheduled to come next month. We can design something special. I can speak with Ayden?”

Ayden has been throwing himself into work, but oddly enough is an incredible artist. If anyone can make us something, it would be him.

“Our brands are all in different spots I think, aren’t they?” I ask, my hand touching my back.

“Similar places,” Sidney disagrees. “Andrya’s is on her hip, mine is on my back.”

“My brand is also on my back, and Grayson’s is on the back of his thigh. He tried to bull kick the guard attempting to brand him,” I tell him.

Smirking, he shrugs. “The Warden is a big man. I hope his kick connected in some way. I think hanging out after work more often may help Andrya. What do you think?”

“I think it may help all of us.” I sigh. “It’s clear that if Andrya is affected, we may all be in various ways. Grayson’s or my room is the largest. We could just watch a movie or talk. Whatever works.”

Blowing out a breath, Sidney nods as he stands. “Thanks for hearing me out. We can’t lose Andrya. I know she probably doesn’t want to talk about what happened, fuck I don’t completely know outside of the nightmares. They’re better, but she still wakes up screaming occasionally. Andrya just doesn’t remember them when she wakes up,” he says.

“Fuck. It’s not like there’s anyone else to talk to about this either,” I mutter. “Let’s see if she’ll speak to us. We all aren’t sleeping great, at least I’m still having issues. I’ll work until late at night, and then fall asleep at my desk in my bedroom.”

“We could always try a big puppy pile,” he suggests as he walks out.

Who knows, maybe it’ll mean I wake up without pains in my neck and back. Pushing back my chair, I decide to find the Warden. It’s time we chatted.

The hallways are fairly empty, the assets are in classes or in their bedrooms. Dinner has come and gone, and I know that the twins and Sidney ended class about an hour ago. It’s why he swung by to speak to me. If Grayson isn’t in his office, I’ll go for a run on the treadmill. I have some nervous energy to work off.

Knocking on his office door, I wait for him to yell admittance. Grayson's door is rarely open the way it used to be. I think he's been seeking peace from masses that need his time and energy as well.

"It's me," I tell him as I pop my head inside. Gray gives me a relieved smile, nodding for me to come in.

"Hey, yeah come in. Just shut the door behind you?" he asks.

"Have you been busy today?" I ask, closing the door and locking it behind me.

"Between calls, emails, video chats, and people coming to my office to speak to me, I've been slammed," Grayson groans, knocking on wood. "I just want to be done with today."

"Fancy some company? We have a bit of a situation with our people," I tell him softly, walking over to fold myself into the chair in front of him.

"Our... who? What happened?" Grayson definitely cares about us, and anyone who doesn't believe that is daft. He's just decided to cash his give a fucks to the five of us and no one else.

"Drya decided to have a rather intimate moment with a razor." I sigh. "She's fine, and Sidney found her before she really cut herself, but she's struggling."

Gray stares at me for a moment before burying his fingers in his hair and pulling. "Fuck," he groans, closing his eyes. He looks magnificent, strong, and tired.

"So here's what we're going to do," I tell him, so he can stop thinking about how to fix it. Andrya isn't something to be fixed, but we can help each other. "I'm sure Andrya isn't the only one having trouble, but she is the one with the most outward signs of it. The monotony of our days is isolating all of us a bit. What do you think about getting together throughout the week?"

"Yeah. I'm alright with that. Is Andrya still having trouble sleeping?" he asks softly.

The five of us have very few secrets from each other now. It was an

unspoken rule when we got back. I became Gray's shadow for a while as he went back to assuming his responsibilities, and we've been slightly distant. It feels wrong to continue the relationship we started when Silla was with us. I don't know what's going to happen, but this is a good start.

"Yeah," I grunt. "Sidney suggested possibly sleeping in bed together to see if that helps to quiet her demons. Andrya wakes up screaming, but doesn't remember it."

"I don't know if it'll help quiet anything, but I'm willing to try. My bed or yours will be the only options large enough," he murmurs.

"I draw the line at having morning wood dig into my ass," I chuckle, earning me a smirk.

"I'm a good cuddler. You'll have to deal with it." He snorts. "Dicks get hard, we're adults."

"Gods, it feels as if that's the only time these days that my dick gets hard." I sigh. "It's been three months since we left that hell hole. When will it become easier?"

"It'll be different for all of us, I expect," Gray says, folding his arms across his broad chest. "Until the queen says differently, we're going to rot here indefinitely, fueling her supply for spies. Fuck knows what she's using them for."

Huffing, I roll my eyes. It's something we have refused to discuss. My mind will go wild with the possibilities, but I have a feeling someone is trying to overthrow her. Possibly multiple people. "Sidney also suggested a group tattoo. I know you're not necessarily a joiner, but—"

"Brands can't be tattooed over," Gray says immediately, making me shake my head.

"They have to be well healed, and there are exceptions. Sidney is going to have us all drink a special tea at night that will make the edges smoother and help it heal faster. It can be part of our bonding nightly sessions," I tease.

As a knock sounds at the door, Grayson waves me off.

“Kumba-fucking-ya, count me in then. Off with you, I’m trying to work.”

Snickering, I nod as I stand up. Smoothing my expression, I walk to the office door, opening it. Anyone can be a spy these days, both on staff or as an asset. We don’t trust anyone outside of our group anymore.

The secretary stands outside waiting, so I nod to her before walking out. While I am busy with my own shit for my Section, I still have regular meetings with the Warden, so it’s not suspicious for me to be chatting with him.

No one knows the specifics of why the five of us disappeared, and no one ever will. We would do it all again, because people don’t deserve to starve. A certain raven-haired beauty made us all fall in love with her, and people have been known to do crazier things than commit a small bit of treason against a despot queen for love.

Three

SILLA

Today is my twenty-sixth birthday, but I feel closer to sixty. Sitting in the car, outside of the castle for the first time in a year, I can't get enough of the fluffy blue clouds above me.

I have to convince people who probably think I'm dead to do something, even though I don't want to.

My wants and wishes don't matter anymore. The Queen's will is paramount, because I don't want to end up back in the dungeon. Glancing down at my gloved hands, I frown. I hate them, as they're the part of the perfect lady persona that Cinder has made me adopt.

I especially hate the color navy. I would be happy to live my entire life without seeing it again. The guards who hurt me wore sharp navy uniforms, until they lost their clothes, of course. Sometimes my step-sister would come visit me, her skirts swishing across the dirty floor. Bathed in the shade of blue that I loathe, Cinder would smile brightly at me.

"You're not screaming loud enough, Drizella. How am I supposed to have mind blowing orgasms without your screams to get me there?" Cinder would ask. She disgusts me. I knew she was vile, but the atrocities she continues to level on my body are awful.

Flicking my long skirt into place, I count my blessings.

I'm out of the castle.

I'm under a beautiful blue sky.

I could be traveling in the trunk.

MAYBE I NEED to work on that.

“Silla,” Lana croons, placing her hand on my arm. Swallowing hard, I can taste the sharp, sour flavor of bile. I couldn’t eat breakfast this morning, because Cinder cleared the room to eat Lana’s pussy on the table. I wasn’t allowed to leave, as my step-sister gets off on having an audience. The stories I could tell you would be enough to turn your stomach. It definitely turned me off of my meal.

Cinder has never let me forget her generosity when she pulled me from the dungeon four months ago. She also enjoys oversharing, knowing no one will say a word. For example, my step-sister likes to enhance the pain of others, and would pipe in the sounds of my torture to the five most important people in the world to me.

They heard every scream, whimper, and fear. I’m ashamed that I couldn’t hide my pain, instead making theirs so much worse.

“Yes, Lana,” I respond softly. My voice used to be smooth, light, and beautiful. The constant screaming damaged my vocal chords, which means that it’s now lower, raspy and almost sultry. It feels so incredibly odd not to be who and what I once was.

I’m a fucking mess of emotions right now.

“Remember your mission,” Lana reminds me, her hand massaging my knee through my dress. She’s always been very handsy whenever Cinder isn’t around. It’s gross, and reminds me that I have no autonomy over my body.

The word “no” only seems to spur her on, so I simply nod instead.

“Are we almost there?” I ask even as I nod, curling my toes hard together, reveling in the pain. I kicked my heels off when we got into the car for the six hour drive north to the reform camp.

These shoes pinch, but Cinder insisted. There are few people who even wear them, because they are my step-sister’s signature. She loves to be able to be heard from a long distance, as it makes everyone scurry away. The

Queen of Forbach rules with fear and terror within the castle, and there's a river of blood to prove it.

The moment I kicked off my shoes early on in our journey, Lana's eyes moved to my feet. I immediately hid them under my skirts, because it makes my skin crawl. The small, black-haired beauty has a thing for feet, and while I'm not one to kink shame, I hate her so much. She makes me have to constantly overthink my actions, worried they'll set her off. Or worse, turn her on.

I've been primped, shaved, manicured, and molded into what Cinder wants me to be: an extension to the queen. She has a question, a demand, a proposal for me to make to the Warden, the twins, Isaac, and Sidney, but only one answer will ever be correct. "*Yes, Your Majesty. How may I serve you?*"

Gods, how will I survive this?

"Yes, we'll be there in the next few minutes. You know Cinder is counting on you, Drizella. Don't fuck this up, or it could very well mean all of their heads. The Underground will not be quiet, and there's danger afoot," she hisses. I am well versed by now on all of those dangers.

For the last four months, Cinder has sent in spies to infiltrate the ranks of the Underground. All of them have been dropped at the front gates tied up and shamed for their actions. They leave the spies alive, knowing that my sister will execute them with grand fanfare for her own amusement.

How the rest of the kingdom has no idea any of this is happening is beyond me. Someone wants the crowns to topple from the heads of the Queen and King of Forbach. Cinder swears she doesn't have enemies, but that's only because of her method to kill them before they become an issue.

She brought me Zachary Dion's head on a pike while I was in the dungeon. My banged up, tired body was hanging from the chains on the wall, and I remember how all I wanted was to die that night. Cinder came in with a smile, chortling about how Zachary let Lana and her into the reform camp. I didn't really know how many days had passed since my step-sister decided to

slip into the reform camp like a thief in the night. Time runs differently when every breath hurts, and there's no light underground. I only know it was night, because Cinder told me.

It turns out that Zachary wasn't a criminal at all, just a spy for the Queen within the reform camp. He's always been a staunch supporter of hers, and his little sister is actually her maid.

Kailee is one of Cinder and Lana's fuck toys, but Zachary never knew this. I can't imagine how that conversation would have gone. Cinder killed him because people who snitch will more than likely turn on you as well.

It seems like solid logic. Zachary was a fucking rat.

The pain as my toes cramp violently makes me wince. I would much rather ground myself now, than suffer a panic attack in the small space of this car. Lana loves to see blood in the water, and refuses to back down. I've learned not to let her smell my fear.

"Alright, Drizella, here we are," Lana murmurs as the car comes to a stop. My gaze rises to the familiar steel door, and I force myself to fill my lungs. I just need to make myself put one foot in front of the other.

Wiggling my toes, I force them to relax. Shoving my feet back into the shoes, I nod at Lana.

"Off I go then," I tell her, waiting for the driver to open the back door for me.

Slipping out of the car, I take a deep breath of fresh air. I'm not free, but I'm outside, even if it's just for a moment. The six hour drive brought us into windy conditions, and the clouds are gathered now, threatening to dump onto my head. Happy fucking birthday.

"Oh, Drizella?" Lana calls out of the now open window after I've taken a few steps.

Turning to look at her over my shoulder, I can see the evil in her eyes. "You're twenty-six now. Cinder can legally execute you after she has her fun with you," she says. The double meaning makes me shudder. There's been a

gleam of attraction in my step-sister's eyes that I don't think I noticed before.

I don't know when it developed, but I loathe it. There are days I wish she had let my body scar from the damage and atrocities the guards leveled on me, instead of allowing the healers into my cell to ensure my skin would heal perfectly. "I'm aware," I rasp, pitching my voice so she'll hear it, even with the wind pulling my words away.

Lana is hanging out of the car as she speaks to me, and inclines her head when she hears my words. "Perfect. Happy birthday, my lovey. Off you go," she says, repeating my words back.

The ick factor is high right now. I do not want to be her anything. Swallowing hard, I start walking toward the steel entrance.

My hair is up in a braided bun, but I can feel the wind pulling strands of hair from it, begging it to play. I wish I could, but I'm a dour diplomat for the queen today.

There's a doorbell that I never noticed by the heavy door, so as the wind almost topples me over, I press it. This weather is insane today. Figures that it would be on my birthday. I'm having a hard time remembering a single happy birthday since my mother married Marcus Tremaine. It's possible I've never had one at all.

The door begins to open, forcing me to step back. My dress swirls around my ankles, that shade of blue that will always be the worst color in the Rolodex of blues.

"May I help you?" asks a woman that I don't know. She's in a gray skirt and white shirt, and it makes me wonder if she's one of the secretaries. Cinder cleaned house at the reform camp, so I wouldn't be surprised if I don't recognize a single person.

"Yes, I'm Drizella Tremaine, and I'm here to speak to the Warden on behalf of the Queen," I explain. The woman takes in my outfit, and her eyes flit over to the official looking sedan with all of the windows blacked out. Lana closed her window at some point, so there's no way for the woman to

know who else is inside.

“Oh... Is he expecting you?” she asks, her face draining of color. It’s almost as if she’s trying to figure out what to do next. “Is anyone coming in with you?”

“It’s just me,” I tell her carefully, really hoping that Lana will stay in the damned car. She promised Cinder that she would. This is going to be hard enough as it is, coming back from the dead.

Cinder took great glee in telling me about how Andrya and my men grieved for me. Gods, I don’t even know if I can call them mine anymore. So much has changed since the last time I stood in front of this door.

“Yes, Ma’am. I’m his secretary, and I’ll take you to him. Please follow me, then,” she murmurs, opening the door wide to admit me. Stepping inside reminds me of the terror of the unknown that I had when I was here for the first time almost a year and a half ago.

It’s incredible how much can happen in that amount of time.

The clicking of my heels on the tile draws stares as I walk across FRC to the Warden’s office. My navy dress skims across the floor, another reason why I need heels, so I won’t trip on it. Cinder despises clumsiness, so she taught me how to be aware of my surroundings in her own twisted way. Whether it’s dark or bright in a room, I have cat-like reflexes, but they cost me a lot of bumps, and bruises, and once she threw me into the soldiers barracks just outside of town.

Holding back a shiver at the memories that threaten to wash over me, I package them away. I can survive anything for thirty seconds at a time. And then I’ll start the timer in my head again.

The secretary frowns as she sees that Grayson is standing outside of his office talking to someone. Cinder mentioned that I may have trouble convincing him because he’s become extra grumpy lately. Barking at assets, ruling with an iron fist, and he’s been leaving his office less. I imagine the latter is because it’s four months into the next rotation of assets, and the

Queen is demanding audits to see how things are going.

She's a master of twisting the facts, and one of the reasons my hands are shaking with anxiety and terror. I'm worried they'll hate me. Sure, Cinder charged them secretly with treason, but the true reason is that she doesn't want to see me happy. My lot is to forever be under her thumb, so she can watch me writhe in distress and humiliation.

Everything that happened really was because I exist.

Steeling my spine, I force myself to breathe. My anxiety is getting better because I can hold only the small amount of good memories I do have. I can do this because there's no other choice.

"Warden, there's a Miss Drizella Tremaine here to see you," the secretary says.

"Don't be silly," Grayson snaps at her, glancing up. The woman shrugs, pointing at me. Eyes moving to me, the man pales. I almost take a step forward to catch him in case he falls over, but that's ridiculous. Due to his size, we'd only collapse together. "Oh, I see."

"Hello, Warden. I'm here about the Queen's business today," I tell him. There's a small wrinkle between his eyes as he listens to me. His feet are planted to keep him upright, but anyone else would just see the gruff, fair, burly Warden. I see more, though. I always have. "Can we speak in private?"

"Yes, I expect that we'll need to," he murmurs. "I'm unavailable for a bit, Laura. Please ensure that no one disturbs us. I don't care if you have to sit outside of this door and shoo people away. Is that understood?"

"But..." Grayson levels a death stare at Laura, who takes a quick step away from him. He has changed. He wasn't quite this quick to react before. "I'll go grab a chair."

Laura scurries away, and Grayson strides into his office, leaving me to follow. My heart is pounding at the thought of being in a room with him. What will he say? It'll break my heart when he tells me that he and the other four people who have my heart, hate me.

My foot snags on the carpet, but I lift it quickly so it's not obvious that I almost tripped. I remember my lessons well, and I can't fuck this up. Grayson needs to accept my proposal.

"Close the door behind you, please, Drizella," the Warden says as he makes his way to his desk.

Moving slowly, I feel the air start to leave the room as I close the door. It seems silly, but I'd swear hope is leaving too. Fuck, why is this my life?

Hands fisting, hidden in my dress, I walk toward the chairs in front of Grayson's desk.

"Gray," I whisper, swallowing hard as I look down. Gods, I'm so weak. I can't face him. I've missed him so much.

"Silla," he whispers, and I can feel him move. He's a force of nature, the very air moves when he does. I wish I had some of his strength right now. A hand cups my chin, making me shiver. "Look at me. Gods, you're so damn beautiful. A sight for very sore, tired eyes, Dangerous Girl."

"I don't feel so dangerous anymore," I whisper.

"Look. At. Me," he growls. "I thought you were dead. I want to see you."

Raising my gaze, I meet his eyes. "I'm so sorry," I tell him. "I didn't know you could hear me. I didn't know you thought I was dead until Cinder told me. I wouldn't be surprised if you hated me. But she's sent me here, and —"

"Shh," he murmurs, his arms wrapping around me. Swallowing a sob, I stand stiffly. It's been almost a year since I've been held. "Am I hurting you?"

"No," I rasp, my voice miserable. "I just don't know how to be held anymore."

A second later, my legs are swept out from under me, making me gasp. Grayson carries me to his desk chair, sitting me in his lap.

"That's fine," he tells me. "I'm an expert cuddler these days."

I look up at him in surprise as I lay my head on his chest. So many

questions run through my head. Who is he cuddling with? Have they all moved on? Am I wasting my time here? Gods, maybe I would be better off ripped apart by Cinder's—

“What is going on in that brain?” he asks, horror coming over his face. “Your eyes... Silla, shit. Whatever you're thinking, stop. The twins, Sidney, Isaac and I have started sleeping in the same bed for comfort. None of us were doing well recently, because we're so used to being in the same space. It's just another part of our trauma. The only person we've been missing is right here in my lap.”

Sagging against him, I try to breathe, but instead choke on a sob. “I've missed you all so much. I have a big ask. A giant one, and you can all tell me to fuck off. I'll understand.”

“What will it cost you if we say no, Silla?” the Warden growls.

I need to get a hold of myself, but the scent of spices and peppermint swirl around me, making it so hard to pack everything away. Shuddering, I dig my nails into the palm of my hand to try to get my shit together.

“Silla,” he barks, making me jump. There's anger, sadness, and the sheen of unshed tears in his eyes. “No bullshit. Stop apologizing. I don't want to hear it. None of this was your fault. It makes sense that Cinder is a diabolical bitch, but on the other hand, you're alive, and that's worth everything. Do you hear me? You're the best part of the five of us.”

Nodding, my body jerks from the overwhelming flood of emotion that I feel. I have too many boxes that I stuff everything away, and they're refusing to close.

“Yes. I hear you,” I croak out. Kicking off my shoes, I haul myself up so I'm straddling his thighs. I can't stop staring at him as I reach out to touch his face. Seeing the gloves, I scowl, pulling them off to throw them. “Don't let me forget those or it'll be my head.”

“Silla, I don't know if that's a joke or not. Your truth bombs are killing me, Baby,” he groans as I finally touch his cheek.

His face is scruffy with a five o'clock shadow, and the feel of it grounds me. Leaning forward, I drop my forehead to his. "Thank you for seeing me." I sigh. "I'm sorry it had to be like this."

Hands surrounding my waist, his fingers dig in. I'm so grateful I'm not in pain, because my flinching if I had been recently beaten would upset him.

"I'm not. I almost passed out in shock when I saw you. I didn't believe it when my secretary announced you. We have wished to see your face one more time since we were released. You're always in my thoughts and theirs," Grayson reminds me.

"What if they hate me?" I ask, my fingers tangling in his hair. It's as if I'm trying to lock everything in my mind. How soft his curls are, how hard his muscles are, how safe I feel in his arms. I'll miss it all after I leave. *Gods, why are you so cruel to offer me this moment, knowing I have to be strong enough to walk away soon.*

"Why don't we find out for ourselves?" Grayson snorts. Picking up the phone, he clicks on the intercom. All I can do is twist around to look on in horror. "Sidney, Isaac, Ayden, and Andrya please come to my office immediately. We have a very important visitor here."

"Why did you do that?" I gasp after he hangs up the phone.

Pulling me tightly to him so we're nose to nose, he says, "Because the five of us love you, and they would never forgive me if they couldn't see you. Is anyone waiting for you?"

"Lana." I wince, having a hard time focusing on his words. They all love me? Is that possible? I don't think anyone is able to love me after everything I've lived through in the last year. I'm spoiled and tainted goods. "Maybe someone should give her a heads up that you all are seeing me and that we're discussing the Queen's proposal?"

"Yes, I will tell Laura to do that. This isn't important, but I need to know. Why is your voice different?" Grayson asks, his fingers digging into my neck, releasing tension I didn't know I had. I'm fucking putty in his hands.

“I damaged my vocal cords, and it’s not reversible. This is my voice now,” I explain, my voice filled with shame. I hate the way I sound now.

“You sound as if you’re a walking sex advertisement,” he chuckles. “It’s sultry and beautiful, just different.”

Nodding, I shift in his lap, surprised when I rock against something hard. “Oh,” I breathe, my eyes widening.

“That hasn’t happened in ages,” Grayson says, his brow raising. “It doesn’t have to mean anything. We don’t have to do anything about it. Just know that outside of a morning erection, none of our libidos are worth a shit.”

“None?” I ask, wonder and surprise in my voice. The Trio always had happy sexual appetites, though before everything went to shit they revolved around me.

“Nope. Life has been dull, sad, and lonely without you. We have each other for comfort with our memories, but nothing else. You’re the glue, Dangerous Girl. Now remember who the fuck you are, and get ready because they’re on the way here,” Grayson rumbles.

Who the hell am I? I don’t even know.

Clambering off Grayson’s lap, I step back into my heels and pick up my gloves. Pulling them on, he looks at me strangely before passing me to speak to his secretary. Drying my face with tissues on Gray’s desk, I take a deep breath as my trembling fingers take several attempts to line up into the correct holes in the Godsdamned gloves. Once done, I blow out a breath of frustration as I walk to the chair facing the Warden’s desk.

“It’s alright,” Grayson soothes as he sits down. “Remember to breathe. There are no enemies in this room.”

A harsh knock makes me flinch at the sound.

“You summoned us, Warden?” Sidney snipes, and it makes me smile. Some things never change.

“Come in, you louts,” Grayson roars, his strong, sure voice bolstering my

confidence just a touch.

My back is facing the door as they walk in.

“Another audit, Warden?” Isaac asks, surprised.

Waiting for the door to close behind them, I stand. I bite my lip anxiously, knowing I either have to turn to face them, or wait for them to come to me.

Gray gives me a look, and I remember his words. Reminding myself that this won't kill me, even if it feels as if it may, I turn as the four of them approach me.

Their eyes widen, Andrya bursts into tears, and I wrap my arms around myself.

“Hi,” I whisper.

Four

ANDRYA

I'm dreaming.

"Is this for real?" I gasp, tears running down my cheeks. I'm having a break from reality. "Do you see her too?"

"I'm real," the Silla lookalike says. Sidney leans in, linking his fingers in mine for support. "She looks real, Sweetness."

"I've hugged her and spoken a bit to her, so I can assure you that she's real. The Queen has sent her to talk to us about something, but first I want to clear up concerns Silla has," Grayson begins, walking around his desk to sit on the edge.

"What concerns? Fuck, I can't believe you're here," Isaac says in wonder.

"I—" Silla's voice cracks, and she shudders. It's filled with emotions, unshed tears, but sounds different to me. What's wrong with her voice? I still remember it, even after all of this time.

"Take your time," Grayson murmurs. "Someone grab her some water? Silla, it's okay to cry, we'll figure out your makeup after so you're immaculate again."

Silla nods jerkily, forcing herself to take a breath, and shaking out her hands. Ayden immediately goes to grab her a glass of water, but my eyes are on her hands. Her hands are covered in short navy gloves, so none of her skin is showing. Her dress is long-sleeved and brushes along the ground. Is she trying to hide something? Are there scars and bruises?

"Silla, you're safe in this room," I tell her, taking a small step toward her. "Ayden and Isaac sweep this room for bugs constantly, and if you walked in with anything, a sensor would beep on Grayson and Isaac's computers. Take a breath. We love you. We've missed you. Happy birthday, Baby."

Silla sobs at my words, the sounds jagged and broken. "You should...hate

me,” she gasps, covering her mouth with her hand.

“No one hates you,” Isaac growls, also stepping forward. We’re scared to touch her, she’s already hysterical.

“Fuck me.” Grayson sighs, pushing off his desk to wrap Silla in his arms. I feel a stab of jealousy for a moment, but force myself to pay attention. Silla stiffens for a bit as she cries before sagging in his arms. “No one is upset. Everyone in this room loves you.”

“It’s true, I do,” Ayden says, holding the glass awkwardly, but wraps himself around her back.

“I love you so much, Baby,” I tell her, taking the glass to set it aside before joining the group hug.

“You don’t owe us shit,” Sidney rumbles, his eyes glittering with emotion. “We have lived every day for this moment. I love you so much, Silla. I’m so glad you’re alive.”

Stepping up next to me, his arms go around both Silla and I, making her squeak.

Isaac stands there for a moment, simply staring at us all. He has worked so hard to keep us all functional. There are no secrets, if there’s an issue, we talk through it. We are a united front.

Slowly he joins us, walking into the space left as if it was always meant for him. Laying his head on Grayson’s shoulder, his gaze meets her eyes. “You’re our everything. However you were able to survive, thank you. I love you so much, Little Hacker.”

Silla loses it, keening as we hold her. The difference in this is that she’s had no one. Cruelty has been the sole source of touch, based on the screams we heard, until even that was taken from us.

“Breathe,” Grayson demands, so we all take a breath together. It helps quiet the raging emotions in Silla’s mind, as she focuses on our breathing. Every time we breathe, she does as well, her eyes closing slowly. “Drink some water for me, the bitch may not stay in the damn car for long, yeah?”

Nodding, Silla straightens. Her face is streaked with her mascara, and it's honestly more makeup than I've ever seen her wear. I fucking hate it. She's so beautiful, but the clothes, the makeup, and the hair are as if she's trying to be someone else.

Cinder dresses like this.

Grayson hands out tissues, and we all take some. At some point, all of us broke down, giving into our tears and emotion. Collapsing into a chair, Silla blows her nose.

"I'm a mess." She sighs, shaking her head.

"I have makeup remover and I'll fix it," I tell her, sitting next to her. The guys all grab chairs so they can sit in a circle around us. We're all eager to hear why she's here, but trying not to crowd her. Her claustrophobia is something we don't want to trigger.

Six people is a lot for Grayson's office.

"And don't touch your face with the gloves," I chastise, tapping her hand. "The smudges on the fabric will be harder to handle than those on your skin."

Nodding, she drops her hands into her lap, looking around at us.

"It's so good to see you all," Silla rasps. "So, here are some of the highlights, because my time is short. Lana is in the car outside, making sure I complete the task Cinder demands of me. I knew I would be seeing Gray, but seeing all of you... it's more than I ever could have dreamed."

No one talks, letting her tell her own story. We are starved for Silla Tremaine. The woman could read a grocery list, and we would be captivated.

"You may have noticed my voice is a little fucked," she begins, her fingers fretting the material of the gloves. "I did a lot of screaming in the dungeon, and I messed up my vocal box. It can't be corrected, either. I also want to say that I had no idea that you could hear me... Cinder was piping my screams into your torture chamber. Otherwise, I would have been way too far for you to ever hear me. She also wanted you to think I was dead. My step-sister is unhinged, sadistic, and has no moral code."

Isaac growls under his breath, and Silla's eyes move toward him. Shaking his head, he waves at her to continue. He's straddling the chair he's sitting in, his hands holding the back as if to keep him seated. We all just want to touch her, remind ourselves that it's not an illusion.

"I carry a lot of guilt," Silla says in a hushed tone, but we all hear her voice break from the strain. Shaking her head as if she's yelling at herself, she clears her throat. "Cinder has been keeping me in the castle for the last four months, training me to do her bidding. I can't... no, I won't tell you what that was like, because it's not pertinent to why I'm here."

"I'm gonna stop you right there for a moment," my brother mutters. "Your words, all of them, are 'pertinent'. I don't care if you ramble, tell us the same Godsdamn story a million times, every single one of those words is worth its weight in gold to me."

"Yes," I agree. "We want to hear them, when you're ready. But you don't owe them to us."

Leaning back into the chair, she inclines her head to show that she hears us. Her hands fist in her skirts, and I want to rip the dress off of her. Navy blue is Cinder's color, and she doesn't get to turn Silla into a life-like doll so she can dress her up.

Grooming thoughts roam through my mind, and I force them away. I don't know shit about shit until I hear them from my girl's lips.

"I truly expected you to hate me, not send me all of this love and support, and remember my birthday," Silla says sadly. "Cinder is currently facing a threat from the Underground, and requires your help. You can say no, but it'll mean there's no reason for her to keep me alive."

Oh motherfucker. I already want to tell her I'll do anything and everything she needs. I'm sure that's what Queen Cinder is banking on.

ISAAC

I can't stop staring at her. Silla is beautiful every day of the week, and even freaking out with mascara on her cheek, she is a vision. The clothes aren't her, they look stiff and uncomfortable. And yet... my eyes are trained on her every move.

"The Underground is attempting to overthrow Cinder and the King. Charming is rarely home, and happily fucking his mistresses, while pretending to keep the kingdom prosperous in the southern end of Forbach. However, he has his own personal guards, and most of the power lies with the Queen," Silla begins, staring at her hands. "This is why she's been auditing and pushing for more assets. Cinder is pushing the majority of them to infiltrate the Underground as members."

"Fuck," I mutter. "They're not trained to do that. We're putting our efforts into using our intelligence and hackers in place behind the scenes. Most of them don't have the people skills to infiltrate an organization like that."

"The Queen is seeing this, and yet she has been slow to pull out her assets. The Underground doesn't want bloodshed outside of Cinder's head on a pike, so they deliver the disgraced spies bound and gagged in the middle of the night at the castle gates," Silla says.

Her mouth twists as she thinks about what she's going to say, her fingers clenching together. This isn't going to be good. "I don't know if they expect her to offer mercy, but spies that can't do their jobs have no worth to her. Therefore, the women are given to the guards so they can play with them. Once they're tired of these women, they slit their throats in the bowels of the dungeon as they fuck them. These are sadistic people, but we all know this."

My heart clenches as I look between Andrya and Silla. They more than

know what it's like to be at their mercy, and I hate that we couldn't protect them. Andrya covers Silla's hands, and I watch her close her eyes. There's so much shame in how she carries her body, when there's no reason for it.

We all do things to survive, and we have all had to endure horrors. They don't define us.

"The men are torn apart in gruesome ways for the Queen's pleasure with her new torture machines, and Cinder likes to make me sit next to her and watch. The woman's favorite new device is one that mimics drawing and quartering. It's messy, and..." Silla shudders, and I can see that she's pushing back the memories.

Fuck, we left her unknowingly to a monster.

Her sea-green eyes meet mine, and I refuse to flinch from the pain in them. I'll gladly be her focal point, pushing strength her way.

"Cinder is realizing this isn't working, and has begun to move her remaining assets into different positions. However, there's been so much loss of life. So much..."

"Such a fucking Godsdamned waste," Grayson growls, rubbing his face angrily. This is why Cinder took all of our people from the facility. Fuck, so many deaths.

"So now what does she want?" Ayden asks curiously. It's not that he's not affected by the deaths, we all are. He wants to know why Silla is here now.

"My step-sister has decided you're the cure to all of her problems," Silla says. "She wants the five of you to go undercover to figure out who the leader of the Underground is, and kill them. After all of this time, not one of the assets has been able to figure it out. Cinder tortured each of them extensively before they died."

Silla winces at the memories, and Andrya squeezes her hands.

"She's holding your life as the carrot to make us do her bidding?" Sidney asks, folding his arms. We would do anything for her, but she's still not safe

if she's at the castle while we're on this mission for the Queen.

If we do this, I want Silla where we can see her, feel her, protect her. No one is completely safe in a world with this monarchy within it, but to want to overthrow them is treason. My thoughts are beginning to spiral to a place that I try not to go, so I force it all away. Forbach would be a better place without Queen Cinder in it.

"Yes. However, she's made it known that if I didn't at least propose this, then your lives would also be forfeit. I'm not sure what would happen to you all if you denied her," Silla says, looking pale. Removing one of her hands from Andrya's she places it on the armrest as her body weaves. Our girl looks so damn fragile.

I want to bundle her up and steal her away. There's a thought.

"I want to counter the offer," I tell her before I realize I'm speaking. "I want you to be on our team for this. You're one of the best damn hackers that any of us have ever seen. You're laser focused, too. Is there any reason why you couldn't be?"

I don't know if her face is well known due to the tabloids picking up everything that they can about her.

Silla blinks at my words, and I worry that I've broken her as she thinks. "I... the tabloids have never posted my face, they just like to talk a lot of shit," she says, following my train of thought. "They actually think I'm still here at FRC, believe it or not. But Cinder likes to have me close by, it's actually starting to get a little creepy," she mutters.

Starting to? There's so much that is wrong with her words, but I force myself to stay on topic.

"Cinder is creepy in general," Ayden says. "She wanted me to masturbate to her and Lana and another girl fucking while we were on a video chat."

Silla looks stricken for a moment before groaning. "I wish I could ask if you were kidding, but I know you're serious. She's out of control lately. Cinder sends me off to perform dumb tasks for her while she's on video

chats.”

“Does she make you watch that shit?” Ayden asks, and I glare at him. We’re running out of time. I want to know as much as he does, but I want to secure a bit of her freedom.

“Yeah, all the time,” she whispers. “The other girl you probably saw is Zachary’s sister. As for Zachary, he’s dead. May no one have mercy on his soul.”

“So may it be,” Andrya says softly. “Will you ask Cinder if we can have you with us for this? Would she punish you for asking?”

Rising, Silla walks to Grayson. Placing his hands on her waist, he looks up at her from where he’s sitting. “Can I use your computer to video chat with her? She said that I could if there was a concern, or you wished to speak to her.”

“Yeah,” he grunts, standing. They’re so close, Silla stumbles back, but Grayson keeps her steady. “Why are you in these damn heels, Dangerous Girl?”

“It’s part of Cinder’s image for me,” she explains, waving the words away as if they’re unimportant. However, they are. The Queen is attempting to mold Silla into someone she isn’t. I hate that. She’s perfect just the way she is.

“Your makeup,” Andrya gasps. “I’ll be right back.” Taking off at a dead run, she leaves the room. She’s right, Silla’s makeup is wrecked from crying.

“Do you want to do this with us? You can say no. Remember that your words matter, even if Isaac and I do tend to act like cavemen. The castle isn’t a safe place for you, is it?” Grayson asks.

I watch her body, breaths, and every small tic that I can remember. I want her truths. I’m cataloging every truth bomb away so I can ask her about it later, when we aren’t at the mercy of the impatient black-haired tiny demon who is currently sitting in the car outside of the camp.

“It’s going to be so hard to leave now that I’ve seen you all,” Silla says

sadly. “I don’t know how safe you’ll be because Cinder’s moods are so capricious, but...”

“Pet,” Sidney murmurs, moving to put his hand on the back of her neck. Silla turns her head to look at him, while Grayson buries his face in her neck. We all ache to have her around more. Anywhere away from Cinder and Lana has to be a better place to be. We don’t know what happens in the castle now that Silla has emerged from the dungeon. She may be living in a worse hell. “Your body is holding on to so much fear and shame. It’s worth asking Cinder if it takes you away from her. I’m worried about your continued health, Little Love. If we can all be together, let’s make the counter offer gracefully and carefully. You have so much to offer this mission.”

“Why isn’t she pushing for you to go?” Ayden asks as Andrya walks back in. She’s breathing heavily, and I can tell she ran hard in her flats. Thank the Gods she dressed for comfort today.

“She enjoys torturing me too much,” Silla says simply, moving away to take the makeup bag from Andrya.

“I’ll do it, just sit for me,” Andrya tells her, placing her hand on Silla’s back to encourage her to sit.

Dread pulls in my stomach. *Please say yes, Cinder.*

Five

GRAYSON

Andrya puts Silla back together, but I wish she didn't have to wear any of this. This feels like a fabrication of my girl. I have so many questions that I'm biting back, because it's not the time. The other four people who love Silla are doing the same, noting how damn thin she is, and the careful way she holds herself. As if she's in pain, or has been for so long, that she's used to bracing herself for it. The makeup, the hair, the clothes are just being used to cover up the ugliness happening in her life.

It makes all kinds of terrifying treasonous thoughts fill my mind.

Standing, Silla walks over to where I'm leaned over, arms braced over my desk.

"Let's do this before Lana comes looking for me," she sighs. "I know Laura told her I was talking to you all, but the little shit is petty."

My lips twitch at her comment, but I am worried about her. This little stunt may cost her. Sitting in my chair, I move the mouse to wake up my computer, only to see there's an incoming call. And it's the Queen. Fuck.

Hitting accept, I incline my head to her. "Good evening, Your Majesty," I tell her, as the shadows have encroached in the hour and a half that we've been speaking to Silla.

"I understand your meeting has run late? Is everything going alright?" Cinder asks, looking down at her nails as if bored. I saw her cold blue eyes though, and they're furious. Her navy dress is cut in harsh lines, with a white buttoned up top. It almost looks militant. The Queen is definitely attempting to groom Silla in her image.

"Drizella has been telling us your proposal," I explain, ignoring her questions. I have my professional persona firmly in place, though I know she won't buy it. I just don't want her to think that we're running late because we

were fucking. “We had a lot of questions, so it’s our fault that we’re running a bit behind. Our apologies for that.”

Nodding, Cinder crosses her arms as she rocks back and forth on her heels. She appears to be in her office tonight.

“And what is your answer?” she asks, brow raised.

Taking a breath, I shoot my shot for us all. “We want to serve the crown, but have a request that we wish to be considered?”

“Is this a question or a demand?” Cinder asks, rolling her eyes. “What could you possibly wish to request? It’s all very cut and dry. There are people who wish to assassinate me! I would very much like to sleep peacefully in my bed, thank you, without worrying about having my throat slit.”

I very much despise this woman and her dramatics.

“Did you send Drizella back to the car? Where is that lazy girl, anyway?” she complains.

“I’m here,” Silla says quickly, moving so Cinder can see her. “I was just going to call you to discuss their concerns before they formally accepted. We must have been on the same wavelength, because you beat me to it.”

Scoffing, the Queen rolls her eyes. “We are on no such thing, you stupid girl. You’re simply trying to save your hide.”

“You sent Drizella here to ambush us, knowing we thought she was dead. We had questions,” I tell her firmly. “Meetings are meant for open communication, within reason, and that is what was happening.”

Cinder wrinkles her nose, her eyes on Silla. Fuck. I’m worried for her. We shouldn’t ask for this, but at the same time, she could kill Silla if she has to stay in the castle. All it would take is one fit of uncontrollable rage.

“Fine, I don’t play nice,” the Queen snarls. “State your piece. Lana is tired of waiting, and I am not responsible for what she does outside of my sight.”

Silla’s nails dig into the palms of her hands, and I despise them both even more.

“Drizella is one of the best hackers in the kingdom,” I tell Cinder quickly, worried for my girl’s safety. “Isaac's counter proposal is that she join our mission to gain access to the Underground. Poisons, hackers, people who are well spoken who can discuss the issues in the kingdom that those in the Underground tout as issues are what you’ll need to be successful in this mission. Without those things, we will be set up to fail, just like the other assets who went before us.”

Isaac comes around the desk, squeezing in to speak to the Queen as well. “I did Drizella’s assessment when she came through intake, and I was floored by how well she could code. She has laser focus, and I couldn’t figure out for the life of me how she got caught for hacking,” he says incredulously.

Carefully, so she can’t see, I pinch the shit out of the fucker. He’s poking the bull right now.

Cinder frowns, the lines that mar her forehead deep and ugly. And then, it’s as if she relaxes, releasing whatever thoughts she was holding onto.

“There was never any real proof to back Drizella’s charges. As Queen, the courts looked the other way, pushing her indictment as quickly as possible. It was all fabricated. Sorry, Drizella. I wanted you to suffer for refusing to do as you’re told!” Cinder roars, making Silla jump with a gasp.

It’s exactly as we thought. The queen is fucking petty.

“Be as that may,” I say, ignoring her explosion. Maybe the rule for toddlers will work for errant queens as well. “Drizella will be an asset to the mission in exorcizing the threat to the throne. You want the absolute best for this, and she’s one of them, outside of the five of us.”

“How fortunate for me,” Cinder says sarcastically, rolling her eyes. “I’m rather attached to my step-sister, so she wasn’t part of the negotiations. I need something to hold over your heads after all so you all actually do what you’re contracted to do.”

“They’re not going to double cross you, sister,” Silla says, and I can tell she’s playing up the familial card. “You said the danger was growing

yourself. Don't you want to see it handled properly?"

I can feel the anxiety rolling through her body, it's literally vibrating with it. And yet... Silla Tremaine speaks clearly and decisively, as if she's not scared shitless of her step-sister because we asked to amend the proposal. Gods, I hope we're making the right call right now.

"Fine," the Queen says in a bored voice, flicking her fingers at me. "I think it's poppycock for you to be 'necessary to the mission'. Your best assets are on your knees like the pretty little whore that you are. You're mine to do with what I please, do not forget that."

Cinder is pissed. There's a vein in her forehead that is pulsing like crazy, and I lean forward worriedly. Shit shit shit.

"Of course, Your Majesty," Silla murmurs, dropping her head. The crown of her head faces the computer screen, which is how she's curtseyed.

"They say *I'm* dramatic," Cinder mutters. "I will see you back at the castle, Silla. As for the rest of you, pack up, you'll leave in two days, which is how soon I'll be able to get your replacements to FRC. Leave detailed instructions for your positions, who knows if you'll live to return. Oh... wait."

Silla raises her gaze to the Queen, who is now grinning evilly.

"Where are the rest of you? Did Silla tell you what would happen if you managed to succeed?" Cinder asks.

"No, Your Majesty. We didn't get to that part of our negotiations," I rumble.

Looking at the Trio over my computer, I jerk my chin for them to join us. Once they stand behind me with murmured greetings, the Queen nods.

"Should you actually manage to pull this off, you'll have your freedom. In my eyes you'll always be branded as traitors, but I won't say a word. Leave the kingdom, have babies, I don't fucking care," Cinder says, throwing up her hands.

"I hate to ask, but does this offer include Drizella as well?" Sidney asks,

his fingers gripping the back of my chair. I can feel the indentations behind my head, hidden from where the Queen can see.

We're all nervous to hear her answer. Something tells me...

"No. This girl will always be mine," Cinder says callously, refusing to care how she sounds. Silla said that she was acting oddly around her, and I can see it plain as day. She doesn't look at my girl the way that a step-sibling who grew up with her should.

She stares at Silla as if she's a possession.

Rather than fight about this, I nod. "Then we accept, as long as Drizella can join us in our mission," I agree, purposefully wording it in ways that can't be misinterpreted.

Cinder sneers, but nods. "So be it. Good night."

As she signs off, Silla sags with a gasp, having refused to show Cinder an ounce of weakness. We refused to call her 'Silla', instead adopting the name that the Queen uses so she couldn't accuse us of untoward familiarity. It's obvious that we adore her though, which means Cinder will never give her up.

"Fuck, that is not the way a sister should be looking at you, Silla," Ayden mutters, blowing out a breath. "I'm sorry if we just made this more difficult for you."

Shrugging, Silla turns away. "You meant well," she murmurs. "I really need to go. My punishment will begin the moment I return to the car."

"Punishment?" Andrya squeaks, hands shaking.

"As she said, Lana does what she wants when Cinder isn't watching. The car ride back won't be fun." Silla sighs.

"Is she always like that?" I ask as she reaches the door.

Stopping, she looks at us over her shoulder to respond. "Cinder is unpredictable, and always finds a new way to surprise me. I may not seem myself when you next see me. Please don't ask."

Walking out, she leaves us dumbfounded as the door quietly shuts behind

her.

“What... what did we just do?!” Andrya cries, tears welling up in her eyes.

“We’re getting her away from that monster,” Isaac growls. “I’m just not sure of the cost yet.”

My hand sweeps the papers off my desk as a wave of helplessness and anger washes over me.

“We couldn’t do this without finding a way for her to be with us,” Ayden says, his hand finding my shoulder as I breathe heavily.

“No,” I grunt. “Godsdamnit, I just need her to survive whatever Cinder is going to do to her.”

CINDER

They think they're so smart. Drizella looked too perfect to have been freshly fucked, so I doubt that's what happened. The five of them are still as infatuated with her as they were a year ago. I figured that the shine would have worn away.

Drizella isn't as optimistic as she once was. You can't live through the horrors that she has and believe that unicorns are real and rainbows appear when you need them the most. I've beaten it all out of her, and what I haven't, trips to the guard and soldier's quarters have.

I don't like to share my toys. There's something about my step-sister that has always fascinated me. Her sheer force of will. Even when she hides her eyes, pretends to be this meek little thing, her eyes betray her.

I don't see that spark anymore. Drizella doesn't deny my whims, though she has yet to climb into bed with Lana and I willingly. I don't like to have to chain her to the bed, so I haven't yet. Blood doesn't wash out well from my sheets. Lana and I found this out when we played too roughly with one of the servant girls.

We asked one of the guards to bury her for us, too busy rolling around in her blood to bother. Queens don't wield shovels anyway. I am no longer the house pet for Lady Tremaine. We remain civil, but there have been so many times that I've wished I could kill her.

Too many people would ask questions though, and she hasn't really broken any laws.

"Fiddlesticks and penis rings," I growl, the closest I get to cursing. It's beneath my station, but I'm so irritated.

The five people who can help me with this Underground nonsense are completely smitten with Drizella, and it disgusts me that I just agreed to send

her with them. I'm staying awake until the car gets back to the castle, but the more I pace, the angrier I become.

My gaze travels to the items I pulled from my special closet. Lana enjoys pain on occasion, and allows me to indulge. However, these aren't for her. Not today.

The heavy doors open to the castle, making me turn. I changed hours ago into a silk nightgown and pretty robe. My nipples show through, a clear example of how turned on I am by what's about to happen.

"Cinder!" Lana calls out loudly, making me move toward her. My slippered feet don't make a sound as I cross the floor.

"I'm in here, Darling!" I tell her, leaning out the door to my office. I asked the guards to move in my bondage horse, because it'll be the easiest way for me to restrain Drizella.

Speaking of which, her hair is in disarray, and she's limping. Tears track down Silla's face, making me wonder what Lana did. I won't ask or kick up a fuss, but I have an understanding with my dark-haired beauty. Evil lives inside of Lana, which is why we get along so well.

Good girls always finish last, after all.

Lana grins as she tosses her hair over her shoulder, walking toward me. Her fingers dig into Drizella's previously immaculate braids as she drags her, and my step-sister looks a mess. Just another thing I'll have to punish the slothful woman for.

Lana's hair trails down her body, a sign that she's getting comfortable for a long night. It caresses her curves, something I would love to do with my tongue and hands right now.

Alas, I have to punish Drizella instead for her missteps. I loathe being pushed into a corner, and that's exactly what the twins, Isaac, Sidney, and the Warden did today. I have no plans to ever let this girl go.

"Lana, did you have fun on the ride home, or were you dreadfully bored?" I coo, my fingers tangling in her long hair to guide her head back to

kiss me. I enjoy towering over others, which is why I'll typically wear my heels. Drizella has always been shorter than me, and I have this odd fascination with knocking her off her feet whenever possible.

"I passed the time well enough, Cinder," Lana gasps as I release her.

"Such a good girl for me," I murmur. "Did Drizella rack up any more punishments?"

"She's barefoot," Lana crows, moving to show off Drizella's bare toes. Another reason I insist on her wearing heels is because she has the cutest feet, and her shoes pinch her. I enjoy enacting petty little dictates, knowing they hurt her. Lana has a foot fetish, and I'm a jealous lover. I despise bare feet, and Drizella must have kicked off her shoes for the long drive back. It's just her luck that Lana wouldn't let her put them back on.

"Strip her of her clothes so we can have some fun. I left you vibrators so you can play while I work, Darling," I tell her. Drizella fights Lana when she sees the cane on my work table. I will be using it on her back, ass, and feet since she insists on disobeying me. Sitting will be a distant memory for a while for her, or incredibly uncomfortable. I'll send the healer in afterwards to tend to her skin, but not ease the pain.

I swear she pushes me to distraction, and one day I may actually kill her. It's why I always keep Lana nearby to help me so I won't get too carried away.

It would be a shame to end my step-sister's torment too soon.

Lana's stronger than she looks, managing to rip Drizella's clothes off until she's as naked as the day she was born. Holding tightly to Drizella's hair and yanking her arm so far behind her back it'll snap if she moves the wrong way, Lana shoves her down until her face is tightly pushed against what I usually use as my fuck bench.

Thankfully, it will work just as well for my purposes.

"Raise your leg onto the pads and take your punishment gracefully, Drizella," I warn, picking up the cane.

“Cinder, I didn’t do anything,” Drizella practically growls at me.

Huh. That won’t do at all. Slamming the cane on the table, I help Lana tie her down to the bench, shoving a gag in her mouth for her own protection. My control is unraveling.

“After a few hours of this, I’m going to retire for the night with Lana, and give you to Holden. He caught a bookkeeper stealing from me to pay for his wife’s medical bills, so I’m paying off her debt, and removing her husband’s head from his shoulders. I can be fair,” I chuckle.

Lana kisses my shoulder as she walks away, dropping her dress so it pools at her feet. I think it’s possible that I only dislike Drizella’s bare feet because of how it turns my lover on. Something to think about another time. I dislike being introspective.

Clearly I have too much time on my hands. I should fix that.

Glancing down, I realize I’m holding the cane, and that I’m beginning to lose time again. It happens from time to time, when it feels as if I don’t remember doing something but clearly have.

Keep it together, Cinder.

Taking a deep breath, I raise my arm before dropping it sharply across the offending feet in front of me. Drizella gives a strangled cry of pain, and Lana moans. Her legs are dropped on either side of the arms of the chair she’s in, vibrator deep inside of her as she fucks herself with it. Her nipples are a deep taupe color for someone who is so fair, her breasts stunning.

“Come for me by the time her ass is red and tears stain her cheeks,” I growl to Lana. The doors are wide open, but that doesn’t matter. A handful of trusted people will stay nearby in case I need something. Otherwise, everyone has fled to their rooms while we play.

No one will be able to save Drizella tonight, not even her lovers who are trying so hard to. They’ll find a very subdued and uncomfortable girl when they see her in two days time. She won’t be interested in their cocks or reuniting in any way that counts, far too lost in her only memories of tonight.

I get the most peace when I get to mete out her punishments myself.

As Drizella cries out in pain again as I crack the cane across the perfect globes of her ass, I smile as I drop my robe. The only thing better than this is fucking Lana in her blood after. Unfortunately, that's not on tonight's agenda.

Six

AYDEN

It takes me no time at all to pack a bag to leave FRC, since I won't need any of the work clothes that I use here anymore. I'm hoping it'll be for good, but this has been my home for a long damn time. Sidney, Andrya, and I have been here for six years, outside of the time we spent in the Queen's dungeons.

In a messed up way this is our home, though if things work out right, we'll all be free after this mission for Cinder.

Silla is so reserved now, a shell of herself, and I hate that. Seeing her yesterday was everything, after thinking that she was dead. I can see now that the Queen wanted us to think that, so we would go back to our lives, believing that we lost Silla to the cruelty of the guards.

And yet we didn't, and we get another chance with her.

After Silla left, Grayson called a family meeting in his bedroom, once the camp was buttoned down tightly and everyone was in their rooms.

“So OUR GIRL IS ALIVE,” he begins, leaning forward on his powerful thighs. “Did anyone else notice how possessive Cinder is about Silla? I’m worried we made her life more difficult by counter offering on the Queen’s proposal. On one hand, she’s obviously not safe in the castle...”

“And on the other, Cinder seems to be very calculating about how Silla dresses, looks, and acts,” I finish. “It’s creepy how much they look alike as far as how they’re dressed.”

“Cinder wants a life-sized doll,” Sidney says in disgust. “If she’s comfortable with Ayden watching her have sex with people, I can’t imagine what she’s forcing Silla to do.”

“How do we feel about that? None of this is her fault...” my sister begins.

“No, it’s not,” Isaac grunts. “I don’t believe in shaming a victim. Whatever Silla has had to do to survive, happened. We do our best to help her move past it. It’s that simple. Our girl thinks that we’re going to hate her, and there’s so much shame ingrained in her. It hurts to see her like that.”

“So we agree that she’s still ours?” Sidney asks. I can see the wheels turning in his mind. Usually this is the time that he would be pushing Silla away when things get complicated. I’m glad that he’s not doing that. I’d probably punch him.

“Yes,” I snap before wincing at my tone. “What I mean is that we’ve been given another chance. The only thing that can separate us from her is death. As long as Silla is alive, then we have a chance. The Queen is offering us our freedom if we can dismantle the Underground, we could find a way to take her and run.”

“Yes, but we are keeping her in power by silencing the Underground,” Andrya counters before covering her mouth in horror. We may have started drinking a bit at the beginning of this conversation.

I roll my eyes as if my sister didn’t just mention treason. “We’re already traitors to the crown,” I remind her. “You’re also talking to us, your family. We all hate the bitch.”

“While that may be true, we can’t just remove the monarchy without a plan to fill the vacuum,” Grayson says.

Slouching against the couch, I nod. “Silla is already a walking, talking lookalike, the Gods know she’d make a better queen,” I mutter.

The four of them stare at me with huge eyes, but I shrug. I stand by what I said, buzzed or not.

BLOWING OUT A BREATH, I walk to the conference room reserved for smaller meetings. We usually use them for section instructor meetings to make sure

that we're all on the same page. Today I'm talking to the replacement that Cinder wants updated on how we run our section. Thankfully, she chose to replace the Section B lead teachers within FRC. It's a lot easier for me to debrief someone that way.

Unfortunately, Isaac isn't that lucky, so he's already had a long day.

"Hey, Tracy," I say as I see her sitting. "Now I understand this may feel overwhelming because this is the job of three people, but I promise it'll be fine."

Nodding nervously, she straightens her spine as I sit across from her. Sidney and my sister follow me shortly after, and we begin our two hour debrief.

"Poisons will be dropped from the curriculum unfortunately, until a new head instructor can be found," I explain. "The groundskeepers will take care of all of the vegetation and roses, so that is off of your plate. However, you'll have weekly video chats with the Queen or an auditor on how things are going. If you have a concern, voice it. You'll have a three month period to figure your shit out before she gets irritated with you."

I'm hoping this is the case, at least, because that's how long she gave us to figure out our new positions. I feel as if she wasn't quite as insane as she is now, either, though.

"The assets need to be able to work in difficult conditions," Sidney continues. "Make it hard for them to concentrate, find ways for them to fail within reason and then figure out how to pivot. Without these things, they won't survive in the field."

Grabbing a notebook, she begins to take notes, making me begin to relax. She may just survive this position after all.



"YOU LOOK WEIRD," Sidney says as we eat dinner. We're getting picked up

tomorrow by the castle's transport. It was supposed to be in the afternoon, but apparently the Queen is in a hurry, and is having us picked up at four in the morning.

I think it's kind of ridiculous, but at least we won't hit any traffic.

"It just feels odd to be leaving," I explain with a shrug. "This has been our home for a long damn time."

We're keeping our voices low, but still being careful of our words.

"I know what you mean," Andrya murmurs. "I'm happy to be moving on, figuring out what our next steps may be once our mission is done. It's all so surreal, though."

Finishing up dinner, we take our bags to Grayson's room. We've either been sleeping here or in Isaac's room for months. It's just been easier, Andrya doesn't have as many nightmares, and it's more natural for us all to be in the same place.

If anyone's noticed, no one has said anything. Trauma takes the face of many different things, and the familiar can help fend off its consequences. On the other hand, many of the staff members are scared of us now. Sidney, Andrya, and I have become even more fucked up lately, because we're bored.

We just don't do it through sex anymore, we use fear. If someone doesn't perform well in class, they're terrified we'll do something to their food or drink. Sometimes we do it immediately, sometimes we wait until they think they're safe. It helps pass the time, though I'm sure no one will miss us, outside of the fact that we are all very efficient at our jobs.

"Hey guys," Isaac says without opening his eyes from where his head is leaned back on the couch. "My head is splitting. Why are people so stupid?"

"Poor baby," Andrya chuckles, digging in her bag for some headache pills that we make. We all raided what we've made, making sure to pack it. Sidney also clipped extra bags of our plants, which is why his bag is the largest. Cinder sent word that we could only bring one bag each, and my sister just shrugged it off.

She has so many favorite blankets and comfort items that she's built up over the years, and all she said was, "I'll buy others. That's not important."

Andrya's priorities have changed a lot over the last year, and part of me wishes that they hadn't had to. We've all lost so much of ourselves. The Warden is grouchier now, quicker to anger around others, and more withdrawn. Sidney is broodier, his mind going to dark places when someone pisses him off. I've had to stay his hand several times when he's reached for a dart that he keeps in his pocket now. The man is always armed, and the poison in that thing is lethal. Isaac stares off into space more, and scares off those who come to him for help. And me? Killing off the Queen sounds better than ever.

I've gotten quietly introspective when it comes to my plotting now. Silla would make a beautiful, and fair queen.

Andrya hands a glass of water and pain pills to Isaac just as there's a knock at the door. Grayson wouldn't knock on his own bedroom door, so I frown. Dropping my bag on the floor, I answer it.

"Can I help you?" I ask the small blonde standing outside. She's in my section, and very pretty. Unfortunately, she also has a penchant for fucking the instructors. Again, there's no real rule against this, but Grayson has always made it clear that he's not interested in dicking down the assets.

I'm pretty sure that I've heard him say this when people would hide under his desk to surprise him with a blow job. It would be funny if it didn't happen so often. More often than not, one of us would find a naked woman or man in between Grayson's sheets, hoping to surprise an unsuspecting warden during the early months of this year.

Andrya found the last two, and dragged them out of the room screaming, then demanded that we change the sheets. Fucking gross.

"I know the Warden is leaving tomorrow, and wanted to give him a decent send off. Monica and I were going to see if he'd fuck us both," she says with a sultry, though hesitant, smile. Kelsea knows that I don't fuck

around.

“You’re a whore, and not a very good one,” I growl, leaning forward. “Your intelligence is subpar, or you would realize he doesn’t want your loose pussy.”

“Who the fuck is that?” my sister asks, ducking under my arm to look. “Oh, you’re not very smart, are you, Kelsea? Sidney, love, do you still want to use your dart before we leave?”

“Oh, oh, do you mean it?” he asks dryly, making me snort.

“Children, please. Daddy’s head hurts,” Isaac groans, making the three of us snicker.

“Sorry,” we chorus softly. Kelsea’s eyes are wide, her lips trembling as I grab for her.

“It’s not nice to go after what’s not yours, little girl,” I coo, throwing her on to the ground. “The Warden is tying up loose ends, and isn’t available, either. Sidney, how’s your bladder?”

Looking at me curiously, he shrugs. “I could take a piss if needed, what are you on about?”

Isaac chuckles softly, his head rolling to look at us. “Don’t get any on the carpet, and I’ll look the other way.”

“What are you talking about?!” Kelsea tries to stand, but I roll my eyes.

“I’m tired of you attempting to climb into unsuspecting faculty’s beds. It may not have been *exactly* you, but your type. Fuck it, I’m projecting and I couldn’t give two shits about it,” I grumble.

“I appreciate that you’re so self-aware, brother,” Andrya chuckles, wrenching Kelsea’s hair back hard, smirking at her angry gasp.

She’s not scared yet, but she will be. All of us have been victims of having our autonomy ripped away from us. This may not be fair, but she’s a predator in her own way. Grayson may make us stop if he catches us, but Isaac is merely amused.

“We should get her to the bathtub then.” I sigh. Together, Andrya and I

haul Kelsea to the bathroom.

“Clean up after yourselves,” Isaac calls out tiredly.

“Yes, Daddy!” We yell, grinning. It’s been ages since we’ve done anything truly fucked up, and it feels good. Silla tamed us just a bit.

Picking her up, I toss her into the tub, grinning as Kelsea grunts and squalls in disgruntlement.

“Rule number one of being a good human,” I begin, unzipping my pants, stopping when my sister laughs. It’s pure, unadulterated giggles, and I haven’t heard those in over a year.

“I don’t think we know what being a ‘good’ human is,” she laughs.

Shrugging, I agree. “Yeah, I think we should just piss on her. What do you think, Sidney?”

Unzipping his pants, he nods. “I mean, I feel as if this is a gentler fate than what Grayson would do...”

“Who... who’s Grayson?!” Kelsea wails. “Please, I’ll just go. This is ridiculous. I just did my hair!”

Oops. Warden Ayers is what he goes by in this place.

“Sneaking into people’s rooms for the sake of getting them to have sex with you is sexual coercion, doll,” Sidney says, pulling out his dick.

“Coercion is a really nice crime to get the Warden to have you packed off to prison,” I chuckle, releasing my cock from my pants.

“Wait, I didn’t think it would be a big deal to offer to have a threesome with him before he left. He’s so grumpy, but looks like he can fuck hard,” Kelsea moans, squeezing her tits as if she’s turned on.

“Ew, have some self respect,” Andrya mutters.

“Off we go then,” I crow, beginning my stream of piss, and making it right in the twatwaffle’s mouth.

Sputtering, she begins to scream as Sidney begins to pee on her as well.

“Throwing yourself at people who don’t want you is gross,” I tell her. I see my sister take a deep breath, knowing what she did to Silla when she first

came to FRC. We've grown a lot. However, we are not perfect by any means.

Kelsea's dripping in urine once we're done, crying in humiliation, when my wonderful twin sister scoops up a large container of toilet water to dump it on her head.

"Never do this to someone again," Andrya says, scowling as Kelsea scrambles to her feet. "Did I give you permission to leave?"

"No... n-n-no, Ma'am," she stammers. "May I leave? I have to catch Monica to warn her not to come."

"I guess that's a valiant effort. You may leave," Sidney grumbles, stepping away. We've both buttoned our pants up again, and put our cocks away after defending Grayson's honor.

Andrya rolls her eyes, dropping the plastic container into the sink to wash later.

Kelsea slips twice as she walks out, and Sidney huffs in annoyance as he pulls out his blow gun. He has three darts in his hand as she scurries away, and stares at them for so long, I'm worried she's not going to get away unscathed. Loading it, he blows hard, catching her throat as she runs out. Smirking as she wails outside of the room, Sidney shrugs.

"I can't remember which was which, so it'll be like dart roulette," he snickers as we step out of the bathroom.

"Are you done playing with each other's cocks yet?" Isaac snarks as Grayson walks in. Andrya moves to Isaac's side, sitting down and picking up his hand. Finding the correct pressure point, she watches Isaac's face as she manipulates it. "Oh fuck, you're an angel..."

"Why did Kelsea come running down the hall apologizing to me like there was a fire lit under her ass? And why was she wet? Why... is that piss I smell?!" Grayson roars, and I fall apart laughing.

As fun as it is to defend his honor, it's even better to fuck with him.

GRAYSON

It's really fucking early, and I slept like shit. Isaac's dick is digging into my ass in bed, but honestly, I'm used to it at this point. I'm excited, though it's the kind that manifests as nervous jitters and butterflies in the pit of your stomach.

Fuck. My stomach lurches a bit as I get moving, making me frown.

"I'm going to the kitchen to get some toast or something in my stomach. I don't want to be queasy in the car," I rumble.

"Nervous or bubble guts?" Andrya asks as she throws on comfortable pants and a long-sleeved T-shirt. Cinder told us to dress for comfort, since we won't be going by the castle at all today. Silla is supposed to be meeting us at the apartment we'll be using as our base of operations, and part of me is worried that she won't show for some reason.

"Both," I burp, covering my mouth uncomfortably.

"Don't brush your teeth until after you eat something or you'll puke," she says sagely. "Sidney, honey, can you help at all?"

"Herbal tea instead of coffee today," he winces, knowing I love my caffeine. That's okay, though, because I'm more than awake, so I just nod. "Toast and scrambled eggs should help as well."

"Okay." I sigh. "If you all want to eat, may as well make your way down with me. I'll cook for us."

"Nah," Ayden says, shaking his head. "We're taking care of you today, big man. Let's go. We can't have you sick on our first day out of here."

Packing up any last items left out, we walk out the door afterwards together.

"So what's got your stomach in knots?" Sidney asks, once we're in the kitchens. It's so early, no one will be up yet, so we can chat semi-openly.

“I had a hard time sleeping, like my mind couldn’t turn off. I sometimes get like this when I have to be awake early for something, but the other part of it is that I’m worried.”

“About...” Isaac drawls, sitting at the large stainless steel island.

“What if the Queen does something to Silla, causing her to be unable to meet us?” I groan, feeling like shit for voicing my concerns.

Andrya stumbles as she gets ingredients from the refrigerator before shaking her head.

“Silla is part of the deal, Cinder is too smart of a business woman to do that,” she says.

Her brother nods under the harsh light of the kitchen. “She’s right. Silla is fine,” he grunts.

Deciding that I’m borrowing trouble, I shake my hands out.

“You’re right. My stomach is just off about it,” I explain.

“Silla was trying to tell us something before she left the other day,” Isaac rumbles, leaning forward. “She said something about not questioning if she appears different. This could mean anything, but something tells me she’s gotten used to being in pain.”

“Yes,” Andrya mutters as she cooks. “The way she held herself was the way someone does when they’re used to everything hurting.”

“Fuck,” Sidney grunts, folding his arms. “I know this was the best decision for her in the long term, because it gets her out of the castle, but she’s been alone with her step-sister for the past two nights. Anything could have happened.”

“Then we’ll deal with it when we see her, apologizing because of the consequences of our words,” Andrya says sharply, shoving the lever for the toaster down with more force than necessary. “No matter how we get her out of that place, there will be more than a few scars involved. I just hope we can put each other back together afterward.”

“We’ll have to,” I say, my stomach beginning to grumble as I can smell

the bread toasting and eggs cooking. If I'm hungry, I'll rally back from this.

Sydney moves to boil water for tea, and I watch how comfortable we all are with each other. We went from barely being able to be around each other, to finding a sense of family together.

It doesn't make me want to kill the queen any less though.

Seven

SILLA

Moving gingerly, I studiously ignore the pain between my legs, back, and body. Fuck, if I'm honest, I'm in pretty bad shape, and have no idea how I'm going to be expected to function. Holden invited several of his friends to help warm my bed last night.

Usually, I can disassociate from everything because it's not happening in my room, the only place I can imagine being safe. I guess it's not a real last hurrah before I leave without disturbing the rest of my peace.

Thankfully, Cinder told one of the healers to tend to me this morning, so I'm not going to scar anywhere. It seems silly, vain even, for *me* to be concerned with that, but it's my only source of solace. If no one can see how ugly I am on the inside, how broken, it helps me keep my facade in place.

My step-sister likes to blow my emotional wounds wide open, but I'm getting ready to get started on this mission with the guys and Andrya, and I just can't get myself sorted. Closing my eyes, I take a shallow breath, testing my pain levels.

My ribs twinge, but it's manageable. Cinder told them to make sure the bruises couldn't be seen anywhere my skin would show. As much as she enjoys her punishments, she doesn't want it to affect her bottom line either. So I'll have to make sure to wear pants, long skirts, and no tank tops. Thankfully it's nearly December, so there will be snow on the ground soon, too. The weather is unseasonably warm, so the ground is muddy from all of the rain we've been having. Yuck.

I unfortunately have to go shopping once I leave here, because I can't wear these ridiculous clothes that Cinder insists that I wear. The formal day clothing is stifling, and the heels hurt my abused feet. It's going to take everything in me not to limp out of here, but I don't know how long I'll be

able to keep this shit up.

I asked, no begged, the healer for pain management, and she denied me. I know that she's doing her job, but the way she sneered at me, going as far to call me an opiate addict was uncalled for. The only thing I'm addicted to is the sunshine, cool breezes, and imagining the faces of my loves.

They're the only reason I haven't ended everything. Cinder doesn't pay attention to razor blades, or knives with my meals when I eat in my room, etc. I've spent a lot of time staring at the razor blades in my bathroom, going as far as to lay them out on my bedspread, but the sad reality is that I'm worried I won't be able to stop once I begin. So I can't even get the small bit of relief that cutting would offer me.

Instead, I spend way too much time staring at them, dreaming of the day when the twins, Grayson, Sidney, and Isaac are finally free so I can let go of the tenuous control I'm holding onto. The Queen will never let me go, and happily ever afters ain't meant for me. I must have been born under an unlikely star or something.

"Silla!" Lana and Cinder yell from down the hall, and I sigh. They told me to get ready and wait to be called, but I'm pretty sure they spent the last two hours getting lost in each other and watching one of Cinder's maids get railed by a passing nobleman as they discussed "royal business."

I'm sure the guys and Andrya are all panicking that Cinder rescinded her agreement that I join them by now. I need them to be less suspicious of my well-being, not more.

I haven't bothered sitting down, since it hurts too much. Riding in the car is going to be an exercise in torture, since my entire backside aches after being caned. I swear Cinder always finds a way to marry together her kinky sex fuckery and punishments.

Walking as quickly as I can, I pick up my duffle bag, wishing it was a rolling suitcase. My shoulder pulls my back with it with every step, coupled by the backpack on my other shoulder that's loaded with my laptop and tech

stuff. I was surprised when I came in this morning to find new equipment after breakfast. The note made me roll my eyes:

I won't have you complain that you failed because you didn't have the proper equipment. Here is my credit card to purchase whatever else you need.

-Cinder

I don't plan to use her card unless it's something that I absolutely need, because this will come back to bite me in the ass.

"I'm here," I tell them, finding Lana wrapped around Cinder's waist. Thankfully, they're both dressed. I heard that there will be dignitaries here all week, so they had to get it out of their system. The rest of the world believes that Cinder and her King are the perfect power couple, which means he will also be traveling back to the castle as well.

As I begin following them to the stairs to make our way to the front doors so I can depart, I hear the booming voice of Charming. I can't help but smile as Lana and Cinder jump apart. He may have an idea that Cinder fucks around, but doesn't want to see it.

Even as hypocritical as that is, since he has his own mistresses.

"Honey, I'm home!" Charming yells. My hand covers my mouth, because I have the most inappropriate need to giggle. If I start, I'll never stop, and my exit into the real world will be cut short.

"Bumbling idiot," Cinder groans. There's no love lost between them, which is why Charming enjoys poking her in any way that he can.

The man isn't terrible, just slothful and uncaring of the kingdom's citizens' wellbeing. He believes that his queen has everything firmly in hand, because she did in the beginning. Life actually was pretty good for the

kingdom within the first two years of her rule. I have no idea why that all changed.

“Hello, husband,” Cinder says, opening her arms to him as we descend down the stairs.

“You look beautiful as always, my queen,” Charming murmurs, his eyes moving over her. Cinder is a timeless, blonde bombshell. It’s the evil inside of her that makes her ugly.

“You look... immaculate. How are you so clean after traveling for hours?” Cinder asks, pouting. This is one of the many reasons that she hates to travel.

Chuckling, he shakes his head. “I stopped an hour outside of the city to catch a shower and change. Drizella, are you going somewhere?” he asks, surprised.

Charming is pretty oblivious to how badly Cinder treats me, and thinks that I’m interested in learning about diplomacy. She told him that I was one of their advisors now. I really don’t know how this man is able to survive his wife’s machinations. I know for a fact she tried to have him assassinated earlier this week, and only told him to come home for meetings when the attempt failed.

The man is dumber than a box of rocks. It’s kind of sad.

“I...” I have no idea what to say, because I was supposed to be gone before he arrived. Fuck. Come on, sister, help a girl out.

“Drizella is going on an errand for me to help dispatch those troublesome Underground members. Did you know that she’s incredibly talented on the computer?” Cinder steps in smoothly, linking her arm in his as the servants bring in his luggage.

“Really? That’s incredibly selfless,” he murmurs, taking a sharper interest in me. I really don’t want that, so I give a little curtsy to them back.

“I’ll be in touch, Your Majesties. Good day,” I tell them, striding out the door. Gods, I can’t believe it was really that easy. I’m sure that Cinder would

have drawn this out if Charming hadn't walked in.

"Drizella?" says one of the soldiers, stepping forward as I walk out.

"Yes? Is there something the matter?" I ask nervously. He's not someone who's hurt me before, but I don't trust any of the people who support my step-sister.

"No, no. The Queen wanted me to tell you that you'll be traveling by public car service. Using the royal cars is a red flag for anyone who may be watching the castle," he explains.

"Okay... None of the services go through this part of the city, and I don't have a cellphone," I tell him, stopping and digging in my heels. Something doesn't feel right, and I'm uncomfortable with his reasoning. Cinder doesn't have the foresight to think of things like that, which is why I'm in these hideous clothes.

Pushing the point, I sweep my hand toward what I'm wearing. "Aren't my clothes an issue as well if we're discussing this at all? The Queen controls my wardrobe, what I eat, who I... Essentially, I can't so much as sneeze without permission," I mutter.

"Can you just walk with me?" he asks. Turning, I see the heavy front doors are shut behind me now.

"I'm actually really late and have people waiting for me," I begin, biting my lip.

"Look, I tried," he grunts, reaching for my arm and mouth to cover it. Sidney taught me a lot that I've never been able to practice before today, but I'm convinced this man is not following my step-sister's orders and the courtyard is emptier than normal.

Even though my back is screaming as he pulls me toward him, I contort my body so my back is toward him, stomping my heel into his foot. It may be a steel-toe, but the strangled noise he makes is gratifying. Biting his hand, shoving my elbow into his stomach, I finally drop my weight so he's unbalanced before wrenching my body away.

“You have no idea who I am,” I hiss, taking several steps away from him.

Checking out his palm for bite marks, he shakes his head. “You’re right, I don’t. I think you’re who we need though. I won’t force you, but I’ll get you where you need to by driving you. I’m not actually a soldier for the queen, I’m Underground. I need to get the fuck out of here before I’m caught though, so shall we?”

My legs only start moving because of what he said. “Cinder will... are you out of your Godsdamned mind?!” I gasp.

Smirking, he opens a door hidden by ivy that I never knew existed there. “You’re nothing like your step-sister I see,” he says as I follow him onto the sidewalk. “Can you run in those?”

“It’ll hurt, but yeah,” I tell him, gritting my teeth at how much my feet already hate me.

Taking my duffle bag and backpack from me, he dons them instead to take the weight.

“The ground is filthy, grin and bear it,” he demands. “Run.”

Lifting my skirts so I won’t trip, I run after him. It’s only after running around the corner that I hear people yelling. There’s a car parked on the street illegally, and the man throws in my bags in the back seat, motioning for me to get in.

“If you kill me, I’m haunting you forever,” I bite out, collapsing into the seat. My feet hate me so much right now. Shutting the door behind me, I’m careful not to lean back, knowing I’ll burst into tears. I’m already cursing up a storm in my head as I hold back a whimper. It’ll invite too many questions that I have no intention of answering. Kicking off my shoes, I hiss at the equal parts relief and pain that I feel.

“What the fuck is your problem?” another man asks as the fake soldier gets into the car.

“I believe I’m owed an explanation, but you may want to drive before we’re caught,” I warn as guards start to run around the corner.

“Fuck,” he curses, throwing the car into drive, which throws me against the seat. White hot pain travels through my body as I release a strangled scream.

“What, what?!” the driver asks, eyes searching for the danger.

“Nothing,” I whisper, my voice writhe with pain. “My back is a little sore is all.”

“Silla—”

“I don’t know who you are, which means you have an advantage I am uncomfortable with,” I say haughtily. Pain sometimes makes me a real bitch.

“Fuck, you even speak like a rich bitch,” the driver chuckles.

“I speak like someone who was severely beaten by a cane,” I grumble, forcing myself to sit up again.

“A... fuck. I’m Noa, and this asshole is Wilhelm,” Noa says, turning to face me. “Why would the queen hurt you? Aren’t you her step-sister?”

“You’re clearly just as clueless as everyone else,” I tell him, blinking back tears from my eyes. “You said you’d get me where I’m supposed to be. Do you have any idea where that is?”

“Yeah, it’s an apartment on the other side of the city. I paid off the driver earlier today for the information. Everyone was distracted by a reported fire on the back side of the castle, which wasn’t at all true,” Noa explains with a shrug. “So we’re going to chat while we drive, maybe stop to get you some normal clothes? Why the fuck are you wearing that?”

It appears that there are some truths that will have to be discussed. I’m not at all loyal to my step-sister, but I didn’t expect to be having this conversation with Underground followers.

“Imagine that I have no choice over my entire life, and that would be why. I’m a prisoner of the Queen in all ways, even if I’m not in the castle currently,” I explain. “She will check to make sure that I arrived at my destination safely, but she also knows I wouldn’t run when I have people waiting for me.”

“Okay, fair enough, so why are you going to this apartment?” Wilhelm asks.

So they have some information about me, but very little else. Relaxing slightly, I decide to just tell them the truth. Our original plan hinges on false identification, so that’s no longer a viable option.

“The Queen is tired of the Underground being a thorn in her side,” I tell them, my lips twitching when they snort. “She has executed every person that you’ve sent back to her, but hasn’t found out enough information to decimate your organization. Rebels don’t have a place in her kingdom, especially ones that wish to dethrone her.”

“Anyone in the right mind wants to get her off the throne,” Noa mutters. “Our leader had a feeling that he was sending them back to their deaths, but didn’t have any other options at the time. It shows how callous and inhumane she is.”

“There’s so much more to Cinder than you even know.” I sigh. “She’s unhinged, crazed, and I have a feeling currently in a bout of mania; which means I’m safer out of the castle right now. There are dignitaries currently at the castle as well for the next week, possibly longer, to reevaluate treaties and update them as needed.”

“You know an awful lot for a prisoner,” Wilhelm grumbles, looking over his shoulder at me.

They don’t need to know that the guards talk when they fuck, and I don’t need to relive that for utter strangers.

“When you’re invisible, people talk. No one sees me in these clothes, and Cinder likes making me look like her twin,” I tell them, trying to get comfortable. I’m putting on pajamas when I get to the apartment and going to bed. I don’t fucking care what the others have to say about it.

“Outside of the hair, it’s remarkable how much you look like her,” Noa murmurs.

“Okay...? Spit it out,” I sass. I’ve run in heels today, I’m late, and I’m

tired. I'm not taking shit from some snotty rebels too.

“What if we removed the current monarchy and replaced it with you?” Wilhelm blurts out. “How much do you know about her treaties with other kingdoms, the laws of our land, and what we need?”

“I haven't... Do you even know what my life has been like for the last year?” I sputter incredulously. The fucking gall. I know the world doesn't revolve around me, but I should be allowed to wallow for just a little bit.

“You've been holed up with the queen, living the life of royalty,” Noa says, rolling his eyes.

“Take me to the apartment or I'm jumping out of this fucking car,” I rasp, forcing myself to breathe. Being holed up in a car with strangers is not my idea of a good time.

“Did... you say you were caned?!” Wilhelm asks, taking a turn. It's like his brain is finally catching up with the rest of our conversation. “Is that some kind of sex thing?”

“Oh my Gods,” I growl, gritting my teeth. “Let me out. Right fucking now. I'll fucking walk, even though it'll hurt.”

Grabbing my bare foot, Noa pulls it up, even as I try to kick him.

“Ow, ow! Stop!” I scream, because he's pressing his stupidly large thumb into my arch. Cinder enjoyed swatting her damn cane into them way too much.

“Shit, what's wrong with your foot?” he gasps, dropping my foot. I'm not ready and I close my eyes in pain when it thumps into the center console.

“Caning, which is most assuredly *not* a sex thing, fuck you very much,” I croak, forcing myself to breathe through it. Fuck, that hurt.

“But... she's your step-sister!” Noa says.

“You're idiots, bumbling ones at that. If Cinder is willing to kill hundreds of spies who failed her, it makes perfect sense that she wouldn't hesitate to hurt me as well,” I grumble, easing my foot away. “I don't have much consent these days, but please refrain from touching me. The Queen has

asked a group of people to dismantle the Underground in exchange for their freedom, and frankly, I care more about those five people than I do about you.”

“Harsh,” Wilhelm grunts. “I guess we have been kind of dumb. There’s no information about you anywhere. You were a pretty hot topic in the tabloids, but you fell off the face of the earth this past year.”

“I was a little busy being tortured,” I say drolly as he pulls up to the apartment. I found the address tucked into a pocket of my backpack, where I had forgotten I had put it, so I know I’m in the right place. “I don’t want to see you again. If you want to talk to me, set up a meeting on the dark web with your leader.”

“You’re a girl,” Noa snorts. “What do you know about the dark web?”

“And yet, you all want me on the throne... As what? A figurehead? I know my history well, and I know how to not repeat it. That’s a great way to get assassinated, with a worse government put in place,” I complain, picking up my bags. “If all of you are this misogynistic, then I don’t know that I even want to talk to your leader. Fuck off.”

Picking up my shoes because there’s no way I’m wearing them now, I climb out of the car. The sidewalks are clean, so I decide to chance it barefoot. It’s not very ladylike or royal, but I’ve never cared about any of that. The pavement is cool under my feet as I slam the door closed behind me, and begin limping toward the main door of the apartments. Sidney is just stepping out of it, when my legs decide they’re done.

“Silla? What the fuck?” he roars, running toward me. Dropping to his knees, his eyes land on Noa in his fake soldier’s outfit. I have no idea how he lifted it, because the Queen insists on shades of blue for it. It’s quickly becoming my least favorite color. “You there. Did you hurt her?”

Lowering the window, Noa shakes his head. “I didn’t do this to her, but I probably made it worse,” he says. Sidney’s hand dips into his pocket, and my eyes widen as I see there’s poison darts in them. Grabbing his wrist, I shake

my head. Growling, Sidney brushes a kiss along my forehead. “We’ll be in touch, Silla,” Noa says.

Squealing tires mark their exit, and I bite my lip.

“If you pick me up, my waist and under my knees are probably your best options,” I tell him.

“You have so much explaining to do.” He sighs. “I have a feeling that if those numbskulls didn’t do this, then the queen did because we asked for your involvement in this mission.”

“Got it in one,” I whimper as he picks me up.

“Alright, let’s see what the fuck is going on, and then get you some pain meds too,” Sidney says.

“Can I get some type of tea that works like a morning after pill?” I ask, dropping my head on his shoulder. I was on something while I was in the dungeons, and while I was living in the castle. It was like Sidney’s tea, because Cinder found out quickly how violently ill I got while on the implant and had to remove it.

I tried to tell her, but she thought I was full of shit.

Unfortunately, I didn’t get the tea yesterday or today, even though I asked for it. The healer was in too much of a rush, and told me I was responsible for whatever bastard I ended up pregnant with. I hope that woman falls down the stairs and falls on a dick she doesn’t choose one day.

Fuck, I don’t want to become a mean, spiteful person.

Sidney almost trips after what I said, but catches himself quickly. The apartment is on the second floor, and he does a great job not jostling me too badly. My feet start to cramp as he kicks the door so they’ll let him in.

“Oye! We got a situation!” Sidney barks.

“I’m not a ‘situation’, dickcheese,” I huff.

“Seriously?” he asks, an inappropriate, hysterical laugh bubbling in his voice.

“I don’t get to curse much anymore,” I mutter.

“Call us anything you want, it may become a fun new degradation kink we didn’t know we had,” he jokes.

Lips twitching even though none of this is funny, I nod. “I’ll keep that in mind,” I tell him as Grayson opens the door. “Hey, Baby.”

“Hey yourself, Dangerous Girl. I was starting to get a little worried,” he says as he opens the door wide.

“Cinder kept me waiting, and then I got waylaid by some Underground rebel misogynist assholes who want to make me queen,” I explain, tears starting to creep into my voice. Dammit, I was doing so well.

“Deep breath, Little Love. It’s obvious you’ve been through so much since you last saw us. I need to look you over. Can we take this to the bedroom? I think I left Silla’s bags out front. Someone go grab them before they’re taken, please?” Sidney asks.

I didn’t even realize that he’d left them when I fell, or that I had dropped them.

“They’re out there,” Andrya says, looking out the window. “I’ll go grab them.”

Sidney walks me into a bedroom, and I find it’s one of three. Sitting me on the edge, he drops to his knees to look at my feet.

“Ayden, grab my herbal and medical bag?” he calls out.

Bringing it in quickly, Ayden hands it to him. Sitting next to me, he holds out his hand. “Squeeze as hard as you need,” he whispers.

Nodding, even as my lips twist at how sweet he is, I watch Sidney as he pulls out some cream.

“There’s still some angry welts on your feet, so I’m going to put this cream on them. They’re healing up well, why didn’t Cinder’s healers give you pain medication?” Sidney asks.

Hissing as the cool lotion is slathered and worked into my feet, I slowly start to relax as I begin to feel relief. “If you’re going to punish someone, you don’t want them to feel better. The long lasting memory reinforces the

supposed lesson,” I explain. Shifting, I wince as all of my other pains begin to flare up.

“What else hurts?” Ayden asks, his thumb moving over the back of my hand.

“The better question is what doesn’t,” I grimace. “I was whipped with a cane for a long time before a new fresh hell was introduced. It’s not the worst thing that’s ever happened to me. I’m fi—”

“Don’t finish that sentence, Silla,” Grayson growls, standing outside of the door. “I should have known she’d do this shit. I don’t know how I could have protected you from it.”

“You don’t. It’s the other way around,” I tell him.

As his eyes heat with anger, I avoid them, looking down at Sidney.

“You’re poking a bear you shouldn’t, Pet. Let me see your back?” he asks.

Wincing, I bite my lip. “I need help getting undressed. I... I’m still really sore.”

“That’s fine, we’ll get you out of this hideous dress, and I’ll have you lay on your stomach,” he soothes.

Nodding, I begin to turn to offer my back, so he can get the zipper. Scrambling to his feet, Sidney shakes his head. “I’ll get it, just sit there and be perfect, Pet.”

I’ve missed them all so, so much.

Unzipping my dress carefully, his finger traces my skin reverently, which makes my tears escape. I love him so much, and yet I hate myself. I’m such a broken shell of who I used to be.

“Am I hurting you, or are you feeling overwhelmed?” Sidney asks as he pulls my dress down.

“Overwhelmed,” I whisper. “You’re not hurting me. My bags don’t have anything comfortable, and I’m pretty sure I just want to burn it all. Lana packed my clothes, and anything that she touches...”

“Makes me want to cut her hands off,” Andrya snarls, popping her head in, pushing Grayson the Mountain out of the way. “Move, you oaf!”

“You’re tiny enough to go around, little minx,” he chuckles.

Rolling her eyes, she ducks around Gray, walking to me. “What do you want to wear? Joggers, shorts, long-sleeves, pajamas, nothing?”

Smirking through my tears as I move my hips up to push the dress to the floor, I say, “Soft pajamas sound good. I need to go shopping for ‘normal people’ clothes. I also need to open up a chat to see if the prick who leads the Underground is serious about meeting with me.”

Brushing her lips gently along my forehead, she whispers, “That’s my girl. You fucking fight. We aren’t afraid of your tears, either.”

My face is dripping with the useless tears, but I nod to show I heard her as she leaves the room.

Unclipping my bra, Sidney’s fingers slather lotion on my back, making me sag in relief. “That’s lovely,” I whisper, my voice raspy with sadness and pain.

“Cinder went to town,” Ayden mutters as he looks at my back. “It looks like she lost control too.”

“She did.” I sigh. “I think Cinder is manic right now. She’s doing things that are reckless and stupid, losing track of time and facts that she clearly knows. There’s a summit of meetings starting this week, so she needs to be on her toes. Charming even came home for it.”

“What else hurts?” Isaac asks, also pushing Grayson out of the way, who snorts.

It’s nice to see them doing so well together. That’ll be important when I’m gone.

“Silla,” he barks, making me jump, wincing when things tense up that hurt.

“Fuck,” I croak, wincing. “Nothing that can be fixed outside of time. Sidney I need—”

“Gods, yes. Our window is closing, fuck,” he curses as he runs out of the room.

Gray has moved into the room, thus no longer in the doorway, which is good because I’m sure Sidney would have attempted to forcibly move the mountain otherwise. Andrya returns shortly after, with comfortable clothing, helping me throw my bra to the side and quickly dress. I keep my arm over myself, because I’m almost certain there’s a bite mark or two. Fucking savages.

“That’s better.” I sigh, because getting out of the dress is progress. Wincing as I lift my arms to unpin my hair, Andyra quickly takes over.

“Why is Sidney in the kitchen throwing herbs around and muttering to himself, Kitten?” Ayden asks as he sits on the floor by my feet. Ruffling his hair, I shrug.

“He’s closing up some loose ends, is all,” I murmur. “I’m a little worried about the Underground’s stunt, and I’m hoping Cinder doesn’t think that I made a run for it—”

There’s a ringing sound coming from my bag that someone brought in, and I lean down to open the zipper. Moving is getting noticeably easier after Sidney rubbed me down with his special cream. My dirty mind apparently is alive and well too, because I’m smirking as I sit back up with a phone. There’s a note on it that says:

THIS PHONE IS MEANT to be used to speak to me and for the mission. Use me.

-Cinder

ROLLING MY EYES, I answer the phone on the last ring.

“Hello?” I answer carefully, though I’m fairly certain it’s my step-sister.

“*What the hell happened?*” Cinder roars, and there’s a hint of fear in her voice. “*Where are you?*”

Thinking quickly, I give her pieces of the truth. “You had an Underground member on castle property, pretending to be a soldier. I know you don’t typically have soldiers inside the gates, but with delegations arriving today—”

“*We brought people in for extra security,*” Cinder finished.

“Somehow he stole a uniform, and told me I couldn’t use the royal transport for my travels today. Instead, he said I needed to walk to the nearest public transport or rideshare, he said it would cause undue attention based on my clothing. I look like someone who works for the Queen,” I explain.

“*I didn’t think of that,*” she grumbles. “*You’ll have to go shopping.*”

“The man ended up pulling me out of the safety of the courtyard, threatened me, and then released me just outside of the apartment. Apparently the leader of the Underground wishes to speak to me,” I tell her, stretching the truth a bit.

“*You’ve already managed to do more than any of the other assets. Unbelievable,*” she complains. “*As long as you’re not their prisoner, then I guess everything is fine. You carry too much information in your little brain to be taken hostage. Goodbye, Drizella.*”

Staring down in surprise at the phone, I blink twice. There were no threats, a backhanded compliment in there, and an offer to buy normal clothing. Who kidnapped my step-sister and put a pod person in her stead?

“Silla,” Andrya says insistently, moving my hair off my shoulder to press a gentle kiss onto my neck. Startling, I realize this isn’t the first time she’s called my name.

“Yeah?” I ask, turning.

“What happened?” Ayden asks, lifting his face up to look at me. Ruffling

his head, I smile a little.

“Cinder wanted to know what happened when I left the castle. She sounded a little hysterical, but she bought what I said. I think this is the perfect time to say that this explains how fucked up I am, because there wasn’t one threat in that phone call, and I’m very surprised by this,” I chuckle sarcastically.

“You’re not fucked up at all.” Ayden shrugs, pulling off his shirt to hand it to me. Confused, I stare at him as I take it. “Dry your face, Kitten. Are you hungry?”

My tears are drying on my cheeks from earlier, and it also speaks to how much has happened just now that I didn’t notice. Sighing, I dry my face as I think. I should eat, but I’m nauseous and tired.

“Maybe later,” I tell him with a small smile.

“The tea is steeping,” Sidney says as he comes back in. “Do you want me to draw you a bath, I have herbs in case you’re sore...?”

It’s like the air has been pulled from the room as people catch up to a conversation that only Sidney and I are privy to, making me wince.

“A bath would be great later, and I really am fine,” I murmur. “I usually have more time to recover before I have to do anything...”

“Is rape a common occurrence for you?” Grayson asks softly, swallowing hard as he pushes away from the wall he’s been holding up. Dropping his crossed arms, his long legs eat the distance up between us.

“Grayson...” I whisper, my eyes locked on his. It’s hard to hold his gaze, he’s so intense. “I told you I’d be different today, I have zero emotional energy right now to make you feel better about this. I literally am the Queen’s whore now.”

“Whores have a choice,” he growls. Pulling my shirt down, I gasp as his thumb grazes a bite mark. “I thought I saw something, but you got dressed so damn fast. Hiding your body, there’s no reason to hide from us.”

Pulling away, I throw down the shirt I had, attempting to scoot back on

the bed, forgetting that Andrya is behind me. “There’s every reason to hide,” I snarl. “Cinder told them they could do whatever they wanted as long as it didn’t show outside of clothing. My bruises have bruises.”

“Silla,” Andrya says, her voice breaking. Shuddering, I turn and hug her, my face buried in her neck. Carefully, she hugs me, her body shaking. “You don’t have to explain a thing, Baby. I promise. Gray is a growly asshole when one of us is hurt. And you... you’re everything to us, do you hear me? We don’t know what things have been like, and we forced the Queen’s hand. There are consequences for that. We’re so sorry you were hurt out of our need to save you... even if it’s not forever.”

Gasping, I can feel the tears overflow. “I’m so tired of crying,” I wail, holding tightly to Andrya. My legs lift to curl into a ball, and she pulls me to her. I can feel the guys standing in front of me, or still kneeling on the ground, but I’m filled with so much shame and self-loathing. I couldn’t fight, I couldn’t stop them...

“Silla,” Sidney grunts, rubbing the back of my neck. It's one of the only places that isn’t bruised or sore right now. “We can tell you have all of this shame, this unfathomable pain inside of you, and it’s not warranted. Whatever you had to do to survive is the exactly right thing to do at that time. Do you understand? The strength it took to ask for something that we wanted in negotiations knowing that it would blow back on you, I can’t even imagine. You’re my Godsdamned hero, Little Love.”

“Wha...what?” I hiccup, turning. I lose my balance falling into Andrya, who just helps me move, so I’m cocooned between her legs.

“We should have thought through our request when you came to the camp,” Andrya explains, her fingers running through my hair. “Cinder has this unhealthy obsession with you, and we didn’t understand that. We hated the idea of you having to go back...”

“You didn’t do anything wrong,” I protest, sitting up and dashing away the stupid water that keeps leaking out of my eyes. “I knew it was going to

happen when I went to call her...”

Growling under his breath, Grayson leans over, crowding me. “This shouldn’t be expected behavior, beautiful. She’s never going to let go of you, is she?”

“She will when I’m dead,” I shrug. “Whether it’s by my hand, the guards, or Lana and Cinder remains to be seen. I don’t have a life anymore, Grayson. I’m a trapped insect in her web, and there’s no way out. But... I can get you all out, where you can live normal lives away from this corrupt kingdom.”

“What if we don’t want to leave without you?” Gray rumbles. The others are deceptively quiet, and I know that for some reason, they’re letting him take the lead.

“I stared at a line of razors for twenty minutes today, and the only reason I’m here is because it means that you’ll be free at the end of this. Don’t fuck with my sanity or my heart,” I growl, pushing at his shoulders. I hear a strangled sob behind me, but ignore it, even as my hands shake. “After this mission is over, you’ll be free, and I’ll be dead. I will not return to that house of horrors. Do I make myself clear?!”

I’m screaming, my feet pushing Grayson away from me. I can feel Isaac, Ayden, Andrya, and Sidney watching as I lose it, simply trying to send me strength as I struggle to process things. Gods, I feel as if I’m the one going crazy, and not my step-sister, who has completely lost the plot.

“Silla, okay, okay. Grayson, back the fuck up. You’re not helping things right now,” Sidney yells, pushing him away.

“Do you hear her though?” he asks dejectedly, yanking on his hair.

“You’re not going to win this one. She heard you, okay? Just stop. Silla, come drink your tea, and have a piece of toast. This stuff will upset your stomach otherwise,” he tempers when I go to open my mouth.

“Okay,” I whisper, letting my hair slide forward as I get up, hiding my face. I’m ashamed of my outburst. I used to be so much stronger than this, but when you’re beaten down as much as I have been, sometimes things

break and never mend.

Eight

SIDNEY

Looking down at Silla and her stuttering breaths as she sleeps finally, I sigh. I made sure she ate a piece of toast and drank her tea before I noticed her starting to lean to the side in exhaustion. I don't know how much sleep she's been getting, and she's clearly in need of it. I managed to get her to agree to take a nap without too much negotiation.

But, fuck. This girl has been living in a war zone, alone for months. Not knowing isn't an excuse. We know now.

Slowly standing, my feet drag as I walk away from her. It feels wrong to be leaving her right now.

"Do you think she'd freak out if we curled up and slept with her when she knows that she went to bed alone?" Gray asks softly. There's a sorrow surrounding him like a shroud. He pushed too hard today, and he knows it.

"Maybe " I sigh, keeping the door half open as I step out. "We need a family meeting. I hate not including her, but—"

"We need to talk first," he grunts, walking toward the living room. "Family meeting!"

Sitting, we all watch him as he stays standing, his arms crossed as he thinks.

"I don't want her to relive things if she doesn't need to," he begins, watching us. "The shame needs to be lanced, and the only way to do that is to talk about it, though she may not want to discuss it with us guys, Andrya."

To his credit, Gray winces, knowing how that sounds.

"No, you're right. I'll broach the conversation when it's right. It'll be good for both of us. I... I'm not too far from where she is now. I don't think about killing myself as much anymore, and each positive step we make that leads us to freedom helps, but she doesn't have any hope," Andrya says, her

fingers digging into her thighs as she leans forward.

“We need to give it to her,” I grunt. “She can’t return to the castle. I’d suggest we make a run for it, but Silla won’t risk it. How do we keep her safe?”

“She mentioned the Underground,” Ayden mutters. “Why are they interested in her? The entire reason we got Cinder to agree to Silla’s involvement was because we thought they didn’t know who she was.”

“Cinder is grooming Silla for something,” Isaac intervenes, his face souring. “The clothes, keeping her close to her for meetings, think of how much information on royal matters Silla has stored in her brain. Cinder was also very worried about the liability her step-sister would be if she was taken hostage.”

“Could Silla be placed on the throne instead?” Andrya whispers. “They look so alike outside of height and hair color...”

“Silla sounds different though,” her brother counters, tugging his hair in concentration. “How much of a fuss would the kingdom make if we offed the queen?”

“I don’t know how the king would feel about it,” Grayson rumbles. “He’s a figurehead, it seems, while Cinder does everything. And then there’s the matter of how corrupt her court is. Charming probably enjoys his current lifestyle too much to give it up easily. They’ve enjoyed the perks that their queen has given them.”

“Like violating our girl?” I growl. I can’t believe this is a perk offered by Cinder. She’s a human being!

“Yes,” Grayson grunts, looking a little green with revulsion. “Silla didn’t look too thrilled with the knuckleheads who brought her here. How much should we trust the Underground? Should we set up a meeting with their leader and see what their intentions are?”

“I want to discuss it with Silla, but I think that’s the best course of action,” Isaac says. “They brought her here, so they’re not trying to hurt her,

yet they were insistent in their own bumbling ways. We need to make sure they're not just idiots with a bone to pick if we're going to work with them. If Silla is going to become Queen—”

“No one else is worried about our very treasonous conversation?” I ask, amused by the way this is going. I'm not surprised, because it'll be the best way to get the Queen's heel off of Silla's neck. If she's dead, she won't be able to hurt her. We just need to make sure to block those that feel they can step into the royal seat as if they're destined to it. A gap in power means people will fight for the privilege of leading. We don't need a riot or power play for the crown. We need real leadership for a dying kingdom.

I'm just asking for a nice, smooth transition with a sweet, well balanced ruler like Silla. Is that too much to ask?

“Nope, I'm not at all. We've already been branded as traitors,” Ayden jokes, sticking out his tongue. So charming.

My lips twitching, I shake my head. “Be that as it may, we can't have Cinder catching wind of this. Whenever Silla wakes up, let's take her clothes shopping, and broach the idea of contacting the Underground leader. I don't want to gang up on her,” I warn them. “She's been bombarded with so much, I want this to be her choice, understood?”

They all nod, soon lost in their own thoughts about what Silla has been through.

“My own choice for what?” Silla asks sleepily. It's like convincing a toddler to stay in bed, but realistically, she's twenty-six and has a place in this conversation.

“Come sit, Silla,” I murmur, waving her in. “We wanted you to nap, but I don't want you to think that we're talking about you or making decisions on your behalf. We're not. It's more that we're trying to process what's happened over the last few hours.”

Walking in slowly, she shrugs in agreement. “Every day for me is a lot,” Silla snorts without humor.

“Wanna cuddle?” I ask, a slow smile taking over my face.

Her lips twitch without realizing it, and she nods. “Yeah. Just don’t let me go back to sleep quite yet.”

“When’s the last time you had a decent sleep?” Grayson asks as she clambers into my lap.

“I don’t know what that is, Gray,” she answers, laying her head on my shoulder. “I tend to sleep in spurts, even though my bed is... was, my safe space. It was so comfortable, until it was all ruined. I was too twitchy to sleep right now. I kept feeling as if something was about to happen.”

“Truth bombs,” Isaac fake sneezes. “Little Hacker, you’re killing me here, because I don’t want to press or ask. But, I’m dying here.”

“I’m sorry.” She sighs, glancing over at him. “My entire life is pretty shitty, so if I censor everything, I’ll become mute.”

“Then truth bomb the fuck out of me, but these little hints of your life makes my imagination run wild. The bitch is hormonal, so everything my brain is throwing at me may be worse than what happened,” Isaac groans.

“I fully doubt that,” she blurts out. “My step-sister has this air of being fully in control, but my existence pisses her off, so everything sets her off. I can’t be away from her for long periods of time, so I get front and center floor seats to her crazy. Cinder can have entire meetings where she’s the smartest person in the room, collected, and dominates the decisions so they’re in her favor. Then the next minute she’s pulling me from the room because she doesn’t think I’m breathing properly for my station to punish me. She’s unhinged.”

“So there’s no rhyme or reason?” Andrya asks, brow furrowing.

“There’s a reason,” Silla snorts. “The time in question, Cinder lost her shit because someone kept trying to pull me into the conversation. She was upset by this, so she shared her displeasure with me.”

“Can I ask what she did?” Ayden asks hesitantly as we all glare at him. Silla just shrugs, thinking.

“She told me that if I was going to insist on being the center of attention, then she’d make sure to give that to me. So she forced me to stand naked in the guards’ dining hall,” Silla says, her eyes fuzzy and unfocused as she remembers. “It’s one of her tamer punishments, though humiliating.”

“Did they touch?” Isaac growls, and her eyes move to him.

“There wasn’t anyone to keep them from it,” she says absently, her voice showing how detached and checked out she is from the memory.

Strangling his response, Isaac’s fist tightens as he keeps his face blanked from a reaction. We’ve grown better at this when we have to be, though we try to be real with each other. Silla doesn’t need to see Isaac’s reaction though, not when she’s holding on so tenuously to her own sanity. Fuck, I had to give my girl an emergency tea today to ensure she isn’t pregnant by her rapists... I hate this all for her.

Taking a breath, I decide to broach the subject we’ve been discussing.

“Silla, how would you feel about talking to the Underground to work with them to dethrone your step-sister?” I ask.

“Noa, the guy who pretended to be a soldier, mentioned it, but I’m not willing to exchange one tyrant for another,” she says, shaking her head. “I want to see what I can find out about the Underground, the state of the people in the realm, and then set up a meeting. I need my computer for that too.”

“You really want to do that right now?” I ask, wrinkling my nose. She’s tired, but I can see her thoughts are running through her mind in rapid fire, so there’s not a chance in hell that she’ll be sleeping any time soon.

“Yes,” she says, nodding so hard she winces as she hurts her neck.

Kissing her forehead, I chuckle. “I love you so much,” I tell her, ignoring the way she stills. We’ve all gotten more comfortable talking to each other, showing our feelings, though Isaac and Grayson have been a bit stiff around each other the last few months. I’m done hiding. Life is too damn short, even for a psychotic narcissist like me. “I’ll give you anything within my power to give you. Do you want to get set up at the kitchen table or the couch?”

Biting her lip, she shrugs. “The couch works. The cream you applied really helped my pain levels, so I think I can lay comfortably,” she says.

“It’s colder here than the kitchen, let me grab some blankets,” Andrya mutters, getting up.

“I’ll grab your computer bag,” Isaac says, moving to do that.

“Hungry?” Ayden asks, hopeful.

Silla’s stomach growls, making her giggle. Fuck, I’ve missed that sound.

“Do you want pizza, some other takeout, or we can whip something up?” he continues, going with what her stomach wants.

“Gods, I shouldn’t, but I really want pizza now,” she groans. “I can’t tell you the last time I had some.”

“It’s been a long time for us too,” I grin. The kitchens would attempt to make pizza for the staff, but it’s really just not the same. “Let’s pop our pizza cherry together?”

“How do you manage to make that sound delicious and dirty at the same time?” Silla asks in wonder, looking up at me. Her sea-green eyes sparkle, and it’s nice to see the real Silla Tremaine come through.

“It’s a talent,” I snark, brushing her lips with mine. “Ayden and I will get dinner sorted, why don’t you get to work?”

“Sir, yes Sir,” she grins. “I’m partial to pineapple on my pizza.”

Picking her up as I stand, I gently return her to the couch. Usually I’d drop her to hear her squeal and watch her tits bounce, but we’re a ways off from all of that. I don’t want to move too fast. This all has to be on her terms.

“Such a pretty little brat,” I tease her as she gets comfortable on the couch. Her raven hair is a curly, unruly mass down her back, her smile wide. I can’t help but take a mental snapshot of Silla looking just like this.

Walking into the kitchen, I take a deep breath as I see Ayden.

“You’re really good with her,” he says softly, toying with his phone.

“I’m struggling, but I want to give her normalcy. Remind her she’s not as broken as she thinks she is,” I sigh, pulling out a flier for pizza in the area.

“This is all so fucked up,” Grayson groans from the doorway. Startling, I shake myself. The man is so damn quiet. “Didn’t mean to surprise you. I can see she needs normalcy, and I want to give her it. I just wish we could have protected her better.”

Gray has a savior complex. He feels so much guilt for the last few months, and I understand it, because I went through it when the Queen sentenced the twins and I to the reform camp without a chance at parole. We had no idea how insane the Queen really is, but we also weren’t going to allow the reform camp to starve.

That’s what we thought we were in the dungeons for, but based on what Silla was saying about her step-sister, Cinder is very particular and obsessive about her.

We are going to earn the word branded on our bodies soon, and I don’t feel bad about it at all. Play stupid games, win stupid prizes.

Silla is ours, bitch.

ISAAC

“Isaac, want to help me?” Silla asks, her voice soft as she works slowly through the system.

I was leaning against the wall watching her like a creeper, just in awe that she’s sitting in the same room as me. I’ve been in this weird state of shock today, hearing her talk about ending things. She’s our bright light, to hear her talk like this hurts my heart.

“Sure, what do you need?” I ask, my feet already walking toward her.

“Stop looking at me like that and come sit with me. I’m not disappearing, not right this second anyway,” she mutters.

Taking a breath, I drop my ass slowly to the couch so she doesn’t bounce too much. She stays curled up in a corner, typing and searching the dark web for information.

“I’m aware of this,” I say softly, rubbing her knee through the blanket she’s thrown over her legs. It’s buttery soft and warm. Andrya was smart to bring her this, because it is colder in this room. “I’m trying to keep a lid on all of my questions. I don’t want to pressure you or make you uncomfortable, yet I’m just in awe that you’re sitting in front of me.”

“This is weird for me too,” she says with a sigh, glancing at me. “I didn’t expect to ever make it, to be honest. Between Cinder and Lana fucking all day because they need to be on their best behavior for the King, to being pulled into the drama with the Underground, it’s a little surreal that I’m here.”

“Truth bombs,” I mutter. “Okay, so does Charming not know that he’s been cuckolded? I feel like that could be really awkward to find out during a multi-nation summit...”

Silla snickers, shaking her head. “Charming kind of knows, and he has his

own mistresses, but he doesn't want it thrown in his face. He has his own place where he spends most of his time so he won't have to deal with my step-sister. So when he comes to the castle where he has to show a united front, he wants his wife to be his wife," she explains. "He's very much willing to keep his head in the sand if it means he gets to have his cake and eat it too. Charming enjoys his current lifestyle while doing minimal work. Cinder is the face of the monarchy."

"She's batshit crazy," I grunt.

"You have no idea," she says with a grim smile. "I'm looking for information on how she's treating the citizens of Forbach. It seems as if everyone is happy and loves my step-sister, but some of the laws they're discussing makes me uncomfortable."

"Such as?" I ask, brow furrowed.

"Cinder wants to enact a one child per family rule going forward," Silla says. "She seems to believe that there's a food shortage, and that this will head off the issues. I think it's an incredibly arrogant approach."

"What would you do?" I ask, truly interested. If our plans are to put Silla on the throne, I need to know that she can handle it.

"Find a way to ensure that our farmers who grow the food for our kingdom have the resources needed to grow the most food possible, without destroying their soil," Silla says immediately. "When these conversations are happening around me, I immediately ask how I would handle it. It keeps my mind from wandering. While Cinder doesn't want my input, she doesn't want me daydreaming, either."

I have a feeling that this has happened to her in the past, and the results weren't great.

"So after you find out what's going on within the kingdom, what's your next step?" I ask, grabbing my computer from the coffee table. I'm not one to sit idly while my girl is working, so I'd rather jump in and help.

"I want to know what dignitaries are dirty, which do the jobs they're

asked to do without corrupt dealings, and who isn't happy with Cinder's rule," she explains. "I know this is a big undertaking at this hour..."

"Little Hacker, it's seven at night and we're about to eat dinner soon. There's no curfew here, no one to tell us when to go to bed. Go nuts. Ayden can pull a roster and help us as well," I soothe. It's weird being outside of the camp, but I'm also enjoying the freedom. While I was an instructor with certain liberties, I was just as much a moth caught in Cinder's web.

The Warden accepted the job ten years ago because he believed in prison reform, but didn't realize how corrupt the system was. I joined because we've been friends for years, and then I never left because I wouldn't leave him. There's no sob stories here, just loyalty that knows no bounds.

"Gods, you're right!" Silla squeals, leaning forward to kiss my jaw, as it's all she can reach with the way she's sitting. Wincing, she wiggles to get more comfortable.

"Did you strain something?" I ask, wondering what just happened.

"Just my vagina," she mutters. "I hate that my body is so damn battered."

My heart clenches at the truths she's telling me. I want to burn the world for what's happened to her. A straight up killing spree is starting to sound really good right now. As black dots start to litter my vision, I remind myself to breathe. Passing out because of hysteria and raw, unadulterated anger isn't very awe inspiring or helpful.

"Sidney may be able to add some herbs to a bath later if you'd like the help," I say instead. It's not my damn place to push. I'm going to accept what she wants to tell me, and wait to see if anything else comes.

"That's a good idea," she says absently, already pulled back into what she's doing. Grayson is in the kitchen with Ayden and Sidney, and I'm not sure where Andrya is right now.

As she comes in with wet hair twenty minutes later, I realize she went to take a quick shower, and is in pajamas.

"Can you grab Ayden for me so I don't have to yell for him like a

caveman?” I ask Andrya as she strolls in.

Nodding with a smile as her eyes drift to Silla working diligently, she ambles over to the kitchen.

“What's up, you two?” Ayden asks, stretching as he walks into the room.

“Want to help us with some research?” I ask, raising my brow.

“Yeah, let me grab my computer,” he murmurs, walking to the desk. Sitting across from us, he wakes up his device. He was checking for any accidents earlier today when Silla didn't arrive on time. We were all a bit on edge.

“Can you pull a roster for guards that work on the Queen's Guard, royal officials, dignitaries in Forbach and.... ummm I think that's it for now,” Silla says, glancing up from her work. “Oh! What do we know about the leader of the Underground? Anything?”

Ayden shakes his head at how fast she's talking. “Okay, zoom zoom girl,” he chuckles. Silla simply smiles at him, batting her eyes. I can almost imagine that everything is normal, and we're not traitors to the queen as they banter. This is such a different Silla from the one earlier. Is she compartmentalizing? What's happening in her mind? “To start with your last burning question,” Ayden continues, “I don't think anyone knows who leads the Underground. I think we may need to set up a meeting to get that information. Also, they seem like an organization that is truly concerned with the state of the kingdom. I did a search on some of the closed blogs on the Interwebs, and have found a lot of disgruntled people.”

“Disgruntled how?” Silla asks, frowning. “I can't afford the prettiest and most expensive handbag unhappy, or food and housing is a stretch unhappy?”

“Food, housing, foreclosures from the Queen's bank after missing a payment by a couple of days, kinds of issues,” Ayden explains with a sigh. “None of this is reported to a news source though, probably because Cinder is controlling it.”

“I don't know for sure, but I wouldn't be surprised,” Silla agrees. “When

I was at the camp, Isaac and I came across a job where he was asked to find out who was trying to assassinate my step-sister. I wonder who else she's pissed off," she says, lips twisting in thought. "I know she's not a good person by any stretch, but I didn't think she'd do this to her kingdom. Cinder used to be a good queen."

"She was," Ayden drawls. "However, I've been taking weekly meetings with her since I returned to the camp, and she's been a bit crazier than usual. She encouraged me to masturbate while she was fucking Lana. My dick is broken, well mostly, but her eyes have had this manic gleam lately."

"I've noticed that," Silla says, lips pursed. "She's typically angry or disappointed with me, so I figured that was it."

"You're perfect." I sigh. "I don't know how you could possibly be in trouble, unless that person was being overcritical."

Shrugging, she blushes. "What do you mean, your dick is broken, Ayden? That's like a travesty to all female kind."

"It turns out, my cock only wants you, Kitten," he says, looking down at his pants as he palms it in wonder. "It appears it's woken up due to your disappointment. Huh. Tell me I'm a bad boy, and I need to be chained up. Maybe I'm developing a degradation kink."

Snorting, I hide my smile. His cock has simply missed the woman next to me, kinks be damned. The throaty laughter coming from her makes even my dick twitch. Fuck me, she's beautiful.

"My dick isn't broken!" Ayden throws back his head and crows. Grayson's head pokes into the room, his lips twitching.

"My cock decided to look alive the moment I saw Silla," he chuckles. "I was harder than a damn rock. Dicks get hard around you, Dangerous Girl, just know the ball is entirely in your court."

"Can we add Silla to our puppy pile snuggles?" Ayden asks, jutting out his bottom lip. It's ridiculous and adorable.

"Erm, the what?" Silla asks in return.

“Remember how we all sleep snuggled in a bed together? He wants you to come sleep with us. Just sleeping,” I confirm. “Cocks get hard, we know how to behave, it’ll be hard for us all to sleep knowing you’re under the same roof and not sleeping with us.”

Weighing the decision in her head as she rocks her head back and forth, she nods. “Yeah, I can do that. If I have a nightmare, I may wake everyone else though... maybe that’s not a good idea,” she retracts quickly, second guessing herself.

“I apparently still have nightmares a few times a week,” Andrya says, having been listening to us at the doorway. “The guys really don’t care. We’ll all help you back to sleep. Trust me, it’s better than doing it alone.”

As the doorbell rings, signaling pizza, she nods. “Anything has to be better than that,” Silla says softly.

Ayden stares at her for a beat before going to grab the pizzas. Knowing Sidney and Ayden, they ordered for an army.

“Dinner time,” I murmur, putting my computer on a side table. “We’ll knock this out after we get some food in our stomachs.”

“Okay...” Silla trails off, eyes on her screen. Leaning over, I see a chat box opened up. “I got a message. We appear to have been invited to a masquerade party by the leader of the Underground.”

“It’s smart,” Ayden says, scowling as he comes through with boxes. “Sidney, food! Bring some plates, please, and drinks.”

Andrya moves to help Sidney, and Silla continues to stare at the screen. “What do I say? The little green light is on, which means he or she is waiting for me to respond.”

“You wanted to meet them,” Grayson chimes in helpfully. “This is a controlled environment, we’re relatively safe, and we can leave whenever you want.”

“Yep,” I agree. “We’re going to have issues not having eyes on you at all times, so we’re all going.”

Silla doesn't seem bothered by my response, instead shrugging as she types out a response.

"They want to know how many of us there will be?" she says, her fingers twitching, as if anticipating her next move. "Well, Noa and Wilhelm saw Sidney and I mentioned you all, so that's not a stretch of the imagination to ask how many."

Silla's talking to herself is adorable, and my lips twitch.

Going back to rubbing her thigh, I wait for her to respond. Slowly, she types as she thinks, hitting enter.

"Okay," she blows out, as if she ran a marathon. Her anxiety is still something she struggles with, and it makes me want to tell her that I'll help her slay all of her terrors and monsters. Even the biggest one: her step-sister.

Nodding, she types another response before putting her computer on the end table.

"Looks like we're going to a party in three days at the Heights quarter," Silla says, smiling tightly. "Gives us just enough time to find appropriate clothing, and get this research done. No pressure."

"You handle pressure beautifully," Sidney counters, handing out plates and drinks with Andrya. "Keep a level head, the masquerade ball is held under the stars, so that means you're going to be in your happy place. Find your way the best way you know how: intrigue, knowing when to speak, and when to listen. Those qualities make the best spies."

"I'm not a spy," Silla says, shaking her head.

"You've been a spy longer than you think, Little Love. Do what feels right and natural. Remember that your eyes still say volumes, even if you've found a way to train them to say less," Sidney explains.

"You mean all of my maneuvers through the royal balls and eavesdropping is going to come in handy?" Silla teases as she begins to open the pizza boxes now on the coffee table. Helping her, soon they're all opened, and she's pulling pineapple and pepperoni pizza onto her plate. My mouth

waters as I serve myself some as well, listening to the conversation.

“Yes, that’s exactly what I mean. You’re perfectly equipped for this mission, so just roll with it. Tonight do some research and recon, eat, and rest. Not in that order,” Sidney chuckles. “Be yourself, Little Love, because you have everything you need inside of you.”

Taking a deep breath, she nods as she takes a bite of her pizza, moaning as the flavors hit her tongue. Based on the slight shift and adjustment the guys all make as we watch Silla, I’m pretty sure we were all affected.

It’s nice to know our dicks aren’t broken, but damn poor timing to pop a boner right now. Dinner is shaping up to be an exercise in pain and patience.

Nine

ANDRYA

I can't keep my eyes off Silla tonight. Even something as simple as watching her eat or watching her code on the computer draws me in, because she's here. Silla is alive, and though she's been hurt in unimaginable ways, she's with us all now.

It may be temporary in her eyes, but we're determined to set her free from her step-sister. One day she or Lana will go too far and kill her, and a world without Silla Tremaine in it is unfathomable. We all walked around thinking it was true, and it was devastating.

"Andrya, do I have something on my face, Love?" Silla asks, arching her brow as she glances.

Flushing, I shake my head. We've all been a little creepy, but I don't know how else to be.

"No, Silla. I think I'm afraid to blink and find you're not actually here." I sigh. Patting the seat next to her, she signals me to sit by her.

It's been hours since dinner, and the guys moved to the kitchen to drink coffee and work. Embarrassed, I walk slowly over to her. It's not her fault for calling me out, I was being slightly rude.

"I am here though. I don't know for how long, I just want to enjoy my so-called freedom for a bit," she says softly as I sit next to her.

"You sound so... without hope," I tell her helplessly. "I've heard little parts that you've let drop, I saw your back, you're still in pain..."

"It's not that bad." She shrugs. I can hear the unspoken "anymore", and my fingers twitch. If I could drop poison into the water at the castle and walk away, I would. I'm feeling pretty homicidal at the moment. Let's just throw them all away.

"It may not be that bad right now, but it's as if you're talking about a

destructive relationship that you can't get out of, Silla," I implore her.

Dropping her head back, she sighs. "I can't walk away if there's a chance that Cinder could hurt you. And when you're all safe, I won't have a reason to keep fighting. You're everything to me, even when I didn't know how you were, Cinder would taunt me. When you were released was the day that I came out of the dungeon to join castle life," she explains. "It's been moderately better than being tortured, but almost worse at times too. I knew what to expect in the dungeons. I don't know what each day will bring outside of that."

Taking a breath, I draw my legs underneath me, pulling the blanket over me as I drop my head on the cushion next to hers.

"I think the unpredictability would be worse in a lot of ways," I admit. "Not being sure when the bottom drops out because of something you said or did, even if it seemed innocent."

"That's exactly it. Lana is obsessed with feet," Silla says, wrinkling her nose. "It's why I always have to be in heels. They hide my feet, and I think Cinder is secretly hoping to ruin them, making them ugly."

"You have such cute feet," I tell her, shrugging. "I find it a little unhinged of her to be this jealous of them. I feel as if she's a little obsessed with you. It's not healthy."

"Nope," she says, popping the 'P'. "Her eyes are always on me, I can't leave the room without her permission, and she enjoys flaunting her sexual escapades in front of me."

"I doubt it's to make you jealous," I scoff, rolling my eyes.

"No, but lately I feel as if she's trying to entice me into joining, and I'm so not interested," Silla says with a shudder. "My sister has very special sexual tastes that lean toward the macabre, and her partners don't always leave her rooms alive. Two weeks ago, one of the guards had a maid thrown over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes. Cinder isn't well lately."

"Why does no one talk about this?" Ayden says. The guys are so quiet,

that I didn't realize they were quietly listening from the doorway.

"The Queen has a stranglehold on the castle and its occupants. The executions of the spies who didn't complete their missions were a great deterrent from saying anything to the newspapers. Those who work for the castle either live there or in the barracks on property," Silla explains. "I thought it was a little odd as well when I came out of the dungeon, but Charming has no idea how long I've been at the castle. I know he's been back and forth to see Cinder over the last year because he's had business to take care of, but he's very oblivious."

"Fuck," Grayson grunts, walking into the room to drop onto the couch across from us. "Did you find anything interesting?"

Grayson gestures to the computer, and Silla nods, clicking a tab she has open on it. There's a ton of notes written down.

"The west quadrant of the kingdom is currently experiencing a drought, but Cinder hasn't offered them any help. There's an uptick in crime that's weird to me in the north, because she's had such a strong stance on it. However, the police team that works that area is kind of corrupt according to my notes," Silla begins, chewing on her lip. I want to pull her tortured lip away from her teeth, but I force myself to take a breath. My control is tenuous at best around her. "The entire kingdom is a fucking mess at the moment, and Cinder is in the middle of discussions with dignitaries over useless fucking laws. What is she doing?"

Silla's chest heaves with distress as she shakes her head. "The prison system was supposed to deter crime, did it work at all?" she asks.

"I did some research too," Isaac says gently, sitting on the coffee table in front of us. "The prison system was helping, but people are hungry, so they're mostly looting. That's not a good way to handle things, but it's what's happening. Cinder has several meetings over the next several weeks. One is with the adjoining kingdoms to discuss what's working for them, how to build their trading relationships, etc. The other is the surrounding dignitaries

that help manage the kingdom so that Cinder can discuss the upcoming laws that she is implementing to ‘help’ with the food shortages.”

“Population control,” Silla snarls as he nods. “There has to be a better solution to this problem.”

“What would you do?” I ask.

“I would figure out how to create more jobs in addition to what we talked about earlier. The kingdom needs an overhaul on its laws as well, so we can find out what’s working and not, and some of these people in charge need to be replaced,” she says, wrinkling her nose as she continues down her list. “Constable Sable is more interested in taking payoffs and being sucked off by his secretary than getting anything done. I was snooping on his computer, and I found some rather disturbing videos of them together.”

“Gross,” I chuckle. “I heard that man is slovenly and obese. I can’t imagine being on my knees for him. No thanks.”

“You do look pretty on your knees,” Sidney chuckles, yawning as he pushes off the wall where he was resting.

Blushing, I shrug. I haven’t had sex since we left the dungeon, and I’m a little nervous about it. Granted, the guys have given me space too, because we’ve all been in a state of mourning. Things may change eventually now that we have Silla with us again.

“I think we’ve done as much as we can today, guys,” Grayson murmurs, stifling his own yawn. “We were up stupid early this morning, and I’m beat. What do you think?”

“I think I’m finally ready for bed,” Silla admits with her own yawn. “It feels wrong to go to sleep with so much up in the air.”

Standing, I pluck the computer away to put it on the table. “Can I shut this, or do you need to log out of anything?” The first thing I learned from Ayden and Isaac is not to shut a laptop without permission.

“I’m logged out and have closed my holes in people’s networks,” Silla says. “You can shut it.”

Closing it firmly, I cross my arms under my breasts. Silla glances at them before forcing herself to look at my eyes. As long as she's slightly interested, we'll work toward anything else. I refuse for Cinder to take her away from us anymore than she has.

"You can't solve the kingdom's problems in a day when it took years for Cinder to fuck it up," I remind her. "Come sleep, cuddle, and we'll tackle this all tomorrow. You can get all of the evidence you need to assuage yourself of any guilt you may be feeling about relieving Cinder and Charming of their throne."

Scooting up onto her knees, she's careful not to sit on her feet. I remind myself to have Sidney put more cream on her body so she can sleep easier.

"The issue is that it's their own fault for fucking things up. They ignore what people need, and place arbitrary restrictions and laws that just bring in more money for their own gains," Silla says, shrugging. "I never thought about being queen, but if it'll make things better for the kingdom, why not?"

"Silla," I whisper, dropping my arms to take her hands. "It'll mean that you'll be free. You won't have to look over your shoulder constantly, no pretending to not have an opinion on things, and most importantly you'll be safe."

Eyes widening, they start to fill with tears as she realizes the magnitude of what that would mean.

"I don't even know what it means to be safe," she whispers. "I mean... I really just thought I'd finish this mission and then jump in the river. I don't want to go back. I can't. I won't."

"Pet," Sidney murmurs, moving to push her hair away to cup her face. "You are too important to throw your life away. I can't even imagine what you've been through. I can't speak to what you will only speak about in small truth bombs, but I know you're one of the most beautiful people that I've ever had the pleasure to know."

Silla winces when Sidney talks about the truth bombs, but I shake my

head. “No, we don’t ever need to know if you don’t want to tell us. You don’t owe us shit. We want to be sure we don’t trigger you or upset you if there’s something you dislike now. However, if you do ever want to talk about things, I had an unpleasant experience with the guards once while I was in the dungeon.”

Silla’s eyes search my face before her lips tremble. “No,” she whispers, but I shake my head. I didn’t tell her for pity, just so that she could feel a little less alone.

“I’m okay,” I murmur, squeezing her hands. “My point for telling you, is that I leaned on the guys a lot, and they helped me feel a little more like myself. I was in a dark place, still am some days if I’m being honest, but if you ever want to talk or break things, I’m your girl.”

The guys smirk at my words.

“I’ve broken plenty of things in my office,” Gray admits, shrugging. We all look at him surprised, and his cheeks get ruddy with embarrassment. “I have a really good hold on my emotions, but we’ve all felt helpless in the last year. There’s merit in fucking shit up.”

Silla pulls away with a smile, standing. Moving over to Grayson, she brushes her lips over his forehead.

“So who’s coming to bed?” she asks, and everyone not already standing does so.

“Can Sidney give you something for your pain?” I ask carefully.

Silla turns, surprised. “I’m usually better at hiding it,” she says.

“You don’t have to hide anything from us,” Isaac admonishes. “Your body is healing, and I’m sure being in constant pain affects that.”

“It does.” Sidney sighs. “Come on, Little Love. They’re all going to take awhile to get ready for bed. How does a bath sound?”

“Someone may have to check and make sure I don’t fall asleep,” she chuckles. Silla says it without guile, and I can see it’s because she’s tired, not because she’s having ill-intentioned thoughts.

“I’m going to grab a shower,” I agree. “We’ll all meet in the middle bedroom for cuddles!” Something about talking about the dungeon and my experience just makes me feel dirty. I’m sure that may change with time, but for now, showers make me feel cleansed, even though I took one before dinner.

“Ayeeee!” the guys call out as we part ways in the hallway, making me smile.

We may all come out of this together, after all.

AYDEN

Someone is whimpering in bed with us. Sitting up with a gasp, I look for my sister. Andrya hasn't had a nightmare in at least a week, but trauma doesn't stay quiet for long. Blinking in the dark room, I see someone struggling in the blankets.

Silla got caught up in the sheets, because Grayson trapped her accidentally with his arm. Grabbing a pillow, I fix the problem in the quickest way possible: I reached across and hit Gray with it.

Gasping, he lifts his heavy arm, which means Silla can free herself. Kicking the sheets off with a strangled scream, she wakes herself up. The light is too far for me to reach, so I start talking to her.

"Silla, you're safe. You had a nightmare, where something was probably trying to hurt you. But that's not real, not right now. You're completely safe. Can you hear me, Kitten?" I ask.

Stilling, her heavy breaths sound harsh in the quiet room. Shifting next to her, Andrya makes a snuffling sound as she starts to wake up. On the other side of me, Sidney sits up.

"Yes," Silla whispers. "Gods, I'm so sorry." Putting her hands over her face, she groans, sitting up. "I should have known this wasn't going to work."

"I trapped you in the bedsheets," Grayson says sheepishly, turning on the light over Isaac's body. "This one was totally on me."

"Did you?" Silla asks, dropping her hands with a nervous giggle.

"Oh, yeah. I'm a fucking dickweed," Gray says with a grin. "Forgive me?"

Our giant is literally a simp for this girl. It's so funny, because he's so growly most of the time.

"Always," she says, leaning into him. They've come a long way from the

last time he pissed her off.

“Did Grayson pin you down and make you tell him you love him again?” Isaac jokes, leaning his elbow on his thigh as he watches them. His black and purple tattoo on his side can be seen from here since he’s just wearing low slung joggers, the skulls practically look alive in this light. “I’ve told you over and over again, that’s not the way to get a woman to proclaim their undying love.”

“What?!” Grayson looks aghast at him, while Isaac tries hard to keep a straight face. Andrya peaks into giggles with Silla, and even I find my lips tugging hard into a smile. Fuck, we’ve never been able to just be all together like this, outside of the date we took her on that began our nightmare. “Fuck, if I wanted to get her to proclaim her undying love, I’d just do this!”

Gray turns, tickling Silla’s sides as she squeals. Sidney winces, and I know that he’s worried about her back, but she’s not feeling anything after her bath and the lotion.

“Mercy!” Silla screams, laughter coloring her voice. “Gray, I love you, but I have to pee!”

“No more golden showers, let the girl pee,” Isaac snickers.

Grayson drops a kiss on Silla’s lips casually, and I know I heard the inhaled gasp from her as he did. Moving away, he smirks. “You heard the man, one golden shower this week is more than enough.”

Crawling off the bed, she stands, hands on her hips. “Who is getting golden showers, and what weird kinks have we developed?” Silla asks, appalled. “I’m not kink shaming, but I’d much rather be showered in cum than pee.”

Leaving us in shock, she sprints to the bathroom.

“Did she...?!” I gasp, mouth dropped.

“She didn’t mean it, but fuck, I’m harder than a rock. I think I’m going to have to rub one out for the first time in I don’t even know how long,” Grayson groans, getting up.

“I’m coming with you,” Isaac mutters. “You can rub one out, and I’ll either take a cold shower or I’ll get off to your noises.”

I swear I’m having an aneurysm, because Grayson just grunts in agreement as they walk out.

“Did they...What...?” I think I’m broken.

Andrya smacks me over the head, snickering. “Get a hold of yourself, man,” she says with a grin. “That’s called healing. It’s a good thing. Now don’t be weird about it. We probably need to tell Silla about how you peed on a girl with Sidney. Maybe we’ll skip the fact that you possibly killed her too.”

“I looked at my darts after,” Sidney chuckles with a shrug. “I definitely used a lethal dose, but it’s a slower release of poison. Ding, dong, the whore is dead.”

“Who’s dead?” Silla asks, walking out of the bathroom.

“Oh shit,” Andrya whispers. “We were bad. Wanna come punish us?”

I worry that we may have pushed too far when Silla climbs up on the bed until she’s standing on the end.

“Absolutely,” Silla grins evilly. “Catch.”

Dropping onto our laps with her body, we all yell, scrambling to catch her. She doesn’t hurt us because she’s so tiny now, but fuck she scared me.

“Bad Kitten,” I growl, making her sit up in my lap.

“Maybe,” she responds, brushing her lips against mine. “Now tell me who you’re peeing on?”

Closing my eyes, I groan.

“Don’t make me enact the pinky promise,” she warns.

Andrya chortles delightedly, while Sidney hides his smile. Game, set, match.

“Can I get a kiss, too, if I debase myself by explaining how Sidney and I pissed on a girl for trying to climb into Grayson’s bed?” I ask with a wince.

“You...? What a little whore!” Silla exclaims, moving to straddle my lap.

“Kitten,” I protest as she sits firmly on my erection. I’m afraid that my dick will always be standing at attention as long as Silla is in the room. Fuck, she could be in the next room, and all I’d need is to hear her sultry, throaty voice.

“Dicks get hard,” Silla says dismissively. “I can’t really do anything about it right now...”

“Nor do you need to,” I reassure her. “I think if you’re around, my cock will show its appreciation.”

Grinning, she cups my face, kissing me. It’s not a brush along the lips, it’s a real kiss. I feel so special that she’s kissing me, giving me a vulnerable piece of her. Kissing is sacred to her, so this is everything. My hands gently massage her hips, and she slowly starts to rock back and forth against my dick.

I force myself not to react. Gods, she feels so good, and if she needs this, I’m fine if my reward is that I cum in my boxers. Silla Tremaine can have anything she wants.

I can feel Sidney and Andrya’s eyes on us as we kiss. Silla’s tongue slips between my lips, gently flicking my tongue, and I can’t help the grunt I make.

“Ayden,” she whimpers, rotating her hips. “I shouldn’t want this, but...”

“Use him,” Andrya says immediately. “If he dies due to not getting enough blood to his big head, then so be it.”

Silla and I huff out a laugh, and my fingers squeeze her hips gently. Her head drops back as her breaths grow stuttered and breathy with desire as I kiss up her neck.

“Yes, Kitten,” I breathe, licking as I kiss her skin. “Cream for me, like a good girl.”

Whimpering, her thighs clench as she shudders. “Please, I need this,” she whimpers, a beautiful flush spreading along her neck.

“Grind on my cock, use me,” I growl, goosebumps spreading along her

skin as she hears how crazy she makes me feel. I'm fucking feral. Sidney moves to cuddle Andrya, his hand sliding into her panties to help her come too. Hey, it's only fair.

My hands slowly move under her shirt, massaging her skin. I know she shouldn't be in pain, but I'm more worried about being self-conscious about her body.

"Please, touch me," she whispers, and that's when my restraint snaps. Pushing up her shirt, I can see her beautiful breasts. There's a fucking bite mark on one, and it makes me see red. Carefully, I lave my tongue along her nipple, listening for sounds of pain. Instead, needy moans come out of her mouth instead, and I smile.

Lifting her arms, I take this as a sign to remove her shirt.

"Gorgeous, and mine," I murmur, palming her heavy breasts. They're gorgeous, the flush along her neck continuing to them.

"Can you..." Silla hesitates as I roll my hips, giving her the perfect friction against her needy clit. Her sleep pants are thin, and she can feel every inch of me.

"Anything, you have but to say it," I groan. The sound should be obscene, but neither of us notice. It's been so long since I've had her in my arms, and it feels like a miracle.

"Make me yours again," she begs. "I just..."

"I got you, Kitten," I promise. "Be a good girl and grind your needy pussy on my cock until you come. I'm going to suck on your pretty tits, make my own marks so that every time you see them, you know I was with you."

It should be perverse for me to say this to her so soon after her trauma, but her words tell me she needs this. I'll never deny this woman anything.

Sucking on her nipple, I carefully tweak and pull at the other, watching her reactions. Her eyes hood with desire, her breaths pant as she rides my cock through our clothes. Silla's eyes watch Andrya, who has lost most of her clothes as Sidney plays with her. My eyes remain on my girl, the true queen

of my heart, happy she's getting her own personal live sex show.

My teeth scrape along her nipple insistently, making her cry out as her fingers plunge into my blond hair. I've let it grow out a little, so she has enough to hold on to as I hug her tightly to me. Silla's hips rock, grind, and ride my cock through my pants as I thrust against her. Her cries grow more and more desperate, and I know she's close.

My eyes must glint with demands as I watch her. I'm getting close, my balls are drawing up, and heat is growing up along my back.

"Come with me, my Queen," I growl, smug as her eyes grow wide. Sucking hard on her nipple as I grab her hips to rock them hard against my length, Silla begins to beg and keen.

"Please, yes, oh Gods, Ayden," she cries just as she stiffens, her eyes rolling in the back of her head as she explodes. Nothing else matters at this moment, and I've even managed to ignore Andrya as she falls apart for Sidney as well. Letting go as I feel the rush of wetness from Silla I grunt as I release ropes of cum into my own boxers.

"Fuck, that's it, yes, Kitten," I roar as I finish. Breathing hard, I glance down at Silla finding that she passed out on my chest. Chuckling, I brush my fingers along her beautiful, raven hair.

"She's a fainter," Andrya pants. Glancing over, I find she's dressed again, smirking. Sidney's still rock hard, but looks happy. I would love to let Silla sleep, but we're a bit of a mess.

Chuckling, I say, "Come back to me, Silla. Wake up and clean up with me."

Blinking sleepily, she yawns as she looks up. "I did it again, huh?"

"Yes, Beautiful. I think it's the best compliment in the world," I tell her honestly. Smiling, she kisses my chin.

"Be my chariot and take me to the bathroom? I think my legs are jello," she chuckles.

"Absolutely," I tell her honestly, scooting off the bed with her in my

arms.

“Don’t think this gets you out of telling me about the golden shower,” she warns, making my sister and Sidney howl with laughter.

“Fuck, the orgasm didn’t give you amnesia?” I bark with laughter.

“Orgasm?” Isaac asks as he and Grayson come in wearing towels around their waists. They both look lighter, and I’m glad for it. They’ve been growly bastards lately.

“A distraction tactic that clearly didn’t work,” I smile. “I mean, it did but...”

Pushing my shoulder as her cheeks color, I decide that I love the color rose on her. I need to ask my sister to keep an eye out for a dress to match it.

“I haven’t developed amnesia!” Silla teases. “I want to know about the golden shower.”

Gray and Isaac chuckle as they move to get dressed, knowing exactly what this is about. Walking into the bathroom, I drop her slowly so that her feet meet the ground. Pushing her pants off her waist so that they both drop to her feet with her panties, she stands there naked, waiting.

Blowing out a breath, I spin to turn on the shower, leaving my boxers on, hissing as my cum starts to dry. I don’t want to trigger or upset her, and I don’t know how far to push. I’ll suffer.

“Get in with me?” I ask. “Put your hair up so it’s just a quick rinse off.”

Grabbing a hair tie out of the few littered on the counter, she nods as she gathers her hair in a messy bun, securing it.

“Spill, Ayden,” she murmurs, getting into the shower with me.

“So there was once this girl who didn’t know how to keep her hands off what isn’t hers...” I begin, and I completely spill my guts.

I never want to keep anything from her again, pinky swear or not.

Ten

SILLA

I should feel awkward this morning after I got Ayden and I off as Sidney made Andrya come next to us, but I don't. I needed to take back a piece of myself, even if it's just for right now.

"Good morning, Kitten," Ayden says sleepily as he slides coffee to me. "Want some French toast?"

I'm not sure I could eat initially, but my stomach makes the decision for me by aggressively growling.

Snorting, Ayden turns away to start pulling things out.

"You're not cooking," Grayson chuckles. I can't say he runs to Ayden, because his strides are too big to be called that. "Sit and cuddle Silla."

Ayden pouts, turning to stand behind me and wraps his arms around my waist as I sip my coffee.

"I think I'm getting the better end of the deal." He grins, kissing my neck.

"We'll just be here all day if you do it," Grayson tells him. "You're a perfectionist when you cook."

"I like it to be pretty and shit," Ayden says with a shrug. Grayson shakes his head as he gets to work, muttering under his breath. Leaning into Ayden's arms, I relax completely. It's so nice to just be able to enjoy them.

"Good morning," Isaac yawns as he walks straight for the coffee maker. "What are our plans for today?"

"You're the planner in our group aren't you?" Ayden asks, rolling his eyes playfully.

"We can't fuck off all day," Isaac reminds him. "Aren't you going shopping today, Silla?"

"Yes, I need a dress for the masquerade, and more casual clothing as well," I agree. "I realized that my lists on corrupt officials and dignitaries

versus not looks like a hit list, but I don't know how else to dig out the filth in our kingdom.”

“You're right, it's a literal infection, because it seems to be spreading throughout the kingdom. Cinder and the King have no interest in changing anything,” Sidney says, stepping into the room. I didn't realize he had been propped against the wall.

“So the next step is seeing what the Underground leader has to say, and hoping they're not a swinging dick,” I mutter, drinking more coffee.

Grayson looks amused as he pours syrup on my breakfast as he places it in front of me.

“Gods, sometimes I don't realize how hungry I am until I'm starving,” I complain, cutting a square of French toast off.

“It happened to me for like a month after getting out of the dungeon,” Isaac shares as he leans on the island to watch me take a bite. I would usually be really self-conscious about this, but I'm not in the castle any more.

Wrapping my lips around the fork, I pull it off slowly. Holy shit. The flavors burst across my taste buds, making me moan as my eyes half close.

“Everyone in this room now has popped a boner,” Andrya giggles as she makes her appearance for the morning. “Your food moans should be illegal, Baby.”

Blushing, I take another bite after swallowing the first. “Grayson is amazing,” I mumble. “Mmm, so good.”

“Why is that so hot?” Sidney asks, snorting. “I'd tell anyone else to chew with their mouth closed.”

Sliding into a chair next to me, Ayden starts on the food Grayson sits on the other side of me. I'm happily sandwiched by my men. “Silla's just that cute.”

Andrya gives me a hug and a light kiss on the cheek before sitting down across from me with her coffee. “So it's you and me today, Silla, unless these possessive men decide that we need a guard dog.”

“Reporting for duty,” Isaac says slyly, surprising me. “I’m at a standstill on my information gathering for a bit, but I want to hack into the bank camera that’s across from the castle to see if there’s been anything interesting happening when we get back.”

“Lucky bastard,” Ayden mutters. “Can I send my list of preferred dress colors with you, Andrya?”

Lips pressed inward to hide her smile, she nods. “Yes, you can. Text them to me.”

“Yes!” Ayden fist pumps the air, making my heart happy. It’s just all so, I don’t know... normal?

I haven’t had normal in a long damn time. Finishing the rest of my breakfast, I smile.

“Let’s get the day started then,” I tell them as I start to pick up my dishes. Everyone else is in various stages of eating, but I need to use the pain lotion that Sidney left on the bathroom counter for me before I get dressed.

“I got the dishes, Dangerous girl,” Grayson insists, pulling the plate and coffee cup from me.

“Nah, Ayden and I have the dishes,” Isaac grins. “You cooked, Gray, don’t put up a fuss.”

Shrugging, Gray tucks into his food resignedly. “Let me get your back for you,” Sidney insists, taking a big last bite. Humming appreciatively, he gives the chef a thumbs up as he stands.

I love the little family that they’ve made in my absence. I should feel resentful, but I don’t. As I walk through the kitchen, arms snag me around the waist for a kiss or a hug, until I’ve properly met the morning with each of them. Damn, I could really get used to this.

Arm loosely slung around my waist, Sidney walks with me to the bedroom.

“What’s going on in your mind?” he asks, kissing my forehead.

“You all are so close, and today feels so normal. I’m just basking in the

joy of it, storing the memories of it,” I explain as we get to the bedroom we’ve all been sharing.

“Wait a second, why not get used to it? We’re not going anywhere,” he says, his eyes crinkling with concern.

“I may not be around to enjoy it forever, the way I want to,” I tell him truthfully as I walk to the bathroom to grab the cream.

Pulling off my shirt, I distract Sidney from my words for the next four minutes. I’m not ready to face the truth of it. Cinder is never going to let me go, not unless she’s dead and gone.

ANDRYA

Silla is quieter when she walks back into the living room once she's dressed. Sidney keeps giving her furtive glances, and I wonder what they talked about. I'm not going to press the issue right now and ruin our day, though.

We all dressed by using the other bathrooms or bedrooms. There's not enough closet space in the bedroom that we're currently in, so we have clothing in the unused rooms.

"Ready?" I offer lightly, and Silla nods. Isaac grabs his coat, offering another to her. She's dressed in another navy blue dress that skims her curves. If Cinder was trying to hide her sister's beauty, she failed miserably. Silla could wear a potato sack and still be beautiful.

"I hope you're ready, because we're going to need a ton for you. It's colder, so we definitely need more coats, a good pair of boots, and snuggly sweaters," I tell her as we wave goodbye.

"Don't buy out the store!" Ayden yells, making me giggle.

"I'm glad he's not coming, because he'd be bored quickly," I tell Silla conspiringly.

"Oh, I've never really been shopping with anyone outside of Anastasia or my mother," Silla frets, lifting her dress a bit as she goes down the stairs so she won't trip. She's in heels again, since she doesn't have any other shoes.

"Can I ask a question?" Isaac asks as we follow her down.

"Mmhm?" she says absently as she breathes a sigh of relief when she hits the last step. I remember she said that the shoes pinch, and it makes me angry that Cinder wants to hurt Silla in every way.

"Where exactly are your sister and mom in all of this?"

"Oh," Silla says, surprised as we walk outside. The breeze is frigid today, making us all shiver. Isaac made sure to call a ride share for today's outing.

It's not here yet, so Silla thinks about her answer. "My sister, Anastasia, is married now, and Cinder helped them match. My sister loved the parties, but also wanted to know that someone would take care of her. She went to the parties to find a husband, and Cinder saw an opportunity to match her with someone who would reward my step-sister with something that she wanted. However, Anastasia's husband lives in the kingdom, in a town outside of the main city. My mother kisses her step-daughter's ass, and is civil, while ignoring my existence for the most part. Neither of them have had anything to do with me for months."

"They sound terrible," I mutter, wrapping my arms around myself for comfort. It's so easy for someone to fall through the cracks when people don't care.

"I've always been much happier when my mother's attention hasn't been on me," Silla says simply. "The woman is depraved and horrible, and killed my step-father by using me to do it. So there's utterly no love lost there."

The car shows up as she finishes, and Isaac's hand fists.

"Godsdamn truth bombs," he growls.

Silla merely shrugs, and I know that she does this shit to bother him. I really wonder how Marcus Tremaine died. The man was a pretty shitty human, from what I remember of the gossip Sidney's aunt would tell me. Before he married Silla's mother, he was in the tabloids pretty often too. I loved the gossip of the royal families, so she and I would pour over them. It probably wasn't the best topic for a preteen, but it was really fucking fun.

Getting into the car, I give the address for the dress boutique first. My phone buzzes, and I roll my eyes, knowing it's my twin. Pulling it out of my purse, I open the text.

Ayden: I'm really partial to the pretty pink color that Silla turns when she's turned on or embarrassed. Please find her a dress this color? I'll love you forever!

You already do, dill weed. I'll see what I can do.

MY LIPS ARE SPREAD WIDE with a smile. My brother is so ridiculous.

“What does your ridiculous brother have to say for himself?” Isaac asks with a smirk. He’s sitting between Silla and I, his tone at war with his face. It looks pretty savage, his gray eyes behind his glasses glittering with the force of his thoughts. No one enjoys hearing that Silla has been hurt, me least of all. Isaac takes it as a personal affront when he doesn’t have all the facts. He feeds on information, craves being in the know, because then less can hurt us.

“He’s sending me his requests for dresses,” I explain, showing the message to Isaac.

His smile is breathtaking as he glances down, and I’m glad I helped diffuse his anger a bit. I know he’s not mad at Silla, but at how hard she’s had things in her life.

“Yeah, that’s a really good color,” he grunts.

“What color?” Silla asks innocently.

“A dusty rose,” I explain immediately, being able to recall the color in my mind.

“Oh, that’s one of my favorite colors,” she says with a smile.

Ours too, baby girl.

The boutique isn’t far from where we’re staying, so a few minutes later we arrive, stepping out. People glance over at Silla in her clothing, and I see them walk quickly away from her. Silla braided her hair back to keep it out of her face today, but I’ve never thought that she looks particularly scary.

Pushing the thought away, we walk into the store.

It’s true that not many people in general in the kingdom wear heels outside of the Queen, unless it’s for a formal occasion. A lot of the time, people walk in the city, unless their commute to work is far. Even then, few people have their own cars, because one thing Cinder did was ensure that the

public transportation was amazing. It always manages to run on time.

We have a lot of errands today, so the rideshare was the easiest, and still affordable.

As Silla walks on the hardwood floor, people's eyes snap in her direction, and the whispering begins. Her dress is made of pretty and expensive material, but there are a lot of other noblewomen who also have pretty dresses. I swear my brain is broken, and I'm unsure why people look almost scared.

"Should we go somewhere else?" Isaac asks, uncomfortably.

"Why is everyone staring at me?" Silla asks exasperated. Her voice is louder than hers and sharper than I'm used to. Though, the stares were getting pretty old, so I don't blame her.

"Your Majesty, you should have let us know that you were coming!" a woman with a blonde, chic bob says. She's an energetic, happy woman, but I can see a slight sweat breaking out on her forehead. Cinder isn't exactly easy to deal with.

But... why is she calling Silla that?

"Excuse me?" Silla asks, eyes wide as she takes a step back.

"It's no matter," the woman says quickly. "I'm Zhana, and while the store owner isn't here, I'd be happy to help you. You've been helped by Lori in the past."

Oh fuck. I didn't realize that Cinder actually shopped in the city. Maybe we should just do some online shopping and call it a day. I don't think they look all that alike because of their hair color, but I could be biased.

"I see you changed your hair too, may I say it suits you? Now, what are you here today for?" Zhana asks with a smile.

Slowly, people are being herded toward the door, and Silla decides to just go with it. What else are we supposed to do?

"I have a ball to attend, and I'm in the mood for a dusty rose color," she says, raising her chin and pushing her shoulders back.

Isaac reaches out and squeezes my hand, and I can only nod because I've never noticed how regal Silla can actually be. Life has beaten her down for so long, I've seen the quiet, sad girl most of the time that I've known her.

Silla could easily take over the throne, changing the tide of this kingdom once and for all.

ISAAC

The saleswomen in the store cleared this place out in moments. No one grumbled, because who would complain about the “Queen” making an emergency trip to buy a dress?

I never in a million years thought that this would be the predicament that we’d face today.

As Silla goes into the dressing room, Andrya hisses, “We’re going online shopping when we get home! I’ll just make sure to mark pick up and one of us will go get it. She’s never allowed out in those clothes again.”

It’s not funny, not even a little bit, but I feel an inappropriate laugh bubbling up. It’s like a burp that is insistent, and won’t give up. First my lips twitch, so I smooth them out by rubbing my index finger over it. Then I feel it start to rise up my stomach and tickle my chest, so I rub my chest.

“Are you okay?” Andrya asks, and there’s just enough laughter in her voice to make me sputter. Covering my mouth, I wheeze, shaking my head. This is so out of character, but Godsdamnit I feel as if I just stepped into the twilight zone.

“You see it too, right?” Andrya hisses. “This is insane.”

“Are you two alright?” Zhana asks, popping her head out from behind the black curtain to the changing rooms.

Forcing myself to breathe, I drop my hands, nodding quickly.

“Totally fine,” I say, my voice tight and weird. “Can we maybe get some water? My throat seems to have something in it.”

Zhana brightens with a smile. “Of course. I’m going to go ahead and get you some drinks, and the girls will be bringing in dresses. The Queen would like for you to join her,” she says, as if there’s nothing wrong with it. She may think I’m gay, come to think about it.

“Thank you,” Andrya says with a nod, struggling to keep a straight face as well.

Walking in, we see a wide-eyed Silla, who is not our queen. Well, at least not yet.

“Hanging in there, Your Majesty?” I snicker.

“Let it all out now,” Silla mutters, shaking her head. “How on Earth does that woman think that I’m Cinder?!”

“If I’m being very honest, you look a lot like her, outside of the hair. I just don’t want to sleep with Cinder, so I haven’t really noticed the similarities,” Andrya says, hugging her. Silla is just slightly taller than her, so being the opportunistic little shit that she is, Andrya wiggles down a bit so that she can lay her head on her chest. “I need snuggle time later.”

“Okay, yes, of course, just help me live through this,” Silla says tightly.

“No one talks about where Cinder goes. The tabloids are so tight lipped, I didn’t even know if she had a seamstress for her dresses or not,” Andrya tells her. “This visit won’t be spoken about.”

“Deep breaths,” I remind her as Andrya steps back. “Are the changing rooms large enough?”

Zhana comes back in with water and the saleswomen, and her eyes widen with panic. “Are they too small? I can close all of the blinds and make the store your dressing room if needed,” she says urgently.

Silla looks around the room, and honestly, I can see it being problematic. It looks like she’s judging the area, when she’s really judging her ability to function when she’s already highly anxious.

“It’s a bit small,” she says haughtily. “Would it be too much trouble to set up a changing area in the middle of the store?”

“Not at all!” Zhana says. You can see her thinking on how to do that, and I saw a circular heavy curtain that could be used in the middle of the store.

“I have a suggestion, if I may help?” I ask, taking a step toward the door.

“Thank you, yes please,” Zhana says gratefully.

Andrya starts picking up dresses as they're brought in, dismissing things that won't work for Silla out of hand. I know that she has a vision in mind, and she won't stop until she finds it.

Walking out of the dressing room, I point to the rolling contraption that has a heavy curtain around it. It's large enough for Silla to move around inside, even with Andrya inside to help her as needed.

"What if we set this in the middle of the store with a few mirrors just outside of it so she can see if the dress works for her?" I ask Zhana.

Looking at what I'm pointing at, she nods slowly. "This would work. I was freaking out, because I really didn't know what I was going to do. Could you possibly help us move the mirrors? They're connected, and a bit unwieldy to move."

"Absolutely, thank you for being accommodating. The Queen prefers open spaces," I explain.

Not thinking there's anything wrong with that, she simply nods, and everyone gets to work closing the shop and drawing the blinds so no one can see in. Soon, we're ready for Silla to try on clothes. Most of the bruises and marks have healed outside of her feet and lower back. Silla still has pain, because while her body has healed at a rapid pace, it still feels the ache from her beating. Thankfully though, it means no one will see anything but beautiful, unmarred skin.

Soon, Silla is trying on clothes. She tries on dozens of dresses as I sit on a comfy chair that someone brought me. Every single dress so far has been a no. A few of the colors have had a rose hue, but they're all too bright, so Silla decided to try other colors in hopes of finding something.

"I have a suggestion..." a saleswoman, Lini, says, stepping forward. "Every dress hasn't been the right color, Your Majesty. They're all gorgeous, but they don't have the ability to elevate your beauty."

Lini is smooth, I have to give her that. Silla blows out a breath, nodding. Every dress that she's tried on has had a slightly different hue than what

works for her typical palate. I also can't stop thinking about the pretty blush that Ayden prefers, and that's the color I now want. Dammit.

"Go on," Silla murmurs. She's currently wearing a beautiful teal dress that has a plunging front and sleeves, but it's not *the* dress. I'm a picky fucker today, but even Andrya is pursing her lips as if she sucked on a lemon.

"I have a white dress that would be stunning on you," Lini begins. "I feel as if you have a color in your mind, and everything else is falling flat. We have a vendor who could dye it for you in time for your event."

Silla's eyes light up as she smiles. "Let's see it," she says with a nod. "I love this idea."

Zhana sags with relief, no doubt beginning to worry. Disappointing the Queen isn't great for one's business, or sometimes even their lifespan.

Hurrying away, Lini grabs the dress. Walking back into the makeshift dressing area, Andrya helps Silla into it.

As she struts out, I can tell this is the dress. Our girl has fire and attitude in this thing. The straps are off the shoulder, and form fitting until it hits her waist. Then it flows away from her as if it were water to the ground, with a beautiful train. The material appears to be crepe-like, and I can only imagine how beautiful it'll be once it's the color we have in mind.

"Yes," Silla whispers, staring at the mirrors as she turns to look at it from all directions. "Andrya, can you show Lini the color we'd like, please?"

"We" is often used by the monarchy, so no one blinks an eye. Instead, I know that Silla is talking about herself and her lovers. It works so perfectly, and yet it's the perfect inside joke.

"Absolutely, Your Majesty," Andrya murmurs, opening her phone to find the color she's looking for. As she shows Lini, the salesgirl grins.

"This would be perfection, Your Majesty. It would be our honor to do this for you," she says.

Showing Zhana, they both nod happily. Discussing when it would be needed, I organize pick up as Silla changes back into her clothes. The last

thing we need is for it to be delivered to the castle accidentally. Paying for the dress isn't an issue, because the card is in Cinder's name.

Walking out of the boutique, I hear the girls in the shop squeal as the door closes. Silla bursts into giggles, taking a breath of fresh air.

"Can we go home and online shop now, please?" she asks with a slightly hysterical laugh. "I don't think I could do that again."

Walking to the rideshare that arrives promptly, I nod. "No more shopping for you, troublemaker," I tease.

"Gods, don't start with that shit," Silla grumbles. The entire time she's been in the store, she's stayed in character, since the Queen is notorious for not swearing.

"It's just so easy," I laugh, letting her into the car first so I can sit in the middle.

The rest of the ride is smooth, with no one mistaking Silla as the Queen. The guys had quite the laugh over lunch once we told them too.

I'd do anything to keep Silla with us forever, and I plan to.

Eleven

SILLA

Life feels as if it's on flash forward the last two days. Grayson was worried that the royal mixup would get back to Cinder, but as Isaac predicted, no one breathed a word about it to anyone. He checked the tabloids constantly just to make sure.

Otherwise, things have been busy and quiet. Isaac and I have been pulling up more dirt on people who need to be removed from office. The plan is to release it to the public at some point so that they'll have to abdicate. The guards, however, will all need to be fired and stripped of their privileges. That'll be a little more tricky, but Isaac thinks the Underground may be able to help us with the logistics on this. This is all a bit preemptive, because my step-sister is still an evil queen.

The six of us are relaxing finally after a productive day, and I'm drinking my first fruity alcoholic drink of my life. I've snuck champagne here and there, but I don't really think that counts. I never really enjoyed the taste.

Andrya mixed me something called a Leg Spreader, and handed it to me with a wink. After one more restorative bath last night, I finally don't feel sore anymore. I don't know if I'm quite ready to spread my legs for anyone, but it's possible after this drink. It's strong, but delicious.

"What if you became queen?" Grayson blurts all of a sudden, glancing up from his scotch. He's been staring at the amber liquid for a while, and I thought he was just lost in his thoughts, not planning mutiny and treason.

"I... pardon?" I gasp. "Do you think I'd even be any better at it than Cinder?"

The chorus of "yes," is resounding.

"Okay, then," I mutter, taking a sip. "No one would believe that I'm the queen. Lana, for example, lives and breathes my step-sister, and anyone who

spends much time around her wouldn't believe it. We sound incredibly different, especially now that my voice is ruined."

"Nothing ruined about you, Little Hacker," Isaac admonishes. "We all have our scars from our time in the dungeons that can't be hidden."

"Do you?" I ask harshly. "You're all perfect. Outside of our shared emotional damage, I'd never guess."

Maybe I shouldn't drink. Leaning forward, I put the glass on the coffee table.

"I'm sorry." I sigh. "Apparently I'm not very good company right now."

"Don't do that," Sidney grunts, standing. "The Queen had the word 'traitor' branded on our bodies. Everyone of us, including Andrya. Cinder wanted us to always remember what we did."

My eyes go wild, glancing at each one in turn. Andrya's eyes drop in shame when my gaze meets hers.

"Really?! I... oh my gods, I'm so—"

"Finish that sentence, and I'll spank your ass red," Grayson growls. It's really weird, because any other time I'd cower from his words after all of the abuse I've taken from others, but I can feel my pussy begin to get wet. Damn, I must be really fucked up for that, right?

"It only happened because of me," I begin again.

"No," Sidney grunts, and I swear this man is becoming a caveman right before my eyes. Growly fuckers, the lot of them. Grabbing the back of his shirt, he pulls it off, and then starts pushing down his joggers.

"What...?" I can't even talk, because this man is always gorgeous. I can't process why he's stripping for me right now though. I'm so dumbfounded as the twins, Grayson, and Isaac all stand with heavy sighs and do the same.

Turning in their various states of undress, they turn in unison to show me their backs, hip, thigh. There's a beautiful phoenix tattoo placed there as it rises from the ashes.

"Come here, Silla," Ayden says gently, his voice drawing me to him.

Taking my hand, he places it on the beautiful tattoo. I can feel slightly raised lines, but it's so well healed, I can barely tell. Sidney really is incredibly talented at phytotherapy. Tracing the words with my finger, I make out the letters T-R-A-I-T-O-R.

Tears prick my eyes as I lay my hand flat on his skin. The tattoo covers most of his hip, and he pushed down his boxers so I could see it. I never noticed it before, because they've always been careful to be clothed around me, and at least wear boxers or enough that covers it. Grayson's is across the back of his thigh, while Isaac's is along his back. Andrya's tattoo is along her hip, making me wonder why they're in different places. Instead of harsh colors, all of the ink for each of them is done in watercolors and is stunning.

"I won't apologize again because it'll be insulting," I rasp, my voice thick with tears. "I just don't understand why she branded you and not me."

"Cinder seems to be obsessed with not allowing your skin to scar," Andrya says gently, fixing her clothes. "You don't have one mark, and I think it's because of her obsession with you."

"After what happened in the castle recently," I tell them, shuddering as I remember, "Cinder insisted that my skin heal perfectly. She refused to let the healer give me any pain medication, but just cream to ensure that my skin was perfect. I have always thought she still wanted to sell me off to the highest bidder."

"Never," Isaac snarls. "We won't let that happen. You just have to be willing to step up when we need you to."

Biting my lip as the guys redress, I think about if I could logistically take over as queen. "Cinder rules the castle with a bloody, iron fist, guys. Most of them love her antics, at least I know that the guards do, because when women are punished in the castle, it means that they're getting their dicks wet."

The five of them wrinkle their noses at my description, but it's considered a perk of Cinder's leadership. "We'd have to send the entire guard packing, as well as over half of her auditors who are loyal to her. It means an entire

overhaul,” I explain. “I don’t want to be a blood-drenched queen. I refuse to be my sister.”

“This is why you’re perfect for this,” Andrya explains, wrapping her arms around me. “You’re one of the most fair people that I know. Just say the word, and Sidney, Ayden, and I will spread a mysterious illness through the castle. We’ll find a way to plant people in the kitchen to serve the tainted food just to the people we’re removing. Pieces of shit shouldn’t be allowed to survive. It’ll be as painless or as painful as you’d like, baby girl.”

The idea is having more and more merit as I think about it, and my mind is whirling with the possibilities.

“You’re thinking really hard there, Dangerous Girl,” Grayson chuckles, pushing my chin up to look at him. Ducking his head without waiting for me to answer, his warm, full lips brush mine. As my lips part for him, his breath hitches as if he wasn’t expecting it. Andrya kisses my neck, sucking on my pulse point that’s beginning to beat rapidly. Moaning into Gray’s mouth, I rise on my toes to deepen the kiss.

“No, no,” he chuckles. “You’re not ready for me yet, Beautiful. Bed, everyone?”

They snicker, moving away as I whimper in need, my thighs rubbing against each other. Andrya smacks my ass, making me gasp as I rub it. Fuck if my pussy didn’t also clench on nothing, making me shudder in annoyance.

“None of that, Baby,” she purrs as she walks away.

Making a face, I move to the computer, opening it to an adult toy website. “Fuck that,” I grumble under my breath as I throw a few items into my cart. A clitoral sucker with a bendy vaginal part that threatens to pull my soul out of my clit, nipple clamps for the hell of it, and a dildo to fuck myself with. I think it may even have a suction cup, but I don’t know why I’d use that. Checking out quickly, I close the computer with a smirk.

“You good, Kitten?” Ayden asks, popping his head around the corner.

Giving him a lazy smile to cover my vengeance, I nod. “I am now.

Totally ready for bed.”

“Why do I think you’re up to something?” he asks with a smirk.

“You’ll never know, and it’s not a bad thing so you can’t complain that I’m keeping secrets from you,” I tell him, walking over to wrap my arms around his waist.

“Sneaky Kitten,” Ayden mutters, lifting me up to throw me over his shoulder.

“Ayden!” I squeal, gasping when he spanks my ass.

“To bed we go!” he yells, running for the bedroom as I bounce.

Everyone laughs at his antics as he walks in. Whatever, I’m all keyed up, with no one to help. Rude.



TONIGHT IS the night of the masquerade. I’m nervous, but Andrya won’t allow me to stop moving.

“Braid your hair, throw a knit hat over it, and let’s go get our nails done?” she suggests with a grin.

The guys groan. “You’re going to leave us for forever,” Ayden mutters dramatically.

“No, we won’t,” his sister denies. “I suck at doing nails, and people notice when you go to an event like this without them done.”

Sidney rolls his eyes. “You’re stealing Silla away, and you’re being a sneaky shit about it. You’re lucky we all love you, Sweetness.”

“She grows on you,” Gray snickers.

Andrya pouts, and Isaac diplomatically smacks him over the head for her.

“Fuck, I’m going to have to start working out again. That actually hurt,” Gray mutters.

“Yeah, yeah, old man,” Isaac chuckles.

“Run,” Andrya says urgently, pulling me along as Grayson launches

himself at Isaac.

“Oh my Gods,” I giggle, running after her as I grab a hat and my boots. Shoving my feet into them and scooping my hair under the hat, we take off.

“How you manage to do that, and your laces are always perfectly tied, is beyond me,” Andrya smirks as we hurry down the stairs.

“I’m naturally a klutz, so this is the Gods simply smiling upon me,” I tell her with a shrug. I may try my hardest to be a dainty, perfect noblewoman for Cinder, but I’ll never be one. I just hide it better to avoid the beatings.

“How could the Gods not smile at such a gorgeous girl?” Andrya flirts, lacing her fingers in mine as we walk outside of the apartment. Thankfully, I’ve started wearing my coat in the apartment because the heating unit sucks, but I still gasp as the cold air hits my body. “We really need to look at moving. It’s getting too damn cold in our apartment.”

“Isn’t there some kind of office manager that deals with this?” I ask. I’ve never lived in this kind of setting before, so I have no idea.

“There’s supposed to be, but neither Isaac nor Grayson has gotten him to agree to get someone to look at the heating unit. It’s going to start snowing in a few weeks. I can almost smell it in the air,” Andrya frets. As we breathe, the air fogs up from the contrast in temperature. Something really needs to change.

“I’m sure that Cinder doesn’t want us to freeze, so I’ll bring it up the next time she calls,” I decide. The funny thing is that she hasn’t called or texted in the last couple of days. I have my phone in my pocket on vibrate at all times, just in case she decides to call.

“There’s a nail salon not far from here, so I thought we’d just walk, but I underestimated the cold!” Andrya says, shaking her head.

“We can make it. It’ll be faster than finding a car right now,” I tell her. The streets are actually busy with people bustling about, so I keep my head down. I don’t think anyone will recognize or mistake me for my step-sister in a pair of jeans, sweater, and coat, but stranger things have been known to

happen.

Though, the day the Queen of Forbach wears a pair of combat boots will signal the end of the world.

Soon, Andrya drags me into a shop, and a woman looks up from the desk.

“Hi, may I help you?” she asks with a smile.

“Do you think you could fit us in?” Andrya asks hopefully. The shop is only half full and it’s mid-day. People seem more interested in getting lunch than getting their nails done right now it seems.

Nodding, the woman calls two nail techs to take care of us. An hour and a half later, I feel so much more relaxed. My pedicure and manicure included the most amazing massage, and I feel incredible.

“They have a reputation for making you feel as if you’re walking on air by the time you’re done,” Andrya grins as we walk out after paying.

“I didn’t realize how much I needed that. Thank you,” I tell her. “I’ve been a little stressed about tonight.”

“Why don’t you take a nap before we get ready?” Andrya suggests. “I’ll make sure to distract the guys by enforcing haircuts for them all. They’re all starting to look a little rough.”

Giggling, I can only imagine how that’ll go over. Grayson’s hair is getting a little longer, and Sidney needs to get his buzzed again. The Underground managed to get us all invited to the masquerade, however we all agreed that I would enter as if I’m unattached. Andrya will go in with Sidney to be sure she’s protected and safe. Isaac asked why I would go in by myself, and I explained that I can protect myself if needed.

Fighting back just hasn’t been an option at the castle.

Going upstairs, it’s awe inspiring how quickly Andrya brow beats these men to move their asses. Getting a kiss from each of them as they leave, I chuckle as the lock engages, ensuring that I’m safe.

It’s oddly quiet, but I embrace it as I take off my boots, scurrying to my bedroom to jump under the covers. Thankfully we have an excess of

blankets, and the guys usually create enough body heat to keep us warm. My eyes see the corner of one of the toy boxes I bought peeking out of the bag they came in, and I bite my lip.

The five of them were distracted this morning with breakfast when the delivery man knocked on the door. No one asked me who was at our apartment, and I think it's because they didn't even notice.

Deciding to play before my nap since they'll be gone for a bit, I open the box up. It's the clit sucker toy that promised to give me my very own Dementor experience. I haven't owned many toys before, but this seems pretty straightforward. Undressing into my underwear, I jump into bed with the toy. Thank God for rechargeable toys that come fully charged out of the box.

Playing with the settings as I huddle under the blankets, I see there's two motors: one for the clit and one for the vaginal part. Cool, I got this. Laying back, I wiggle my panties down until it dangles from one of my feet, forgotten until I need it. I rub myself with the sucker part first, gasping as it creates a seal around my clit. Ramping it up, my back arches as I moan. My pulse is racing, and I'm already embarrassingly wet as it mimics oral. Fuck, this is the best thing ever.

Bending the vaginal part to push inside my core, I whimper as my legs start to tremble. Rocking the toy back and forth, I fuck myself with it as I writhe. Lifting my hand, I tug down my bra cups as I knead and pull at my nipples. I can imagine Andrya sucking on them with her hot little mouth, while Sidney laps at my weeping pussy.

"Oh Gods!" I cry, feeling a gush as I shudder. I'm so close, it's almost painful. "Please..."

I don't know who I'm praying to as I mewl. The pressure building in my G-spot has my legs shaking where they're splayed wide open. Feeling restricted by the blankets, I kick them off, feeling naughty as I play. Andrya and the guys have been so sweet and careful, but my pussy wants to be filled

and well-fucked.

I don't know where this feeling came from, when just a few days ago before they came back into my life, I'd have told you that both men and women could take a fucking leap of a cliff. Neither option was safe for me.

But then Ayden took such good care of me that first night, rocking me on his hard cock, allowing me to use him as my own personal Sybian fuck toy. The memory pushes me even closer to my orgasm, my arousal painting my thighs with its evidence. My chest is heaving, and I'm panting as if I've been running for miles.

Flicking the button to increase the power on the clit sucker, it does its job a little too well. My soul is being pulled from my body, and I don't have it in me to care. Screaming soundlessly, my feet flat on the bed as I arch my body, I finish fucking my pussy into oblivion. My fingers are shaking as I turn the toy off, the vibrator releasing with a wet pop as I pull it away.

Too sleepy to put it away, I yawn as I pull the blankets over me. I'll explain later after my nap. I'm a damn adult, and I'll fuck myself if I want to.

Twelve

SIDNEY

Haircuts took fucking forever. I was worried about leaving Silla alone, but Andrya told me that she needed a nap. Five people in an apartment may as well be a herd of elephants attempting to be quiet. She also mentioned something about how we hover a bit.

Whatever. I think we're allowed to be helicopter boyfriends after the last year. We haven't talked about labels, and I don't think we need them either. "Ours" works as well as anything else.

Walking into the apartment as quietly as possible, we toe off our shoes and put up our jackets. It's almost time to get dressed for tonight, and we have to make sure to feed everyone. Silla's stomach sounds like an angry gremlin when she's hungry.

Making my way to the bedroom we all share, I ignore Andrya hissing at me to let her sleep. I want to lay my eyes on her, watch her dream, and if that makes me weird, then I shall happily wear "Silla's Stalker" tattooed on my ass.

The bedroom door is wide open as I step inside, making me smirk as I see Silla sprawled on the bed on her stomach. The blanket has slipped a bit, and her ass is up in the air. It's the oddest way to sleep, but what's odder is her bare pussy.

"Naughty girl, what have you been up to?" I murmur. There's a lavender toy laying by the blankets, almost underneath, which makes me chuckle. We've been so careful with Silla, almost as if she were glass, so she obviously took matters into her own hands.

Her long raven hair is partially over her face, unruly curls spreading over her beautiful back. Most of the damage Cinder inflicted has already healed, and Silla no longer needs the pain cream anymore.

“What is she doing?” Gray asks, snickering at her awkward position.

“I think Silla fucked herself to sleep,” I tell him, walking over to pick up the toy. It looks like it has some kind of sucker...and the other end bends? Huh... I wonder if I could fuck her while it's inside of her. Placing my thumb over the clit sucker as I turn it on, my lips part open in surprise. That could be fun. “We've been so careful not to push outside of kisses and innocent touches, I think she's over us.”

“I can recognize an invite when I see one,” Gray says with a slow, wicked smile. I think it's easy to think of Grayson as the voice of reason amongst us all, but I've heard the rumors that he is into some kinky shit. I think if our Little Love ran from him in the woods at night, he wouldn't be able to resist, chasing her down until he could fuck her into the ground. Damn, I hope he'd drop me an invite to something like that.

The mattress dips a bit as Gray kneels on it, maneuvering himself until his mouth hovers over her pretty, pink pussy.

“I'd absolutely deserve getting donkey kicked for this,” he says before his mouth opens to cover her exposed pussy. Lapping at her slit, he groans at her sweet, vanilla taste. Grunting, I adjust my dick in my pants.

Still asleep, Silla sighs, pushing her pussy against Gray's tongue for more. “Such a greedy girl,” I rumble as I watch. She's so beautiful as she pushes her hair out of her face with her eyes still closed.

Grabbing the globes of her ass, Gray spreads them so he can push his finger inside of her tight channel. Silla's breaths start to quicken, and I wonder how long she'll stay asleep. I didn't think fucking my girl while she was sleeping would be something she'd be into, but I think sometime in the near future we need a group twenty questions session. I need to know what's on the table, because consent is important to us all.

Speaking of, should we wake her up before she comes?

“Please,” Silla mumbles in her sleep, and I wonder if she's dreaming about one of us fucking her, or if she's about to wake up. “I wanna come...”

She's definitely dreaming.

"Do it," I grunt, palming my dick through my pants. "Make her cum."

Sucking hard on her clit as he crooks his fingers inside of her, he guides her closer to the edge. Silla's hands close on the blankets, her face approaching a look of pain. Her mouth is open as she moans, nowhere near waking up. Fuck, I think I've discovered a new kink. I definitely enjoy watching my girl come while she's fast asleep.

"That's it. Let go for me. Squirt all over my face," Grayson commands. I can see the moment he scrapes his teeth insistently on her clit, twisting his fingers as he fucks her with them.

Screaming, Silla comes, waking herself up. Chest heaving, her eyes open wide, her gaze meeting mine. "Holy shit," she gasps as my lips curve.

"You're absolutely stunning, and a very impatient girl," I tell her as I raise the toy to show her I found it. Silla blushes as she pushes herself up onto her forearms. "Get up and shower once you're awake. You need to start getting ready, and we'll make dinner, Baby."

Grayson gives her a light smack on her ass as he licks his lips and stands. "If you were tired of us giving you too much space, the message has been received, Dangerous Girl. Sidney, you may want to make sure that you make her the birth control tea. Though, know that one day we all plan to see you round with our child."

Oh, fuck yeah. A baby with her beautiful sea-green eyes would be perfection. We just need to get through some of this 'overthrowing the monarchy' shit. I really like Andrya's idea of poisoning everyone. It's a good, clean death, and we can make it look as if a plague went through the castle.

As we leave a thoroughly confused yet satisfied Silla on the bed, I'm in a much better mood. We'll see what the leader of the Underground is like first, but I'm beginning to feel confident that we can make this work.

Long live Queen Silla....

SILLA

My nap ended wonderfully, if I do say so myself. I don't think that I've slept so deeply before. Now I'm imagining what it would be like to be fucked while I'm asleep, would I like something like that? I've been learning a lot about myself lately.

A quick shower wakes me up, and Sidney leaves me my tea to drink as I dry off. I don't have a clue what I'm going to do with my hair, but I do know I need to dry it first.

"Can I help you with your hair?" Andrya asks as she watches me drink tea and scowl at my reflection.

"Oh my goodness, would you please?" I beg, making her laugh.

"Of course," she grins. "Dress in your underwear for the dress, throw on sweats with a top that zips up to stay warm, and I'll get the blow dryer and diffuser. Thank god your hair naturally curls."

Dressing as asked, I snuggle under a blanket as she comes armed with hair products as well. An hour later, she's amassed my hair to lie perfectly in a cascade of curls down my body, and has also pinned my bangs up in such a way that gives me the illusion of more volume, while keeping them out of my face.

Andrya also went ahead and did my makeup while she had me in her clutches, which is perfect because it's not my strong suit.

"Is she done yet?" Ayden whines, leaning into the doorway to look at us. "Fuck, I take it all back. You take as much time as you need. You look incredible, Kitten. You're glowing."

"I think that's from the orgasms that she's had today," Andrya grins as she twitches a curl into place to behave. "All done. Let's eat, and then we'll all finish getting ready."

Blowing out a breath to release some of the anxiety I'm starting to feel, I turn toward the mirror, but Andrya pushes me away from it.

"I want you to get the full effect of everything with the dress. Food, now," she grunts.

"Oh someone's hangry," I giggle and Andrya blushes.

"I think I am." She smiles, walking with me.

"Please feed Andrya," I proclaim as we walk into the kitchen.

"Gladly," Sidney grins, his eyes widening as he sees me. "Looking hot, Beautiful."

"Thank you," I murmur as we grab food. The guys made steak, veggies, and a salad, and from the first bite, it's all delicious. "Who made this?"

Okay, I may have moaned a little, and five pairs of eyes hood with desire.

"Isaac and I made dinner," Gray says, licking his lips. "I'm glad it's making you make sex noises."

They're very close to my noises when I come, so I can't even deny it. Instead of answering, I give a secret shrug, working through my food.

"We all have invites for this, so let's space out our entrances a bit. Sidney and Andrya can go in first, then Grayson and Ayden, then Silla, and I'll arrive last," Isaac says. He's in full swing tactical mode, and I'm here for it. I want to know that we have some sort of plan. "The Heights quarter is an area of wealth in the kingdom, though they're all people who made their money in trade or through other means. Their loyalty to the crown isn't because their pocketbooks are tied to it."

"This will make this area a neutral territory," Gray says, continuing the planning session. "Silla, we don't know who the leader of the Underground is, or even what gender they are. So walk around, grab a drink, and mingle. They don't want you leaving without speaking with you, so I imagine they'll be in touch. The entire party is being held in a garden with a mansion behind it. The person throwing the ball owns the property, and wishes to fundraise for orphaned children."

“How are they raising money for them?” I ask. Even though it’s not tied to our mission, I’m still interested.

“Private auction held through the mazes on the other side of the property. It’s apparently a nice walk, and since it’s not typically open to the public, people attending will want to see it,” Isaac explains.

I’ve never understood lavish parties used to fundraise, but as long as those who need it receive the money, I guess these have their purpose.

“Anything else I need to know?” I ask as I finish my dinner.

“Yes. I picked you up a gift,” Sidney says, standing and leaving the room.

“It’s from all of us,” Aydens says, rolling his eyes.

“They’re being ridiculous, but I can’t say they’re wrong,” Andrya sighs. “There’s a lot of unknowns tonight, and we need to know we can find you if you disappear.”

“It’s a tracker isn’t it?” I snort as Sidney comes in with a black box.

“We’re really that predictable, huh?” he chuckles, putting it on the table. “Open it up.”

Curious, I purse my lips as I lean over it. It’s a pretty normal, black jewelry box with smooth edges.

“It won’t bite, Kitten,” Ayden chuckles, so I do the mature thing and stick my tongue out at him.

“Alright, already,” I mutter, opening the box. Inside is a pretty anklet that no one would notice with the dress or any other daily activity. I don’t wear shorts outside of pajamas because I’m not comfortable with the attention. It’s possible that’ll fade eventually, but I imagine it’ll be a long way off. There is a saying on the silver tag that says: Trust or die.

Reaching out for Ayden’s hand before I realize what I’m doing, I link my pinkie in his. He has this exact same saying tattooed along his pinkie.

“I love it.” I sigh. It’s such a beautiful and thoughtful gift, I can’t bring myself to be annoyed that I have to be tagged like a dog.

“Yeah?” Ayden asks, his beautiful hazel eyes soft with vulnerability.

“Yes, it’s a very sweet gift,” I tell them all.

“Softie,” Andrya teases me. “The tracker is embedded in the silver, so no one will be able to notice it, and it’s also undetectable. You can wear it anywhere, and as long as it’s on your body, Isaac or Ayden will be able to find you.”

“Thanks guys,” I whisper, blinking hard. Damn mascara, I don’t know if it’s waterproof.

“No, no, no! None of that. Eyes wide open,” Andrya panics, leaning over me to blow lightly over my eyes. “No crying, no mushy shit. Guys, go get dressed. If you make her cry, I’ll castrate the men I’m not fucking.”

“Safe!” Sidney crows as he walks out.

“Aw, fuck,” Gray grumbles, cupping his dick through his pants as he stands.

“I don’t know how I feel about all this,” Ayden complains as he leaves, making me cackle.

“Good girl,” Andrya says once we’re alone. Kneeling at my feet, she attaches the clasp on the anklet. It fits perfectly and when I shake my foot it doesn’t make any noise. “Maybe we are a little fucked up for wanting to know where you are at all times, but I don’t care.”

Helping her up off the floor, I hug her. “I don’t either. I always want you to be able to find me.”

Andrya swallows back tears as she drags me out of the kitchen to get dressed. She still won’t let me look in the mirror, and even fixes my makeup where it smudged a bit. The guys are all dressed in tuxedos as she finishes.

“Alright, go look. I won’t be long!” Andrya races to the bathroom, and the guys stand slack jawed as they stare at me.

“Is it too much?” I ask hesitantly. Swallowing hard, Isaac shakes his head.

“No, you look like... a queen,” he says, his voice raspy and harsh.

Looking over at the mirror, I gasp. The blush color of the dress is a deep,

almost raspberry color. The straps hang perfectly off my shoulders, and the dress shows a deep décolletage. The chiffon flows as if it's water once the tight fit of the satin ends at my waist. It looks like a gown meant for royalty.

"Oh my Gods," I breathe, eyes wide.

"Bombshell!" Andrya yells through the bathroom, making me giggle. "Okay, start calling the rideshares, I'll be out in ten."

I have no idea how she's able to get ready so quickly when it took hours for me. My eyeshadow is done in dark browns, making my green eyes pop. Dark, ruby red lips and a hint of blush finish out my makeup, making me feel as if I'm looking at another person.

Sure, I wear makeup because Cinder demands it, but I only know the basics. A maid was actually nice enough to teach me, and we made sure that no one ever found out. I stick to lighter colors, and can't do a smokey eye to save my life. I'm absolutely in awe, and so damn lucky to have Andrya in my life for so many reasons.

"Come on, Little Hacker," Isaac murmurs. "Let's move. The cars will be here soon. It's showtime."

Taking a deep breath, I walk with him outside, making sure to grab a jacket. The event is going to have heat warmers everywhere, so I won't have to worry about it. It'll be a perfect seventy-five degrees, even though in reality the temperature is taking a nosedive.

"Where's Andrya?" I ask as the cars start to arrive.

"I'm coming!" she yells running down the stairs. Turning, I watch as she makes her way to us. We all have our masks in place now, and so does she. I really don't think I would recognize her, because the blue streak in her hair is cleverly hidden in the braided bun she created.

Her hazel eyes look incredible as they gaze out from her white mask, and works well with her shimmering gold gown.

"Wow," I breathe, entranced by the baby pink of her lips. Andrya looks as if she dusted shimmery gold on her skin, and I wouldn't be surprised if she

had.

“Off we go, Andrya,” Sidney murmurs, amused. He can’t keep his eyes off either one of us. Licking his bottom lip, his eyes sparkle behind his mask. Gods, I can only imagine what his next words will be. “You can eye fuck each other later. There’s work to be done.”

Reaching out, Andrya squeezes my hand. “Break a leg, Beautiful. Magical things will happen tonight. I can feel it,” she says softly.

I can feel the anticipation in the air as she disappears into the first car with Sidney. Each car will take a different route to the ball, so we all truly arrive at different times. I have my clutch with my phone and invite, all we need to do is get there.

I hope Andrya is right, we could use a little magic tonight.

Thirteen

SILLA

Taking a deep breath when I arrive alone at the Trainor Mansion, I step out of the car. Marion Trainor was an author who wrote incredible fantasy stories about dragons who fell in love with princesses. The kingdom's citizens still read her books, even though she passed away ten years ago. Her daughter now owns the property, renting it out for events like this.

I've never had the honor of being inside the gates, but I remember walking by it when I would run errands for my mother. It's one of my happier memories, because it allowed me to dream, even if it was just for a few minutes.

Life has not been kind to me over the years.

Smiling as I walk up the side gate where the guard is admitting people, I hand my invitation to him. He's wearing a mask as well, dressed in a black tuxedo.

"Good evening, Miss. You're all set to go in. Have a lovely time," he murmurs pleasantly, keeping my invitation.

Thanking him, I walk through the gate when he opens it. The entire front yard has Edison twinkly lights strung up through the trees. There are also poles where more lights are hung to beat back the darkness as I walk across the stepping stones on the grass. Quickly glancing at my phone in my bag, I see it's now after nine, so the party began an hour ago. It's nice not to have to worry about my heels sinking into the grass, so I take my time as I put my phone back. There's nothing worse than ruining a gorgeous pair of shoes.

The walkway leads me through the canopy of trees, and out to where there are more attendants. I can feel the warm air from the heaters now, and it helps me relax as I hand my coat to someone. I hate being cold, and can tell it'll be warm enough for me. Taking the tag so I'll be able to retrieve it later,

I slip it into my bag.

Walking slowly, I see a literal wonderland. People are dancing on the black and white checkered dance floor, there's a live band playing, and it seems just about everyone is here as the party is well under way. I am the focus as planned as I'm fashionably late.

I can feel the weight of their eyes as I skirt around the dance floor. This is what is supposed to be happening, so I force myself to embrace it. I've spent my entire life attempting to stay out of the limelight, but today this stunning dress and I are going to steal the show. Grabbing a glass of champagne, I pretend to sip from it as I go exploring.

Small talk isn't my thing, and I'm terrible at it, so I spend some time listening to everyone around me. This event tends to gather a ton of funds for orphaned children every year it seems. The uptick of children without parents is due to Cinder's bloody ways of dealing with her displeasure with people.

It's sad that the queen of our kingdom is the reason this is even needed. I'm flabbergasted, and can feel inappropriate tears of sadness beginning to well. I need a moment to gather myself, because I'm not callous enough to hear these stories and not react.

You'd think I'd have a thicker skin, but that's just not true. People are freely speaking about the queen as well, which is surprising to me. So often there are whispers, but everyone who is willing to speak out is quickly silenced. The newspapers don't discuss the executions, so naively I wondered if anyone even knew about them, or cared.

Walking further into the yard where the private auction is occurring on the other end, I wonder what things would be like if someone else was queen. Would life be vastly different?

The shrubbery opens into a tunnel-like passageway, and isn't well lit. I watched other people go through here, so I know it's safe to pass through. Unfortunately, there isn't much light outside of the very dim twinkle lights that line the pathway so no one trips. The air smells of honey from the crocus

flowers that are growing in the shrubs. Looking up, it has been shaped into a huge archway all the way through to where I believe the maze begins. That's not creepy at all.

"You're thinking awfully hard while attending a party," a man says, stepping into my path.

Startling, I swear I can feel my heart in my throat.

"Gods, I wasn't expecting someone to jump out at me like that," I gasp. Faintly, I realize that I didn't curse when usually I would have if I was with the guys. I think I've developed a block when it comes to language and how I use it around people I don't know.

Cinder has beaten the art of being well spoken into me, and 'ladies' don't curse. I am not far enough gone to use words like "fiddlesticks", so I've just removed them entirely from my vocabulary.

"I know this is a masquerade, and it's meant to hide identity, but who are you?" I ask.

If this is the leader of the Underground, I want to know now. If it isn't, I'll be polite, but continue on my way. This path to the mazes is darker than I'm comfortable with, though I can see where it brightens again where the lamps are hung. I'm surprised they didn't add any to this walkway.

Walking toward me, he lifts his hand to cup my face. Flinching, my eyes widen. I'm uncomfortable with people touching me for many reasons.

"Fuck, who hurt you?" he mutters, making me shake my head.

"That seems a very personal question for a stranger," I murmur. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I was taking a walk and had a destination in mind before you interrupted me."

Pulling away, I move around him. The boutique's seamstress was kind enough to bustle the dress in such a way so that it wasn't obvious and I could still move. Otherwise, I'm sure people would be stepping on it.

As I walk away, I hear the mystery man muttering to himself. Even if that man is the leader of the Underground, I don't want to work with someone so

presumptuous that he can't understand the importance of personal space.

All of a sudden, the darkened area leading into the maze makes me uncomfortable, and my feet move faster. Fuck, why did I think this was a good idea?

"Silla!" the man says, beginning to follow me. "Dammit, I didn't think you'd be so damn skittish. Will you wait?"

Rolling my eyes, I refuse to stop. The darkness feels cloying, and I can feel my heartbeat beginning to thunder in my ears. I will not freak out in here.

"Nope," I tell him, ignoring how immature I sound as I raise my hand to wave. "I'm not doing this here."

"But will you speak to me? Silla, are you afraid of the dark?" he teases me. This man doesn't know me well enough to be giving me shit.

Whirling around, I face him, barring my teeth.

"There are few people in this world who call me Silla," I hiss, as he stumbles to a stop. "If you want to speak to me, that's fine, but as I said, it won't be here. I've survived too much for a man with a tiny dick to make fun of me for the things I won't abide by."

Leaving him with his mouth dropped open, I walk quickly through until a rush of light seems to open up.

"I do not have a tiny dick!" he roars, following me. There are people all around us, the twinkle lights blazing happily as people go in and out of the maze. His black hair is a bit ruffled, as if he dragged his hands through it before coming after me. Apparently I'm a bit more of a handful than he thought I'd be.

A bubble of giggles escapes me, making me raise my hand to my lips. Uh oh.

There's a moment of silence around us, and I could swear that I can see his neck turn red. Pressing my lips together tightly, I shove the giggles away. Gods, this man made it too easy to fuck with him, and I don't even know his name.

This can't be the leader of the Underground, right?

"Walk and talk to your mistress, or not at all," I say loudly, and everyone begins to go about their business. I'd rather them think we're role playing some kind of kinky sex game.

Huh, that could be fun. Maybe I'll talk to Andrya and the guys about it.

Growling under his breath, he holds out his arm for me to take. "Yes, mistress. May I walk or would you prefer for me to crawl?"

"Walking will work for now, Pet," I say in a bored voice, taking his arm.

"You are way too comfortable saying that," he mutters as we begin walking.

"I have four boyfriends and a girlfriend, of course I am," I respond softly as we walk into the maze. The pathways are wide, and I can see the sky above me, so this doesn't trigger my claustrophobia. Taking a deep breath of the night air, I close my eyes for a moment.

"You don't like closed spaces, do you?" he asks and I stiffen.

"If you use that information against me, I will unleash my people on you. Is that understood?" I ask, turning my head to glare at him.

"We're supposed to be on the same side. Why would I use anything against you?"

"I typically don't trust people whose name I have yet to receive," I say haughtily. I don't care if I sound like a bitch. This has gone on way too long.

"You know who I am. I'm the leader of the Underground," he mutters. As I start to pull away from him, tired of the bullshit, his arm tightens around mine. "Okay! Fine, I've spent a lot of time keeping my name a secret. My mother is the only one who knows it at this point, and she has dementia. Everyone else calls me Falcon."

Snorting, I roll my eyes. "A cute name to go with your tiny penis, I see. You are nothing like what I thought you'd be. It's disappointing, to say the least," I tell him. I'm in full-on brat mode at the moment, with a mission to make him break. I can bring the Gods to their knees when I need to, twisting

their words until even they aren't sure as to what they said.

I need to know if my people and I will be safe with him. I've been duped too many times, and there are people that I care about now. I have hope now that I can survive this, and dammit I want to live. So I'm going to fuck with this "Falcon" until he breaks for me.

"Why are you so obsessed with my penis, Silla?" Falcon asks softly, staring down at it. "You already have so many men, are you collecting them?"

Laughing, I put my hand on my chest. "Oh no. My dance card is quite full, thank you. They're around here somewhere, so be sure to behave."

The crowd thins as they take turns in other directions, while we continue straight.

"Who are you? No one talks about you, outside of the tabloids mentioning that you were arrested over a year ago," he says, shaking his head. "Otherwise, you're a ghost. Where did you go? Were you released?"

"No," is all I say. "The queen controls the flow of information, including when she makes her step-sister disappear into thin air. If it makes you feel better, I haven't been sitting pretty drinking tea and eating crumpets. Cinder has her petty jealousies and obsessions, and I unfortunately embody all of them."

"She wouldn't hurt you," he scoffs, making me glance at him. "You're the perfect person to infiltrate the royal circles as her right hand. The perfect puppet queen..."

Pulling my arm from his, I make a disappointed noise. "I believe you have the wrong idea, dear boy. When I take over, it shall not be as a puppet. Have you any idea how much corruption exists in the kingdom? How many people are starving while others thrive on their misery?" I ask, shaking out my skirts. "I shall add your name to the people to topple on the scale of corruption... Falcon. Goodnight."

Turning left to get away from this sad, misguided man, I walk away. A

puppet indeed. I will never in a million years have someone else pull my damned strings...

A hand grabs my throat, pulling me tightly to his chest. Immediately, I stomp on his foot and then throw my head back. Barely missing his face because he forced himself to move, Falcon curses.

“Godsdamnit, why do you know how to fight?!” he growls.

“So... I... won’t... die,” I grit out, dropping my weight and shoving my elbow into his stomach. Grunting, he pivots and shoves me back into the shrubbery.

Nose to nose, his lips curl back as he gazes at me. “You’re not who I thought you were,” he rumbles, his midnight blue eyes glittering with anger and confusion.

“Neither are you. Pity when assumptions don’t pan out,” I rasp as his hand tightens around my throat.

“Anyone else would love to be a pretty little queen on her throne while we do what needs to be done in the kingdom,” he complains. “Why can’t you be pretty and useless?”

“Because pretty and useless people die when they’ve been tortured for a year,” I growl at him. “You are a weak, stupid man who doesn’t understand or care about the people of Forbach. I have no use for masked men playing at being a leader.”

Lifting his hand, he tears off his black mask, throwing it away. Falcon is gorgeous, in an asshole, villainous kind of way. Slightly wavy black hair, midnight blue eyes whose pupils are blown in anger, nostrils flared. I don’t know how this man makes nostrils look sexy, but he manages it just fine.

“I’m not weak or stupid. I want to be sure I’m not putting another tyrant on the throne,” he snarls. “How can one little girl care so much about others? You looked as if you were going to cry earlier over children you don’t even know. Why?”

Stomping on his foot again, I grind my pretty heel into it. Practically

hissing at him, I hit his chest with my hands. Falcon is loosely holding me in place, and since he's not hurting me, I won't force him to move. I will command his full attention, though.

"I care because it's the right thing to do. My step-sister is Queen, and even though we aren't related by blood, I feel a sense of responsibility for her. I have watched her kill every single asset that you've sent back, because she wanted information," I tell him. "It would have been kinder to snap their necks before dropping them bound and gagged at the castle door. They didn't have easy deaths."

"I thought I was showing kindness," he stutters. "Who would kill people that she put so much effort into training?"

"Those men and women failed in the eyes of their queen, so they immediately were dead on arrival." I sigh. "You have no idea how depraved she actually is. I came to see if you could be helpful in righting the mess this kingdom is sitting in. You're just another example of how well Cinder hides her crazy."

"What if we worked together?" he asks desperately, already watching me withdrawing from the conversation.

"I'm not at all impressed with what I'm seeing. Do better," I mutter, breaking his loose grip on my throat. Moving away, I hear him whisper something. "Speak up when you're talking to me, or don't speak at all," I command, still walking away.

"You're quite regal for an evil step-sister, Silla," he says louder. "My name... is Kenzo. We'll be in touch."

Silence meets my back as I stand there. Lifting the edge of my dress so as not to step on it, I whirl around to find him gone.

"Falcon?" I ask the empty space, not about to use his real name. I'll keep that secret for as long as I need to, especially since no one else knows it.

Fuck, a part of me hates that he gave this part of himself to me, because now it means something. Whenever he turns up again, I'll have to give him a

few minutes of my time, even if I don't want to.

It's an awful thing sometimes to insist on being fair. Breathing in a shuddering breath, I shiver in the night air. The heaters apparently don't extend to the mazes. Turning away, I find the exit to the mazes, on the search for another glass of champagne and the private auction tents. I'm in the mood to spend some of the Queen's money for a good cause.

GRAYSON

I watched Silla walk into the mazes on the arm of another man, and I felt indescribable jealousy. It's a feeling I'm not very familiar with, and I hate it.

Muttering to myself, I cut throughout the maze, watching her through the shrubbery. Red hot heat tore through me when he attacked Silla. My Dangerous Girl isn't a blushing flower or weak, and fought back. My hands fist even as I watched, because I wanted to help her.

Now, standing outside of the maze, I watch Silla walk out of it alone. She's unharmed, not a hair out of place, and beautifully peaceful. Silla Tremaine is in full control of her emotions right now, and you'd never know she was just yelling at someone.

I really enjoyed how she put Kenzo in his place several times during their interaction. No one else was in the mazes when he gave up his biggest secret, and I don't intend to tell anyone either. I do have questions though.

Was he just testing Silla, forcing her to become angry enough to slip in her true intentions? If a year in the Queen's clutches haven't changed the fiber of her being, I don't believe anything can. What's his deal?

Following Silla as her shadow, I watch her bid on a few items. I know it's all going on the Queen's card, and it makes me smile. Stress bids will lead to orgasms when we get home, because I need her to sleep well.

We can deal with Kenzo another day, but I don't believe that we need his help either. What are his qualifications other than a bone to pick with a bloody queen?

Vengeful men can only breed ugly intentions I've learned. I need to find out a lot more about him before any of us agree to work with him.

Once Silla has exhausted her energy bidding, she walks out of the gauzy, white tents back into the night air.

Walking up behind her, I hold my hand just slightly away from her back so she can feel the warmth of it before I touch her.

“Dance with me,” I breathe in her ear. “He already knows about your boyfriends, it’ll do no harm.”

“You’re such a stalker,” she chuckles, even as she nods. “Tonight is going differently than I imagined, so I would love a dance.”

Walking her back through the maze and the creepy passageway, I guide her onto the black and white checkered dance floor. It reminds me of a throwback into time, but I love the elegance of it.

Turning her gently in a circle, I gather her to my body as I begin to lead the dance. “Another first,” I murmur in her ear. “I will count every single one for the rest of my life, because I’m lucky enough to be here with you.”

Biting her lip, she looks into my eyes with tears. Brushing my thumb along her waterline to catch them, I shake my head.

“No tears, Dangerous Girl, but I do want a promise,” I insist.

“Everything I have to give is already yours,” she breathes as she sways with me.

“Promise to stay with us. Fight for what’s important to you. Never let your light extinguish,” I growl, brushing my lips against her forehead. Silla has been slowly gathering strength the last few days, but I know that she’d choose us over her own survival a million times over. While I appreciate her fierce dedication to our safety, we can fight for ourselves too now.

I don’t want her to crumble at the first sense of trouble. I want her to beat the fucker down like the tigress that she is. Silla didn’t want to hurt Kenzo, which is why she didn’t throw her full fury at him. Her motions were half hearted at best, which means she knows when to fight and when to growl and threaten.

I want to watch her spar without any reservations, though. I want to see what she can really do if she needs to bring down a grown man. Kenzo isn’t on our side quite yet, and he’s a wild card.

Silla is quiet for a long time, and I wonder if she's going to answer me. Finally, she whispers, "I promise."

As I dance with my beautiful girl, I wonder if he'll be her champion or foe. I'll only accept the former when it comes to Silla.

Fourteen

SILLA

Dancing with Grayson helped to ground me. I saw Andrya's dress a few times during the ball, but there were so many people, it was difficult to spot her. The rest of the guys stayed away, but it made my heart happy that my broody warden felt the need to stalk me a bit.

I know they're information gathering, so I grab a bottle of water to take a small break. The throngs of people are making my heart beat a little faster. I don't remember there being this many people earlier in the main area, but I expect that they're all done placing their bids.

Walking away from the dance floor, I walk closer to the beautiful Victorian home. There's a swing dangling from the tree branches, and there are fairy lights strung throughout it. I don't know what makes this tree different when the rest of the party has Edison bulbs, but I feel drawn to it.

I'm going to feel like an idiot if this swing doesn't hold my weight and drops my ass on the ground.

Gingerly sitting on it, I give a small sigh of relief when it doesn't collapse to the ground with me in it. Rocking back and forth, I sip from my bottle and stare up at the house. I had a shit childhood, and don't believe I've ever sat on a swing before in my entire life. You don't realize what you're missing out on until it's glaringly obvious.

"Having fun?" a deep voice asks, making me gasp and hold tightly to the rope because it startled me. Hands carefully grab my hips to balance me before moving away. "I didn't mean to scare you. My apologies..."

There's amusement in his voice as I twist to see who is speaking. He has black hair like Kenzo, but his eyes are lighter. I'm beginning to dislike the anonymity of this ball more and more.

"Marion Trainor was an amazing woman," he says absently as he moves

to stand next to me, looking up at the house. “She had a soft spot for orphans, so I know she’d love this event. It’s raised four million dollars already.”

“Wow,” I breathe. I really am impressed that so many children will be able to be helped by an event that I originally thought was more about glitter and excess.

“She helped me find a family when she found me,” he chuckles as he remembers her. “I believe you were here for my brother tonight, Silla?”

Cocking my head, I rock back and forth on the swing. “Like your brother, I believe you have the advantage,” I tell him snarkily. There’s only one person I’m here for tonight, so I take a shot in the dark.

“Don’t be like that,” he grins. I definitely see the familiarity between him and Kenzo. “Falcon is very over the top at times, protective, but he’s rarely an asshole. I think you bring it out in him. He’s a little bummed that he fucked up his first meeting with you.”

“Maybe he should have kept his hands to himself,” I mutter. “The only reason I didn’t drop his behind to the ground is because I didn’t want to ruin my dress.”

“You’re so self-assured,” he murmurs. “Falcon is very well-trained, why do you think you’d be able to kick his ass?”

“You’d be surprised what you’re capable of when your back is to the wall.” I sigh, looking back at the house. “Your brother wants a puppet, and that’s something I’ll never be.”

“Wait, excuse me? He didn’t say that. I refuse to believe he’d be that much of an idiot,” he says, moving in front of me to squat so we’re eye level. I almost crash into him, but he stops me in time. My dress is an insane billowing mass of fabric when I’m sitting down, and this may have been a mistake. I’ll need a crane to get back up. “My name is Kal, and we’re half siblings. We only reconnected about five years ago, but all he talks about is putting a strong queen on the throne.”

“That’s not at all what he said to me,” I scoff. “I was insulted,

underestimated, and asked why I was so difficult. I don't need him or his organization. You may tell your brother to shove his offer where the sun doesn't shine."

Grinning, his eyes sparkle. Kal is a much more relaxed version of his brother. "You're kind of adorable. Can you even say the word fuck or are you too perfect for that?"

"I see you two share the tendency to leap to conclusions." I sigh, lifting my foot to place it on his chest and push him back hard.

When he barely loses his balance, I roll my eyes. Standing, I shake out my skirts.

"When you're beaten regularly for not being perfect enough, you learn to curb your tongue," I tell him, turning away. "You both have a lot to learn about the queen. I hope that it's not at the hands of her guards in the dungeons like I did."

Hearing him curse as I walk away, I force myself to breathe. I think I have had quite enough peopling for tonight.

Too many memories are brought up by Kenzo and Kal of the things that I've survived and no doubt will continue to survive. I don't want to remember the pain, endless, and often with no reason.

"Wait!" Kal yells, making a few people turn. My eyes are welling with tears, and I just want to go. I don't feel playful, strong, or brave at the moment.

"No," I rasp, continuing to walk. "I've given you both more than enough of my time. I think it's time I do things my way."

"It doesn't seem as if your way is working very well, to hear you tell it," Kal says catching up to me. "Fuck, why do you bring out the worst in me? Silla..."

"To answer your question," I interrupt, making my way to the exit. "I didn't much care if I lived or died before. There are still days when it's a toss up, but this kingdom deserves better. If I'm the one to give it to them, then

that's what will have to happen."

Kal and I are practically hissing at each other now as we whisper while we walk.

"Why are you so selfless? Don't you want anything from life?" he asks, walking beside me onto the path.

"Have a good night," one of the attendants says. "Miss? You dropped this."

I know I didn't drop anything. Glancing at Kal, I turn slowly and carefully. The last thing I need is to be blinded by something thrown in my face. Apparently I'm extra paranoid lately, because it's a sheet of folded paper. Murmuring my thanks, I take it from him, wishing my dress had pockets. I'll be sure to demand some the next time I'm pretending to be my sister.

Shoving the paper into my clutch, I keep moving. I'll deal with it later.

Fuck, what was his question?

"It's not being selfless when everything gets ripped away from you," I tell him, as if we were never interrupted.

"Falcon said you have several boyfriends and a girlfriend. It sounds like you still have them." He smirks.

Blowing out a breath, I grab his arm once we hit the gate, pushing him into a covered area where we won't be seen.

"None of this is public. You can take this to your idiot brother, and then fuck off. I never want to see either one of you again. I'm very serious about that," I begin, pushing my hair off my shoulder. "My people were taken from me, tortured, and they thought I was dead. Cinder has a sick fascination with me, controlling how I dress and speak. Nothing will change while she's in power, so those are part of my reasons for removing her. Another is that I'll probably be dead soon after I finish her mission, which is to deliver the leader of the Underground," I tell him.

"Fucking hell, woman!" Kal exclaims, his fingers tearing through his hair

in a decent imitation of how I affect Kenzo. “The little shards of truth you’re dropping are staggering. I don’t even know how to process this.”

“Do or don’t, I’m never seeing you again,” I snort. Pulling my phone out, I call for a ride share. “I’ve been underestimated my entire life and shit on. I think I’ve officially reached my fill.”

“Can we start over?” Kal asks desperately. “I was supposed to get you to give my brother a second chance.”

“To stick his other foot in his mouth? Tell him that now is the time to crawl. He’ll know what I mean.” I tell him, seeing the car pull up. “I won’t accept any other form of communication.”

Striding away, I no longer feel like crying. I feel just a bit empowered by what I insisted on. I really have reached my limit on people who think they know who I am.

My name is Silla Tremaine, and I am not a weak, spoiled woman living in a gilded cage. Though a prison is still a prison, no matter how pretty it appears to be.

SIDNEY

Silla came home in a mood last night. I don't know how the meeting went, outside of her telling me that he was a small dicked man who was clearly compensating. When I asked her if he needed to be relieved of his small member, Grayson snorted.

"That's to be seen, Sidney," he said, watching as Silla grabbed Andrya's hand to help her change. There's a zipper that's a bitch to get down alone. I think she's had her fill of testosterone because she fell asleep last night wrapped in Andrya's arms.

"Sidney, will you spar with me, please?" Silla asks, winding her braid into a bun. "I feel unsettled, and I don't like not knowing if I'm capable of bringing a man to his knees if he touches me."

"Who touched you, Kitten?" Ayden asks, kissing the back of her neck. Her eyelashes flutter at his touch, making me smile. I need our twenty questions session to happen later today, so we can have our fun. Silla has made it clear that she wants to start having sex again based on the suction cup dildo she left on the shower wall this morning.

Fuck, I want to know if she actually used it or is just dropping teasers to mess with us. Godsdamnit I'm harder than a rock now. Clearing my throat, I force myself to focus.

"If I tell you, you'll kill them, and I'm not sure if we're done with them yet," Silla says carefully. Grayson smirks on the couch, legs splayed wide as he looks something up on his phone.

"You were pretty fierce last night, Dangerous Girl. Any more practice, and you'll be able to drop any man or woman who pisses you off. Do you want to spar here, or down the street at the gym?" Gray asks.

There's a gym that I found that I've started sparring, running, and weight

training at with the guys when we have some time. Isaac and Silla were wrapped up in research, and boredom isn't a good look for us.

"I kind of want to get out for a bit," she says, wrinkling her nose. "No one will think I'm Cinder in workout clothes, right?"

The similarities, now that she's looking for them, are starting to fuck with her head. They may not be blood sisters, but their skin tone and features are similar.

"No, Pet," I tell her with a smile. "Run along and get dressed so we can go. You look as if you have some energy to run off, so we'll jog there, okay?"

Nodding, Silla goes to change, and I turn to Grayson.

"Do I need to worry about anything?" I ask bluntly. "Did she get hurt?"

"No, the leader of the Underground, Falcon, is a bit of a dick," he explains. "It appears everyone thinks Silla is this spoiled royal brat, but she's nothing of the sort."

"Silla wasn't living in the castle because she wanted to," Isaac grunts, leaning forward from his perch on the couch.

"We know that, but no one else does. Silla got very tired of people telling her she'd make a great 'Puppet Queen'," Gray mutters. "Silla made light of it in front of the crowds of people around them when she told him he was compensating for a tiny dick, but I don't know if they're the right people for us to be working with."

"We can always shift the plan so we don't need them," Isaac says caustically. No one is allowed to fuck with Silla, and I kind of agree with his words. I need to start working on a poison that is tasteless in case we decide to poison the castle members.

"Do we turn him over to Cinder?" Andrya asks curiously. "I mean, I don't know that anyone deserves that, but how much of an asshole are we talking about?"

"One who speaks from ignorance," Grayson explains. "I think he's

innocent and means well, but he was spouting bullshit at our girl.”

“Yes he was,” Silla says, dressed in black leggings, a matching crop top, and sneakers.

“Sweater,” Ayden reminds her, tossing a hoodie at her.

Smiling, Silla sees it is his. Throwing it over her head, it’s huge, but Ayden looks smug as a pig in shit.

“Smooth,” I chuckle. “Do we need to know anything else about last night?”

“Falcon is an uneducated asswipe, has a half brother who lived as an orphan, and they recently reconnected. I don’t believe Kal knows what Falcon’s real name is, but he kept trying to reassure me that he’s a good guy,” Silla reports, blowing out a breath. “I don’t like them. I know it sounds petulant, but they’re both so arrogant. The only way I’d agree to speak to Falcon again is if he came to me on his knees.”

“Always trust your gut, Baby Girl,” Andrya reassures her. “You won’t always vibe well with everyone, and there’s a reason for that. Now go do weird work out things, while I make Grayson help me prepare a lasagna.”

“Fuck, that sounds really good,” he groans. “A million times yes, please.”

Linking my fingers in hers, I grab water from the fridge before waving as we walk out. My phone is in my pocket, and my shorts are tight enough that it won’t fall out.

“You look like every woman’s wet dream,” Silla comments as we walk down the stairs.

“Too bad for all of the other women in the world that I’m only yours and Andrya’s,” I tease her, kissing her forehead before we step out into the cool air outside.

Shivering, Silla pushes herself immediately into a run.

“Woah,” I laugh. “Come stretch with me, Pet.”

Huffing, she walks back. “I’m cold, though,” she complains.

“As you stretch, you’ll get warm, I promise,” I tell her, making her

wrinkle her nose at me. She really is adorable. Silla isn't even really whining, she's telling the truth. It's getting really fucking cold.

Showing her the proper way to stretch, we work through them until I know she's not going to hurt herself. Silla has a lot of old wounds that were rapidly healed, so I don't know if that is going to cause any long lasting issues down the road. Once we're past this stage of our lives, and we're all safe, I want to hire a doctor to do a full work up.

It just feels as if we're doing nothing but staying one step ahead of survival lately.

Jogging together is nice, and as much as Silla dislikes running, she does it well. I don't know that there's many things that she doesn't do well, but that could be my biased view.

I've been coming here enough in the past few days that I recognize a few people as I walk in.

"Hey man," the owner says with a grin as he comes over. We got a membership for the guys, but each of us has a guest pass as well. "Winter is gearing up, isn't it? I wonder how bad it'll be this year."

I shrug because this is the first year I'll be spending it in the city in a long time. I don't know what to expect.

"We're going to do a bit of sparring," I explain with a smile. "Is there an open room by chance?"

We could do it on the open floor, but Silla won't be able to keep her sweatshirt on when we spar. The less people I need to kill because they saw her in her sports bra, the better. I can't stop looking at her toned legs, the hint of her ass, even her neck is turning me on at this point. It's going to be a damn uncomfortable sparring session.

These shorts don't hide shit, but I'm wearing a long-sleeved shirt that's covering things for now.

"Yes, there's one at the end of the corridor," the owner says. Fuck... Mark is his name. "I'll sign it out to you until you're done."

“Thanks, man,” I tell him with a nod.

Walking to the room, I open the door. It’s a large space with mats rolled up neatly and put away. Setting everything up after I lock the door doesn’t take long, and then I tape both Silla and my hands.

“Alright,” I tell her with a lazy smile as she takes off her sweatshirt. “If you manage to pin me to the ground, I’ll let you fuck out that nervous energy. If I pin you to the ground, I’m in control.”

“Sidney,” she whispers, eyes wide. “I don’t think that’s the threat you mean for it to be. I’m getting fucked down either way.”

Silla is more relaxed here, I notice. I think it’s because the door is closed, and no one can see us. There’s a lot of windows as well that point toward the woods where this gym is located.

“Big words for such a pretty little love,” I coo with a wink as I pull my shirt off. Silla’s eyes trail along all of the skin I have showing, and I’m hoping to shatter her focus today. I’m not planning to play fair today. “Come show me what you can do.”

Silla takes a running leap at me, taking me by surprise as she pushes at my chest while looping her legs around mine to overbalance me. Fuck...

Once we’re on the ground, Silla pushes her knees into my forearms while shoving her elbow into my neck. She’s not fucking around, and I love to see my girl feral. Twisting and thrusting to dislodge her, she matches me pace for pace, until I finally am able to flip her onto her stomach when her limbs start to tire.

“It seems I’ve caught you, Silla,” I breathe in her ear. Silla looks beautiful with her ass up, wrists bound in my hand while I hold her legs down with my knee. Whimpering, she still struggles, even though there’s no way she’s going to be able to get away from me. I don’t think she truly even wants to. Shoving down her pants and panties, I shift my torso back to look at my prize while ensuring that I’m still holding her calves pinned to the ground. Running my thumb through her arousal, Silla whimpers for me.

“Sidney, please don’t tease,” she begs, making me smile.

“Tell me, Pet. Were you a bad girl this morning and fucked yourself with the big purple dildo?” I ask her, moving my thumb once it’s coated to rub her clit.

“Wha-ohhhh,” she moans, trying to thrust her hips up for more.

Spanking her ass, I revel in her gasps. “Answer, or I’ll spank you, fuck that tight pussy, and refuse to let you come.”

“You... that’s mean,” she whines, making me bark in laughter. “Fine, yes I fucked myself this morning. Andrya’s hands roam when she sleeps.”

I snort, because they always have. It’s why I always sleep next to her so she’s not embarrassed in the morning when her hand is stuffed down someone’s pants.

“Fair,” I murmur, pushing a finger into her tight pussy. “Fuck, you’re so tight, baby. You take my fingers so good.”

“More,” she moans, and I can feel her hips struggling to keep thrusting back.

Rewarding her, I rub my finger over her bound wrists as I push two more fingers into her pussy.

“So pretty when you’re stuffed full,” I sigh, rubbing my palm against her clit. Silla pants with her cheek pressed tightly against the mat, and despite the compression of her bra, I feel the need to see her tits. “Don’t move your hands from behind your back, or I’ll stop what I’m doing.”

“I’ll be good... please,” she whimpers. Silla has the ability to be so good when there’s the promise of an orgasm on the other end. Although, she’s a brat with Grayson for the same reason.

Letting go, I reach around and unzip her bra so her breasts bounce free. Perfect. I want to watch them bounce while I fuck her.

“Don’t move, Pet,” I warn her, moving my leg from her calves so I can claim my delicious treat.

Dragging my tongue along her clit as I fuck her with my fingers, I listen

to her sounds. Silla locks her fingers together to keep her hands from moving, and I decide to let it slide.

“Sidney,” Silla moans. There’s a wall of mirrors in front of us, and I watch her eyes roll in pleasure.

“Tell me how good it feels,” I mumble against her clit before sucking hard on it. Thank fuck we’re the last room on the end, or everyone would be able to hear us.

Silla’s hips rock naturally against my fingers as I fuck her with them, and I have the best view of her swaying and bouncing tits. Keening meets my efforts, and I crook my fingers that are deep inside of her. Silla cries against the mat, tears building as she gets closer to her release.

“That’s it, Pet. All you have to do is squirt for me, and I’ll give you my dick,” I tell her, dragging my tongue along the needy nerve endings.

“I don’t know if I can,” she mewls, her voice raspy with desire and need.

“Yes, you can,” I growl, nipping at her clit before sucking hard.

Screaming, her hands hit the floor hard as she writhes. As my fingers continue to fuck her through her orgasm, they’re strangled by her walls. Finally, Silla shudders, spraying my face as she comes in a second wave.

“Good fucking girl,” I praise her, righting my body as I wipe my face with the back of my hand. Pushing down my shorts, my cock bobs out as I look down at Silla. She’s trying to catch her breath, but there’s no way that’s going to happen when I fuck her.

Grabbing my dick at the base, I glance down at the fairly new artwork that I’ve added to it. It’s been over a month now, and within the scrollwork are the hidden names “Andrya” and “Silla”. These girls have my heart and my dick in a stranglehold, and neither know what I’ve done.

Maybe one day they’ll notice when I fuck their throats. Or maybe not.

Pumping my cock, I stroke the length of it to smear the precum across the head. My dick is weeping in excitement, and I can’t wait any longer.

“This is going to be hard and rough, Little Love. Are you ready?” I ask

Silla as I slide the tip of my cock through her arousal, getting it wet.

“Yes, please, Sidney. Make me see the Gods,” she begs, making me smirk. That’ll be some shit.

Rocking my hips, I thrust inside of her, and that’s the last gentle thing I’m capable of.

Slapping her ass, I grip her hips firmly, pulling her roughly. Using her as my own personal fuck toy, I watch her look up at the mirror to watch me. My lips are curled into a snarl, and the only sound is that of skin on skin and Silla’s cries. Needing more, I push her hips up so that I’m hovering over her, fucking her into the mats.

The change in position makes me feel deeper inside of her, and Silla’s mouth drops as she groans. Reaching between us, I rub her clit insistently.

“Sidney, I can’t!” Silla cries out, dropping her head on her arms.

“Don’t lie to me,” I tell her, slapping her ass. Pulling her up, I hold her hair tightly, forcing her to kiss me as I bounce her on my dick. “Whose pussy is this?”

“Yours,” she breathes. It’s like my cock is impaling her as she gets used to the new position. I want her to remember I fucked her in the gym and blush every time someone talks about working out. Maybe that’ll become our new code word.

“Are you sure?” I tease her as I hold her tightly to me so I can thrust up. Fuck, Silla is a vision. Her cheeks are flushed, her eyes wild with desire, and her nipples tight with need.

If I were an artist, my fingers would be itching to paint her.

“I’m... oh gods, I’m close,” Silla gasps, her breaths getting shorter and shorter.

“Good girl. Reach down and play with yourself while I abuse your pretty little pussy. We can watch in the mirror as you break for me in all of the best ways,” I murmur, licking her neck to suck on her wild pulse.

Not hesitating, my gorgeous little cock slut rubs her clit determinedly.

One hand on her hip and the other holding her hair, I fuck her hard. Silla begs and moans so prettily as her legs start to tremble. She really is so damn close.

Her dark raven hair contrasts well with my lighter color in the mirror, her head thrown back in pleasure. I can feel the build in pressure in my back, the sharp edges almost painful, begging for me to come.

“Pet, come for me. I’m going to paint the walls of your pussy with my cum. Get there with me,” I growl. My balls are drawing up and I grunt before I’m exploding inside of her.

The feeling of my cock pulsing triggers her, and she shudders as she comes with me. Chests heaving, I hold her tightly to me, because her body is practically boneless.

“Did I manage to fuck the brat out of you?” I tease, kissing her forehead.

Giggling, she shakes her head. “You have to do better than that,” she says with a smile.

Slowly helping her up, I stand to grab some paper towels. Carefully helping her clean up, we get dressed and clean up the mats with the spray bottles of sanitizer available. Somehow, I doubt that’s what the planned use was for them.

We were loud, and I wonder if they could hear us at all. Linking my fingers in hers, we walk out, but it’s exceptionally loud in the main room. Relaxing, we walk out, as I don’t see Mark anywhere.

“You’re really good at sparring,” I tease Silla, making her blush.

“I have had a really great teacher,” she says with a smirk. “I want to know that I can protect myself. Too many people think they can paw at me without permission. I’m getting pretty damn tired of it.”

“What do you think of carrying a knife with you?” I ask, frowning. It’s true that we’re typically with her, but I want her to feel safe. “I can teach you some weapons training...”

Blowing out a breath, she snuggles against me in Ayden’s sweatshirt. “I think I’d like that. We don’t know what’s ahead of us. Thank you.”

The walk takes a bit longer back, but it's nice to just chat with Silla. Sitting on the front steps of the apartment building is a man in a hooded sweatshirt. It looks like he may have black hair but it's difficult to say.

Silla slows her steps as she sees him, and I look between them. Does she know him?

Rising as he sees her, he drops to his knees, crawling to her. I watch interested, because anyone willing to crawl to my beautiful girl, clearly isn't wishing to harm her.

"Is this what you wanted, Mistress?" he asks, and I realize who he is. Well, it looks like this man just leveled up. The ball is in her court now.

Fifteen

KENZO

I'm a dick, and I don't mind humiliating myself if I need to. Silla looks surprised as she stares down at me, her sea-green eyes darker than I remember in the afternoon light. I see a hint of hurt, confusion, and anger.

"I should chain you to the stairs and leave you here," she mutters, the color high in her cheeks.

"It'll borrow too much attention," the man next to her grunts. Is this one of her many boyfriends? Was she serious about that?

Forbach isn't fussy about convention outside of the royal circles. You love who you love, and you can even marry them all as well. I don't know when she would have the time to date this many people though.

Down, bad Kenzo. Fuck, when did I get so damn judgey?

"I guess you're coming inside then." Silla sighs. "I'm not feeding you, though."

"Yes, Mistress," I murmur, watching as she shivers.

The man next to me snorts, his hand firmly on her back. "I may have some collars, Pet, if you want him to sit at your feet," he says as they start to walk past me.

Fuck, it looks like I'm committing to this. Standing, I walk behind them as they head inside. The man with her, I learn is named Sidney. I don't remember him being part of the castle's inhabitants at all, and I thoroughly researched who has been in and out of that building over the last year.

I haven't paid much attention to those who came into the castle as prisoners, though, because I figured they were all dead men and women walking. I may have been a little premature in this decision after Silla told Kal and I on two separate occasions that she was tortured by the queen.

What the hell did she do for that to happen? There's a lot I don't know

about Drizella Tremaine.

Once we arrive upstairs at the apartment door, it's flung open. A girl embraces them both excitedly. "Are you guys hungry? I had to beat everyone else away to make them wait. Why do you two smell like sex?"

Sidney barks out a laugh as he buries his face into the girl's neck.

"I needed a taste of our girl, Sweetness. We have a guest it seems," he murmurs against her skin as he kisses it.

Surprised, the girl glances at me. There's a glare that appears immediately as she realizes who I am. Shit, it appears my bad behavior is preceding me.

"Ugh. Sidney, can't we chain him somewhere?" she complains, making Silla giggle.

"Andrya, I already suggested it, and Sidney is making me play nice," she whisper-shouts in her ear.

"I can still hear you, Mistress," I say drolly.

Andrya's eyes widen as she looks over at Sidney. "Did you bring the collar from FRC?" she asks with a wicked grin as she walks inside.

As we follow, he cocks his head to the side as he thinks. "Actually... I did because it allowed me to make sure one of my pots wouldn't fall over," he grins. "I'll grab it. I should be able to make it fit. Pet, come shower with me, or none of them will be able to concentrate."

Because of... the sex. Fuck. My cock is swelling at the thought of where they would have been having sex. They're both in workout clothes, though she's wearing a hooded sweatshirt that's covering most of her body.

Silla waves at the guys in the living room before she disappears into a bedroom with Sidney.

A large man who reminds me of an immovable giant walks out the kitchen, sucking on a spoon. It seems odd to me that someone so large would be doing something as innocuous as this.

"Hey big man, stop flirting," another man teases him. I really wish they'd acknowledge me or something. I feel really fucking awkward right now. "Or

at least share some of your dessert.”

There’s a small bowl of what looks like chocolate in his other hand, and his lips twitch as he puts the spoon back into it.

“I’m making a chocolate cake, and as a kid, I always ate some of the batter,” he says with a grin. “I’m not above dropping some on my dick, though, Ayden.”

Ayden’s eyes grow big as a man with glasses rolls his eyes. “That wouldn’t be for you, Ayden. I’m glad to help provide you with spank bank material, though. Grayson, a cake, holy fuck. You’re spoiling us now.”

Grayson chuckles with a shrug before his gaze moves to me. The light hearted smile melts away in front of me, and I find myself missing it. Damn it.

“You’re on quite a few people’s shit lists. Is someone getting the dog a collar?” Grayson asks. I’m definitely going to dislike being here, but I owe Silla a lot of groveling. I should have brought Kal with me. People tend to like him more.

“Yep, Sidney says he has at least one,” Andrya grins as she starts to set the table.

“Is that because you have a dog?” I ask hopefully. *Please don’t be some kind of weird sex thing...*

“Nope, where would we put a dog in a prison camp?” Ayden scoffs.

I can’t stand all of the questions building up in my head and I can feel my nose scrunching from the stress.

“You look as if your brain is about to explode,” Grayson rumbles with an evil smile. “Cinder has a reform camp about six hours north of here. It’s not very well known, mostly because she uses it to train her spies. I was the warden there up until a few days ago, and Isaac, the twins, and Sidney were instructors. The Queen wants us to deliver you to her because you threaten her very cushy life. We are tired of her bullshit.”

“That’s the cliff notes version,” Sidney says, coming back into the room alone. Grabbing my hair, he pulls my head back as he loops a collar around

my neck. “I need you to consent to wearing this collar for as long as I feel is needed. Yes or no? Understand that if you say no, I will throw your ass out, and you will not speak to Silla again. What is your decision?”

Fuck, that’s not much of a decision is it?

“I consent,” I grumble with a scowl.

“You’re not as pretty when you make that face,” Sidney says with a feral smile as he buckles the collar around my neck. It’s just tight enough that I’ll never forget it’s there, though I can still breathe. “On your knees.”

As he lets go of my hair, I drop to my knees for him. “Good boy,” he mutters as he walks away. “The Queen cut our funding because we were protecting Silla last year. We are responsible for a lot of people, so we did what we needed to do to feed them. We grew our own vegetables, picked up extra jobs to refill the camp’s coffers for things like electricity, and kept trucking.”

“Except there was a spy,” Silla says from the edge of the living room, her gaze dispassionately on me. “There was a man named Zachary who tried to befriend and fuck me over my first week or two at FRC. He told someone that I was deathly afraid of small spaces.”

Silla’s eyes cut over to Andrya, Sidney, and Ayden who meet her eyes unblinkingly. I know there has to be a story there.

“We took the information Zachary gave us and used it against Silla,” Andrya rasps. “I had her put in a vent, ignoring when she begged me not to. It was stupid.”

I’m surrounded by psychopaths. Fuck me.

“My step-sister had Zachary planted at the reform camp for months before I arrived, but he told her that I was getting closer to my instructors in a romantic way. He let Cinder into the camp, and she arrested us all. We spent months in her dungeons being punished for treason,” Silla says in a dead tone.

“How is falling in love treason?” I ask, still kneeling at their feet.

“Love made me protect her when the Queen’s Mission wanted to rape her and Section B for sport,” Grayson grunts. “Love made us all take a deeper dive into her supposed crimes, and the Queen is obsessed with her step-sister in a very twisted way.”

“Cinder is no longer fit to be our queen,” Andrya says, bringing the lasagna in to place it on the table. There’s a small area between the living room and kitchen, which appears to be the designated dining area. “To be honest, she has been unraveling in her madness more and more in the past year, but it’s becoming more noticeable now.”

“I had no idea of any of this,” I whisper, shaking my head. “My reasons for wanting to remove the queen are because the people in the kingdom are starving, taxes are through the roof, and loved ones have been disappearing.”

“They’re either in prison, the reform camp, or dead,” Ayden mutters. “You’d think that they’d inform loved ones when a person is charged with a crime, but sometimes it’s in Cinder’s best interest for them to disappear. It’s easier to do intelligence work when people think you’re dead.”

“This doesn’t sound like something that happens in real life.” I sigh.

“Welcome to Hell, buttercup,” Andrya chuckles without humor. “Dogs don’t eat at my table. Everyone else, come eat.”

I guess this is my life for now, I’ll just need to suck it up. I’m intrigued by these people, and I own up to my mistakes.

I very much screwed the pooch this time. No pun intended.

AYDEN

Falcon kneels throughout our dinner without complaint. He's listening to our conversations, and there are times where his forehead gets an adorable little wrinkle. The six of us together must confuse an outsider.

"So gym sex, Sidney?" Andrya prompts teasingly. Chuckling, he shrugs.

"I couldn't help myself. She's incredibly sexy when she fights. Silla mentioned that people tend to touch what doesn't belong to them, so I want to add some knife training too," Sidney says.

The dog on his knees swallows thickly, and I can tell immediately that he's guilty of this.

"Sister, your lasagna is amazing," I tell her, taking another bite. Everyone else compliments her as well, because it really is good.

Grayson rolls his eyes, and Andrya smirks. "Gray helped with assembly and the cake," she admits.

"I'm really excited for the cake," I admit. A timer goes off and Gray excuses himself to take it out of the oven. "So we know you two had fun at the gym, but once the dog takes his leave, I want to play twenty questions."

"I was just thinking about this," Sidney muses. "We've all changed a lot, and our kinks and needs have changed over the last few months."

"And some of us haven't really changed at all," Grayson counters with a shrug as he sits. "I still enjoy watching, chasing, and spanking bad girls."

"Can I be bad?" Isaac mutters, blushing a bit. Their relationship has been heating up since they took a shower together the other night, and I'm loving it.

Silla blushes as well, biting her lip. "Can I watch?" she asks huskily, instantly making me hard.

Forcing air into my lungs because they're making me forget myself, I

struggle to think. “This is why we need the game, no holds barred. We don’t want to trigger anyone’s trauma accidentally, which is why we’re so big on consent, as well,” I remind her.

“I appreciate that,” she says with a nod. Her eyes widen as she has a thought. “Sidney, the tea. I didn’t have any today, did I?”

“Fuck,” he mutters. “No, the tea I made you the other day is going to trigger your period early, though. It’s gonna be a heavier one, probably too. You should probably be getting it by tonight, so I’ll go on a run to the pharmacy for you.”

“Can the peanut gallery ask a question?” Falcon asks from the floor. He’s kneeling in front of the dining room table, so we can all see him.

“If you need to,” Silla acknowledges, taking a sip of water as she finishes her food.

“You’re all in a relationship, but you were all in the dungeon for months as well. How are you still so close?” Falcon asks.

Grayson braces his arms in front of him as he leans forward to address Falcon. “We aren’t all together exactly,” he begins to explain as he raises his hand and loops it in a circle to encompass those at the table. “The five of us are all in a relationship with Silla, but some of us are also in a relationship with each other. Attraction isn’t forced here. Before we met Silla, we’d all been working together for years, but we really banded in a united force for her. Dumb fights and insecurities don’t belong here. We all thought Silla was dead for months, so when Cinder sent her to the camp with a mission, we thought we were seeing a ghost.”

“In a lot of ways, I was a ghost,” Silla mutters. “Cinder knew the only way they’d agree to her mission would be if I asked.”

“The Queen wasn’t expecting us to insist that Silla come with us,” I add. Falcon nods, but I can see more questions in his eyes. “We’ve all experienced horrible things at Cinder’s behest. She enjoys other people’s pain. This is none of your fucking business, but I need you to understand that consent is

very important to us. Don't touch Silla or my sister without express permission. They've both had men take things that don't belong to them, and we all are working through our memories. Don't trigger us because of your ignorance."

Taking a ragged breath that looks oddly cleansing, Falcon glances up at us. His hands are comfortably laying on his thighs, and doesn't look as if this position is bothering him. "Silla, I'm sorry for teasing you. I was really fucking nervous, and I'm an idiot sometimes. I shouldn't have tried to keep you in a dark area when you were showing signs of being uncomfortable, and prejudging you as a spoiled brat was stupid of me."

My hand fists as I wonder if I could get away with punching him. Silla's foot rubs my calf, and she shakes her head as I look at her. Growling in frustration, I nod. I really want to beat the shit out of this man. Silla has lived through too damn much to deal with ignorance like this.

"I don't like you," I say instead. "You told her you wanted a pretty figurehead to pull her strings. Too many people have been telling her what to do for her entire life. That's not the kind of queen that she'll be."

"I... was talking out of my ass," Falcon groans. "It terrifies me that there's so much power in one person when they take the throne. I want a strong queen who will actually do what they say they will. Charming's parents weren't much better as monarchs. Cinder is just a bloodier queen."

"If I take over, it won't be a clean break," Silla says carefully as she watches him. "You appear to be a bit naive and a pacifist. Cinder won't quietly leave the throne, her guards will protect her because they enjoy their privileges awarded to them by her, and everyone else is too damn corrupted by their greed."

"What does that all mean?" Falcon asks. The poor man really doesn't understand the Queen's support system.

"I need chocolate for this conversation." Silla sighs, her head on her hand. She doesn't look right to me. Her elbow is on the table supporting her, but

she's listing to the left.

"Kitten, do you have any cramps?" I whisper, leaning over. I want to give her the guise of privacy, but I'm a little worried about her.

"Ummm. Kind of? There's a warmth in my stomach, but it doesn't hurt yet," she says.

Sidney stands, kissing her forehead. "I'll be back, Pet. I'm just running out to the pharmacy, alright?"

"Thank you," Silla mumbles. Forcing her eyes to focus on Falcon, she tries to find the thread of conversation. "Cinder has an unspoken agreement with Charming. He has a home on the other side of the kingdom with his latest girlfriends, and Cinder can fuck whoever she wants. She has specific sexual proclivities, and enjoys listening to the screams of her prisoners while she is fucked. The guards clean up her messes when things get too rough."

"Wait..." Falcon interrupts, but Silla plows on, ignoring him. I can tell she needs to get this out before she has us remove him from the apartment.

"The guards are rewarded for their silence and work for the Queen by being given women who are unwilling to have sex with them," she continues. "It's why Cinder cut the funding to FRC when Grayson refused them access to Section B. These men could have mutinied on her if they didn't think they were getting their just rewards." Falcon is quiet as he listens to Silla with his eyes wide. I want to tell her that she doesn't need to do this, but clearly she feels as if she does.

I refuse to silence her.

"They're called the Queen's whores in Section B because they're taught how to pull information from men and women with their bodies. I was in that section, and Cinder's guards wanted to rape me," Silla rasps, her voice beginning to thicken with pain. "The Queen's Guard received what they wanted for months, and if I have to go back to that, I'll find a way to end it all."

"Silla," I murmur, trying to send her love in that one word.

“I know.” Silla sighs. A phone rings from the bedroom and her eyes widen as she wipes tears from her eyes. “Oh fuck. It’s like talking about her makes her call.”

Jumping up, she sprints to the bedroom, but I notice that she’s favoring one side of her body.

“Don’t say a word,” I growl.

“She likes to video call,” Andrya says, panicked. “Go to the kitchen, or you’ll be a dead man.”

We’re only bothering to help him because no one deserves to live at the mercy of the Queen. Getting up, Falcon races to the kitchen just as Silla walks out of the bedroom. She’s wearing loose joggers and a tank top from when she changed, and a sweater thrown over it. I notice that she’s zipped the sweater all the way up, trying to avoid Cinder’s wandering eyes.

“Have you accomplished anything yet?” her step-sister whines. “I’ve been in meetings since you’ve been gone, so it’s been good that you haven’t been at the castle. I wouldn’t know what to do with you or how to explain your presence with so many important people here.”

We’re all equally happy she’s not there for different reasons. Andrya begins to pick up dishes on the table as she listens, and Isaac stands to help her.

“I’ve been gathering intel on people who work with the Underground, and I reached out on the dark web to them in hopes that they would pass on my interest in meeting,” Silla begins, mixing truths and lies easily. I know that she started gathering information on the two men who brought her here, finding that there was nothing corrupt about them.

“I also attended a masquerade last night, which is where they—”

“You went to a party, Silla?” Cinder asks, her voice dripping with malice. “I’m not paying for you to buy frilly dresses and dance the night away.”

“Your Majesty, if I may?” I ask, walking to where Silla is standing. Making sure she can see me, I inclined my head to her. I will never bow to

this bitch. “The Underground stated that the leader would only meet with Drizella at this event. They sent us all invitations, and I believe it was to help protect his identity. What better way to do that than when everyone is masked?”

Cinder gives me a smile that I’m sure is meant to be flirtatious, but instead is predatory. Gods, she’s just an evil witch.

“This all has merit when couched in those terms. Come to think of it, Silla has always disliked parties. Well done, girl, on doing things you dislike for my pleasure,” she murmurs. “It’s almost been a week that you’ve been gone, and I have another week of these meetings. Possibly two if needed.”

“I know how much you dislike them,” Silla says softly, trying to commiserate.

“I truly do. Charming has been playing at being the doting husband, and even insisted on sharing the bedroom,” Cinder whispers conspiratorially, her features twisting in disgust. I really don’t understand why these two got married, outside of convenience. “I need him to go away as soon as possible.”

“I know that’s been difficult for you,” Silla says, her face not showing any other emotion except sympathy. I hate the way she’s so skilled at masking her emotions around the queen. We need to make a plan to kill her sooner rather than later, and decide if Falcon has the balls to help us.

The man isn’t unhinged enough for a takeover.

“Fiddlesticks, you know nothing,” Cinder huffs.

“Cinder, where are you, woman?” A man yells, making Cinder growl under her breath.

“I’m in here, darling,” she calls out, and Silla winces. Gods, is that Charming? He’s been out of the press and limelight for years, and I don’t believe I’ve seen a photo of him in years.

“There you are,” he crows, as if she was hiding from him. It looks like Cinder is standing in her office, which means that she was in plain sight this

entire time. “Are you speaking to Drizella?”

“I am, darling,” Cinder says, forcing her lips into a soft smile. She actually manages to pull it off, but it’s one of the most alien things that I’ve ever seen.

Charming’s heavy steps are heard as he walks into the room, and then I can see him in the camera next to Cinder. His fair skin has a bit of a tan to it now, undoubtedly from sunning on the beach where his home is at. Charming’s brown hair is a bit wavy, and appears to have a lot of product in it to keep it tamed. His broad shoulders cut a very strong figure, and there’s not an ounce of fat on his body, even though he’s nearing forty.

His brown eyes narrow as he looks into the phone, seeing Silla as he shoves his hands into the pockets of his navy blue suit. “What on earth are you wearing, Drizella?” Charming asks. “What happened to the pretty dress you were wearing when you left?”

Silla’s hand starts to shake, and I take the phone from her, hiding my hand behind her to rub her back. Getting Charming’s attention in any fashion isn’t good. Cinder may not want her husband, but she doesn’t want him to notice her step-sister either.

“I’m working on something for Cinder, and I have to blend in,” Silla explains. “Wearing the Queen’s colors makes it difficult to do that.”

“It’s true.” Cinder sighs, the anger in her eyes belying her tone. “The Underground is still a problem, darling, so Drizella is helping us.”

“She’s a little girl,” Charming scoffs. My blood runs cold as I listen to him. “Are you hoping that the leader is a man so that she can lure him with her tight pussy?”

“Yes. That’s exactly what I’m hoping,” Cinder says with a smile. “Screw him stupid if you have to, Drizella. I want to know that I won’t have my throat cut in the middle of the night.”

Falcon isn’t exactly bloodthirsty so there’s zero chances of her being killed in the middle of the night. Gods, where is she getting her information

from?

“Yes, Your Majesty,” Silla says automatically.

“I’m exhausted,” Charming mutters. “How do you manage to do this every day?”

King Charming is even more lazy than I remember him to be.

“Drizella used to make my father tea when he was stressed out,” the Queen murmurs. Silla’s fingers fist in the material of my joggers, and I make sure that her hand isn’t in the frame of the video. “Do you remember what was in it?”

“No... Your Majesty. My mother made the tea, and I simply delivered it to him nightly. You’d have to ask her what was in it,” Silla explains. Fuck, there’s more to this than she’s saying.

“Maybe I will,” Cinder says dismissively.

“I did have a request, which is why I asked Cinder to tell me when she called you,” Charming says, his tone slightly biting. Cinder turns to look at him, their eyes saying more than words ever could. What now? “I want to see my sister-in-law while I’m visiting. You ran out of here so quickly, and it’s been forever.”

“I haven’t seen you in over two years,” Silla recalls, confused by his request.

“Yes, yes. Something like that. It’s been ages, and you’re so grown up now,” he murmurs, turning back to stare at Silla. I’m going to murder him. He will have the shits and puke, and fucking beg for death.

“You’ll have to come by the castle for dinner before Charming leaves,” Cinder says with a shrug, but not like she means it.

“What about in two weeks?” Charming says hurriedly, making his wife’s jaw clench hard. It’s nice to see Cinder isn’t throwing her step-sister at her husband, but I know it’s because she wants to keep her for herself.

“Fine, fine. Drizella, do you accept the invitation to dinner?” Cinder asks formally, forcing Silla to respond or be considered insolent.

“Yes, of course, I’ll be there. May I bring guests?” she asks. That’s my Kitten. There’s no Godsdamned way that she’s going alone.

“You may bring Ayden and Grayson,” Cinder says with a wave of her hand. “Good bye, Drizella.”

“Your Majesty,” she murmurs, inclining her head. “Your Highness.”

The video call disconnects, but not before I see the spark of triumph in Charming’s eyes. The man is up to something.

A fist slamming on the dining room table makes Silla and I look up. Falcon’s livid face is the first thing I see and I turn the phone to show that Cinder hung up.

“First of all, you absolutely will not be hopping on my dick on that woman’s command. If it happens, it’ll be for an entirely different reason other than duty,” he growls. “Second of all, I want in on whatever plan you’ve been cooking up to kill that bitch. Fuck being peaceful, this woman needs to fucking die.”

Looks like we broke the pacifist after all.

Sixteen

SILLA

“**I** thought I was known for truth bombs, but what?” I ask. My nerves are shot after that call, and I’m still shaking.

“Silla, come here,” Grayson mutters, coming over and scooping me into his arms. He’s not usually someone who babies me, so I must look like shit. “Whatever you’re thinking, stop. I need snuggles, because I wanted to reach through the phone for how those two treat you.”

The front door to the apartment slams open, making me flinch with a gasp. I’m really twitchy right now, and my body feels as if it’s vibrating.

“I wasn’t gone for very long,” Sidney complains as he shuts the door. “What happened?”

His hands are filled with bags, and Andrya snorts as she goes to help him.

“Cinder and Charming called,” Ayden explains, watching me as Grayson gets comfortable on the couch with me cuddled against his chest. “It was weird though, because Charming kept insisting that Silla come to the castle for dinner. The way he kept looking at her was really gross. He was leering.”

“I had to say yes,” I whisper, wrapping my arms around myself. “I can’t... I won’t survive if something happens again.”

Kenzo walks over to kneel in front of me. Fisting his hands together, I can tell he wants to touch me, but I can’t handle it right now.

“That’s not going to happen, Mistress,” he says as if it’s the most natural thing in the world. “I’m serious, we can infiltrate her staff. I’ve done it before, I have a reason now to do it again.”

“Are you seriously in, dog boy?” Ayden asks, sitting next to me to rub the back of my hand gently. “Breathe, Kitten. We’re going to figure this out. You’re not going into that castle without a plan.”

Nodding, I force air into my lungs again. “That’s it. No matter what, you

keep breathing with us,” Grayson rumbles into my ear.

Gods, why is just breathing so hard? I can feel invisible hands on my body, and twitch to move my hand away from Ayden. He doesn't seem bothered by it. I am seconds away from falling apart. A single tear escapes from my eye as I struggle to keep the rest back.

“I'm in. I hated staying quiet while the Queen and King were speaking. Their lack of care for human rights is just appalling,” Kenzo mutters. He also appears to be vibrating with energy, except his is due to anger and not anxiety.

“The Queen freely gives me to her guards to rape,” I tell him, my ears ringing. My breaths are becoming a wheeze, and I curse myself for being so weak. Godsdamnit, why is it so hard to just breathe? “She uses it to punish me. That woman lives to break me.”

“So don't break,” he says, midnight blue eyes savage with determination. “You're not weak. The things I've realized that you've lived through, no one should have to endure. The King won't be touching you.”

“He could want me for so many depraved things,” I counter, my mind spiraling with possibilities. “Charming could want me for himself, to marry off... I think not knowing is making me crazy.”

“Little Hacker,” Isaac barks, forcing my gaze to meet his. “Have we checked to see if there's any bad debts that the King can't meet? He wouldn't tell Cinder if there was. Maybe he wants you because he's promised something to a debt collector.”

“That's horrifying.” Kenzo sighs, sitting on his calves. His hair is slightly out of place, and I find myself wanting to fix it. Everything is starting to feel fuzzy...

“Breathe,” Grayson reminds me as black spots start to race across my eyes. Stupid, stupid Silla. I was holding my breath. My nails dig into my hands to force myself to stop dissociating right now. Gray doesn't ask me to stop hurting myself, I think he can see how much I'm struggling right now.

I was doing so well too.

“I need my computer,” I say, my voice sounding as if it’s far away. “Sidney, can you work on a poison that’s longer acting, please? We need to be far away from the castle before it starts working. I just need to get through that dinner.”

“I’ll be with you,” Ayden reminds me.

“So will I, Dangerous Girl. I want you armed,” Grayson says, pulling my hair tie out so my hair tumbles down. I don’t have time to protest what he’s doing, because he’s pulling on it, forcing me to look back at him. “I bet you’d look sexy as fuck with weapons in all this pretty hair. Sidney, can you figure out poison laced hair pins or combs that won’t hurt Silla?”

I barely hear Sidney’s response as Grayson’s mouth covers mine. His warm lips give me something to hold on to. Whimpering, I hold tightly to his neck.

“We will try to provide for every eventuality, Baby. Just keep breathing for me, okay?” he asks.

It feels like a solemn promise as I whisper, “I promise.”

Isaac hands me my computer, and I pull up a map of the castle that I hid in the Dark Web. I’ve been cataloging every turn, hidden walkway, and entrance in the months that I’ve been living there. Well, once I was outside of the dungeon, of course.

“I never wanted it to get to this point,” I rasp. “I don’t... I never wanted to be queen.”

“You’re the perfect person for it,” Kenzo says at my feet. “Mistress, can I be frank?”

“Always,” I murmur. Reaching out, I can’t help myself from ruffling his hair. Kenzo leans into my touch, and it settles me. I’m so used to just barely surviving, it’s nice to be able to offer someone comfort.

“You’re very different than I thought you were. I know better than to judge someone. Kal is supposed to know better too,” he mutters. A look of

sadness and remorse crosses his face, and I just want to help him. The issue is that I'm still hurt by the assumptions people make about me. I'm the victim in many ways.

"Before you get sucked into the computer, go get your period situated," Sidney reminds me, and I jump.

How did I forget about that? As if it was waiting to make a reappearance, I wince as my cramps hit again.

"I'll be back," I mutter, a bit embarrassed.

"It's biology, Mistress," Kenzo reminds me, lips twitching.

"I'm making you tea for the pain," Sidney says, turning. "The emergency tea the other day is going to make your period worse."

Standing, I shrug. "Better than the alternative of being pregnant." I sigh. I avoid eye contact as I take the bag of feminine products and rush to the bathroom to put a tampon in as well as a pad.

This is one of the first periods I've had in a little over a year. The stress, being starved, all of those things have contributed to it basically disappearing. I almost didn't realize what was happening.

This is going to suck so much.

Slipping into my bedroom after, I exchange my sweater for one of Isaac's sweatshirts. It smells like him, and I need comfort. When I emerge, I see the tea is steeping and waiting for me.

"Isaac, will you go through that map with Andrya, please? You'll need to know the ins and outs of the castle. We also need to figure out how to plant people in the kitchen, guards' dining hall, and a guard or two at the servants' entrances," I order.

Wincing, I growl under my breath. I hate being a woman. I despise the unwelcome looks, the touches, the idea that I'm property to give, take, and even sell. It may be hormones, but I'm super pissed off right now.

"You look as if you could shoot lasers out of your eyes," Grayson comments. My lips twitch despite myself and I shrug.

“I feel that way. I also hurt. This is my first period in a year,” I explain aloud, curling up in a corner on the couch.

Ayden grabs a heated blanket, plugging it in and laying it over my stomach. “It’s gonna suck, but we got you,” he says softly, brushing his lips over my forehead.

“How?” Kenzo asks, surprised. “Don’t women have monthly periods unless they’re pregnant?”

“Stress and malnutrition,” I tell him. “This year isn’t a chapter of my life that I like to read out loud.”

Ayden’s lips press tightly against each other and I know that he agrees. We’ve all had a really rough time.

Taking a sip of my tea, I grimace. “I love you, but this is vile, Sidney. You clearly are trying to torture me.”

“Pet, I didn’t have time to make it taste good,” he chuckles. “I’m so sorry. I’ll rub your feet and feed you chocolate cake.”

Grayson snorts, standing. “It’s going to be a rough night. Kick out the dog so we can plan,” he says, striding out of the room.

“I have a feeling they don’t trust you,” I tell Kenzo with a small smile.

“I’ll work on that. I was a dick,” he says. “I can provide manpower to whatever you’re working on.”

“We’ll take it,” Ayden grunts, hunched over Isaac and Sidney. “We have two weeks to make this happen. Now go. The adults have to work now.”

My lips twist into a smirk as I sip more of my tea. My lovers are not the kind of people that you want to piss off.

“Bye, Falcon,” I tell him, forcing myself to use the right name.

Standing, Kenzo faces the room. “Do you know who Charming’s sister is?”

“What sister?” Grayson asks, his eyes rising to glance at Kenzo.

“Lauryn Monroe was married off when she was fourteen to a royal on the island of Naroï. It’s part of Forbach, but his father needed their naval fleet, so

he sold his oldest child to them,” Kenzo explains. “She escaped when she was twenty-one with me. Kal wasn’t born yet, and we didn’t reconnect until five years ago. Lauryn is my mother and she left me at an orphanage, stating that both my parents had died and I was alone in the world.”

“Oh my Gods,” I whisper. I’m staring at an heir to the throne.

“The organizers of the orphanage couldn’t find anyone to take me, so I was sent to a foster family that was a bit of a horror show,” he says with a shrug. “I should know better than to judge anyone. Mistress Silla, I am truly sorry.”

Fuck, that shouldn’t affect me as much as it does right now. Nope, no, absolutely not.

“Apology accepted,” I whisper. I think I’m in shock.

“So you’re telling me you’re an heir to the throne,” Ayden bites out. No wonder Kenzo hides himself and his brother as well as he does. Charming and Cinder haven’t had children yet. It’s been years, and I don’t even know if she can. “How are you still alive?”

“He hides really well,” I murmur. “Don’t you ever get tired of it?”

“Of course I do!” he exclaims, Kenzo’s cheeks turning pink as he realizes he yelled at me. I wave my hand, because I understand his emotions are running high.

“Why don’t you take the throne?” I ask. “Charming and Cinder don’t have children, so there are no other heirs other than your brother.”

“We don’t want it.” Kenzo shrugs. “Forbach needs a strong female ruler. I’m the wrong gender. It’s said that the crops grow better, people are more logical, and everything flourishes. Maybe it’s just a tall tale, but I believe it.”

I think it’s more the people who surround a woman that helps a country flourish. Sidney and Ayden are amazing with plants which would translate to crops, and I’m already seeing the rot that lives in those in power.

“Alright. It looks like we have some work to do,” I say, wincing at my cramps. It feels like my uterus is waging war inside of me. Sidney holds up

his balm for my stomach that is made of plants and CBD. “Yes, yes, please.”

The last word is whimpered, making him walk over quickly to drop to his knees next to me. Uncovering my stomach, he rubs the medicated balm into my skin.

“I think we’re in for it for the next few days, Little Love. Give everyone their tasks, and then try to nap,” he suggests, kissing my forehead.

“Damn uterus,” I mutter. Shark week is the worst.

“I’m going to go speak to my brother, start pulling in our more trusted people to help,” Kenzo suggests.

“I feel silly calling you Falcon and dog boy now that I know you’re royalty,” Ayden confesses with a wince.

“No one but Silla and my mother know my real name,” Kenzo says with a shrug. “I don’t fancy becoming the reason that Cinder begins to kill people at random trying to find me. Kal is the next in line after me, it’s just smarter for as few people to know my name as possible for now.”

“That’s a solid reason,” Ayden says with a nod.

I give Kenzo a few last instructions before he goes. I wonder how he’s going to explain the collar, because he never makes a move to remove it. “We need about twelve people to take over positions in the castle. Two in the kitchen, two at the servant entrances for the castle so that we can ensure the right people are in place. We also need servants in the dining halls where I’ll be having dinner and the guards do. There’s a lot to coordinate.” I sigh.

“It’ll all work out,” Kenzo says with a wink. “You have good people supporting you.”

Walking out of the apartment, we watch him leave. “I may hate him a little less,” Grayson grumbles, making me giggle even as it makes me cramp more.

“I think I have a little more planning in me before I’m done for today,” I tell them.

Together, we explore plant options that have no taste for the food, the

best times to switch out the guards, and decide on servants to pull from the castle a few days before the dinner. This way they would be able to find replacements for the staff. Cinder has a bad habit of killing the staff in moments of manic anger.

She also despises being short staffed as well, so there's a constant flow of new employees. It's the reason no one questioned the new soldier outside of the castle doors.

"I'll print this map out, and start creating our plan," Isaac promises. "Please go lay down. It's obvious that you're in pain."

I've started shifting constantly in an effort to relieve the aches, but it's impossible. I need to change my tampon and pad already too.

"I'll see if I can nap," I promise, standing.

Sidney hands me pills, brow raised. "Take these as you're going to bed, please. I didn't want to give them to you earlier, because they're definitely going to make you drowsy."

Ugh, it means a mandatory nap. It's just as well.

"Alright, thank you," I grumble.

"You're adorable when you're grouchy, Baby," Andrya says with a smirk.

Yes, I'm going to remind her of this when it's her turn to have cramps and mood swings. At least things are beginning to move smoothly now.

KAL

I think I'm turning into a bit of a stalker. I'm standing outside of Silla's apartment watching my brother slink out of it. He has the hood of his sweater covering his hair and face, but I know it's him because of his walk.

I may not have grown up with Falcon, but we've gotten closer over the past five years. I know from Falcon that our mom is suffering from dementia, but I haven't seen her since she abandoned me when I was five years old. She told me that she was going into a store across the street, and then there was a car accident during which they mistakenly thought that the woman hit was my mom. I don't know why Mom never came back.

I wonder if she also had some paranoia and mental health issues as well even then, though it's hard not to be paranoid when people are actually out to get you.

Leaning against the brownstone behind me, I watch the apartment as I think. Silla Tremaine confuses me. I don't understand why Cinder wants to hurt her, and I think the queen is even more cruel than we initially thought. She needs to be removed as soon as possible.

Bro: What are you doing?

Smirking, I look down at my phone. My brother would kick my ass if he knew what I was doing right now. I know he went to grovel at her feet.

Fuck, why does the thought of kneeling for that girl make me feel jealous of my brother?

Nothing. Do you need me?

Bro: I'm opening the war room. Pull six of our most trusted people who will respect our choice for the throne.

Shit, he's changed his tune. I know that we both started out on a rocky path with Silla, and her men probably wanted to eat him alive when he went in there.

"Hey!" someone whispers in my ear, making me scream. Fuck, that wasn't very manly. I was very much lost in my thoughts. Dammit.

I startle so hard, I fall completely into the ground. The woman who snuck up on me is five-foot-five, with blonde hair that has a blue streak through it. She's a tiny thing, so why am I so terrified?

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" she asks, baring her teeth at me. I don't even know if she knows who I am. I made the mistake of just being worried about Silla's boyfriends, when clearly her girlfriend is the scariest of them all.

"I... just wanted to see if Falcon was alright," I stutter.

"If you've been watching for any length of time, you'd know that he left a while ago," she says, rolling her eyes.

"Fine." I sigh, slowly standing up. Brushing my hands over my now dusty clothes, I take in the woman in front of me. "You're Andrya, right?"

"Yes, little brother, I am," she says, crossing her arms over her chest. While she's a spitfire and beautiful, I find I'm absolutely obsessed with Silla, even though I haven't seen her face in its entirety yet.

I have so many questions for her, I'm practically bursting with them. One of them is none of my business, but I want to know what the piece of paper given to her as she left the dance said. Did she ever check it?

Blowing out a breath, I decide to stop lying. "I was hoping to catch a glimpse of Silla," I explain. "I was a shit, and she was mad at me when she left the dance."

"Silla is busy in the apartment," Andrya tells me, and it makes me scowl as I think about her boyfriends.

"Is this your way of telling me Silla is indisposed because she's having sex?" I ask. Laughing, she shakes her head.

“You’re cute, but you don’t have a chance with our girl. While her heart is big, she has more than enough to worry about,” she tells me. “Silla doesn’t feel well, and we have battles to fight today. There’s a lot going on. You’re a distraction. Stalking is only sexy when you can back it up with a little more psychotic romance.”

So Silla likes crazy people, good to know. I’ve never felt like this about anyone, but I’ll accept the scraps at her table if it means I can be close to her.

“I’ll add that to my *How to Stalk and Get the Girl* guide,” I snark. “My brother texted me to do some work, so I need to go anyway.”

“Poor little boy’s fun has been cut short,” she coos snidely.

“Andrya, what is your problem with me?” I huff, annoyed.

“Silla is constantly bombarded with everyone’s assumptions. She needs to focus on the next steps because the weeks to come won’t be easy, Kal,” she explains. “You can’t insist on impeding on her heart, energy, and attention right now over a little crush. Now go on your way.”

Andrya makes the universal sign for shooing me along, and I hate that she’s right. I need to actually be able to contribute something.

“The night of the masquerade, an attendant gave her a note under the guise that she dropped it,” I tell her. “Did she ever check to see what it said? I’m curious, but I also pissed her off right after that, so she may have forgotten.”

Her forehead pinches as she looks from me to the apartment in thought. “I don’t think so,” she mutters. “Great, another thing to worry about. I’ll check her clutch from the party. On your way. I don’t want to find you stalking her again. If you want something, lurk without being so obvious, or just knock on the door.”

Jogging, she crosses the street and goes inside, a woman on a mission. At least I was able to do one of the things I wanted to do here, even if I never know the contents of the note.

Stepping out onto the sidewalk, I see a man in navy blue clothes staring at

the apartment building that Silla lives in. Frowning, I glance at my watch. It's almost nine at night, and the Queen's people don't have any reason to be here, except as spies.

Thankfully I have very nondescript features, and can blend well in my surroundings, so I continue on my way past him.

"Did you go into that apartment building at all, son?" he gruffly asks, his eyes still on it.

"No Sir, I was visiting friends in the building across from it," I lie smoothly. "Any reason why?"

"None whatsoever," he murmurs. "The Queen wants eyes on that apartment. Would you be willing to help?"

Fuck me. I'm never stalking anyone again. "I don't want any trouble," I say nervously. "What would I need to do?"

"Find reasons to be in the building, and be the eyes and ears of the queen," he says idly.

Kenzo is going to kill me. "I'll do what I can," I tell him. "I'm not here very often."

The man nods, and I walk past, feeling exposed as I have my back to him. As soon as I can, I turn onto another street to get away from the eyes that turned to stare at me as I passed him. The Queen's auditors are creepy as hell.

Forcing myself to breathe, I pull out my phone, getting ahold of people for an emergency meeting with my brother. As hard as we are fighting to put Silla on the throne, there's only a handful of numbers that I feel comfortable to call.

The war room is in the basement of a library famous in certain circles for carrying banned books. The Queen has no idea it exists, and Falcon makes a point of keeping it that way. There are six different places that we meet on rotation, making sure never to meet in the same one twice in a row.

My brother is careful to a fault, and some people may call him paranoid. Yet... I still say it's not paranoia if they're really out to get you.

Seventeen

ANDRYA

I noticed the man who was watching the apartment as I walked across the street after scaring the shit out of Kal. It's dark, but the shadow under the street light is noticeable. I will always remember the color navy as well, due to the danger it poses to us.

Filing the information for later, I quickly walk inside. I want to make sure I tell Isaac to see if he can find a better photo of him off the video cameras he set up outside of our apartment and the surrounding buildings. We're aware Cinder will want to watch our every move, however we also want to know who she has working for her.

Isaac and Grayson glance up as I slip in the door. "Did you scare the shit out of the kid?" Gray asks with a smirk. We played rock, paper, scissors for the honor of going to see what Kal was up to. It was so satisfying watching him scream. Little punk.

"Yep. He screamed and fell over," I chuckle. "It was so much fun."

"Damn, sis. We haven't made anyone scream in a while," Ayden chuckles, coming into the living room from the kitchen. He's snacking on a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, and it's making me hungry.

"You pissed on the last person who screamed for us." I grin. Yeah, we're the Fuck-a-teers for a reason, and not just because the three of us like to fuck. "Is Sidney with Silla then?"

"Yeah, she fell asleep with the sleep aid, but was whimpering in her sleep. I fucking hate that the emergency tea is so hard on her. Damn limp dicks need to keep it in their pants," Isaac growls.

If their cocks were limp, we wouldn't have an issue, but it gives me an idea. When Silla is queen, I'm going to suggest that any man who rapes a woman be given a shot that causes erectile dysfunction permanently. Fuck

yeah, that's one hell of a new law.

Stirring myself from my thoughts, I force myself to focus. "Did you know that Kal hasn't ever seen Silla's face because of the masks, but is a bit obsessed with her? It's a cute infatuation, though I don't think he's Silla's type. He's so... sweet," I mutter.

Grayson snorts, leaning his forearms on his thighs. It's some damn fine arm porn.

"Not one of us can be considered sweet," he says. "Isaac is grumpy, the three of you are insane, and if I had the opportunity to chase Silla through the woods and fuck her when I caught her, I'd take it."

"I vote we make that happen after we kill the queen," I insist, shivering because that's fucking hot.

"I'll chase you down, Sweetness, whenever you want," Sidney whispers behind me as he wraps his hand around my neck. Whimpering, I rub my thighs together. I think I may finally be ready for sex. I've had a long road to heal. "If you're needy, just say the word."

Kissing my cheek, he moves away, the promise covering me in goosebumps.

"Speaking of Silla's men," Gray says, "did Falcon remove the collar from around his throat?"

"I don't think so," I muse. "Are we counting him as hers? Although his groveling has been entertaining to watch."

"Silla has found herself a pet," Sidney smirks. "I think it's good for her. I wasn't sure about Falcon, but he seems to want to help us."

"We'll reserve judgment then," Isaac grunts, going back to his computer. "I am going to need to meet with Falcon's people so we can ensure they're in the proper positions."

"He left it with me before he left," Sidney confirms. "Did the boy want anything else?"

While Kal is nineteen, it feels painfully young. We're going to be giving

him shit for a long time.

“Oh!” I gasp. I keep forgetting... “I need to check Silla’s clutch for a note that was apparently given to her at the dance, and Isaac we have company outside. I think it’s one of the Queen’s auditors, because he was wearing a navy blue suit. He stopped Kal to speak to him. Do you think that you can check the cameras for a better image of him?”

“Yeah,” he grunts, tapping the keys of the laptop. “I got it. Do we have to worry about the kid turning on us?”

“No, I don’t think so.” I shake my head. “If he turns on us, he’ll turn on Falcon, and I just don’t see that happening, Isaac. Focus that big brain of yours on figuring out who Cinder has watching us instead of finding enemies that don’t exist.”

Isaac rolls his eyes at me as he gets to work, and I start to search for Silla’s hand bag. It’s not in the living room, or our bedroom, or the bathrooms. We were all exhausted, stripped and went to bed after the party.

Silla was also livid after her experiences with the brothers. They’re lucky we were as nice as we were. Sidney wanted to take a paring knife to their dicks. Grayson vetoed it. Party pooper.

Digging in the closet, I finally find the damn bag.

““Drya?” Silla asks sleepily. Fuck me running.

“I’m so sorry, Baby. I need to find the note you were given. Did you forget about it?” I ask, coming out of the closet to sit next to her.

“Yeah,” she murmurs. “Sorry. Too much happening. What does it say?”

Silla is so groggy, so I brush her hair back as I open her bag. “Kal was outside of the building skulking,” I tattle. “He is the one who told me about the paper.”

Silla makes a face, making me chuckle as I pull out the note and read it to Silla.

I need to see you, Drizella. Come to the castle on

Friday. West entrance. 4pm.

-Cinder

“Oh my Gods,” Silla gasps. “That’s the day after tomorrow. Why didn’t she mention it on the phone call?”

“I don’t think she wanted Charming to know,” I murmur. “Cinder seemed really off when you were speaking to her. I just don’t know if she expects you to come alone.”

“I’m sure she does, which is another reason she didn’t say anything,” she groans. “This is gonna suck.”

“It’ll suck tomorrow,” I remind her. “Go to sleep, you’re already halfway there.”

Playing with her hair, I help her fall back asleep, humming a song that Sidney’s aunt used to sing to us when we were little. The woman was tough, but fair for the most part.

I wait a few extra minutes after her breath evens out before tearing out of the room to find the guys.

“Cinder is out of her damned mind if she thinks Silla isn’t going armed,” I growl, handing the note to the first person I see, which is my brother.

“Motherfucker.” He sighs, reading out loud for everyone. “Can’t we inject a tracker into Silla’s body?”

“Not without her consent,” Sidney says sadly. Damn, I love his psycho ass. “I wish she wasn’t going to be in so much pain when she goes to see her. Although, the tea I gave her to make sure she wasn’t able to hold a pregnancy after the rapes means that she probably will end this period faster. It’s why her body is pushing her so hard.”

“I can’t wait to murder them all,” I growl.

“Speaking of, I need your opinion on what you think about using foxglove as our poison of choice for this,” Sidney says.

“It depends on how much you’re giving the person, and when you want it

to begin to work,” I tell him. “It could begin to affect people between thirty minutes or two hours. I’m unsure how long Ayden will be needed at the castle with Gray and Silla. Strychnine begins to work even faster. What is your target time to be out of there?”

“I would like to be out of the castle in under two hours,” Gray grunts. “Our appearance is to be almost forgotten by the time people begin to get sick.”

“What about ricin?” Ayden asks, biting his lip. “It won’t begin to work until four hours after being ingested. It’s also difficult to detect, outside of the bitter taste some people experience. We would need the cook to be in on this so that they’re able to mask the taste, while ensuring that we don’t ingest it.”

“Your food needs to be prepared separately,” I murmur. “The exact same meal, hold the poison.”

Isaac chortles, making me giggle. “Life is never fucking boring, that’s for damn sure.”

“Nope. I’ll take the crazy if it means Silla is safe, we get the girl, and the evil step-sister is dead as a doornail.” I shrug. “We have less than two days before she needs to go to the castle, so let’s make sure we’re making moves to get people into the castle as early as possible.”

“I texted Falcon,” Sidney says. “He said he’ll call me after he’s done speaking to his people. He’s giving them the bare minimum in details outside of their job, so that no one can betray us. It’s unlikely, but—”

“We’ve learned our lessons well.” I sigh, touching where my brand is. Thank the Gods Ayden suggested tattooing over it. It’s made my day to day ablutions much easier, and I can deal with seeing myself naked again. “I’m going to go watch Silla sleep. I know it’s creepy—”

“I do it all the time,” Sidney reminds me. “I think we probably all do. I don’t give two shits what it makes me.”

“Simps for our girl is what it makes us,” Isaac smirks. “Give her a kiss for me. I’ll be up a little longer.”

“Same, I want to speak to Falcon with Sidney. I can’t believe he’s in line to be the heir to the throne,” Gray says in awe. “Charming never really seemed as if he wanted the throne. He’s always liked to party, he fucked his way through a long line of women before deciding Cinder was his beloved.”

“They can’t stand each other from what I can see,” Ayden rumbles.

“They had to have liked something to begin with,” I mumble. I’m exhausted, and half wave at them as I walk to the bedroom. I’ll deal with it tomorrow, I just want to snuggle with my girl tonight.

GRAYSON

We're in for a long night, and I'm a little jealous as I watch Andryra walk into the bedroom to sleep with Silla. Hell, she may just end up watching her and that's a gift that I won't take for granted ever again.

"What is Cinder up to?" I grumble. "She just spoke to Silla today, why wouldn't she tell her that she wanted to see her? Is this some kind of trap?"

"The queen didn't look too pleased with her husband." Ayden sighs. "We can't get onto the grounds, but let's suggest to Falcon that we get a guard on post that's loyal to the Underground. It can be someone who is already employed by the Queen if needed. I just want eyes on our girl."

Sidney's phone rings and he grunts, "Hello? Yeah, we've been waiting for your call, but Silla and Andryra went to bed already."

He clicks the speaker button on the phone, but Falcon has already started speaking. "...people in place for the day you three will be going to see Charming and Cinder. Kal mentioned something about a note? He sounded pretty fixated on it."

"Cinder is keeping secrets it seems." I sigh. "She had a note dropped for Silla, demanding that she meet her at the West entrance of the castle on Friday. I hate to impose, but we need eyes there."

"There's a groundskeeper who is sympathetic to the cause," Falcon mutters. "What time is this happening?"

"Four in the afternoon, which is such an odd time," Ayden says. "Wouldn't there be a lot of people around?"

"They run their training exercises during that time," Falcon explains. "It's kind of ridiculous how predictable they are, but no one has ever gotten close enough to map out their schedule. All guards and soldiers will be there except a skeleton crew. I can make certain the groundskeeper is near enough to keep

an eye on Silla. I wish I could help with someone who would be armed but —”

“I don’t think a guard or soldier would be helpful, and they’ll all be otherwise engaged. This is good,” Isaac says from across the room. “I need to send you a map of the castle with all of the secret passages. Don’t share this, and be careful who you speak to about what their roles are.”

“I agree with that,” Falcon says ruefully. “I met with each person on their own, discussed their role, and that was it. No one can have the entire plan just in case. The women who will be in the kitchens don’t even know that they’re handling poison. I merely told them to make sure no one tries the food once they slip the item into it. I don’t want this on their consciences, and there’s less likelihood of them getting caught. The nerves will be less despite how pivotal their role is.”

“Good man,” I praise him. Falcon is quiet for a moment, and I wonder if I broke him.

“Umm, yeah. So, that’s set. I’ll make sure Mistress is covered as well. Need anything else?” he asks uncomfortably.

I enjoy riling him up.

“Just one more thing. Are you still wearing the collar, Pet?” Sidney says in his most seductive voice.

Silence. “How the fuck does she get anything done with the five of you around?” Falcon asks, scandalized.

“Yeah, I think we may keep you,” Ayden snickers. “You’re fun. But for real... are you?”

“Yes,” Falcon whispers.

“Good boy,” the four of us chorus at the same time before grinning maniacally. Yeah, I guess we really are assholes, but I don’t care. Silla adores us, and Andrya is stuck with us for life.

“Fuck me,” Falcon mutters, hanging up.

“He’s kind of adorable,” Sidney says with a predatory smile. He may

have found a new toy.

“Let’s see what Silla wants to do first,” I tell him with a smug smile. “She may decide that she has her hands full. We have a bit of a road to go with her.”

“We got hijacked tonight, but tomorrow I want to do a new version of my twenty questions that I used to play with her at the camp,” Ayden says. “It was the only way that I could figure out how to connect with her. It may be childish...”

“It worked, though,” Isaac confirms. “I would have to drag her out of your room because she’d get so involved in the game.”

“It took eight million years to play, though,” Ayden grumbles.

“Breakfast, we’ll do it before the shit show of our lives takes over,” I decide. “What is the exact purpose for the game?” I know it’s been skimmed over, but I want to make sure this doesn’t go sideways on us.”

“It’ll help us figure out what is off the table for the six of us, what we still like, and what new sexual activities we’d like to try together,” Sidney states. “We are all sexual creatures, but Silla is...”

“Different isn’t even the right term,” Isaac grunts, glancing at the bedroom where she’s sleeping. “We can’t really discuss what she may or may not be feeling because we don’t know, not completely. Trusting her to know what she needs is the best path, I think.”

“So that’s what we’ll do,” I agree. “Let’s finish up and make sure we get some sleep. I’ll make pancakes.”

“Fuck yeah!” Ayden fist pumps, making me smirk.

We’ll find our way through this minefield of trauma, one step at a time. And then maybe find therapists who will be willing to see us. Or not.



SILLA’S ASS is somehow grinding against my dick. I have no idea how this

happened, when Andrya and Sidney were between us when I fell asleep. Always happy to spoon, I rub her hip as I kiss her neck. I want to make sure she has a way to wiggle away in case she's not awake yet.

“Morning, Gray,” she yawns. “Are you happy to see me, big man?”

“As you can see, I very much am,” I chuckle, allowing my arm to encircle her waist. “How are you feeling, Dangerous Girl?”

“Icky,” Silla pouts. “I know that sounds petulant, but I want a shower and an orgasm.”

Smirking, I move my hands to her breasts, massaging and tweaking her nipples through her sleep shirt. I think this one may actually belong to Ayden. I love how she insists on wearing our clothes.

“Is that why you're grinding all over my cock, Baby?” I tease her, loving how she writhes against me. I'm surprised Silla woke up needy, but I have no issues filling her up with my cock at any time.

“Yes,” she gasps. “And this way we can shower together, get dirty, and have ease of cleanup.”

“I'm surprised I woke up and we're the only ones in bed. I'm always happy to have you to myself, though.”

“They're all working on things for our hopefully last ever meal with Charming and Cinder,” Silla says, turning in my arms as she strips her shirt off. Godsdamn.

“I think my brain just short circuited,” I rumble, dipping my head down to pull her nipple into my mouth. Whimpering, her fingers tangle in my hair, pulling me tighter to her as I draw my teeth along her nipple.

“Gray,” she wails. “Please...”

“Go fuck our girl!” Ayden yells, making me smirk as I let go of her nipple.

“Fucking first, then murder plots, Baby,” I remind her. I don't feel very bad about planning to kill so many people with a painful poison. It's very simple: don't fuck around and you won't find out.

I want to be able to live my life, and that means making my girl scream my name first thing in the morning. Getting up onto my knees, I scoop Silla into my arms smoothly. Two long strides on my knees, and I get off the bed, walking into the bathroom.

Silla giggles as I sit her on the counter so I can drop my joggers, the only clothing I'm wearing, to the ground. Our actions have consequences, but I think some of our madness is rubbing into our girl. She bares her teeth as I turn on the shower, and I fist my hand in her hair, pulling her head back to kiss her.

"In the shower," I growl, lifting her in my arms.

"But—" she gasps, and I know that she's going to mention that she's still wearing her panties. I don't know how heavy her flow is right now, so it'll be easier to toss it into the corner of the shower to deal with later.

My lips fused to hers, walking right into the water. Her hair gets wet quickly, plastered to our bodies, but I don't care. I want to be inside of her, to feel her strangle my cock. It's been so long, and I want to be hers again.

"Gray," she breathes, eyes panicked.

"Tell me," I murmur, setting her feet on the ground. I push her panties down, I kick them to the corner of the shower, arching my brow. "Now what, Dangerous girl?"

"I... have a tampon in," she whispers, watching what I'll do next. The thing Silla doesn't understand yet is that I don't care about biological functions. They're normal.

Dropping to my knees, I shrug as I lift her foot to my shoulder. Skimming my hand over the outside of her leg, I massage it, loving how her eyes hood as I get closer to where she wants my hand to be.

"I love how you taste. I'm fucking feral for it. I want to live between your legs, but I have to share you," I tell her. I can see the string of the tampon, so I gently pull it out before throwing it the same way as her panties. "Give me this pretty pink pussy, and be a good girl."

“Should I call you Daddy too?” she snarks just as I pull her roughly over my face.

“Yes, and often, Baby,” I growl as I open my mouth to devour her. I roll my tongue over her clit, loving when she holds tightly to my hair. Silla is riding my face like a damn pro.

Keening and whimpering, her foot drops from my shoulder to behind my back, her hips thrusting over my face naturally. The sounds I make as I push my tongue into her sweet pussy are animalistic, and I don’t even realize it’s me at first. There’s something primal about her face fucking me during her period. I hope she’s ready, because I may need this to be a regular thing.

“Gray, Gods, fuck me,” Silla whines, and I know she’s close. Come on Baby, do it. Cream for me.

Licking, sucking, I can tell she needs to clamp her tight walls around something. Whatever my Dangerous Girl wants, she gets. Pushing my fingers into her slick channel, I finger fuck her hard.

“Gray, oh yes. Baby, don’t stop!” Silla’s eyes roll as her legs start to shake. Yet, she’s not there yet. Rolling my fingers up as I push in and out of her tight core, I suck hard on her clit while using my teeth.

Screaming, she gushes over my face, making me growl in triumph. Standing, I shove my face in the streaming water, not for my comfort, but hers. Opening my mouth, I fill it with liquid as I swish it around, then spit it out to the side. I’m sure I’m still a bit of a mess, but I need her now.

“I need to be inside you, sweet girl,” I rumble, turning back to her. She smiles at me with a nod, and I lift her up, allowing her legs to lock around me. Shoving her against the wall, I barely allow myself to listen to her hiss from touching the cold tile before I’m pushing my thick cock inside of her. “Godsdamn, Beautiful, you’re so tight. Am I hurting you? Please tell me.”

“A little pinch as I stretch... I like it though,” she confesses, her fingers indenting into my shoulders.

“Yeah?” I grunt, twisting and thrusting my hips to drag my piercings in

all the right places.

“Daddy, oh Gods your piercings,” Silla whines, making my cock twitch.

“Did you forget about it?” I tease her, dragging my tongue up her neck before sucking on her pulse point.

“Kind of? It’s been way too damn long.” She sighs. It really has been. I feel as if pieces of myself are slowly fitting back together now that she’s returned. It’s been a long road. I’ve become more callous in her absence.

“It has. Fuck, I’ve missed you. We’ll do anything to keep you. You realize this, right?”

Silla cries out as I lift her until I’m almost all the way out of her pussy before dropping her down. Her nails slash down my back as her head thumps gently against the wall. “Yes, yes I do,” she rasps as I thrust faster.

“Good,” I mutter, covering her mouth with mine. I swipe my tongue along hers, wondering if she can taste herself. Silla just moans, holding tightly to me as she bounces on my cock. Her tits are perfect, moving with every thrust, and I thank the Gods for the day she’ll start gaining a little weight back. She’s still too thin.

There’s so much working against us, and yet we still find the light. Silla is my bright star, even her memory kept me from losing my mind when I thought she was gone.

“I love you,” I gasp. There’s black spots encroaching across my eyesight, and Silla’s walls start to flutter around me. “Baby, are you going to come for me again?”

“I think... soon, Daddy!” she keens, leaning harder against the wall. Using her body at an angle, I hold tightly to her hips as I fuck up into her. The angle is deeper, and as her noises become more desperate, I know she’s going to come apart for me.

“That’s my girl. So damn perfect for me,” I praise. “I’m going to come so hard, you’ll be feeling the absence of my cock. Will you beg me for more, I wonder?”

“Yes, Daddy,” she grunts, shuddering. “I’ll always need more.”

“Fuck, your cunt is so greedy, you’re milking me like such a good little whore. Are you Daddy’s whore?” I snarl. I wait to see if I pushed her too far, but her mouth opens into a wordless scream.

Burying my head in her neck, I fuck her through her orgasm, whispering nonsense as I come. Dammit. Silla has to be protected at all costs. I won’t survive losing her again. Tomorrow is going to give me new gray hair.

Breathing hard, I kiss her neck, holding her even as my legs threaten to dump me on my ass. We’re both shaking hard, and I swear her pussy pulled my soul from my body.

“Holy shit, Silla,” I rasp.

“I can’t think yet,” she confesses, laughing weakly. We hold each other tightly, but my thoughts follow me even as we clean up to start the day.

Protect, kill, and get our damn happily ever after. Whatever that means.

Eighteen

AYDEN

I make certain breakfast is amazing, which means I have to beg Gray for chocolate chip pancakes.

“I swear I am living with a toddler,” he chuckles.

“No, Silla needs chocolate,” my sister reminds him, coming to the rescue. I grin at him, even as he shakes his head at me.

“Alright then,” he grunts. “Pancakes, scrambled eggs, potato hash, and toast. Am I missing anything?”

Silla is doing her hair after her orgasmic shower, which we all heard. Gray is a lucky bastard.

“Are you finally getting your wish, Ayden? Twenty questions at breakfast?” Sidney teases me.

“Yes! Things keep interrupting the lead in to suggest it. It’s been so damn busy, and now Silla has to go see Cinder for only the Gods know what reason. I want her to have a fun, relaxing day before tomorrow.”

“We can make that happen,” Gray promises as he begins to cook. “Grab me the eggs, Sidney? I think the orgasms started the day off perfectly.”

“Gloating is a new look for you,” Andrya snorts. “I don’t know how Silla agreed to it. I just feel bloated since I’m on my period.”

“You’re beautiful at any time,” Sidney reminds her. “I’d enjoy—”

“Brother here,” I remind them. In the heat of the moment, I can ignore a lot. I don’t want to discuss my sister’s period and sex as I’m watching everyone else cook. Gray is right, I’m too much of a perfectionist, I hyper fixate, and then burn shit. I’d like to eat this century. “Please don’t finish that sentence.”

Sidney just smirks. “I’ll make sure to have this conversation away from childlike ears,” he tells me, winking. The man has fucked both of us, just not

at the same time. I'm not a child, I just don't want to hear about the ins and outs of possible period sex that he may have with my twin. I may be the younger twin, but I can be an adult about this.

Ten minutes later, Silla walks in with a small smile.

"Good morning," she says. "Coffee?"

Isaac adjusts his glasses, pointing at the coffee mug under the machine that's brewing.

"My hero," Silla murmurs, walking over to wrap her arms around his waist.

"You get a break from tea this week, Little Love," Sidney tells her. "Let me know when you're just about done with your period and I'll get you started again."

"I feel like this is curiously altruistic," she teases.

"It is. I want to be buried as soon as possible in your tight little pussy." He grins.

Thank God that Silla isn't drinking because she chokes on her own spit in her surprise. Coughing, she pats her chest as Isaac rubs her back in amusement.

"I'm so glad you do this out of the kindness of your own heart," Silla sputters.

"Orgasms are a kindness, Pet," Sidney croons, walking over to push her against Isaac's front as he kisses her lips. Isaac grinds against her ass, and both smirk as they enjoy their Silla filling. Gods, now I really want to watch them fuck her together.

Discreetly adjusting myself, I ignore Grayson as he glances knowingly at me as he begins to plate the food.

"Grab coffee and plates, everyone. Stop trying to kill and turn on our girlfriend," Gray orders.

"Aw man. But Daddy," Sidney whines, making me snicker.

"You heard her call me that in the shower and now you're jealous, huh?"

He smirks. “Get moving.”

Sidney dips his head to kiss Silla on the cheek before moving to the island to pick up plates.

“Silla, focus on getting some coffee into you, Baby,” Gray reminds her as he leaves the kitchen.

“Gods yes.” She sighs. “Coffee good.”

“Yes, Love,” Isaac chuckles, squeezing her waist before jumping in to help.

Soon, we’re all moaning around good food and coffee at the table. Grayson is an amazing cook, and really damn efficient.

“This is so good,” Silla murmurs, taking one last bite before sitting back in her chair.

“We were thinking,” I begin slyly as I push my plate away. My stomach is so happy right now. “Wanna play twenty questions with us? We talked about it before, but—”

“Life happened,” she says with a nod. “Yes. There are certain things I don’t know if I’m comfortable doing anymore.”

I’m so glad we’re murdering all of those spineless fuckers. Silla should never have suffered any of the things that she has because her step-sister is what? Obsessed with her? Jealous? I can’t even begin to tell you that I know what goes through the mind of Queen Cinder.

She’s a crazy fucking twatwafer.

“We’ll get through them,” I promise. “Pinky swear. No one laugh.”

Everyone shrugs and puts up their pinky for a group pinky swear. By this point, they are used to my eccentricities.

Once done, I take a deep breath. Fuck, I kind of don’t want to go first.

“Someone else begin,” I mumble, laying my head on my fist.

“Will you let me chase you in the woods and fuck you if I catch you?” Gray asks, leaning back in his chair with his arms crossed. He’s so nonchalant, and it’s the perfect question, because Silla’s lips twitch.

“Yes. You’ve been itching to chase me,” she says. “I also think it may be fun. Is this a group activity or just you and me?”

“Oh, I want it to happen several times,” he says with a wide predatory smile. This is a side of Grayson that we don’t often get to see, since he’s so often our voice of reason. “The first time, I think I want it to be just us.”

“Yes. Yes, please,” Silla whispers, biting her lip. She shifts, wincing, and I know it’s cramps. I don’t even wait to be told, I get up to grab the cream Sidney made her for pain.

Placing it in front of her, I bask in her relieved smile as she applies it along her stomach. I don’t know what it does, but it definitely relaxes her. Soon, the lines on her face are no longer pinched.

“What is a hard limit?” Andrya asks, leaning forward. “I don’t like to be approached from behind unless I know who it is. So the guys all say my name before touching me.”

Nodding, Silla says, “I can make sure I do the same. Anal is a hard limit right now. All I can think is that it’ll hurt. I wasn’t terribly experienced before we were all arrested, so it’s kind of ruined things for me. I can do fingers maybe, but everything else...”

Silla shudders, and my eyes widen. Fuck. I know this is needed, but I hate seeing her in pain. Isaac is closest to her, and runs his thumb over her hand gently. Taking a deep breath, she opens her eyes that I’m sure she doesn’t remember closing.

“What is one thing you want to explore, Andrya?” Silla asks weakly.

“Sex at all.” She winces. “Sidney made me have an orgasm while I was watching you and Ayden, and that was really hot, but I haven’t done much else.”

“That’s fine,” Silla says gently with a smile. “There’s no hurry. We’ll work up to whatever you want to do.”

“Okay,” Andrya says, blinking quickly. The nightmares have slowed, but the scars still lay deep within us all. I hadn’t been able to really think about

sex myself, either, until Silla came back into our lives.

We all thought we'd always be broken. My cock proudly has Silla's name drawn on it, because it will always belong to her. I'm attracted to men, but my cock misses her. She is the reason that I temper my insanity now.

I feel like pulling off the wings of pretty things much less now.

"What is something that you want to try in the bedroom?" I rasp, clearing my throat quickly. I wanted this to be an easy conversation, but the truth is that it isn't.

"Me? I want to ride someone's face while I'm fucked from behind." Silla grins. "I also want to suck cock while I'm doing that. Andrya, maybe I can ride your face, Baby, and we can work on some things together."

This woman... It may sound silly to want to kiss Silla as she talks about having sex with your sister, but this is also about helping to heal her. I want to make sure that the poison we are spiking everyone's food with in the castle will include the fuckers who tortured us all for months. They should rot in hell, painfully.

"Yes, please," Andrya says, sounding as if her throat is dry. Like the good brother that I am, I fill a glass with water and hand it to her. Smiling in thanks, she takes a sip.

"How are you and Isaac doing, Grayson?" Silla asks. I'm keeping track of the number of questions, but my girl is really going for the throat. It's difficult to be in a poly relationship, but to also survive a traumatic experience together and salvage those relationships isn't always likely.

Isaac and Gray had a rocky few months. Isaac bent over backward to be whatever Grayson needed, but their easy friendship really took a blow.

"We're better, I think," Gray rumbles, cutting a glance at Isaac to confirm.

"We are. It's just that we had just started exploring our relationship and then we were all convicted of treason." Isaac sighs, rubbing under his eyes. "Then, when we were released, it almost felt wrong to continue without you.

The color of life bled out.”

“Yeah,” Sidney mutters. “I didn’t even want to be outside with the plants without you. Silla, you are our glue. I know life isn’t a picnic right now as we work to dethrone the Queen, but we need you.”

“You mean, as we commit mass murder?” Silla snarks. “There’s not one person who we’ve earmarked for death that has a redeeming quality, so I don’t have an ounce of remorse for them. There’s no other way I can see to be able to remove Cinder from the throne.”

“A clean sweep is the best way,” Sidney agrees shrewdly. “We can analyze who is left that is corrupt afterward and move forward with a plan.”

“How do you feel about spanking?” Isaac asks, changing the subject.

Thinking about it makes goosebumps ride over her skin. “I shouldn’t like it after everything but—”

“What you like or dislike shouldn’t be quantified like that. It doesn’t make you wrong to like certain things in the bedroom, no matter how depraved you may worry that it is,” I explain. “We always want to ensure that all parties consent, and that’s enough.”

“Answer Isaac’s question, and then I have one,” Grayson says intently, his blue eyes on Silla.

“I like being spanked and punished by you still,” she murmurs. “It helps me find my center when I’m really panicking or upset.”

“Thank you,” Isaac says with a smile.

“I woke you up with an orgasm while you were sleeping, so you couldn’t consent. Did that bother you?” Gray asks.

Oh. Ohhh. I’m interested in this question as well.

“No, once I knew it was you, I enjoyed it. I think I should get used to having sex with you all awake before we have sex while I’m sleeping though,” she explains, her brow furrowing. “I don’t want my brain to trick me into thinking it’s someone else. It may be different if it all feels good. Sex hasn’t been an enjoyable experience until recently.”

Silla blinks quickly, and I know she's shaking off her memories. I don't want her to relive those, but this conversation is necessary.

"I think you're right. Your ass was up in the air while you were sleeping, and you were so..."

"Irresistible," Sidney grunts. "Your pussy was glistening with your release. Godsdamn, you're so damn perfect."

Silla blushes with embarrassment at the compliment, but it's true.

"One more question before we get on with our day, Kitten. How do you feel about dog boy?" I ask her. It's a question that has been in my head for a bit. He's fierce enough to fight for his place, while still submitting to his mistress. I didn't like him much before because of his pacifist nature, but things have changed.

"I think... I may like him," Silla says shyly. "Is that a problem?"

"Not at all, Baby Girl," Gray murmurs. "We just need to know who we're protecting. What's yours is ours. He's also kind of fun to fuck with."

The five of us grin ferally, leaving Silla to shake her head at us.

"I love your psycho asses, but I'm not doing dishes. Let's go," she orders.

"Yes, Mistress," we chortle, bursting into giggles. "Yeah no, that's definitely Falcon's thing," I crow.

We're all insane here, it's what the world has forced us to become.

SILLA

I'm still cramping as the guards let me into the castle grounds. I'm wearing a navy blue dress, heels, and I feel like a doll. I don't mean in a pretty, fun way. I don't feel like myself.

I'm a perfect, manufactured person, one that my step-sister has created.

"Don't dawdle, Crawford," the guard barks to the man staring at me. Both have had a chance to look their fill in the dining hall before while I was being punished by the queen. "We have training to attend."

"Yes, Sir," he mumbles, giving me another leering smile before moving along. Thank the Gods for small mercies, though I'm sure there's a reason Cinder chose this time. My heels click across the pavers as I walk around the castle, staying close to the wall so I'm less noticed.

I'm cutting it close to the time asked for, but running isn't very lady-like. Forcing myself to breathe when the world starts to go blurry, I remind myself that I'm wearing my anklet. My dress brushes the ground as I walk, no one can see it, but my loves are tracking me like the healthy, obsessed psychos that they are.

Better to be over prepared, after all.

I can see my step-sister pacing along the west entrance, and swallow hard.

I CAN LEAVE.

I'm relatively safe.

Nothing bad will happen to me.

“DRIZELLA YOU TOOK FOREVER,” she admonishes, grabbing my arm.

“It’s barely four,” I remind her softly. “Wait, what are you doing?”

“I need you for something. Come along,” Cinder says, pulling me toward the partially open door.

“No, I wasn’t planning on going in. I thought that’s why you asked to meet outside?” I squeak.

“I didn’t want you to come through the front door, and there are too many people outside,” Cinder admonishes. I glance over my shoulder to see the groundskeeper watching with wide eyes.

Fuck a duck!

“Cinder,” I begin again, but she yanks me into the dark corridor, pulling the door closed behind me.

“I think you’ve gotten far too used to your freedom, Drizella,” she scoffs, her nails digging into my wrist. “Lana and I miss you, and my husband won’t leave because he wants to see you.”

“I couldn’t ask before, but why? I’ve never had anything to do with the king.” I feel as if I may be overstepping, however this has been eating at me. Charming has never been interested in me before.

“He has a task only you can provide.” Cinder shrugs. “My darling husband has decided that he needs to see you in person to demand it of you.”

My blood runs cold, because I have no idea what it could be. Cinder is also not about to tell me. I’m supposed to do whatever my queen and king tell me to, but neither of them seem to be right in the head. She rushes me through the halls, finally pushing me into a room where there are twelve other people inside. And Lana.

What the hell is going on?

“I found my gorgeous sister,” Cinder says casually as she sits at the head of the table. “I believe those were the last of the demands for backing my divorce from the King of Forbach.”

What the fuck.

My jaw drops at her words before I force myself to show composure, as if I knew what was happening the entire time.

“Why have you been out of the castle, Drizella?” an older woman asks. I believe she’s a duchess on the west coast of Forbach. “It was my understanding that you’ve been living here for the past year, though your step-sister kept you hidden away for much of it. She said you were feeling poorly.”

You could say that...

“Yes, that’s correct,” I lie, still standing. I have no idea why I’m here. “I’ve been doing some work for the queen outside of the castle.”

“She’s very talented,” Cinder gushes. She’s so full of shit, though. The only reason I’m being allowed out of her domain is because Andrya and the guys made me a condition to help her.

“We asked for your attendance for a specific reason,” the duchess says. “While Queen Cinder is an excellent ruler, we need to know all of the facts before we agree to this divorce. Come sit and tell us everything Forbach is facing as far as pros and cons for the future. You haven’t been at any of our meetings, and to be honest, your thoughts are always sought out because you are objective.”

This is why I’m beaten within an inch of life every time I’m forced into a meeting. These dignitaries think I have great ideas, and force me to discuss them. Fuck.

Cutting a look at my step-sister, she merely waves her hand drolly for me to join them at the table. “Come along, Drizella. We don’t have all day. I want my divorce, so lay it on the table. Everyone knows you know the kingdom’s politics as well as I do.”

That’s not entirely true. I had no idea how impoverished the people were. Nor did I have any idea of the shadier dealings my step-sister has been up to until I started searching for them.

“Yes, Your Majesty,” I respond on autopilot. For the next hour, I discuss

the dealings in each quadrant, how Cinder deals with crime (the kind she doesn't reward), and move into what her plans for each issue are. Unfortunately, I've sat in on so many of these meetings, I could talk about the issues in my sleep.

"Thank you, Drizella. The queen has told us that you're going to be her advisor, is that correct?" the duchess asks.

I would rather eat broken glass, thank you.

"I believe Queen Cinder has yet to ask me," I murmur diplomatically, struggling not to flinch when she kicks me. Dammit, that hurt.

"I was getting to it," Cinder says gracelessly. The duchess frowns at the two of us. "Drizella was unaware of my plans to ask for a divorce since she hasn't been home. Darling, 'Zella, will you be my advisor? It means that you'll be my right hand, and will be integral to all things in the kingdom. You can never leave me, as the post is for life."

I can feel the blood leaving my face as I stare at her. Are my ears mistaken? Did she say forever?

Forcing myself to breathe, I struggle to nod enthusiastically. Cinder is a terrible actor, though her use of a nickname must have hurt her soul. I'm sure I'll pay for that in some way as well. The constant carving of my soul is taking a toll on me.

"Alright then," the duchess says with a nod. There are eight other people in this room, but not one of them has spoken during the last two and a half hours that I've been here. The guys have to be freaking out. "We will confer and then decide if we will release you from the marriage. He is rightfully the king, so this is a large request."

"I absolutely understand, Kinsley. Thank you for coming to hear us out," Cinder gushes with gratitude. I can almost hear the person that she was when she first became queen. She wasn't always this twisted.

"Don't thank me yet," the duchess murmurs, standing to leave. "This will all hinge on the information that Drizella was so kind as to provide."

I really hate this woman. If Cinder doesn't get what she wants, she'll make my life even more difficult than it already is. I gave the information with as much of a rose tint as possible without outright lying. I incline my head to the duchess and the eight other people she has with her as they leave, cursing up a storm in my head.

Lana steps out from behind a bookcase, and I remember this room is the end of a secret passageway. She's been listening the entire time.

"Hello, Drizella," she smiles. Lana Kort has always mirrored my sister when she interacts with me in her presence. I don't think she wants to draw Cinder's ire.

"Lana," I murmur carefully. "I still don't understand why I'm here, outside of maybe a referral to get divorced?"

"And oust Charming from the throne," Cinder adds.

"Why now? I just don't understand," I tell her, careful not to cross the line into disrespect.

"I have moments of not being lucid," Cinder says candidly. "I lose track of time, and it's becoming more noticeable. I don't always remember what I've done the night before."

My sister is actually insane. Fuck me. This is even more terrifying to me, because she has so much power.

"Oh," I whisper instead.

"Charming won't leave the castle, and it's affecting my fun," Cinder whines. "Lana can't be anywhere near me because our relationship is very obvious, and it's made me realize how annoying he is."

"I miss you," Lana pouts, batting her dark eyelashes at my step-sister.

"I miss you too." She sighs, opening her arms for the petite girl to step into. "I want to run my kingdom without so much supervision, and next week, everyone will be gone. I have the guards running training exercises, and the soldiers are patrolling the city to keep them from getting bored."

Personally, I don't know why she has so many men of war here. While

protection is always important, they don't really do much of that. We don't have many kingdoms who wish to overrun us, mostly because of trade agreements or peace treaties in place. Those who do wish to assassinate the king and queen outside of the kingdom are typically squashed quickly by our hackers.

Hell, I was one of those hackers with Isaac.

"So I was here for the meeting," I clarify. "Am I needed for anything else?"

"I want to fuck Lana," Cinder says, beginning to pull her lover's clothes off. "I informed Charming that we would be in a meeting for the next hour. Lock the door."

I hate these two. My skin starts to crawl as I walk to the door, ensuring no one will be able to get in.

"Take off your dress, Drizella," Cinder demands. Lana is naked, her high, perky breasts pointed at me.

"May I ask why, Your Majesty?" I rasp. As much as I despise these clothes, they're my armor. Dammit, the walls... Why are they getting closer to me?

Taking a breath, I curl my nails into my palms, attempting to get a handle on my anxiety.

"I want to watch something while I'm riding Lana's face. Kneel on the table naked," Cinder demands.

I'm on autopilot, my hand on the zipper before I remember something that's vitally important. "I have my period," I tell her.

"Since when do you have one of those?" Cinder scoffs. I would be surprised that she's been paying attention to me so closely, but there are certain things that she watches like a hawk.

"Three days ago," I confirm. "Sidney ran out to get my feminine hygiene products. If you've been watching the apartment at all, you'd know that."

I may be a bit snarkier than usual, but I'm also panicking. I don't want to

undress in front of them, and I want to leave the damn room immediately. It looks as if I'm only going to get one of my fervent wishes today.

"You will be our pretty little voyeur then," Cinder says, pushing the sleeves of her dress off her shoulders. She's completely naked underneath it, making my lips part in surprise. I thought she'd have ideas about proper clothing, and therefore never go commando. My step-sister has a lot of silly rules, so it's hard to remember them all. Stepping out of her shoes, I'm reminded of how tall they are. Cinder is probably about six inches shorter without them.

Walking to Lana, Cinder's hand closes around her neck. Moaning, Lana raises her mouth up to hers.

"Sit, Drizella. I know you and Andrya are involved, so you must have learned some tricks during oral. The girl screamed so prettily for the guards, and they still talk about her," Cinder says coolly as she lifts Lana onto the conference table.

I entertain myself with visions of killing her as I watch them. I've never been particularly bloodthirsty, but maybe poison isn't the right method of death for Cinder. Perhaps I need to make it hurt.

Lana lays back on the table, her legs spread wide for Cinder. I don't understand why they insist on my being here, outside of as an alibi. Charming must be watching her even closer now.

Cinder climbs onto the table, kissing up Lana's pale skin. Small whimpers and sighs are all that can be heard when a knock sounds on the door.

"Darling, are you still in a meeting?" I turn to look at the door, certain that my imagination is playing tricks on me. King Charming is unfortunately waiting for his wife to answer.

Cinder is unbothered as she scoots up Lana's body, turning at the last moment so she can stare down her lover's body as she sits on her face. Gods, they're going to get me killed.

As Lana drags her tongue through Cinder's arousal, Cinder's eyes focus on the door.

"I haven't seen my sister in ages, so we're talking before she leaves," she says, though her voice is slightly breathy. "Can you give us another twenty minutes?"

Lana's eyes widen, beginning to suck on Cinder's clit as she grunts softly. I expect trying to be quiet enough to enjoy cuckolding your husband while still fucking your girlfriend's face is difficult. I force myself to sit back in my chair, watching them impassively.

"Drizella? Are you really in there?" Charming asks suspiciously.

"Yes, I'm in here, and I'm ready to go home and take a nap, Your Highness," I tell him, not even bothering to hide the yawn that escapes.

Cinder rolls her eyes as she massages her breasts, beginning to flush as her arousal heightens. I try to hold my breath but I can hear her wetness beginning to cover Lana's chin.

"Alright then, I'll leave you to it. Dinner in a couple of weeks is non-negotiable, Drizella," he says sourly as he walks away.

"That'll be fun," Cinder grumbles sarcastically, biting her lip to hold back a moan. The only positive to having to be here is that she forgets herself when she's in the throes of passion.

"I'm not going to enjoy what he has planned, will I?" I ask running my fingers along my cleavage. Though most of it is covered, I know my step-sister knows exactly what I look like naked.

"Oh Gods," she mutters, her eyes on the path my fingers make. Whimpering, she grinds her hips on Lana's face. "I should make you help her."

Thankfully I've never been pulled into their lovemaking, always forced to watch. Cinder forgets me again as Lana pushes her fingers inside her channel.

"Yes, I... What was the question, Drizella?" Cinder asks as if she's not close enough for me to touch.

“The dinner, I won’t enjoy it, will I?” I ask in a clipped tone, watching as Cinder’s nipples flush to a deeper mauve. I can time this woman’s orgasms, and I know I have maybe two minutes before I can escape.

“No. It’ll be awful,” Cinder moans, her eyes blown with desire as she shudders. “Lana, I’m almost there.”

Lana continues in her efforts, and I’m close enough that I can see her mouth work Cinder over.

“Why will it be awful?” I ask, pushing my luck.

Unfortunately, Cinder pinches her nipples as Lana does something with her fingers inside of her, making her come for her. Shit, I was so close. Breathing hard, my step-sister glares at me, her eyes still glazed over with pleasure.

“I think you just need to see when you come for dinner,” Cinder insists. “I should punish you for almost making me tell you, but I don’t have the time.”

“That’s a real shame,” I murmur, standing. “I do enjoy our time together. Goodbye.”

Cinder’s eyes widen as she realizes I am leaving, scrambling quickly off the table to get dressed. Lana sighs, sitting up while licking her lips. Gods, they really are made for each other. As I turn my back to them, I hear clothing rustling, and Lana runs to the passageway naked with her clothing and shoes in her arms as I open the door.

“You’re being a brat,” Cinder complains, appearing next to me completely dressed. “You don’t understand the kind of pressure I’m under.”

I don’t say a word as I walk out with her berating me under her breath. “Enjoy your freedom while it lasts,” she says as she opens the door I walked in. “Are you any closer to finding out who the leader is?”

“I am,” I tell her. “I am on track to find out his identity, and if all goes to plan, he’ll be in his rightful place.”

My words may be what she wants to hear, but aren’t at all what I mean.

Kenzo and I need to spend some more time together if he's going to be at my side to rule Forbach. It is his birthright, after all.

Nineteen

ISAAC

It's been three days since Silla went to see her step-sister and she's been twitchy ever since. Every night, she wakes up screaming Charming's name. I want to murder him, and I've never really had an issue with our king before.

Other than the fact that he allows Cinder's insanity to reign as queen.

"Silla, what can we do about these nightmares?" I ask, pushing back sweat drenched hair from her forehead as I hold her.

"I need a distraction," she rasps, body shaking. "Can we just get out of the city for a bit? Everything is almost in place for next week. Not knowing what he wants, and Cinder taunting me that I won't like it is making me crazy."

The pain of her period kept her in bed the last couple of days, so now that it's just about gone, I can tell that she's going stir crazy. Date day out of the city it is.

"I'll plan something fun," I promise, pulling her close to me.

Andrya sits up, her hazel eyes clouded with worry. It's about six in the morning, and there's no way that anyone will be able to sleep.

"Let's grab a shower, Baby, okay? We'll let the guys figure everything out. It'll be fun to get out of the city for a bit," she says softly, reaching out for Silla.

"Together?" Silla asks. I can tell she doesn't want to be alone, and I ask with my eyes if Andrya can handle it.

"Yeah," she affirms. "I'll wash your hair for you, Silla."

I smile at her, proud that she's taking the step to be naked around Silla. Andrya takes a lot of showers, almost obsessed with the idea of being clean enough. I'm still worried about her, honestly. She used to be really brazen, openly sexual, and walked around naked without a care. The not so tender

care inside the Queen's dungeon made her quieter, more careful.

I can't wait for her to be back to her normal self. I would love to play with both Andrya and Silla together, but that's going to take some time. I'm a very patient man.

Silla crawls off the bed, disappearing into the bathroom, and I go off to look for the guys. It's Goddamn early, I'm surprised they're up.

Walking into the living room after throwing on some joggers, I smirk as I see them working out in the living room.

"They called me old," Grayson mutters, doing crunches. "We wanted to let Silla sleep because she was tossing and turning, but it doesn't look like that's in the cards."

"No, but I think we need a break. There's a village about twenty minutes outside of the city that I think would be fun to take Silla to. Let's get lost there for the day, eat at a local restaurant, and show our girl what she's fighting for," I suggest.

"Silla hasn't really been outside of the city besides the camp, and that doesn't count. It looks like it'll be a pretty day, too, aside of the chill," Gray grunts as he begins to stretch.

"We'll need to figure out a car," Sidney murmurs as he does a push up. I know that Sidney works out the most out of all of us, but it takes a lot for him to even break a sweat. "Should we reach out to Falcon about borrowing a car?"

"He'll want to tag along," Ayden huffs, matching Sidney push up for push up. Poor man is a bit flushed, and I wonder how long it'll be before he taps out.

"I don't think that's a bad thing," I counter. "Silla told us yesterday that she wants to spend more time with him, so this is a good time."

"What about the baby brother?" Ayden asks with a smirk.

"Gods he's like nineteen," I chuckle. "He's not a baby. Poor kid. I don't know if Silla is interested, honestly. If he tags along, then fine. We're just

hanging out, getting Silla's mind off things."

"Alright, I'll call Falcon then," Sidney says, finishing his last push up to reach for his phone. "It's going to be chilly today, with possible snow flurries. It won't stick or anything, but 'Drya and Silla get cold easily."

"I'll suggest layers. Gray, we should eat before we go, so—"

"I'll get breakfast started before I shower," he finishes for me.

"Thank you." I smirk. As Gray stands, I walk over to wrap my hand around the back of his neck. We haven't done much since our shower, but I want to try. I hate how awkward our relationship became after our time in the dungeons. "Good morning."

Gray gives me this slow, sexy smile that makes my heart beat faster. Holy fuck. "Good morning. Your move, sexy."

Indeed. Leaning slowly, I angle my mouth to cover his lips. Gray fists his hands in my joggers, pulling me close. I can feel his hard length against mine and groan as I rock my erection against his. Fuck, I haven't even had my morning piss yet, and I'm already horny.

I deepen the kiss, and Gray goes with it. His tongue sweeps across my lip, making me shiver. We have an audience which usually wouldn't be an issue, but there's not enough time to do what I want to him.

Ending the kiss with a frustrated huff, I pull away, opening my eyes.

"You should always say good morning like that." Gray winks, rubbing my bottom lip with his thumb. "Go get the girls moving."

I watch him as he disappears into the kitchen, turning to see Sidney and Ayden staring at me amusedly.

"I will be dedicating my morning tug and rub with my cock to this," Ayden says, lips twitching.

Sidney simply stretches, his fingers entwined behind his neck. "It's about damn time is all I have to say," he says. "Moving on doesn't happen overnight."

"That it doesn't," I murmur with a nod as I go to check on the girls. The

bedroom door is closed, and I lean against the frame as I knock. I don't want to walk in on Andrya if she's changing.

"I'm almost done," Andrya calls out, and I nod, even though she can't see me.

"We're going to Peony today, which is about thirty minutes outside of the city," I explain through the door. "Will you—"

The door opens abruptly, with Andrya dressed in a long-sleeved shirt and jeans.

"It's silly for you to talk through the door, Isaac," she teases me. "I do appreciate the effort, though."

"Of course." I grin, surprised when she gives me a side hug. She's more affectionate with others usually, though we've never had an issue. "My suggestion is that you two dress in layers because we're going to have lunch there, walk around, and Sidney says we're supposed to be getting snow flurries."

"Brr," Silla mutters walking out of the bathroom. She's wearing a long-sleeved scooped lavender sweater, jeans, and fuzzy socks. She looks comfortable and perfect for our outing.

"I think you have boots, right?" I ask, biting my lip.

"Stop worrying." Silla laughs. "'Drya and I did so much online shopping that even the mail man was annoyed. I definitely have some winter boots and a long black coat too."

"We're covered. Go shower," Andrya says with a shrug. "Silla, let me dry your hair for you?"

They both walk off, ignoring me, and I snort in amusement. Well clearly, I have been dismissed. It's really just as well, because Sidney and Ayden are disappearing into another bathroom to 'save water'.

"I'm going to use the shower if you're okay with it. Can you finish getting ready in the bedroom?" I ask, dropping my joggers and boxers to the floor. The girls turn away from the twin sinks, jaws dropping as I bend down

to retrieve them.

“Umm, yeah that’s fine,” Silla murmurs, her eyes roaming my body greedily. I’m typically in boxers and nothing else when I go to bed, but I can feel her stare on my cock. I swear, all my blood is leaving my body to pool there.

Dropping my clothes in the hamper, my long legs eat up the space between us.

“See something you like, Little Hacker?” I tease her.

“Yeah,” she breathes, dragging her eyes to meet my gaze.

Dragging my knuckle up her throat, I open my hand to encase her throat with it in the best kind of necklace there is, unless she’s covered in cum. “Good to hear,” I breathe, my nose against hers. “Now scoot, or we’ll never leave the house.”

“Gods, I don’t know whether to pull you out of the room, or let him fuck you while I watch,” Andrya gasps.

I chuckle, releasing the smooth column of Silla’s throat to bury my nose in her shoulder. Fuck yes, sunshine and jasmine, damn she smells so good.

“Are you into watching, ’Drya?” I growl, lifting my face slowly.

“I may be,” she squeaks.

“I look forward to exploring that,” I tell her. “Now out, because I have to fuck myself with my hand in the shower before we leave. You’re both not ready for what I have in mind.”

Scurrying out, they watch me over their shoulders as I shut the door. Those two could tempt a better man than me, dammit. Blowing out a breath to keep myself from dragging them back in, I turn on the water in the shower. I’m just going to blow my load to a hot as fuck fantasy and then start the day.

Dropping my head back on the wall, I close my eyes, my hand already reaching for my cock to stroke it, almost as if I’m unable to wait for the shower. I feel like an overgrown teenager, my hormones out of control and wonky.

I guess that's part of beginning to heal from trauma: different aspects of your life instincts come back online at the oddest of times. Groaning as I straighten, I climb into the shower. If there's anything that I could wish for, it's for one day we can enjoy without the outside bullshit sullyng it.

SILLA

Wrapping my arms around my waist in the frosty air, I take a deep breath, happy to be away from both the city and my personal demons for the day. This was a really good idea.

Kenzo drove us in a large SUV to Peony, and it was shockingly comfortable. Kal tagged along, and he's cute, but almost too sweet. If we had met before my time in the dungeons I may have entertained the idea, but we are very different people. I may need to let him down easy if his lingering looks continue.

I'm not being conceited, I heard from Andrya that he was stalking the apartment the other day. I believe in laying my cards on the table when I can, so that no one gets hurt. Hopefully it's not too late for that.

We're walking through the market now, and snowflakes are falling intermittently from the sky as we explore. Even though I'm cold, this is absolutely worth it. The tinkling of windchimes, the scent of clean air, even the sound of the ground as I walk. I won't ever take anything for granted.

"Doing good?" Kenzo asks, walking next to me as I see a stall I want to go look at. Every corner of this outdoor market has something to see or eat. I've already had a meat pie, a donut, and the most delicious lemon square. In fact, I don't think I'll be hungry for a real meal at this rate. I ignored Gray's knowing smirk as I ate the lemon square earlier, too. He can't complain if I'm at least enjoying everything I'm putting into my tummy.

"I am." I grin happily. "I haven't really been out of the city much, so this is a treat. I love being outside because the demands of my life don't allow for it."

"That's the most diplomatic way of saying you're a prisoner of the dictates of others that I've ever heard," Kenzo mutters under his breath as we

arrive at the stall.

He's right, but we have ears listening to us now. I smile at the older woman who is working at this shop. "Hi," I say brightly. "The bright colors you have at your stall called to me. They're beautiful."

The woman grins with a nod. She has black hair with white streaks through it, and it's pulled back into a thick braid. The bright fabrics appear to be skirts, scarfs, and even knit hats and mittens.

"Ohh, this purple is really pretty. Winter wants to come early, I think." I sigh as I lift a pretty scarf up. It's woven from wool, and so warm. I may be in love. Shit, I didn't bring cash, and I don't know if she takes credit cards. Do I even want to use Cinder's card here?

"It's just a scarf," the woman laughs. "Why are you thinking so hard?"

"I alway think too hard." I sigh. "I bought a new wardrobe recently, and completely forgot to pick up scarves or mittens."

"Then let's get you some. My treat," Kenzo says, squeezing my elbow.

"I couldn't," I deny. "I have money, I'm just overthinking things."

"When someone offers to buy you a gift and their heart is in the right place, you should accept it," the woman says gently.

I nod, biting my lip, because she's right. I know she may just want to make a sale, but if I had a grandparent, I'm sure they'd tell me the same thing. My mother said that her parents died before I was born, and she doesn't speak to my father's parents.

"Thank you," I amend, a smile twitching at my lips because I feel ridiculous for having trouble accepting a gift. Kenzo isn't out to get me, and I feel fairly certain about this. I've had such bad luck trusting people that I find myself paralyzed when I need to make decisions.

"It's my pleasure, Mistress," he murmurs. "I want to do this. Which pair of mittens would you like? The temperatures will only continue to plummet."

"It's true, it's odd to see snow so soon. The weekend markets may have to be paused if this is the trend that will continue through the winter," the

woman frets, rubbing at her face.

I glance at Kenzo, who inclines his head to me. I take this as him agreeing to whatever I need to do next. Together, we choose scarves for Andrya and all of the guys, and even a gorgeous chunky loop blanket for our bed. Our arms are overflowing with bags as we leave her stall, her mouth dropped open in shock and gratitude.

“I’ll find a way to pay you back,” I giggle as we step away with our haul. “I went a little overboard.”

“You heard the worry in her words,” Kenzo corrects me, brow raised as we walk to the car to drop off the evidence of my sympathy.

“I’ve been seeing how hard things are, and her business is affected by the weather since it’s outside.” I sigh.

Opening the trunk to the car, he places a few of the bags inside, waiting for me to do the same. He doesn’t move back, so my back is to his front as I place my bags in.

“Mistress,” Kenzo murmurs, his face hovering over my shoulder.

“Yes, Pet?” I ask, my voice filled with something that I don’t want to identify. My stomach feels as if it’s dropping, and I feel slightly unbalanced, yet not in a bad way.

“You smell so good. How is it that you smell like sunshine when there’s not any today?” he asks in bewilderment. The guys tell me I smell like sunshine and jasmine, but I don’t know how it’s possible either.

“I don’t know,” I whisper, turning my neck to give him more access to it. I am terrible and haven’t put my new scarf on yet. So Kenzo places a kiss on my throat. His lips are cold and I shiver with a small whimper.

“What do you need, Mistress?” he whispers.

“More,” I breathe. We’re away from the main street where the market is, but I’m wearing my tracker anklet, so I’m not worried about anyone searching for me. They’ll be able to see where I am.

My hair is down my back in curls, so Kenzo’s fingers tangle in them to

angle my head so he can kiss me. The moment his lips meet mine, I want more. His lips are firm, insistent, and questioning. *Do I want more?* I part my lips in answer, and his tongue brushes mine.

There's this anticipation and excitement as he kisses me, and my body bows back against his request for more.

"Kitten, are we fucking in public now? So naughty," Ayden teases me.

Whimpering, I break away to look at him with wide eyes. I thought I'd get a little more time before they came to find me. I know I'm not doing anything wrong because we've talked about Kenzo, but my heart thunders in surprise anyway.

Ayden's eyes narrow as he watches me. Coming closer, he pushes my chin up with his index finger. "Are you all wound up, sweet girl?" His finger runs down my neck slowly, making me shiver, but not because I'm cold. "Falcon, your mistress hasn't been properly taken care of today."

"Why is that?" he asks, his hands squeezing and releasing my waist.

"Isaac wouldn't fuck her in the shower," Ayden says wickedly, stirring the pot.

"That's not quite what happened," I deny, breath hitching as Ayden opens my coat.

"So what happened, Mistress?" Kenzo chuckles, gently closing his teeth on my pulse.

"Oh, Gods," I gasp. "We would have never left the house if Isaac had started something this morning. There are other factors too."

"That's sad, Mistress," he murmurs, his hands finding their way into my coat to roam up my shirt to massage my breasts. Why are they teasing me?

"Kiss her, Falcon," Ayden orders, pulling my shirt and bra cups down. The cooler air tightens my nipples, dropping my head back onto Kenzo's shoulder. Ayden's body is blocking anyone who could see, but no one has come down this street recently anyway.

I look up at Kenzo, smiling as I realize he took off the dog collar. I

wonder how long he wore it before taking it off.

“You’re not wearing your collar, Pet,” I murmur, breath hitching as Ayden licks around my nipple. I want the pinch of pain, I want him to bite me, Gods there must be something wrong with me to be this needy.

“I’m sorry, Mistress,” he says softly, kissing my forehead as his arm bands around my waist when my knees go weak. “You should punish me. I had to visit my mother yesterday, and didn’t want her to get agitated with questions.”

“Is... oh my... she doing alright?” I gasp as Ayden forces as much of my breast in his mouth as possible and begins to suck.

“Yes Mistress, she’s well enough,” Kenzo grunts, kissing my lips with more force. I writhe between them, hoping they’re paying attention to the outside world, because I’m not. I exist only in a mass of sensation and need right now. Gods, why couldn’t I have worn a skirt instead? I need more. “If I finger fuck you while you’re wearing pants will you make a mess?” Kenzo asks.

“Yes,” Ayden and I say at the same time.

“So damn sexy,” Kenzo mutters, brushing my lips with his again. “There’s so much I want to do to you, Mistress. I feel like I’m doing this the wrong way.”

“There’s no wrong way,” Ayden says, kissing my breasts before righting my clothing. I sag in disappointment, but he hugs me with a knowing smile. I’m sandwiched between two gorgeous men, and it makes me squirm a bit. Kenzo tries to keep his hips away from me, and I smile a bit. He’s respectful, but also a little kinky too. Ayden on the other hand, I can feel against my stomach, and I press up against him like a brat. “I’m going to have Gray spank you if you keep that up, Kitten.”

“That’s not the punishment you think it is,” I sing-song with a grin.

“There’s my girl,” Ayden grins. “Today will be a practice in edging you, I think. None of us can deny you anything for long, so this will be interesting.

Did you buy out the store?"

"No, but her wares were pretty," I defend myself with a shrug.

"Mm-hmm. Which scarf and mitten set is yours, Kitten? You should wear them because the temperature is expected to continue to drop. The market may close early, so let's finish up your shopping," Ayden tells me.

Moving around them, I grab my scarf, smiling as Kenzo takes it to arrange it around my neck. Ayden does the same with my mittens, and then we're closing up the car and walking back to the market arm in arm.

It's nice to be taken care of, and now that Ayden has also buttoned up my coat, I'm warm and toasty.

"Silla." Gray smiles as he sees me. There's a cloud of worry that disappears from his eyes, and I frown as I realize that I put them there. "I'm glad you bought a scarf and mittens, it's going to be getting colder. There's a pretty path that shows off the cliffs and trees that surround this town if you're up for it?"

"I'd love that," I affirm. "I may have gotten a little too excited about a stall's wares, and bought everyone gloves and scarves."

"So you went to the car," he says, relaxing. Gray *was* worried. Dammit, I didn't mean to do that. "As long as you're fine and you were with someone."

"I was with her," Kenzo says. "Did I do something wrong?"

"No, I'm sorry. I am a little nervous about being in public, I think. A lot has happened this year, and I keep waiting for the other shoe to drop." Gray sighs.

Shit. I'm moving before I can help myself and hugging him. "I love you," I tell him, laying my head on his chest. "I'll let you know if I go anywhere, okay? I didn't mean to make you upset."

His arms hesitate for a second before he hugs me back. "I'm being overprotective, Dangerous Girl. There are days where I can't believe you're here with us. I fully expect a phone call, a Queen's guard visit, something that will take you from us."

Looking up at him, I give him a feral grin. “That’s why we have all of our plans in place. I’m not going back,” I vow.

“There are too many ears for this conversation. Let’s walk, Silla,” he says, pulling away. My hand feels tiny as he takes it, jerking his head toward a cobblestone path out of the square.

Following him, I look around at how beautiful this town is even in the filtered winter’s sunlight. I see a few people huddled together on the ground in dark alleys as we pass and frown. There’s so much work to be done for this kingdom that I wonder if Cinder even cares that there are people in her realm that are starving and homeless.

“Tell me what you’re thinking about so I can be sure to attempt to fix it, Mistress,” Kenzo insists, looking back at me.

Kal smirks at the moniker, but I don’t care. I love that his brother is so attuned to my needs.

“I hate that I worried Grayson by not telling him where I was going, I hate that temperatures are dropping and there are people outside who clearly don’t have homes to go to. I’m angry at my step-sister, whose only care is when her next orgasm is, and I’m worried that she’s not mentally well due to our last conversation,” I tell him. My words run together as I word vomit my thoughts, flushing as I raise my hand to my mouth.

Sidney snorts, making me even more embarrassed.

“Pet, you can’t save the kingdom of all of its troubles today,” he reminds me. “I love how big your heart is, and I swear I’m not making fun of you. No one talks about this, but this kind of poverty is happening all over.”

“I hate it,” I snarl, huffing out a breath. A cloud follows the action, and it really is damn cold.

“What else are you thinking?” Kenzo asks, turning so he walks backward to watch me.

“You’re going to fall on your behind,” I warn.

“Why don’t you curse?” Kal asks, and I know that he truly wants to

know. “Is it a prudish thing or what?”

The path gets steep, and I bite my lip as I see it drops sharply. “I’ll tell you both if Falcon turns and walks properly,” I tell them.

“Don’t overwhelm the girl,” Gray chuckles as Kenzo turns just in time to avoid falling down the hill.

“First off, I am thinking uncharitable thoughts that I shouldn’t repeat in public,” I begin, thinking about how I should bring a knife with me to dinner with my sister and brother in law. “I’m also thinking about how I need Sidney to buy me a few blades that I can hide for next week, and that our previous plan is too simple for their deaths.” My voice drops so it won’t echo. “My thoughts are scary. As far as why I don’t curse in public, Cinder doesn’t so it’s easier if I don’t either.”

“Easier, how?” Kal asks darkly.

“Kal, you’re being rude,” Kenzo warns.

“Easier so I don’t slip up in some way when I’m around her,” I answer with a sigh. “She’s already angry at me for her own twisted reasons.”

I don’t really want to get into how angry she was at me for having my period, or for refusing to stay longer at the castle. The guys know because I was white as a sheet when I got back to the apartment and the groundskeeper had texted Kenzo worriedly when I didn’t reemerge after an hour.

Kal bites the rest of his questions back with a nod. I get it, my life isn’t normal, and I understand being curious. However, I don’t want to get into it all.

“Baby, you’re crying,” Gray murmurs under his breath, and I blink quickly, realizing he’s right.

“I’m sorry,” I gulp, swiping at my tears. “I’m in my head right now, and every avenue is dark and twisted.”

“We’re clear of people now, talk to me, Baby,” Gray says, pulling me to a stop. There’s a cliff to my left, and nothing but rocks and mountains around us now. I pull air in and out as if simply to remind myself I’m safe and free

for the moment. The town is at our back now, and I have no idea where we're going. That's not one of my many worries though.

The 'for now' is really bothering me. My entire future hinges on possible outcomes if everything goes right. I can't go back to being Cinder's perfect doll.

"I can't go back," I gasp, shaking my head. "It felt so normal to be at the castle yet so wrong, and I can't wrap my head around that. Cinder is losing her mind. I can't believe I didn't realize it sooner, I kept wondering why she was so much crueler now."

"Her losing her grasp of reality isn't an excuse," Isaac says, moving to my side to brush back my hair. The wind is picking up, and Andrya's and my hair are sure to be a tangled mess later today. "You can't take responsibility for your step-sister's missteps, especially when she's hurt so many people. You're one of her victims, Little Hacker."

"I know," I huff, my eyes stinging from the cold and the damned water that insists on leaking from them. I shake my hands, hoping to dispel some of the bubbling anxiety inside of me. I don't want to have a panic attack, but it's not looking good right now. "I don't remember her being so awful, or maybe she hid it better. Cinder pretty much sold Anastasia into marriage in a bid to establish a solid relationship with her husband."

"Cinder isn't a good person," Andrya reminds me. "Even when Ayden, Sidney, and I were offered our deal by her, it was for her own fucked up reasons. The reform camp is a funnel of spies for her own political agenda, and the five of us ran it for her."

I know all of this. I do. So why am I crying?

"I think this snuck up on me," I confess. "I haven't dealt with things that have happened, and I'm always on the cusp of one more crisis."

"Please don't make excuses for Cinder," Ayden says. They're all in a half circle around me, with Kal looking at Kenzo worriedly. I must look like a basket case. "She has been torturing and hurting people for years, and it's

getting worse. If she's losing time and cycling into madness, then it's even more important that she not be on the throne."

"Sidney, I want more than poison on my person when I go in," I tell him, meeting his green eyes. He scrubs his short hair as he thinks, his muscles shifting under his clothes.

"I'm strapping a knife to your upper thigh in a harness, but it'll appear to be a garter if anyone is searching for weapons," Sidney decides gruffly. "I'll show you all the ways to kill someone with it. Trust your instincts, Little Love. It'll keep you alive."

Relaxing as they take in my concerns, I nod. Except... "If things look bad, I'll kill myself. I don't want you to feel guilty because you gave me the knife, Sidney."

His eyes are filling with devastation, and Gray's chest starts to heave with anxiety as he holds my hand. "That won't happen," Gray promises.

"You don't know that," I whisper, the world blurring as my tears well again. "I won't survive as her perfect little playtoy. I'll lose myself. I can't, especially since the Queen's Advisors post is for life. I had to accept it in front of eight dignitaries of the realm. It's binding."

"You were under duress," Kenzo pipes up. "It is not binding under our laws."

"Our laws aren't Cinder's," I remind him. "I didn't mean for things to get so heavy, but I wanted you to know that I won't allow the King to rape me. Cinder said I wouldn't enjoy what he has planned, but wouldn't tell me what, and I keep thinking that he doesn't have an heir..."

"People are walking down the hill, Kitten. I'm sorry, but we have to keep moving. There's another cliff further through the trees where we can sit and talk. Come on," Ayden murmurs. I can hear muffled voices and nod, drying my eyes with my scarf.

Walking, I watch as the craggy rocks open into a large grassy area. There are homes to the left, and it looks like there's a community just outside of

town. People laugh and talk as they greet each other, making me smile. I'm having a hard time shaking off my melancholy.

Sidney wraps his arm around my shoulder, pulling me close as we walk. I can feel the scruff of his goatee as he lays his chin by my face. "I love you, Baby," he says softly. "I want to put a baby inside of you, watch you grow round, and have a family with you. I want you to kill anyone that it takes for that to happen. No more playing it nice."

I look up, dislodging his chin from against my forehead. "I didn't realize mass poisoning was playing it nice," I say, brow raising. No one can hear us as we walk closer to the woods. The snow is starting to fall harder, but it's gorgeous, so I have no complaints.

"The moment things start to turn for the worst, you bide your time and then let the blood flow," Sidney growls. "I'll wash your hair in the shower after I fuck you."

I shiver, my panties obliterated by his words. "Why is that so hot?" I hiss. "I'm supposed to be a good girl—"

"You're my Good Girl," Gray calls out to me with a wink. Kal shakes his head, blushing at the sentiment. Kenzo merely chuckles, adjusting his dick in his pants as he walks. He was very careful not to let me feel it against me when he held me earlier, but I don't think I'd mind.

"Good and evil are relative," Ayden tells me, wrapping his arm around my waist. I'm trapped between them now, but it makes me feel curiously safe. Our hips brush against each other as we walk, and I think about his words.

"I've always thought that good was good and bad was bad," I correct him. "Even when I was hacking into people's accounts and stealing from them so I could leave the realm, I knew it wasn't the right thing to do. I was desperate."

"You were going to leave?" Kal asks, surprised.

"My step-sister wanted me to marry someone three times my age, and Forbach has never been very good to me," I explain. "I had no reason to stay

at the time. Cinder figured out that I was going to leave, and arrested me.”

“We never would have met,” Ayden grumbles, kissing my forehead. “I can’t imagine my life without you in it. I’ll be there with you next week, but I’m with Sidney: bite, scream, stab. Do whatever you need to do to stay safe. Gray and I will handle ourselves.”

I nod, even though my mind is imagining all the ways this could go wrong. What the fuck does Charming want with me?

“Okay, you need to stop thinking,” Grayson says with a harsh sigh. “Kal, you’re getting a crash course into our lives, and I’m sure that you’re going to think this is super fucked up, but I need you to make sure no one walks into the woods. No matter what you hear.”

“Grayson,” I hiss. He is not proposing what I think he is, right?

“I’m serious,” Gray complains. “No more worrying, spiraling, or overthinking today. You’re going to run as fast as you can, and we’re going to chase you. I wanted to have you to myself for this one day, but everyone has been edging you today, haven’t they, Dangerous girl?”

I ignore Kal’s ‘what the fuck’ look on his face as I nod. My panties are unbearably wet, and it’s making me uncomfortable as it presses against me, a reminder that I really fucking want this. I need to get out of my head.

“Was this your plan the whole time?” I ask, a nervous giggle releasing as I cover my mouth with my eyes wide. My hands are shaking with nerves and Ayden and Sidney have to feel how much I’m affected by this conversation.

“You’re into this, aren’t you, Pet?” Sidney asks against the shell of my ear. Whimpering, I nod, my breath coming in quick gasps, and my chest starting to heave.

“Yes, Sir,” I whisper submissively.

“Gods, you’re so damn perfect,” Kenzo breathes. “The first time we’re together shouldn’t be like this, but I really want to watch, can I, Mistress?”

“Yes…” I answer, struggling to focus.

“This wasn’t my plan, to answer your question, Silla. You have a five

minute head start. Run,” Grayson says, his heavy steps walking toward me.

The words spark my flight response, and I squeak, throwing myself into motion. Ayden and Sidney whoop, and I disappear into the woods, jumping over stray branches, my mind emptying of all thought.

Holy shit, this is happening!

Twenty

SIDNEY

I grin as I watch my pet race away from us into the woods before frowning. “How much woods does she have before they end at the cliffs?” I ask.

“Five and a half miles,” Grayson grunts as he watches her. I can see his spurts of air from the cold as he focuses on her. “The five of us will corral her. Andrya, what do you want to do, baby?”

“I’ll keep the kid company, but I hope to join you in a run one day. Maybe you could all do it masked when it’s warmer,” she says, winking at us. “I’m just not ready for that level of excitement and intimacy today.”

I love that Grayson checked in with her, and I kiss her forehead quickly as I wait for Gray’s timer to finish counting down.

“Are we really waiting for five minutes?” Ayden asks, shifting from side to side before pulling his sweatshirt off to drop it on the floor by his sister’s feet.

“Nope,” Gray says. “Three max. I figure she knows we’ll cheat, because our girl is running hard.”

Isaac snorts, shaking his head. “This is absolutely our level of fucked up. I approve.”

“I’m surprised to hear you say that, computer boy,” I tease him.

Isaac resettles his glasses on his face with a shrug. “Gray likes to chase, but I’ve been thinking about sinking into her wet, tight pussy all damn day,” he groans, palming his cock. “It’s been too long. I didn’t want to push.”

“You’ve all been edging Silla today.” Andrya snorts. “Alright, go fuck your girl. Dog boy, behave yourself.”

“Like I said, this isn’t how I think our first time should be,” Falcon murmurs. “I’ll keep her from the cliffs. Will she let herself get caught?”

“Nah. My gorgeous Kitten likes the chase. She’ll scream bloody murder

and get all riled up. I can't fucking wait!" Ayden says jumping up and down. He is so hyped and excited, it makes me bark out a laugh as I take off my coat.

Grayson, Falcon, and Isaac do the same, and Gray calls it. "Let the hunting begin."

"Don't let anyone into the woods," I growl as a reminder to 'Drya and Kal. Stalking forward, the five of us enter the woods, quickening our steps into a jog.

It's so quiet, I can hear the cracking of twigs and sticks under Silla's boots. Breaking off to the right, we all move in a different direction, whooping and laughing.

Silla stops, listening, and it's so quiet that I can hear her gasp before running even harder.

"We're coming for you, Silla!" I yell, jumping over a log and stomping hard before kicking the leaves up as I chase her.

"Oh my gods!" Silla squeals.

"You're not very good at hiding!" Falcon teases her loudly from farther away. He's clearly trying to keep her from the cliffs just in case, and I appreciate that. Our girl is a self proclaimed clutz, and falling off a cliff would ruin our fun.

Silla goes silent, and I force myself to listen closer, despite the stomping happening around us. Should we go silent? Really fuck with her?

What is she up to? I can hear harsh breathing, but I can't figure out where it's coming from. Palming my cock, I grunt from how damn hard I am. It's a miracle I can think at all what with how much of my blood flow is pooling south right now.

"Kitten, oh Kitten, you're awfully quiet," Ayden calls out, walking slower ahead of me. I can still hear the crunch of leaves as he walks, and the snow is falling heavier the longer we're out here. We're going to owe our girl a hot chocolate after our shenanigans.

Silla stays quiet, but I can hear her scurrying now. I grin ferally as I listen before yelling, “Pet, watch out! Gray’s coming!”

The larger man curses, and I can’t hear where he is as he forces his body to move fast. “Oh shit!” Silla screams, and I watch as she breaks from behind a tree to scramble away.

This is so much fucking fun.

GRAYSON

I really had been creeping up on Silla when Sidney yelled. Little fucker.

I can see Isaac's lithe body through the trees, tracking Silla's movements as she zig zags as she runs. We're already on her trail, so baby girl is fucked. I forgot how damn fast she is, because Silla is leaping over logs and fallen branches as she runs.

As I get closer and closer, I can hear her rapid breathing, and can only imagine how the blood must be roaring in her ears. Can she hear anything over it unless it's yelled? Is she wet yet? Godsdamnit, I can't wait to see.

It's fucked up, but I've wanted to chase her down and fuck her since I first saw her. I wanted to see her tears as I caught her, licking them off. I'm a lot more fucked up than I pretend to be.

"Pretty Little Whore, will you come on my dick when I force my cock inside of your pretty little pussy? Isaac's gaining, and I bet he fucked his hand at least twice in the shower," I yell as I stomp over some brush.

"This is kind of fucked up, guys!" Silla yells, sounding out of breath. "I better get orgasms."

"You better suck my soul out of my cock, Kitten!" Ayden yells back. "You're making this too easy."

Isaac pounces when she hesitates, his body twisting so that when he tackles her, his back takes the brunt of the impact. A fucking gentleman as always.

Twisting hard, he pushes her face into the ground, spanking her ass. Silla half gasps, half screams at the sting of pain, and Isaac snaps open her jeans to peel them down her perfect ass.

"You ran really hard, Little Whore," he coos as I catch up to them.

"Is she wet?" I grunt, enjoying the sight of her beautiful ass and hint of

her pussy in this position.

“Little Hacker, tell the truth,” Isaac rasps, his voice deep and filled with desire. “If I run my thumb over your core, will I be able to hear how wet your pretty pink pussy is? Dammit, she looks good right now. I can’t wait to fuck you, Baby.”

“Yes, yes, I’ve been wet for hours,” she confesses with a whimper. Isaac runs his thumb over her, but I know I’ll be able to hear it. Her pussy lips are glistening with arousal right now.

“I want her to beg for it,” I whisper into Isaac’s ear, bending over. “I want to see her tears run down her face because she needs your cock so fucking bad.”

“Holy fuck,” Isaac mutters, spanking her ass again. “Done... Silla, you need to be punished. Not for running from us, no we all enjoyed chasing you. You wanted Falcon to finger fuck you and didn’t follow your desires, Baby Girl. I’m very disappointed in you.”

“I’m... sorry, Sir,” she says, sounding confused. Isaac spans her ass cheek hard, and Silla half moans, half gasps from the pain. I know her greedy little pussy is clamping on nothing and wince in sympathy. Soon, baby. Soon.

“Why are you sorry, Little Hacker?” Isaac asks, spanking her other cheek so hard that her body rocks forward. True to form, she stays laying flat on the ground, her hands by her shoulders, ass up in the air. She’s still wearing her coat, and it makes me smirk. At least she’ll stay warm, the temperature really is dropping.

“I don’t know!” she gasps, shuddering.

Falcon watches, fascinated, and I can tell he’s both turned on and surprised by this all.

“You should take what you want, Kitten,” Ayden chimes in. “Right and wrong are relative, remember? So if you had wanted Falcon to bend you over like you are now and eat your dripping pussy, you should have.”

Isaac’s lips twist wickedly and he rocks his fingers through her folds,

gathering up her arousal until they're dripping with it. He's not...

"Falcon, come suck my fingers. You need to taste her. See what you missed out on," he says,

Falcon's pupils are blown from excitement and desire. "I thought I was just an observer," he grunts, his eyes on Isaac's fingers.

"Do you want to taste me?" Silla asks, turning her face to look up at him.

"Fuck, I really really do, Mistress," Falcon murmurs.

"Then do it, Pet," she orders. I don't have it in me to reprimand her dominance, because I want to watch this happen. Silla is the most perfect switch.

Falcon grabs Isaac's hand, bending to wrap his lips around them. His tongue swirls around it as he sucks, and Sidney, Ayden, and I groan as we watch. As he pulls away, it's with hesitance.

"Mistress, you really should have let me eat your perfect pussy," Falcon bemoans.

"I should punish her, shouldn't I?" Isaac asks sagely.

"Wait... what?" Silla squeals.

"Yes. I've never seen a shade of red on an ass before that I've ever wanted to see more," Falcon says as he steps back with a wicked grin.

Fuck yeah, he'll fit in just fine.

"Count for me, Little Hacker," Isaac demands, massaging the globes of her ass. "Who has a belt?"

Silla stiffens for a moment before she forces herself to remember it's us. Standing in front of her, I slowly pull off my belt before handing it to Isaac. I trust whatever he's about to do.

"Strip her for me, guys," he says. "Are you going to be a good girl for me, Baby? Get on your knees and help."

Obediently, she sits up, tearing off her mittens to strip her clothes off. Falcon drops to his knees, kissing her neck as his fingers make quick work of the buttons on her coat. Silla whimpers, struggling to help him get the sleeves

down. She's so damn worked up, it's adorable.

"Slow down, Pet," Sidney coos, watching her. "Let him help."

Sidney doesn't move to help, and I have to admit that I'm enjoying watching her squirm. Falcon tosses articles of clothing to the side, and soon she's only trapped by her jeans and boots. I meet Isaac's eyes and he shrugs, pushing her back to reposition her. Falcon's eyes go wide, and he grabs her coat to make a pillow for her. Okay, that was sweet and not something I'm thinking about at the moment. I guess we can keep him.

Isaac had looped my belt into cuffs while Silla was getting undressed, and he slips them on over her wrists before tightening them. She looks delicious with her head and shoulders balanced on the ground while her ass is high in the air.

"There we go, Baby. Much better. Count for me, Silla."

Isaac's palm cracks across her firm ass, making her cry out. "One," she says, gasping a breath.

"Godsdamn, Kitten, you look so perfect. We may just cover you in our cum while you're being punished. Do you want that?" Ayden asks, palming his cock through his pants. Fucker is totally serious. At least I know there's a stream nearby, even though it's probably freezing right now.

I also know he's hiding his tattooed dick from Silla for now, or he'd already be fucking it with his hand.

"Do you want that, Little Hacker? Answer him," Isaac demands, making her ass bounce as he spanks her other cheek.

Silla gasps, and I know she's getting closer to crying. She may have a high pain threshold, but the humiliation adds to the pain, and she usually cracks around four.

"Yes... I don't know... fuck, two!" Silla shrieks. Stimulation is starting to overwhelm her too, and she licks her lips, staring hungrily at Ayden.

"Such a greedy little whore. You want his cum don't you?" Isaac asks, smirking as he spanks her ass cheek closer to her thigh.

Silla cries out, and her breasts bounce from his punishment. “Yes, yes I want to swallow his cum,” she pleads.

“What number are you on, Naughty Girl?” I growl. My cock is straining against my jeans and I ask myself why I haven’t started fucking my hand yet. The truth is, I want to fuck Silla’s throat or nothing at all right now. So instead, I squeeze my cock, grunting at the discomfort. Soon.

“Three, three, three,” she chants as Isaac spanks her three more times in succession. The tears break and Falcon looks concerned. I shake my head, leaning down to drag my thumb through her tears. Pushing it into her mouth, I smirk as she sucks the liquid off it.

“Sweet Girl, you can take it. We’ll make you feel so damn good. How is she doing, Isaac?” I ask, glancing up. His eyes heat as he meets mine before pulling apart Silla’s ass cheeks to stare at her pussy.

“Gods, I can smell you, Beautiful,” he murmurs. Silla squirms uncontrollably but I squat by her head, my hand palming her face gently.

“Shh, you’re fine, aren’t you?” I ask, and she nods, those gorgeous tears glistening on her cheeks like starlight.

Isaac tastes Silla’s gorgeous pussy, and I narrow my eyes in jealousy. “How wet is she?” I ask, checking again. Isaac groans, pushing his tongue into her slick channel and we all make pained noises. Fuck.

“Our girl is dripping. It’s all over her thighs, too,” Isaac tells us. His chin shows the evidence of her arousal, and I stand, walking over to tangle my fingers in his blond hair. Pulling on it, I lean down to kiss him hard. I hear Falcon’s intake of air, but ignore it as I suck on Isaac’s tongue. Groaning, my eyes roll at the explosion of vanilla across my taste buds.

“She’s delicious.” I sigh, pulling away. “The two of you together are decadent.”

“Fuck,” Falcon mutters, his breath coming in pants, and I can only smirk as Isaac surprises Silla by pushing his fingers inside of her pussy.

“Oh, yes. Please, more,” Silla begs.

“Can you come while I give you three more swats, Beautiful?” Isaac asks palming her ass as he sucks and licks her clit.

“Like this, while you do that?” she pants.

“Use your words, Kitten, or I’ll stuff that pretty mouth with my cock,” Ayden warns. I snort, because I think that’s what she wants.

“That’s not the punishment you think it is,” Silla sasses, looking up at him, and I get the feeling she’s said that to him today by the way he smirks at her. Isaac swats her with his free hand, and she wordlessly screams as her eyes widen. I can hear him feasting on her pussy, and the air smells of vanilla.

“Mmm, you’re squeezing my fingers so well, Baby. I’m going to need to fuck you soon,” Isaac confesses. “Come for me.”

Sidney groans, pulling open his pants. “Ayden,” he barks. “Come help me out. Suck on my cock while we watch our girl come.”

Sidney is standing behind Silla and she whimpers because she can’t see as Ayden walks over to Sidney.

“Such a glutton for punishment,” Isaac teases her, swatting her again. His sleeves are pushed up his arms, his ink standing out in stark relief. His muscles ripple, and I lick my lips as I watch him with Silla. I adore her whimpers and cries as he continues to eat her pussy. Ayden pulls out Sidney’s cock, swallowing it down smoothly. Fuck, I never realized he has such a perfect throat to fuck. I get lost in watching Sidney pull Ayden down on his dick until I hear Silla’s sounds get more tortured.

Dropping to my knees behind her, I take turns with Isaac feasting on her cunt. Our tongues tangle together a few times as we suck and lick, and I push my finger in next to Isaac’s, reveling in how tight she is.

“You are so perfect,” I coo to her. Her thighs shake, her body is covered in a sheen of sweat, and her breasts heave from exertion. She needs to come. Rubbing her clit hard, Isaac and I finger fuck her over the edge.

“Please, yes, don’t stop, argh!” Silla screams, the sound of it echoing

through the trees, and I hope Andrya and Kal are good look outs. Her walls go from fluttering to squeezing as she comes, and I continue to rub her clit hard as she squirts all over.

“Good Girl,” I praise, sucking on my fingers. Isaac is already pulling his cock out, rocking it along her core to drench it in her juices. “Do you want Isaac’s cock, Silla?”

“Yes,” she gasps, moaning as Isaac lines the head of his cock with her entrance, pushing himself inside of her. She’s still wearing her pants and boots, the pants hindering her movements since we pushed the jeans to her ankles.

Sidney is watching Isaac, his head tipped slightly back as Ayden treats his dick like the best dessert there is. I can see the swirls of black ink decorating Sidney’s cock and smirk, wondering what Silla will think about her name being on their dicks.

I push the thought away, moving to drop to my knees in front of Silla. Wrapping my hand in her hair, I pull hard. Freeing my cock, I track her widened eyes and chuckle as she opens her mouth for it.

Tracing the head of my dick along her lips, I grunt as her tongue impatiently flicks to taste me as I fist the base of my cock. “I’m going to steal your breath with my cock, face fuck you hard, and you’re going to love it, won’t you?”

“Yes, yes, mine,” she gasps, overwrought and crazed.

“Take it,” I command, pushing my length past her lips. My eyes roll as her tongue drags along it, paying special attention to my piercings on the underside of my cock. Silla surprises me with a hint of teeth, and I grab her around her throat. “Fuck yes, give me your teeth, Dangerous Girl.”

Silla’s throat bulges with the size of my cock as she swallows and my hand flexes around it, rocking my hips to test how she does. Her gag reflex is better now, and I ignore the reasons why. It’s just me and Silla right now, our demons are put aside, unless we are the monsters.

I groan as I push further, until my pelvis is flush with her nose. “You don’t have to breathe to suck my dick, Baby Girl. Yes, fuck just like that.” I sigh. Isaac pulls her away slightly as he pulls out, and I chuckle as he thrusts her back to me. Together, we fuck her between us, the only reason she breathes is because of Isaac, and I’m sure she’ll have dirt on her body from the ground and leaves. We’re cavemen, our only concern is to use our pretty girl, and make her come for us.

Her throat tightens, and I can see her hands fisted from where they’re still bound behind her back. “Let go for us, Baby. You ran hard, your ass is glowing a perfect shade of red, let go. You deserve it.”

Silla keens, eyes looking adoringly at me. We aren’t being gentle, her eyes are watering, but she’s a glorious mess for us. Isaac reaches between himself and Silla, and I can see him rubbing her clit with his thumb.

“Do as he says, Silla. You want to be Daddy’s good girl, don’t you? Oh, fuck, yeah,” Isaac mutters. “She clenched so damn hard.”

I can’t respond, my eyes closing as Silla pulls my soul out of my body. My fist closes hard around her throat, and she chokes slightly, her throat getting tighter. Forehead furrowed in concentration, I gasp as the pressure gets too much to bear. “Come for Daddy, Beautiful. If I want to suck your juices off Isaac’s dick, I expect to be able to,” I tell her.

My hips thrust as I shoot ropes of cum down her throat. The amount is so much, it leaks out her mouth, and I roar with pride, shuddering. Isaac’s thrusts stutter as I pull out of her mouth, and I can see he’s close too.

“Fuck, yes Baby. I’m coming,” he groans, pumping her full of cum. She’s indeed going to be a pretty little cum queen.

Sidney pulls Ayden off his cock, a thread of spit connecting Ayden to it still. “Shall we show Silla our surprise?” he asks quietly.

My thumb catches some of my overspill from my orgasm from the corner of Silla’s mouth. “Open,” I tell her. Her breaths paint the air white as she struggles to regain control over her breathing, but my perfect girl opens for

me anyway. Silla sucks and licks away the last evidence of my release, and Isaac kisses her back, releasing her hands from the belt as he pulls out of her.

Standing unsteadily, he tucks himself back into his pants. Falcon watches everything as if he doesn't know where to look or not look, completely overwhelmed. If I wasn't part of this fucked up crew, I'd probably feel the same.

"Sidney and Ayden have a surprise for you," I tell her, pulling away to stand. Her hands push herself up so that she's on her knees. There are leaves and bits of snow in her hair, and her body is streaked with dirt. I know she's going to be even messier by the time we're done.

Silla's eyes are sparkling as she looks at us, and I decide this is one of the best ideas that I've ever had.

SILLA

My skin feels electrified and I want someone to touch me. I am loving every moment of this, and I grin as Sidney and Ayden stand in front of me.

My pussy aches in the best of ways from Isaac's thick cock, and I want to beg to breathe the way my body did while I was sucking on my favorite treat. "I want to see my surprise," I tell them, my voice low and throaty. If this is my voice now, I may as well embrace it. I heard Sidney getting sucked off by Ayden, but pout as I see he's put his dick away.

"You're dirty, adorable, and want more, don't you Pet?" Sidney teases, unzipping his pants. He glances at Ayden who mirrors his actions. "We did something a little crazy, because you have touched our soul. A piece of all of us died when we thought you did, as you know."

They're both commando, so their dicks pop out, covered in black swirls and markings. They're similar, yet different, because Ayden has a Prince Albert piercing at the head of his cock. Both of their cocks are dripping with pre-cum. They both remind me of a work of art as my lips open in surprise.

"Wow," I whisper. "Did you do this when you did the other tattoos?"

"Mmhmm," Sidney says, angling his body so I can see more of the masterpiece. "What else do you see?"

Leaning forward, I see the letters "s" and "i" and "a" and frown. "Is that my name?"

"It is. I have Andrya's name in the design toward the bottom of my cock," Sidney says, smirking.

"I have your name only, by the way. I don't need my sister's name on my cock," Ayden smirks, and I chortle in laughter.

"I can't breathe," I gasp, holding my stomach. "I love that you did this, and I promise I'm not laughing at your cocks. Will you fuck me now,

please?”

“You had Isaac and Grayson, you still need more?” Sidney teases me.

The cold air makes me shiver, but my pussy clenches over nothing, and I whimper. “Yes, I do,” I rasp.

“Our queen gets what she wants,” Ayden murmurs, and my eyes widen even as I drop my head back as he moves closer. “You want your enemies to bleed? It’s yours. You want to ride my cock as their blood drips to the ground, I’m in.”

I lap at his slit, shivering in pleasure at his words. He tastes sweet to me, and I find myself craving more. They won’t judge me for what I need, and it makes me love them even more. Sidney pulls my head away from Ayden, and I whine before his lips cover mine.

“Patience, Little Love. You’re getting our cocks now. I want to warm you up a bit,” he murmurs. “You taste like yourself and Ayden’s sweetness. Fucking delicious.”

“Godsdamn, that’s so fucking hot,” Falcon mutters. I can’t look at him as Sidney moves away because Ayden takes up all the space in my vision. His ridged abs, swollen cock, the way his piercing winks at me, all of it has my attention.

Sidney kisses my neck and I arch my back to give him more room. “We’re all a little pent up, Baby. Ayden is going to try to be gentle—”

“Don’t,” I tell them, looking up into Ayden’s intense hazel eyes. “Be you. Fuck me however you need to.”

“I don’t want to hurt you,” he rumbles, fisting his hands to keep from touching me.

“You won’t,” I tell him at the same time that Gray does.

“Silla knows how far she can go, but if it helps, if your mouth is full of cock, how do you want to make everything stop, Baby?” Gray asks.

“I can slap his thigh, my hands aren’t bound anymore,” I tell him confidently. Well, my words turn into a whimper as Sidney lifts me to sit on

his cock. “Holy fuck.”

“Yes, Little Love. Get used to your new seat, you’re so damn wet. Fuck, Baby,” Sidney growls, fucking up into me.

Crying out, I fall back against him at his pace.

“Perfect, just where I need you. Smack the fuck out of me if it’s too much, Kitten,” Ayden says. I nod wildly, pulling him to me. His hand squeezes the tip of his cock, and it looks like it hurts. “Promise?”

“Promise,” I mewl. Sidney’s large hands are holding tightly to my hips, using his grip to move me up and down his dick. I can’t move, but I’m not adverse to being their sex toy.

“Such a good Kitten,” he mutters, straddling my body to push his cock past my swollen lips. Sucking dick is hard work, and my throat is slightly sore. My fingers dig into the muscles of his ass, pulling him deeper. “Dammit, I’m going to blow my load all over your face and tits. You’re so eager, fuck.”

“We’re keeping you forever, Pet,” Sidney promises. I moan as he stretches my muscles. He feels deeper like this, I don’t know how or why, but the head of his dick brushes parts of me that I forgot could be reached. Forcing myself to forget the small dicked men of my past, I focus on Ayden’s fingers as they press into my cheeks and scalp.

“There she is,” Ayden murmurs. “You can’t leave us, Kitten. No one else exists.”

“We’re all that matters,” Sidney growls, sliding almost all the way out before thrusting up. I gasp, and I stop thinking. All that matters is every nerve ending that lights up as Sidney fucks me.

Ayden takes advantage of my head resting on Sidney’s shoulder, immobilizing it so that he can fuck my throat. The piercing feels a bit cooler than the rest of him, and it heightens the experience as he fucks my throat. Soon, all I can smell is his masculine scent of musk and amber.

I can’t see because Ayden’s body blocks out the world, I can’t breathe

because his cock pushes me to my limits. Saliva drips from the corners of my mouth, and my nose is running, but all I care about is driving him wild. My fingers make indentations in his ass, but he just grunts.

“You squeeze as hard as you need to,” Ayden groans. “Your throat is a vise, and your body is mine to play with.”

“Ayden, her pussy is so tight. She’s strangling me, fuck, my balls are screaming for mercy, Pet,” Sidney wheezes in my ears. “Dammit, I’m not going to last. Come for me. I demand it.”

I can’t say anything as I suck and swallow around Ayden. I want to come, I’m close. I need a little more...

Fuck me. The world whites out as Sidney slaps my clit as he twists his hips while he rocks up into me. I squeal, the only noise I can make as Ayden gives me just enough air before obliterating my airway with his dick. Spots of black and white dance through my vision once I can see again and Sidney’s hands massage the inside of my thighs. I know he’s up to something.

My G-spot is getting a work out, and I could possibly come from that alone, but Sidney is an overachiever. If I’m not almost passed out after he’s done, he’s not happy. Just as I get used to them using me together, Sidney rubs my clit insistently.

“Oh Kitten, come for us,” Ayden gasps. “Gods, yes, please.”

In true Sidney fashion, he pinches my clit at the same time that he does my nipple. My body writhes, and ceases to exist. My eyes roll as I explode, and suddenly Ayden rips his cock away from me. Ropes of cum splash over my open mouth and breasts, my tongue out to catch his sweet flavor.

Sidney roars as he fills me with his cum, his face buried in my neck. My chest is heaving, my lungs happy to have oxygen returned to them, and I feel lightheaded. I am pretty sure I have cum on my eyelashes and I blink furiously.

“Hold on, Mistress,” Kenzo murmurs, and he wipes it away with a wet cloth. I don’t know where he found water, but I rasp out a "thank you". He

stares down at me, a worshipful grin on his face. “You’re so damn beautiful, and utterly covered in cum.”

I giggle because it’s true, and his eyes cut to Sidney. “I think a quick dip in the freezing river is in order,” Sidney chuckles. “I promise there will be hot chocolate after, Pet. Off you go, Falcon. We’ll follow.”

I squeak as I’m pulled from Sidney’s cock, and Kenzo carries me off over his shoulder with my pants around my ankles. The boys whoop and laugh, carrying my things.

They’re insane and utterly mine.

Twenty-One

ANDRYA

Silla emerges from the woods with a cum drunk smile. Her hair is wet and now in a braid, and... is that dirt on her forehead?

“Did you have fun, Baby?” I tease her, pulling out a bottle of water and handkerchief to clean her face. I’m practically a Girl Scout with how prepared I am.

“I did,” she says happily. Kal’s jaw drops slightly at the sight of her as I kiss her lips. He looked like he wanted to save her as her screams bounced through the forest, and I had to tell the people who lived just outside of the village that they were playing hide and seek. Nothing to see here, folks.

“Why is your hair wet, Silla?” I ask, smirking as I clean off her forehead. I’m glad they at least bundled her tightly in her clothes.

“Falcon threw me into the river,” she says, rolling her eyes. “I was promised hot cocoa for being a good girl.”

“Silla, you can have whatever you want after being such a good girl for us,” Grayson growls, and I shiver with Silla. Godsdamn, that’s new. I guess my libido really is waking up again.

“Fuck me,” I whisper, eyes wide. Gray looks at me in surprise and smirks. “Silla wants hot chocolate, so we should totally do that right now.”

“That wasn’t very sly,” Kal murmurs as he walks next to me.

“Shh,” I laugh. The kid is sweet, but almost too much so. Our world is dangerous, and even Silla likes things that nice boys can’t deliver on.

“So you’re really okay, Silla?” he asks, his eyes searching for bumps, bruises, or signs that she didn’t love every moment of that fucked up chase.

“I am,” Silla says, with a goofy look on her face. My girl is definitely dickmatized.

“I don’t understand what happened at all,” Kal says, shaking his head.

“I am not a nice girl,” Silla says reluctantly, her happy glow fading. I want to poison Kal’s drink, not to kill him, but give him the shits so badly he believes his bowels are making their exit from his body. “You’re so sweet, Kal, I think we should be friends, because my sex life is a little fucked up.”

“I would say you’re being presumptuous in thinking I’m interested, but Andrya found me stalking you,” Kal grumbles, making me snort. “I was obsessed with you before I even saw your face. You’re beautiful, but I don’t know what to think.”

“She’s too much for you, bro,” Falcon chuckles behind him.

Kal glances back, flushing with embarrassment. I don’t think he realized that they were so close to us. That’s the other thing, there’s no privacy amongst us. I don’t think that he could handle it.

Spending years in a reform camp means I’m used to it.

“I mean, maybe I am,” Silla says with a shrug. “I’m a little broken now.”

“You’re perfect,” I growl, wrapping my arm around her middle and laying my head on her shoulder. “Life is short, enjoy the kinky side of life.”

“Are you going to follow your own advice on that, big sis?” Ayden teases me, and I shrug.

“Maybe. I was almost a little sad I didn’t join you all,” I tell them, ignoring the silence behind us. They can interpret that however they’d like.

I’m not being a tease, I’m simply figuring out what I can handle. If a therapist would see me and not be killed by the queen for my spilling her secrets, I’d go see one. However, I won’t endanger anyone with the anger and hatred in my soul.

“Alright then,” Grayson says, clearing his throat. “We’ll figure out what that looks like as we go, Andrya.”

“I know you’ve had sex with Isaac and Sidney, but if you could have sex with anyone else in our group, who would it be?” Silla asks.

“What?” I ask. I understand the question, but I’m confused regardless. Isaac and I stopped hooking up as soon as Silla came to Forbach Reform

Camp, and I...

I don't know how to process this. Grayson is very caring with all of us, but I haven't allowed myself to really think of him in a sexual way. Well, not until the growl earlier today. Fuck, what is going on with me?

Why is my vagina a hussy, now of all times?

"I'm not trying to trap you into an answer, Andrya," Silla admonishes. "The question just popped up, and my mouth ran away with it before I could think about it."

She pulls away from me, taking steps to stare out at the drop off the cliff. "I wasn't expecting her to ask me that," I whisper.

"She thinks she did something wrong by asking," Isaac tells me, staring after her. "Silla is making me nervous standing so close to the edge."

My heart starts to pound as I break away from them to walk toward her. I don't think she's going to step off, but Isaac's words make me feel twitchy.

"Baby?" I say gently as I slowly ease my arm around her waist, forcing her to take a step back. The wind is blowing hard over here, and it's frigid.

"I wasn't going to step off, just needed space," she mumbles, staring in front of her.

"You have every right to ask me whatever you want," I explain to her, kissing her cheek. "We are yours, but there's a lot of relationships happening between us all too. No one will ever hide anything from you. I was just taken a bit by surprise because I hadn't thought about it before."

"I... it's selfish of me to be with so many people and then ask you that, isn't it?" Silla is staring unseeingly into space, and I'm doubly glad that my arm is anchoring her.

"Why is there a limit to who you can love?" I ask, inhaling her jasmine scent. "I think open communication is really important, I just have been so anti-romantic attraction for anyone, it really took me by surprise. To answer your question, Grayson growled at the two of us, and I wanted to call him "Daddy"."

Silla sputters with laughter and I grin.

“Gods, he is sexy when he growls,” Silla sighs. “I think he knows it too, doesn’t he?”

“Oh yeah,” I grin, looking out over the cliff with her. There’s a raging ocean over the edge, the water angry as it slams into the cliffs. I was so focused on Silla earlier as we walked through here that I didn’t pay much attention to the view. “He was really good to all of us when we thought you were dead, but I didn’t realize that I was developing feelings for him. I feel as if I’m doing something wrong.”

“You’re not,” Silla denies, shaking her head. “I don’t feel possessive of them with you. Maybe I was a little jealous when I found out you had been sleeping with Isaac before I arrived to FRC, but that’s more because I thought he’d prefer you to me.”

“I was easy pussy,” I mutter with a shrug.

“I heard that,” Isaac says behind us.

“You all have such cat-like reflexes,” I complain. “You weren’t supposed to hear that.”

“Then don’t talk about yourself like that,” he responds. “We were both looking for no strings attached sex, and that’s what it was at the time. It would mean something now, simple as that. Alright?”

“Yeah, alright,” I tell him, biting my lip, refusing to look at him. Tears prick my eyes because I feel embarrassed that he heard me say that.

“You’re shaking, Baby,” Silla says, turning to hug me. “Isaac doesn’t like when we’re mean to ourselves.”

“None of us do,” Sidney affirms, pulling us to him. Apparently it’s a party.

“I don’t. I want you to realize that taking what you want sexually isn’t being easy or a whore or whatever else,” Isaac says, brushing my hair away from my forehead. “Our identities have been fucked up enough without adding shitty self talk to it too.”

“Okay.” I sigh, laying my head on Sidney’s shoulder as he holds Silla and I. He smells like the herbs he was working with this morning, and it gives him a smoky scent.

“I love you and I want you to be happy, Andrya,” Silla says. “Today has been emotional, huh?”

“Yeah, it really has. I think that’s what happens when you avoid dealing with your emotions,” I tease. “We’ll figure out our way, I just wasn’t expecting your question. You did nothing wrong.”

“Okay.” She nods. “I felt like I was ambushing you a little.”

“Not in the least. Now, I need hot chocolate and a pastry, stat,” I demand, brushing away the tears that threaten to escape.

“Andrya,” Grayson rumbles, making me shiver. Dammit. “Come here.”

I bite my lip as I move over to him. Falcon is watching our interactions as if trying to understand them, and I wish him good luck with that. I barely understand myself. I just know I feel a bit more settled in the knowledge that if Gray and I do develop into something, Silla will be okay with it.

“Yes?” I ask, walking into his open arms.

“You have something to tell me, Sweetheart?” he asks, enveloping me in a hug.

“Maybe? Your growl packs a punch, Grayson. Maybe you should be careful who you use that around,” I tease him.

“Oh Andrya, I think it worked on exactly who it was supposed to,” he says, tilting my face up to him. “I’ve been obsessed with your wellbeing and the asshole men with us. It’s totally normal for you to develop feelings. Do they bother you?”

“I... no. They’re really new, though,” I whisper.

“Okay,” he grunts, dipping his head down to brush his lips against mine. I squeeze my thighs together, whimpering, and I can feel his lips curve up in satisfaction. “You’re so sexy, Andrya. Lean into your feelings, we’ll take our time. Now I believe we promised our girl hot chocolate.”

“We did.” I smile. His lips are still against mine and his hand tilts my head back to kiss me again. My lips part, and holy hell, the way his tongue swipes across my bottom lip makes me grip his coat lapels.

Grayson hums to himself, his mouth opening wider, and I mirror his movements. Slowly, he ends one of the most toe curling kisses that I’ve ever had. All I can smell is peppermint, and it feels comfortable. Sleeping in his bed regularly means that I constantly slept with his scent wrapped around me.

Blinking, I realize I closed my eyes and I gaze up into his blue eyes. “Hey,” he says softly, leaning back with a small smile. My heart is beating faster, and my hands are still gripping his coat.

He looks really good in the damn thing. “Hi.” I sigh, forcing myself to let go of him.

“Gray is just that sexy,” Isaac chuckles, pulling me away. “Don’t let him bask in that for too long. He’s hard enough to get through doorways as it is.”

“I get myself through doorways just fine,” Gray yells as we walk away, making me giggle.

“Agree to disagree,” Isaac grunts, winking at me. I see Silla walking ahead with a smile on her lips as she looks back at us. I squish my nose at her, which just makes her laugh.

We’re a messy group, filled with trauma, but somehow we make it work. As I glance at Falcon who is walking next to us, he looks thoughtful. Kal on the other hand looks adorably confused, and I’m glad that Silla talked to him. We’ll take care of him as a little brother, but I don’t think he has what it takes to hang with us.

Time can only tell, though. We have to kill a queen first.

KENZO

I learned a lot about Silla and her lovers today. Hell, I am finding out a lot about myself, too.

As I walk up the steps to my home with Kal, I struggle to process it all. If I had known that I would chase my mistress through the woods and watch her lovers fuck her, I wouldn't have brought my little brother with me. I think he had his eyes opened today about them.

Rose colored glasses are a lot more fun usually than reality.

"Are you really fine with everything today?" Kal asks once the front door closes behind us. And there it is.

"Yes," I grunt, turning on the lights. We live in a heavily wooded area just outside of town, which is why we have a car at all.

"She has like five boyfriends, Falcon," he complains. I want to take Silla out alone one day, just for the sake of hearing my real name. Secrecy is important because of my bloodline, but dammit is it lonely.

"Polyamory is acceptable in our society, why are you making this a big deal?" I ask. There are many families who make this kind of dynamic work for them, but Kal is very sheltered.

I think he had a huge shock today.

"It's acceptable, but I've never seen it put into practice. Is there a schedule or something?" he snarks.

"Are you upset that she friend-zoned you today?" I ask, walking into the kitchen for a beer. It's late afternoon now, and we made sure to drop them at their apartment before returning home.

"No, because I don't understand her," Kal sighs, following behind me. "I don't understand how she can enjoy being chased through the woods, Gods, she sounded petrified."

I think back to her gasps and screams, but they just manage to make my dick hard. “I think the experience was meant to get her to stop thinking. Silla is overwhelmed by what we’re asking her to do, and walking back into the castle willingly scares her. Maybe more than she realizes.”

“Is she doing it for power?” Kal asks, chewing on his lip as he gets a glass of water.

Opening the bottle of beer in my hand, I shake my head. “Nah, she’s not. Silla wants to help mend what’s broken. The sight of homeless people hurt her heart. A woman at the market was worried about the weather shutting them down for the season sooner than normal, and Silla bought a shit ton of scarves and mittens,” I chuckle. “She’s got a big, big heart.”

Sipping his water, he grimaces. “Is that what we’re calling it? It just feels gluttonous.”

“Silla spent a year being raped and beaten at the pleasure and behest of the queen, who I can honestly say is obsessed with her,” I tell him, my hand squeezing around the bottle so hard I’m worried it’ll break. “There’s no fucking way she doesn’t deserve the world.”

“So you want to be with someone out of a sense of duty?” he asks, brows furrowed.

“No. I want to get to know her because she equally infuriates me and turns me on, Kal. I can’t say I have much sexual experience because I’ve been working on this underground movement for years, but I know that I’m enjoying being around them all.”

“You’re going to become a twisted, sexual deviant too,” he groans, draining his glass to put it into the sink. “It’s like a little, exclusive club!”

I open my mouth to stop him, but snicker instead. “What are you calling the club?” I ask instead.

“You’re impossible!” Kal rages, stalking out of the kitchen, while all I can do is laugh.

Mistress: I had a lot of fun today, Pet. Thank you for helping us get out of the house. I needed all of that.

Smiling, I read her text, finding my heart beating a little faster because of it.

Mistress, it was my pleasure. The memory of your taste still lives rent free in my head.

Sipping my beer, I take a walk down to the basement. This is where I think, decide my next move, and make things difficult for the monarchy. The reason she's so worried about me is because people have started to talk about their displeasure in the realm.

Kinsley, a duchess on the west coast of Forbach, is concerned about Cinder's ability to rule, and asked how she could help the Underground's mission to remove her from her throne. I was surprised when she approached me a few weeks ago, but add on that Cinder also wants to now get a divorce from Charming, it's clear something is going on.

Turning on the lights, I stare at my board that shows the issues in each district in Forbach. The East is having trouble with their crops, the North is having issues with looting and severe poverty, and there's an uptick in crime all over. People are desperate, and it's definitely beginning to show.

I wanted to... I don't know, remove her without things becoming a bloodbath, but I'm past that now. My focus was so much on the kingdom as a whole and Cinder's inability to rule that I forgot to pay attention to the misdeeds occurring in the castle. Silla was tortured in the dungeons for a year, and I thought she was on a damn vacation.

I was so stupid. I can command a group of people, organize them, and convince them to overthrow a queen, but I missed something so large. The Queen of Forbach is bathed in the blood of her people, and this has to end.

Mistress: Let me know when you'd like another taste, Pet.

Gods, this woman is going to be the death of me. Staring at my board, all I can see is her face in the throes of ecstasy. Even when she was scared and running, there was feral exhilaration in her eyes. She fucking loved every moment. Mistress loved it less when I threw her ass in the river to get clean though.

Chuckling, I lift the phone and decide to shoot my shot before we all commit treason against the crown.

Want to come over tomorrow night so I can make you dinner?
I'll pick you up, Mistress. I'll have my taste and then feed you.

I wait for her reply, biting my lip when she takes a while to respond. While I'm not a virgin, I haven't had the time to date. Once I founded the Underground and then found my brother five years later, everything else was pushed to the back burner. I'm twenty-seven years old and sweating bullets that I'm coming on too strong to a girl I like.

Mistress: I'm a full meal, Pet. Maybe just feed me dessert.

Fuck me. Now I'm counting the hours until tomorrow night.

Twenty-Two

AYDEN

Is it wrong that I think it's adorable that my girlfriend has a date? Our last date involved chasing her through the woods... but does that count as a date if we didn't ask her out?

This is hurting my brain. I need to up my game if Dog Boy is already taking her out on dates. Our lives are so chaotic that the fun things are being put to the side. I want to give her the world.

"Why are you thinking so hard?" my sister asks, curled up in a chair reading. She looks more relaxed than she has since before we were arrested, and I think it's because she's realizing that she's a lot less broken than she thought.

The broken pieces make everything prettier, I think. You can put them back together in whatever way you'd like, and sometimes, never be able to see the cracks.

"I'm afraid I'm a bad boyfriend," I mumble. I'm pretty sure my ears are red because they feel warm, and I force myself not to call attention to them.

"You are not," Andrya smirks, putting her book down. "Explain why you think that?"

I don't care what people typically think about me, but I am a bit embarrassed about this.

"Shouldn't we take her out on dates, I don't know, do couple-like things? Dog Boy is taking her out on a date, and I feel as if we're slacking." I sigh.

"We should make the effort, you're right." She nods. "In a lot of ways, we do. You make sure she has coffee during her period, I curled her hair for her date, Sidney is teaching her self defense. We all have our places in Silla's life," she reminds me. "But, if you want to do something special, do it. We all know that life is short, go for it. Don't feel as if you need to live by someone

else's standards though."

I nod, standing to check on Silla. Dog Boy will be here soon. Walking over, I ignore my sister's eye roll. If I want to kiss Silla stupid before she goes on her date, I will.

Knocking on the closed door, I hear a breathy moan as she says to come in. It sounds like someone else had the same idea. Stepping inside, I smirk at Grayson as he looks up from kissing her neck. His hand is stroking her clit under her panties, and she's still not dressed yet.

Naughty kitten.

"It looks like I should have offered to help you get dressed?" I say, amused. Silla is breathing hard, and I notice that she was in the middle of orgasming when she told me to come in. Grayson pulls his coated fingers out of her panties, sucking on them hard.

"Mmmm. Maybe," Grayson murmurs. "Falcon is going to be here soon, you can't go out in your underwear, even though it's very pretty."

Andrya and Silla went wild on Cinder's credit card, and bought Silla cute lingerie. I stare at the lilac bra and panty set as she disappears into the closet to dress, and I sit on the bed next to Grayson.

"Lucky bastard." I sigh, chuckling as Gray takes his time sucking another finger still coated in her arousal. Now he's just gloating.

"Falcon is excited for their date, he's texted me three times already. One was to make sure that the dessert he made would be acceptable to his mistress," Grayson rumbles softly, sitting on the bed to wait for Silla to dress.

"Dog Boy is kind of adorable. It's annoying," I grumble.

Gray snorts at me, and I hear Silla curse under her breath in the closet. The six of us are accumulating a lot of things, so we're spaced out over three closets. I can't wait until we're able to move into a bigger living space. Maybe we can do a little renovating in the castle: one big room and two huge closets for us all. Damn, it's nice to dream and know it's all so close to being within our reach.

“Kitten, do you need help?” I ask when I hear her bump into something again.

“I got it!” she says triumphantly, opening the door to step out. Silla is wearing light brown heeled boots that make me want to push her legs over her head and fuck her. My cock thickens in my joggers as my eyes travel up, and I’ve only really seen her shoes.

I’m a psychotic simp for Silla, and I’m not even sorry.

Silla is wearing tights, a brown leather skirt that hits mid thigh, and a cropped lilac, long-sleeved, low cut shirt. Her hair is curled perfectly, makeup is done in a smoky eye, and I want to see if I can smear her mauve lipstick all over my cock.

“Godsdamn, is it too soon to cancel your date and keep you?” I groan.

Gray reaches for Silla, pulling her by the waist between his thighs. “Dangerous Girl, how is Falcon going to eat your pretty pink pussy if you’re making it so difficult to get to it?”

He fingers the pretty tights covering her thighs, and I find that I have to agree.

“Ummm,” Silla blushes, pulling up the skirt until we can see the garters she’s wearing. Damn, I’m officially a little jealous of the dog. “I figure my panties won’t last long, either.”

Grayson groans, leaning forward to kiss her exposed stomach. “I’m going to need a card game night where you wear these tights, garters, and nothing else,” he says.

“I’m not sure you’ll be able to concentrate,” she teases him, fixing her skirt.

“I’ll lose a million times over to stare at you to my heart’s content,” he growls, and I smile sadly because it’s true. We will do anything to be able to keep her, even if its just to play naked card games together.

“I love you too,” she says, cupping his face to kiss him. Gray pulls her into his lap so that she’s straddling him, and I have to say that I approve.

“He’s here, Silla!” Andrya calls out, causing Grayson to make a sound of protest.

“I’m going to miss you.” He winces.

“When I get back, we can do whatever you want,” Silla says as she gets up.

“Anything?” Gray asks.

Shrugging, she nods. “You know what I won’t do, so yeah. Anything.”

The level of trust that she gives us all is incredible. Silla turns to the bathroom to freshen up her smeared makeup, staring at herself with a huff.

“You’re gorgeous, Kitten. Let’s go get your coat or you’ll be a Pretty Popsicle.”

Silla giggles at me, following me out to the main room.

“Hey,” she murmurs to Dog Boy with a smile. My sister has her coat ready for her, and I’m not surprised since we’re so in tune with each other.

“You look amazing,” Dog Boy whispers. They really are adorable. Fuck, I guess we’re going to have to keep him after all.

Silla puts on her coat and I grab her wrist once it’s on. There’s no room for the tracker on her ankle with her boots, so I push up her sleeve. Fuck, yes. I was so busy looking everywhere else that I didn’t notice the tracker. Tugging her to me, I smooth back her hair, staring at her.

“I didn’t forget,” she says so softly her lips barely move.

“Don’t fuck up, Dog Boy,” I tell him, looking up at him as I kiss her forehead. My lips curve into a feral smile as I see that he’s wearing the dog collar Sidney put on him. Good boy.

“I wouldn’t dream of it. We’re just going to my home. It’s away from everything and safe. I have no doubt you’ll track her as well,” Falcon smirks.

I guess I wasn’t really very discreet. Oh well.

“Have fun, Kitten. Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do,” I tease her.

Andrya and the guys roll their eyes. “You basically told her to do everything,” Sidney chortles, shaking his head.

Damn, they're right.

"Whatever, have fun, Baby." I grin with a shrug, letting go of her hand.

"Thank you, I'll be fine," Silla reminds me, walking to Falcon to take his hand.

I nod, watching my heart walk out the door. "I hope no one judges me for watching them the entire way over there from the computer," I grunt, whirling around to grab it. I don't care if I'm being dramatic right now.

"Do you want popcorn or ice cream for our stalking?" 'Drya asks, moving toward the kitchen.

"Do you have any more mint chocolate chip ice cream?" I ask, settling on the couch.

"Middle," Gray grunts, jutting his chin at me to make me move. Ugh, I guess this is a group activity. Fine.

Scooting over to the middle of the couch, I roll my eyes as Gray and Sidney sandwich me between them, and I can hear popcorn heating up. I guess Andrya decided that she wanted some.

Firing up the computer, I open the app that tracks Silla through her bracelet.

"They just got in the car," Sidney grunts, leaning against the couch cushions.

"Ice cream, Ayden," my sister says shortly as I raise my eyes. She's standing there with a bowl and I grin in thanks as I take it.

Maybe we can put together a club or something: The Growly Mates. I'll be sure to work on that.

SILLA

Kenzo is a perfect gentleman the entire drive to his house. Apparently he lives ten minutes outside of the city.

“Does Kal live with you?” I ask, realizing that I have no idea. Damn, I’m kind of terrible. I don’t want to use the excuse that my life is a shit show, even though it’s true.

“He does, but I haven’t seen him much today. I think I pissed him off yesterday, so he may have fucked off to a friend’s house.” He shrugs. “We still butt heads occasionally, since we had very different upbringings. I found him when he was fourteen, and that’s when he came to live with me. I have this big brother mentality that often moonlights as a daddy complex.” Realizing what he said, he flushes. “I didn’t mean it like that, Mistress.”

“I know what you meant,” I reassure him. “I think there’s a fine line between being a parent and a sibling. It sounds like sometimes Kal gets overwhelmed.”

“That’s exactly it.” He sighs. “So it’s just us tonight. I texted him, but he didn’t respond. That’s also not out of the ordinary. I wish he’d text me since we are moving on the queen in four days, but sometimes he’s a real asshole.”

My lips twitch at the sentiment.

“I’ve been working on my weapons training with Sidney, and I think it’s going well,” I confess to him. I’m nervous about going to the castle for dinner.

“Yeah? I may be a pacifist to a fault, but everyone who works for the Underground has basic weapons training. I work with each new recruit to make sure they can handle themselves and the dangers present, especially after Cinder started sending her spies to infiltrate. It’s the reason that they were found hog-tied and gagged at the gates of the castle. I would be doing

this movement a disservice if I didn't expect it would come to violence. I am just a lot more motivated now that you're involved."

Biting my lip, an idea comes to me, and for the first time in forever, I speak without overthinking it. "Do you maybe want to train with us? Sidney and I are going to spar with knives tomorrow," I explain.

"Yes," Kenzo says immediately, turning onto a dirt road. "Are you expecting things to be bad at the castle?"

"Yeah, I am." I sigh. "The way Cinder talked about Charming and how much I'll dislike what he wants from me..." I shiver, disgusted with the conversation. "I want to plan for every eventuality. My hair pins will be dipped in poison that will kill immediately, so I'm practicing my throwing skills as well. Honestly, shoving it in someone's throat is probably the best I can ask for."

"So bloodthirsty, Mistress. It's really fucking hot," he mutters.

I smirk, looking up as I see a house appear down a long driveway on the right hand side. Kenzo turns into it, and my lips part in surprise. The place reminds me of a house in a fairytale. Moss covers the walls of the home, and there are bay windows that are the focal point. It's absolutely breathtaking.

"Wow," I whisper. "This is beautiful, Kenzo."

He glances at me, a smile lighting up his face. "I love the way my name sounds on your lips. Please use it more when we're together alone."

"Yes, Pet," I promise.

"Mistress," he breathes as he parks the car. "If you keep flirting with me, we won't make it inside."

It doesn't escape my notice that he's wearing the collar that Sidney and I gave him, so I nod, taking off my seatbelt. Kenzo is off like a flash, racing around the car to open the door. Fucking swoon. So damn sexy.

"Mistress," he says, holding his hand out for me to take. His gaze feels like he's eating me alive as he watches me get out of the car. "I can barely wait, get inside of the house, Beautiful."

The door slams behind me, and he locks the car as we walk toward the house. Kenzo ushers me inside, being sure to lock the door.

“Let me get your coat,” he murmurs, his voice almost a growl. My pussy spasms around nothing, and I bite back a whimper. *Down girl. Are we really going to sleep with him on the first date?*

I remember who I am, and almost laugh at how silly that is. My life is filled with a thousand impossible things to believe before breakfast, so if the opportunity presents itself, I’ll take it.

“Come with me. Do you want anything to drink?” he asks me as I look around the house as he escorts me through it. It’s homey, and there’s actually plants hung here and there. It’s not a surprise a man can keep them alive, but it is another layer to Kenzo that I wasn’t aware of.

“No I’m fine,” I respond absently.

“The house is a work in progress,” he sighs.

“No, I love it,” I tell him quickly. “I love how it feels lived in, plants and all. I don’t like closed spaces that are suffocating. This house feels open and inviting.”

“What was your home like growing up? Can I ask that?” he asks nervously as we step into the kitchen.

“You can ask whatever you’d like.” I shrug. “I lived in a brownstone in the main city of Forbach with my mother and sister until we moved in with my step-father. His home was closer to the castle, and he worked in some capacity for the crown. I was too young to pay attention to it at the time. It was a house with a courtyard, he had servants, and it felt very stuffy. My mother was constantly telling us not to touch anything because it was an heirloom.”

“Ugh, that sounds boring and terrible,” Kenzo complains.

“Honestly, there were just more people to witness when my mother would lose it at me. I wasn’t quiet enough, fast enough, poised enough. So she’d drag me into a tiny space and lock me away. My mother had to be

careful about it when my step-father was alive though.” I shrug. “She waited until he was at work before beginning my punishment. I was always out of the crawl space by dinner, but my step-father would always notice my red eyes or paleness. He’d ask if I was getting enough sleep or sun.”

“What did your mother say to that?” Kenzo asks, his brows knitting in consternation.

“She’d say that ladies didn’t need the sun, and that I was merely feeling under the weather.” I sigh. “The questions continued the longer it went on, and before long my mother started making me bring my step-father a ‘special tea’ to help him relax. Within three months, my step-father was dead.”

“Your mother made you bring him poisoned tea. Gods, do you think Cinder knows?” Kenzo asks in horror.

“She asked me what was in the tea when she called the day you were over, so I am certain she does,” I grumble. “Cinder wouldn’t stoop to murdering the King of Forbach and her husband if she didn’t think she could get away with it.”

Kenzo drops to his knees in front of me, his arms wrapping around me as he lays his head on my stomach. “I’m sorry that your childhood was like that,” he says softly, kissing my stomach. “Some people shouldn’t have children.”

“No, no they shouldn’t. I don’t really remember my father anymore, but she has always wanted her own way. Cinder and she get along moderately well, and they just ignore each other as needed,” I explain. “I haven’t spoken to my mother in ages. The woman was very disappointed that I wouldn’t marry someone who’s three times my senior.”

“Ew,” Kenzo groans. “What was the purpose of marrying him?”

“Money, power, and getting me out of Cinder’s hair. He promised to trade goods with her that Forbach can’t get, but I was the prize. I would also be forced to leave Forbach. This realm has not done its best by me, but I still care,” I tell him fiercely.

“So beautiful, I can hardly stand it,” he murmurs, picking me up as he stands.

I squeal, struggling not to wiggle as he places my ass on the island. “I do believe you promised me a meal,” he growls.

Rubbing my thighs together in an effort to gain friction, I nod. Pushing my skirt up, his eyes widen as he sees my garters. “Naughty Mistress,” he breathes. “Will you lay back for me? I want to unwrap my present.”

Allowing him to take the reins, I lay back on the table as he pushes my skirt up so it bunches around my waist. Greedy eyes take in my body, and he shoves my shirt and bra up so my breasts bounce free. “Mmm so pretty.” He sighs happily, his thumb brushing over my panty clad pussy.

Finally, I release a whimper, squirming.

“What, Mistress? Is someone feeling a bit needy?”

“Yes, please, I need more,” I whisper.

“Your wish is my command,” he promises. Wrapping his hands around the waistband of my panties, he pulls until they shred in his hands. In my defense, they were gauzy material, and I knew they wouldn’t be a match for him. Shoving the scrap of fabric in his pocket, he lifts my legs until they’re pressed up by my ears. “You’re so beautiful.”

Breathing deeply, his eyes flutter closed. “Damn. I wonder, would you gush and beg as I eat you out?” he asks.

“It depends on if you’re worth your salt.” I smirk. I’m waving the red flag in front of the bull, and his midnight blue eyes flash with desire.

Leaning slowly down, he drags his tongue over my core, just barely grazing my clit. My body jolts up, a command that he do better. Kenzo chuckles darkly, opening his lips to suck on my bundle of nerve endings.

“Mistress, how do you smell and taste so good?” he groans. I’m completely exposed to him now that he has my legs pinned to the table. Kenzo grins ferally at me with his face soaked by my juices. I should feel embarrassed, but he’s so damn proud. “Hold your legs open for me, Baby. I

want to savor you.”

I immediately grab my thighs, leaving Kenzo’s hands free. Pushing his fingers deep inside of me, I gasp at how full I feel.

“You’re sucking my fingers in so well,” he praises. “I wonder if you’d do the same to my cock. What should I do to deserve the honor, Mistress?”

“Make me come,” I keen as he scrapes my clit with his teeth. Something about riding the edge of pain and pleasure really does it for me and I shudder. “Keep doing that please.”

Kenzo suction his lips exactly where I need it, making my eyes roll. He twists his fingers as he rocks them inside of me, stimulating my G-spot. Damn, that feels so good. I’m insanely close, and I know it’s because I’ve been working myself up with the idea of what it would be like to be with him.

“Such a good girl for me, Mistress. Will you reward me with your cum?” he growls. I’ve been watching him eat my pussy as if it’s his last meal and moan, my head dropping back to hit the counter with a slight thump.

Everything he’s doing is exactly what I want. My breasts bounce with each thrust of his fingers, and a pressure begins to build inside of me. My thighs tremble as I hold them, too.

“Pet, yes, more, please,” I beg, writhing as he takes his time discovering me, even as I catapult toward my release.

Screaming his name, my vision goes black as I explode, squirting all over the counter and Kenzo’s face. I slowly come back to myself to kisses on my thighs and Kenzo gathering me into his arms.

“There you are, Mistress. Is it wrong that I’m extremely proud of making you lose consciousness? At first I was a little worried, but I could feel your pulse in your thigh,” he chuckles.

“I do that sometimes,” I whisper, still twitching with aftershocks. “Take me to your bed and fuck me, Kenzo. Now.”

“No,” he says, surprising me as he begins taking me somewhere. “I plan to make love to you, and then feed you chocolate brownies and ice cream

once you're boneless. I hope you don't have any plans for the next few hours."

I huff out a laugh, burying my face in his neck. I really thought he was denying me there for a bit. Kenzo smells like oranges and cloves, and I just want to wrap myself in his scent.

"You smell good," I mumble, kissing and biting his neck. I'm still half dressed, but Kenzo doesn't seem to mind as he jogs lightly upstairs.

"I plan to smell like you very soon, Mistress," he says. "I've never smelled anything better than the scent of jasmine and vanilla before. I want to finish unwrapping you of these clothes that are tempting me, all except your garters. I never thought these would be sexy on anyone, but they are like a pretty frame for your pussy."

I flush at his words. All of my men and Andrya seem to have a way with dirty talk, and it makes me want his cock inside of me more.

"I want you inside of me," I whisper into his ear. "I can't... I can't do anal, so don't ask that of me, but anything else is yours."

"I never want anything that isn't mine to take, Mistress, and neither should anyone else," he tells me as he steps into a room. It's done in dark greens, and reminds me of being outside. I relax completely, happy that his private spaces make me comfortable. It would suck to ruin our fun with a panic attack.

Kenzo lays me down gently on the bed, toeing off his shoes before covering me. I love the weight of his body over mine, even though he braces himself on his forearms as he kisses me. I pull at his shirt, desperate to feel his skin on mine. Grabbing his shirt at the back of its neck, he pulls it over his head. Why is that so hot?

His skin is smooth to the touch over his sinewy muscles. Kenzo throws his long-sleeved shirt to the side, capturing my lips as he unzips my skirt. Getting up to kneel between my legs, he pulls it off. Touching my boots, he smirks, shaking his head. "I think we'll leave those on for a bit, Mistress."

He's confident, pushes gently for what he wants, yet leaves the final decision to me. I love that the dynamic between us there is so easy. He trusts me to take care of myself. There are for sure moments where I'll need help, or feel overwhelmed, but there's a person in my life to help fill my every need. My life outside of my homicidal step-sister and taking over the throne is just about perfect.

"If you're thinking that hard, then I'm not doing a very good job, Mistress," he murmurs, leaning over me to suck on my nipple. My shirt and bra are still pushed up over my breasts, and I sigh at how good the scrape of his teeth and gentle swipe of his tongue to chase it feels.

"I'm here," I promise as he pulls my shirt off and removes my bra.

"You're so damned beautiful, it feels like a dream that you're even here," Kenzo says in awe. Standing, he shoves off his pants, and I'm on my knees in front of him before I even realize it. Reaching out, I circle his cock with my hand. It's big enough that I can't close my hand, and I bite my lip as I draw my hand up to rub my thumb across his slit.

"Mine," I growl, leaning over to lick and suck on the head of his dick. Kenzo grunts as it jerks in my hand. Looking up, his midnight blue eyes seem electrified, and I see there may be a beast within him too. If you scratch the surface far enough, everyone can be pushed to their snapping point.

"Yes, I am yours. My cock, my heart, everything I have to give. I want to give you the chance to play and tease, but your mouth is so hot," he groans. Needing to taste more, despite his warning, I take all of him down. My throat spasms as I swallow, moaning at his salty taste. His cock would be the perfect treat with a little dark chocolate syrup on it. Messy, but so damned satisfying. "Silla..."

Deciding that I've pushed my luck far enough, I pull back, letting the head of his dick pop out of my mouth.

"Yes, Pet?" I say, my voice dark and filled with forbidden things.

"I need to be inside you," he begs, getting on the bed and pulling me so

I'm straddling him. I gasp, because of the suddenness, and I'm staring down at him. I don't get to be in this position much, and I find that I very much enjoy it.

"Like this?" I ask almost shyly, and he nods rapidly. "I'm not usually on top, I could suck at this..."

Kenzo's face looks perplexed as he sits up, his large hands cupping my face. "Anything you do would be amazing. Bounce on my cock, rock back and forth, use me and deny me my release. I don't fucking care, Mistress. I am yours. You could never suck at this. Is that understood?"

He kisses me hard, his tongue swiping my bottom lip, asking for more. I part my lips, allowing him entry. Kenzo makes a primal sound as his tongue meets mine, making me shiver. This very private part of him is mine too, and it makes me feel powerful. I love that he trusts me enough to unleash his demons.

I barely remember his question, forcing myself to remember. "Yes," I whimper, my hand wrapping around his cock to pump it at the base. He is incredibly hard, the skin silky soft. It's a pretty penis, smooth of any hair. Holding back my eye roll at my waxing on about his perfect dick, I rise up on my knees to line him up at my entrance. Sinking down, I whimper at the stretch. Kenzo gets on his knees, holding me tightly, and I wrap my legs around his back to continue to ride him.

"Take every inch like the queen you are, Mistress. Show me how perfect your tight pussy is," he growls, kissing my neck. I rock up and down on him, sliding every inch into my pussy. I feel so full, almost as full as when I'm with Grayson. Apparently I'm very attracted to big dick energy. Kenzo just hides his better behind his quiet demeanor.

I sigh as my ass hits his powerful thighs. He's tall, and his clothing masks how strong he really is. Kenzo is all muscles and coiled power, waiting to strike. I want to see what happens when he loses control. The only thing he's wearing is his collar, and I'm oddly proud of that.

Lifting and twisting my hips, I start to bounce on his cock, my fingers getting lost in his hair. The corded muscles in his neck and chest strain as his eyes close.

“You feel so good, Baby. Gods, please don’t stop. I’m trying not to take over,” he groans, his hands moving to squeeze my hips tightly.

“Take over,” I rasp.

Kenzo’s eyes close as he lifts and drops me on his cock. Gasping, my fingers pull on his hair, and his final veneer of control snaps. “Use me for your pleasure, come for me, claim me.”

Kenzo takes up all the air in the room as he gazes at me intently, fucking up into me. All I can do is hold on, the sound of flesh slapping and moaning filling the air. I don’t even recognize my voice as I beg for his cock, and he definitely delivers. Kenzo grinds me over his pelvis as he fucks me, making me see stars.

“Kenzo,” I cry out, my body breaking out into a sweat as my skin starts to tingle.

“That’s it, Mistress,” he growls, biting my shoulder. I scream, my hips bucking even as his hands clamp onto my hips. “Fucking come, Silla!”

“Yes!” I gasp, my entire body answering his command as I clamp down on his cock, coming hard. I feel Kenzo’s dick twitch inside of me, his teeth gritting as he explodes. I collapse against him, shivering from the force of my orgasm.

His hand rubs my back as he kisses my forehead, making my eyes prick with tears. I’m not the girl who cries after having an orgasm, not usually.

“Shh, you’re fucking magnificent, Mistress. I’d cry too if I had an out of body experience like that,” he teases me. Giggling, I blink away the tears as he cuddles me. “You need sugar after that, let’s clean up and I’ll feed you brownies covered in ice cream and chocolate syrup.”

Damn, he may be a mind reader after all. Kenzo picks me up to take me into the bathroom, where we make out for a bit before cleaning up to get

dessert. It's one of the best dates that I've ever been on.

Twenty-Three

ISAAC

Silla isn't home yet, but I can see the little dot says that she's still at Kenzo's home. Yawning, I find myself wanting to go get her.

"At what point is it acceptable to pick up your girlfriend while she's fucking her new boyfriend?" I complain. Playing that sentence back to myself definitely hurt my brain. Dammit, if this thing with Falcon is as serious as I think it is, we may need to move him in. We need a much bigger place.

"I miss her too, but she needs this time." Grayson sighs. It's after ten, and I want to ask her if she plans to spend the night over there. I'm exhausted for some reason and it's making me grouchy.

"Eh," Ayden grunts, making me laugh. He's been stuffing his face with ice cream, and none of us ate a proper dinner. We are impossible without proper supervision, even though we've been taking care of ourselves for years before Silla came into our lives.

"Fuck, I got so caught up in her date that I forgot to make dinner," Grayson groans.

"I'll help." Sidney grins, he thinks we're all hysterical, but he also parked himself next to Ayden for hours. I stole his spot when he got up to pee and refused to give it back.

Andrya rolls her eyes next to me, where she's perched on the couch edge. Pulling her into my lap, I ignore her squeak.

"Your ass is going to fall asleep if you continue to sit there," I admonish.

"You just want someone to snuggle," she snarks, taking full advantage of my body to use it as her own personal pillow.

"So fucking what if I do." I grin, kissing her forehead. Things have been a little easier for Andrya since our trip out to Peony. She has only taken two

showers today, so I'm calling that a win. It's not uncommon for it to be twice that on a good day.

"I hope she's having fun," Andrya says, wrapping her arms around my waist. "I expect sex hair and stolen panties to be able to call this a successful date."

Ayden snorts before shrugging. "I don't see any faults with what you just said. I wonder if he'll use them to jerk off into."

"I would," I chuckle.

"I have!" Grayson yells from the kitchen, making me shake my head. We've come a really long way since we all first met Silla. Damn, the girl came in all soft, skittish looks and turned our lives upside down. I wouldn't change it, though.

"Are we ready for this damn dinner?" I ask, smoothing back Andrya's hair.

"Yes and no," she says truthfully. "Silla's hair pins have all been dipped in poison. I'll do her hair to make sure that she doesn't stab herself with them. These are meant to kill immediately. I'm not fucking around. If she pulls a pin from her hair it means that all hell has broken loose."

There's silence in the kitchen before a glass explodes against the wall. Swallowing hard, I can take a guess that it was Grayson. He hides his anger issues, but it just makes it even more explosive when it bubbles over. Andrya flinches, making me squeeze her waist.

"You good, Baby?" I ask against the shell of her ear.

"Yeah." she sighs. "I agree with Gray's sentiment, though. I don't want to think about the worst case scenarios but I have. The ricin will be ground the morning of and split into pouches. The guard and soldier halls both are having stew the night Silla will be having dinner with the queen."

"Where did you get that information?" Ayden asks curiously, leaning back to look at his sister.

"Cinder's assistant chef really dislikes how his sister is treated in the

castle. She's the Queen's maid. Cinder is either fucking while she forces the maid to clean, or forces her to strip naked and lay restrained spread eagle while Lana is fucked from behind by one of the Queen's Mission," Andrya says, wrinkling her nose.

"I'd expect hazard pay for all of that," I mutter.

"Her brother is worried it'll continue to escalate. Marie has become very depressed and secretive of late, and his fear is that she'll spiral and either end her life or Cinder will kill her," Andrya explains. "It's not unexpected for the Queen's Guard to bury a dead body found in her bedroom."

"How is a dead body just 'found'?" Sidney scoffs from the kitchen. "Silla hasn't told us half the shit that her sister gets up to, and on some level, I don't want to know. I'll be forced to kill Cinder with my bare hands, causing an even bigger shit storm than we're already about to face."

"Keep that big dick energy in check," Andrya teases him. Sidney barks out a laugh, making her giggle.

"I think Grayson's dick is bigger, what do you say, Isaac?" Ayden asks curiously. I smirk at his question when Grayson yells, "I swear it's a normal sized cock!"

"I don't understand how you manage to walk around with that thing!" Ayden yells. We're soon all laughing at Gray's expense when there's a knock on the door. Glancing at the computer, I frown as I see that her tracker hasn't moved.

Squeezing Andrya's thigh, I nudge her over as I stand. Sidney leaves the kitchen, a knife in his hand, and I follow. At least one of us is armed.

There's a man in royal blue clothes at the door, and I wonder if this is the same auditor who was standing in front of the building the other day.

"Hello, how may I help you?" I ask fairly pleasantly. I can fake it with the best of them, and the tall man's face almost appears skeletal as a smile stretches across his features.

"Is Drizella in tonight?" he asks. Of all the nights for our girl to be out,

I'm almost happy she isn't here.

"She's not, I'm sorry. Can we help at all?" Sidney asks.

We're both standing there with firm, helpful smiles, even as we're anxiously waiting to see what bullshit he's bringing to our door.

"I've been waiting for her," he says slowly. "I have something of hers that she'll want."

What the fuck? I can't think of anything that she would want or need that he would have, so I widen my eyes.

"Did she forget an important engagement?" I ask, talking out of my ass. Maybe if I ask enough questions, he'll actually answer me.

"No," the auditor says in a drawn out way. I swear these people are absolutely insufferable. Sidney squeezes the knife he's holding where the man can't see, and I can tell that he's trying his patience. I wonder if simply firing them will be enough, or if we'll need to ensure to kill them all as well. It may be a bit harder to poison them too if they all eat separately.

"Is there a message I can pass on?" I ask, pressing the issue. He's giving me the creeps, and I very much want to know what he may have that belongs to Silla.

"No, if she's not here, I'm afraid she'll find out at another time." The auditor sighs. "I bid you goodnight."

Giving us his back, we watch him walk away, and I can feel the goosebumps clawing up my body.

"Fucking creepy," Sidney mutters after the door is shut again. "Grayson, we have an issue!"

Traipsing into the kitchen together, the twins unsurprisingly on our heels.

"What did the auditor want?" Grayson asks, a black apron around his waist. He still manages to command an air of authority, and it's really sexy. He's in the middle of making breakfast for dinner, which is easy and one of my favorites.

"He kept saying that he had something that Silla would want, but

wouldn't explain what it was. I feel like we need to call her, because that was really creepy," I mutter, shuddering.

Nodding, he palms his phone out of his back pocket, dialing Silla and putting her on speaker so he can continue to cook.

"Hello?" she says breathlessly, and my cock inappropriately snaps to attention. Gods, I really want to know what Falcon was doing to her just now.

"There's been a development," Grayson says. "Do you think you can get Falcon to drive you home?"

"Yes," Falcon's deep voice says next to her. "Tell us when we get there? We shouldn't have this discussion over the phone."

"Absolutely. I'm really sorry this couldn't wait." Gray sighs.

"It's fine, we were trying to convince ourselves to get moving," he chuckles.

"You pinned me to the bed, and said we should really get moving," Silla giggles. "We're getting dressed now, we'll be home soon."

As she hangs up, I realize this little apartment has become a home of sorts because she's here with us.

"She sounded like she was having fun," Andrya says wistfully. "I hate that we had to interrupt that."

"Me too." Sidney sighs. "The auditors follow the queen blindly, what are the odds that we can poison them all at dinner too?"

Andrya shrugs as she thinks. "I'll find out from the assistant chef if everyone eats at the same time. I don't really know if they have homes to go to or if they're on call at all times. Can't we just fire them all and call it a day?"

"Drya, the auditors are drones, you know that. They're all really fucking creepy. I don't know how they're able to live with themselves. Even Mr. Todd, while a vile pervert, isn't the worst of them," I grunt. "He could be appeased by a sex show. I doubt some of the others would go for that."

"Ew," Andrya shudders. "That is a really gross visual. I don't think I'll be

able to stomach breakfast without a shower after that.”

Dammit, I fucked up her streak. “I’m sorry, ‘Drya. How can I help?”

Her eyes fill with tears, and I open my arms patiently. I’ll take this as progress because she’ll usually just leave the room. Stepping into my hug, she shudders. Her body feels as if it’s been electrified, and she’s shaking and jerking.

“I hate that Silla is doing everything she’s supposed to and Cinder is still fucking with her,” she says, her voice shaking. “I worry that the auditors are so brainwashed that we’ll have to be afraid to sleep for fear of being killed in our beds. What if this isn’t enough to keep her safe, Isaac?”

“Then we kill the auditors,” Sidney says. “I’ll see if the Underground will help us by flooding their homes with carbon monoxide while they sleep. They’ll all be dead, and we’ll be able to move on. No one will have to know.”

Nodding, I agree. “Can you make her something to help with the fight or flight hormones that are currently flooding Andrya’s system?”

“Sweetness, I have an herbal tea that’ll help with the anxiety. You’re safe, we are working through it. We’ll figure it out, okay?” Sidney says carefully as he finds the loose leaf tea he wants to use and fills up the kettle with water.

“Okay,” she whispers. “We’re so close, I just need to believe we’ll actually win this time.”

“We’ll believe with you,” I reassure her. “What do you need to do to get in touch with your contact?”

“He doesn’t live on the castle property, so I’ll go to his home early tomorrow to speak to him,” she says. “If we find that we need to enlist the Underground—”

“We’ll broach it with the dog,” Ayden grunts. I glance over at him and see the smile playing over his lips. It’s nice to see that Falcon is slowly growing on him. He may always be Dog Boy though.

The Fucked Up Trio have changed a lot, but they’re still really petty.

KENZO

Silla is anxious by the time we arrive at her home. I insist on parking around the corner and entering through the back door. There's a courtyard back there, and it's overgrown with moss. I can smell winter flowers growing, and it reminds me of how the season is upon us. It's not currently snowing, but it is frigid.

Walking quickly because my mistress isn't properly dressed for this weather, I escort her inside the apartment building. I still haven't heard from Kal, and I wonder if this is something more than his typical pouting. I need to make sure I text him on my way home.

Grayson is standing at the door when we arrive upstairs, and I hold back a smile as I realize that he was probably listening for us to come inside. He is, after all, tracking her. He ushers us into the apartment, looking around suspiciously before he closes the door behind us.

The apartment smells amazing, and Silla's stomach growls. "Did Falcon not feed you?" Gray asks, making me flush.

I fed her a chocolate brownie sundae and my cock, but I don't think that counts.

"We burned a lot of calories," I mutter.

Gray snorts, pulling Silla under his arm to head to the kitchen. She buries her head in his chest shyly and I find it adorable.

"They're back," Gray calls. They're hanging out around the island eating, and smile as we walk in.

"I think the night was a success," Andrya proclaims, eyes on Silla. "You have sex hair and a glow of happiness around you. Did you have fun?"

"I did." She grins, sitting at the table. Gray gets her a plate of food, and Isaac, Ayden, and Sidney all move in to kiss some part of her as if they're

inexplicably drawn to her. I don't blame them, I am too.

"Good," Grayson murmurs, putting the food in front of her. "If we talk about something, do you think you can still eat, Baby?"

Silla dutifully picks up her fork, taking a bite of eggs as she nods.

"One of the queen's auditors came to the door tonight." He sighs. "He was incredibly gaunt and kind of creepy, and kept insisting that he had something of yours that was important. He refused to give any context or hints, and then was gone quickly when he realized that you weren't home. It made us realize something."

"What?" I ask, laser focused on the fact that this man is a potential threat to my mistress.

"The auditors are all extremely loyal to the Queen. What happens when their queen is no longer here and they find themselves out of a job? Who will they be loyal to?" Ayden asks, picking up the conversation.

"They will be loyal to the memory of my step-sister," Silla says immediately. "Some of the people that she employs enjoy their stations because of what they can get away with. Terrance abuses his step-daughter, and Cinder turns a blind eye to it all. Dorothy sacrifices animals on the full moon, but Cinder thinks it's adorable. None of these people are fit for their stations."

"They sound crazier than us," Sidney scoffs. "I've watched Ayden tear the wings off of butterflies, but I have to say that it has been a very long time since he's wanted to."

"It's true," Ayden grunts, taking a bite of chocolate chip banana pancakes. Fuck they look good. Gray rolls his eyes, grabbing a plate for me as well. Hell yeah. "I usually have a fucked up reason for the shit I get up to, but I haven't needed to hurt people in a bit. Now I'm saving all of my energy to fuck up the queen."

Okay, that was fairly sweet, even if enthusiastically psychotic.

"So we agree that they will not follow Silla as their new monarch?" Isaac

asks as he eats.

“They won’t because they are so used to running shit their way,” I explain. “How do you propose that we get rid of them?”

“Do they live at the castle and have designated meal times?” Andrya asks, lips pursed in concentration.

“No,” I deny. “They must live within three to five miles of the castle so that Cinder’s every beck and call can be answered rapidly, however they do not live at the castle.”

“He’s right,” Silla says. “I didn’t know that they had a certain distance that they needed to stay within Cinder, but I knew that they didn’t live at the castle. So how do we eliminate them?”

“I have a plan for that, but I’ll need help.” Andrya sighs. “You two saved me from having to see a man about poison, so thank you. Falcon, can you let me borrow twenty men?”

“Will it end in the deaths of these men and women?” I ask. The way they’re talking seems as if they are planning a wide range death squad, but I still need to ask. “It’ll help me decide who to recommend.”

“Absolutely,” Andrya growls. “I’m thinking of carbon monoxide poisoning.”

“I’ll have a list of people texted to you,” I grunt, noting something on my phone.

“Cool. I don’t want them to be able to hurt us again,” she says.

“I plan to be in the castle the night this happens. I have a guard’s uniform picked out so that I can walk the inside of the castle,” I explain. “I’m uncomfortable not knowing what’s happening.”

“Fair,” Sidney agrees. “If Silla is grabbed and she kills someone, what will you do?”

“Cheer her on because she’s still alive,” I pout petulantly.

“Good dog,” Ayden mutters.

Ignoring him, I keep my eyes on Silla. “I expect you to kill everyone if it

makes the difference between you and death. Is that understood?”

Silla nods and I give her a brilliant smile. I don't enjoy killing but I want to keep her safe.

“Sidney, can I join your hand to hand combat training with Silla?” I ask. I play it humble, keeping my eyes on her.

“Yes, as long as you have something to bring to the table,” he agrees.

Finishing my dinner, I stand to bring it to the sink. Someone takes it from me, and they begin to say goodnight to me. I'm floored at how quickly they throw me out to spend time with her. Damn.

Shaking my head, I make way to the car, leaning against it as I text my brother.

It's okay to be angry at me, but can you tell me where you are?

Silence welcomes me, and my heart rate begins to race. He doesn't respond to me, so I get into the car to drive home. I hope he's okay, because the last of my innocence is tied to his.

Twenty-Four

SILLA

I've been training for today, but I still don't feel ready. Kenzo, Sidney, and I sparred together the last few days, and they both commended me on my form. It ended with Sidney fucking me in the shower when we got home from the gym, and I loved every moment of it.

Staring up at the castle now, I wish I didn't have to go inside. The Gods only know what is waiting for me. Taking a deep breath, I remind myself that I can do hard things for thirty seconds at a time and then I can start the timer over and do it again. Time is relative.

"We're here," Ayden breathes next to me. I nod, forcing myself to breathe.

"I know," I whimper, swallowing hard. Gray pulls me to him, dwarfing me.

"You have how many weapons on you?" he rumbles, rubbing my neck.

"Six," I rasp, blinking hard. Andrya helped me do my makeup, and I don't want to fuck it up. I have four poison pins in my hair, a knife strapped to my thigh, and a small knife in my boot. I am wearing heeled boots so that my shoes tap against the floor as I walk, a concession to my normal heels.

"How many ways can you gut a man, Kitten?" Ayden asks, playing along with Gray.

"Six," I tell them, my voice sounding a little stronger.

"How many people expect you to survive today, nay, need you to?" Gray grunts.

I can see where he's going with this, and the vise around my chest begins to loosen.

"Six," I say clearly.

"Good fucking girl. Now let's go inside and sort out the crown," Grayson

growls.

Nodding, I take a step toward the guard gate. A guard looks cruelly down at me, but I keep my head up high. I don't know this guard, though it doesn't mean much.

"My name is Drizella Tremaine, and these are my guests. We've come to dinner at the behest of the King and Queen," I tell him, my tone haughty and cold.

His eyes widen and he nods wildly, losing the tone. I despise men who swing their dicks around when they're working. Just do your job. He quickly opens the gate, telling us to walk through to the front door.

We aren't the dirty little secret tonight, that's definitely different. Forcing myself to continue breathing, I walk up the driveway to the door. My step-sister arches her eyebrow at me in annoyance as she stands at the front door, throwing me off balance.

Cinder never answers the front door nor waits for anyone.

Her gaze takes me in, her upper lip curled up. "I see you're no longer in those terrible clothes," she says in reference to the casual clothing I wore when she video called me last week. "I suppose I should be grateful for small mercies. Grayson and Ayden, I am so glad you're here. You'll love the surprise we have for you."

My sister must be on crack, because I never enjoy her surprises.

"It's good to see you, Your Majesty," Ayden murmurs as Cinder steps back to allow us to move inside. "Has this chandelier always been here?"

I take this as the warning that it is, looking up because she's always had a fancy candle chandelier in the main foyer. Pressing my lips together, I hold in my horror as I see that there are three human heads mounted on spikes. The entire chandelier is macabre, with black crystals covering all of it.

"I felt like I needed a change." Cinder sighs. "Isn't it beautiful? Everyone is upsetting me lately, and I'm hoping this will remind them to tread lightly and do their jobs. The halls will run red if the staff can't get their lives

together.”

Striding away, we follow a few steps behind her, careful not to dawdle.

“Did we know any of those people?” Gray asks, barely moving his lips.

“I’m pretty sure the one on the right was the auditor who was watching the house and came to the door earlier this week,” Ayden mutters.

Fuck, fuck, fuck. I can’t even wonder what those people did to deserve their fate, because I’ve learned that it could be anything with the Queen of Forbach.

“Other than people being irritable, have you been well?” Grayson asks graciously.

Cinder glances over her shoulder, smiling at him. It’s meant to be flirtatious, but she’s an awkward taco instead. “I have, but my husband won’t leave the castle,” Cinder grumbles. “I’m irritable, and want to play. Since I can’t, my pet is forced to hide in the west attic wing.”

Pouting, she continues on through the castle, and I recognize that we’re headed toward the dining room. I am both happy to get this over with, yet terrified as well. Ayden links his pinky finger in mine, squeezing lightly. That’s the closest he can come to reminding me that he loves me, so I force myself to bask in that.

“Charming!” Cinder barks as we walk into the dining room. Ayden releases my finger as we enter, and I swallow at the sight of the empty table and a naked maid on it. I’ve never known Charming to flaunt his infidelities in front of Cinder at the castle, and I wonder what has changed in the last few days. I also don’t understand why Cinder is holding onto the civility of keeping Lana hidden.

Charming is sucking on the maid’s breasts, drizzling caramel syrup over her body.

“What, Cinder?” he mumbles, looking up. “You left me to my own devices an hour ago, and I was bound to get bored. What did you—Drizella! You’re here. Hello, darling girl. Did your sister keep you long?”

Charming has always called Cinder my sister because we look so alike, outside of our hair color. I don't understand why, I just thought it was an odd quirk. Now I can feel how creepy it is and shudder.

"No, not at all," I tell him, my voice curiously even.

"Your Queen has been redecorating as I'm sure you saw when you walked in. Isn't it dreadful?" Charming complains, his eyes on me as he pinches the maid's breasts.

Ignoring her pained cries, I force myself to answer. I can't help her right now, I need to figure out why the hell we're even here.

"I saw the evidence of my sister's distemper," I say easily with a shrug. "Maybe the staff should ensure that they don't upset her."

Charming shrugs at my answer, his fingers skimming the maid's body. Looking closely, I realize that it's Zachary's sister, which explains Cinder's annoyed look.

"I see you're busy, Your Majesty. Should we return another time?" I ask, wondering if I can safely get the girl out of here. I might hate the woman's brother and what he did to us, but she hasn't done anything to me.

"No, no. I don't believe that's necessary. Please sit, and we'll get dinner served soon enough," Charming murmurs. The girl moans as he rubs her clit, legs opening wide.

"You've stolen my plaything," Cinder complains. "Why can't you go home already to your little whores?"

The king's jaw tightens, and I realize that he's closer to the edge of madness than I thought. I wonder if my step-sister has been dabbling in gardening recently. Taking my seat, I can see the king has a paler demeanor than the usual healthy tan he usually sports. Charming also doesn't seem like himself at all.

We're all mad here it seems.

"I can't go home until I have what I want, Cinder," he growls. "Your sister is a cheater and a cunt, Drizella."

I can't process what he's said because of his words. No one curses in front of my sister. She screeches, scandalized, forcing me to wince.

"I don't understand what you mean, Charming," I gasp. Cinder watches to see what I'll do, curious as much as she is scandalized. "You're the one currently with his fingers deep inside the maid."

I will do anything to stay on my step-sister's good side, even though it's clear they are both dangerous as fuck. I have been terrorized by her for longer though, so the need to make her happy is well ingrained.

Charming shrugs with a smile, beginning to finger fuck the maid. "She's so beautiful," he murmurs, his other hand touching the girl's hair. "I know my wife wants a divorce, dear Drizella, so I'm afraid that 'jig is up' as they say. The truth is she's barren, which are clear grounds for my own divorce!"

He is angry at what he feels is a faulty wife's reproductive organs. Cinder can't change this, but on the other hand, I wonder how long they've tried since they're rarely in the same place for long.

"You don't know that I am barren," Cinder hisses. "How dare you air out our dirty laundry in front of guests."

"I wonder if this girl will get pregnant if I fuck her," he muses, pulling his fingers out of the maid's pussy. Arousal coats them, and I struggle to maintain eye contact as he sucks them clean. "She even tastes better than my wife, who complains of a headache and refuses to have sex with me for the succession of the crown. What kind of queen are you?"

"A busy one," Cinder counters. "I've been in meetings for the past few weeks, and I need to figure out how to make the changes everyone is insisting on. Apparently people are starving in our realm and I was never given a report about it. How would I know this is happening without that?"

"It's called leaving the bedroom for longer than a few moments a day, dear wife," Charming complains. Grabbing a huge knife, he raises it to the maid's throat. She trembles for an entirely different reason now. "Are you one of the Queen's favored whores?"

I wonder what happened between the day I was here last weekend and now. Charming has never been a jealous man, and he has his mistresses. I figured they both knew about the other's transgressions but didn't want them flaunted in the other's face.

"Your Majesty?" the maid squeaks. "I'm her maid. I clean her room, help around the castle. I don't understand the question."

"Has Cinder tasted your sweet cunt, ever strapped on a toy to fuck you, sweet Kailee? It's a truly simple question." Charming sighs, slowly drawing the knife along her body. It's so sharp that it cuts her flesh in shallow cuts, the blood welling before running down her body. "Wife, why don't you end this farce before I have to kill her? It's so hard to find good help."

Cinder watches greedily, unable to avert her eyes as the knife grazes along her pubic bones. "What will you do if I say yes, husband?"

"I'm holding judgment until I'm able to feel how your response will make me feel," he says honestly, turning the knife's handle until it's facing upward. "You've been so quiet and distant recently, you don't want to share my bed, and the black-haired demon glares at me when she sees me. Then the secret meeting you had with Drizella was simply the cherry on the damn sundae. Kinsley is a busy body, so I called her to shoot the shit with her. She mentioned her condolences for the divorce papers which are currently being filed against me. I spoke to her earlier today."

This explains a bit the manic gleam in his eyes and how out of character he's acting. However, I wonder at the game Kinsley's playing, because Charming's clearly coming undone.

"The ink hasn't even dried!" Cinder roars. "I didn't even receive a call telling me they were granting my divorce, Charming. I've been so on edge because Kinsley is avoiding my calls."

Charming chuckles, low and seductive as he runs the handle of the knife through Kailee's arousal. She whimpers, "Please, please use your fingers instead, Your Majesty."

“I’m in control here, Kailee. Focus on how good it feels. Don’t you want your king to make you come? It’s so unfair. Cinder gets gorgeous maids, while I’m forced to fuck the same three women on my private island.”

“Boo-hoo, Charming. Have your fun and then let’s get on with the night.” Cinder sighs. “Please stop cursing, you know how upset it makes me.”

“Frankly, I don’t fucking care, my dear wife,” Charming says drolly as he rubs Kailee’s clit.

I unfortunately have a front row seat to everything he’s doing, and I wonder if I have a sign across my forehead that begs people to let me watch their depraved, most fucked up sex acts. Forced voyeurism isn’t my kink.

“Drizella, do you see how wet she is?” Charming groans, palming his cock. “She moans so prettily too. Do you eat pussy, my dear sister-in-law?”

Cinder’s brow furrows at his words, probably also wondering what he’s angling at. The maid’s eyes roll in pleasure, and I wonder how long this will last until she’s dead.

“Watch the handle disappear into her pussy. I wonder if she’s so hungry to please me that she’ll come around this,” he mutters.

Grayson, Ayden, and I are helpless to do anything but watch, scared he’ll kill her on the table. Lining the handle up with her entrance, Charming pushes it inside of her.

“Oh,” Kailee gasps, her nails digging into the wood of the table at the new sensation and fullness.

“That’s it. You can take it, little whore,” he growls. I’ve never seen this side of the king. What the fuck. Cinder has to be drugging him with some psychotropic shit.

My gaze cuts to Ayden, wordlessly asking my question. He mouths, “He’s fucking high,” to me, and my lips twitch in validation that I’m correct.

Dammit, Cinder. What the hell are you playing at? You made your husband angry, psychotic, and horny. Great job.

“Your Majesty,” Kailee keens, and Charming continues to fuck her with

the handle of the knife. Rubbing her clit with his other hand, he groans as he watches her.

“The only thing that would make this better is if you were sucking my cock, Drizella,” he tells me.

I curl my fingers around the edges of my seat, denying my body the need to fulfill his request. The castle twists my soul with the evidence of my trauma, and I refuse to be violated today.

“You’re no fun,” he mutters, pulling the knife out of her pussy to suck her juices. Kailee whimpers, she must have been close to coming. “You will be serving your king tonight. Go clean up and then wait for me in my chambers.”

Charming is no longer forcing Cinder to sleep in the same room with him anymore it appears. Fuck, the gloves really are off. Kailee sits up, flushing with embarrassment as she’s faced with her audience. Scooting her ass across the table, she slides off. There’s blood left behind from Charming’s knife play, and she almost slips in the liquid dripping down her leg.

Cinder rolls her eyes, yelling for someone to come clean the mess. Kailee manages to leave the room without falling down, and soon everything is cleaned away. I don’t know why they went through the trouble when my step-sister is very skilled in making people bleed.

“Charming, you can’t fault me for wanting a divorce,” Cinder says, picking up an earlier conversation. “You’re never here, and I know you’re cheating on me. You don’t exactly hide it.”

“Bollocks,” Charming roars. “You’re my wife, and I expect you to get pregnant like a good girl. If you were to get pregnant, how the hell would I know it’s mine?”

Cinder shrugs as if it’s a dumb question, but the reality is that it’s not. “It’s a moot point, because I’m not pregnant. I have needs, and your cock is too small to manage them.”

This is going downhill really fast.

“Your Majesties, may I ask why we’re here?” Ayden asks, his eyes bouncing between the monarchs that are currently acting like overgrown toddlers.

“You’re currently here so I can make a point,” Charming mutters. His hands shake a little as he points at Ayden. “Drizella, come here.”

I remind myself of where my weapons are as I stand.

“We should really eat first before you ruin our appetite, don’t you think, darling?” Cinder stresses.

I send a little prayer up in thanks, even though I’m sure it’s for purely selfish reasons. I don’t plan on eating anything, and Cinder is used to this. She also has to expect the same of Ayden and Grayson. You never know when the next verbal or physical explosion will be.

“Of course, dear. I still want to be indulged by my sister-in-law,” Charming grumbles. My eyes flick to Cinder as her fingers flick for an attendant, and the corners of her eyes tighten before she inclines her head toward me.

Swallowing, I stand, wondering what the hell he wants. Gray and Ayden’s eyes track my movements, only appearing relaxed. I know Kenzo is around, and I hope he doesn’t see whatever is about to happen. I would hate for his opinion of me to change. Though, he may not be strong enough to be with me if that’s the case.

Sooner than I’m ready, I’m standing next to Charming. He’s tall, and pushes away from the table to pull me into the space he leaves behind. His large hands lift me onto the table, and I struggle to keep my heartbeat from escaping my chest. Creepy, but not dangerous... yet. That’s my mantra at the moment.

“Your Majesty, may I ask the reason for your request that we come to dinner tonight?” Ayden asks pleasantly. His crazy is well locked down at the moment, and instead his hair lays messily. Hazel eyes gaze intelligently at Charming, and his clothes are well appointed. Gray slacks, long-sleeved teal

sweater, and three different knives hidden on his body.

I'm totally safe... so why are my palms sweating?

"...Drizella looks so much like Cinder, outside of her hair, doesn't she?" Charming asks. I missed the beginning of his sentence and blink owlily, trying to piece together the missing words.

"I've always pondered how it's possible for Drizella to have such a similar appearance. I even asked my father if it was possible for us to be real sisters before he passed, but he met your mother after you were born, making it impossible," Cinder muses.

My stomach turns at the thought of this.

"You asked your father about this?" I ask before I can hold back the question.

"Oh yes, Drizella," she chuckles. "You made it possible for me to ask a great many things before he passed. His nightly tea made him weak and fragile. There are days I wonder if I should kill or thank you for killing him."

"My mother made the tea, I didn't realize it was laced in poison until years later." I sigh. I'm ashamed I allowed my mother to use me as her vessel to kill my step-father. She would make it and tell me he had a headache, and then it quickly became our nightly ritual.

"You did me a favor," Cinder rasps. "My father wasn't a good man."

My mind whirls at this, and I feel a warm hand on my ankle. Startling, I return my attention to Charming.

"Your Majesty, are you well?" I ask, my gaze on his hands as he begins to push my dress up my legs.

"I need an heir, dear sister," he murmurs, his hands massaging my skin. I wish I had worn tights, because I'm quickly covered in goosebumps. "You guys won't mind if I fuck your girl so I can ensure the succession of my line, do you?"

"Does this fall under 'duties to the crown?'" Grayson asks drolly. I can't look at him, I'm frozen in indecision at the moment on when to make my

move. Charming could change his mind, but either way he will be dying tonight.

“Righto,” Charming chuckles, choosing to grab the front of my dress and tear it as if it were tissue. Glaring at him, I push his chest back with my heel.

“No,” I clearly say, shaking my head. “I’m not having a baby for you, and I’m on birth control. Your line will die, Charming. I don’t care if my sister is barren or not.”

“Drizella!” Cinder says, her pupils blown with excitement as she claps her hands. “We both know you’re a scared little twit who will allow your king to do whatever he wants. He won’t succeed, my divorce will go through, but the king will soon know the pleasure of your sweet pussy strangling his cock.”

I’m so in shock at her cursing, I’m not ready when Charming grabs my foot and pulls it high, as he shoves me onto my back. Roaring, he stands, shoving my dress up completely. The knife remains hidden in the folds of my dress, but I stare up at him in shock. I can’t kill him yet, I can’t telegraph my movements, he must think I’m useless and scared.

I won’t risk our mission because I moved too soon.

“I’m tired of everyone telling me no.” He pouts, climbing onto the table and shoving down his pants. The tip of his cock is swollen, and a piercing glint proudly through it. “I want you to bounce on my cock, why is that so hard, Drizella?”

“I’m not yours to take,” I growl as he leans over me, his hands attempting to pull my panties aside. “Do you flounder like this for all of your sexual conquests, or am I the special one?”

Cinder releases a surprised snicker, her hand covering her mouth quickly. “He is always like this, sister dear. You’re so stubborn, never doing what is asked. Just lay there and take one for the crown. You’ve never had an issue with it before.”

The casual way she discusses the rape I’ve endeavored in this castle of

horrors makes my body flush with shame. Charming decides I'm finally getting with the program and I'm responding with excitement, because he holds me down on the table by my throat, shoving my bra cups down. Allowing him to be enamored by my tits, I unsheath my knife.

"This is highly irregular, Your Majesty." Grayson sighs, sounding bored. "Cinder's father could have lied, and they could be sisters. What if they're both barren? I think you're wasting our time."

I ignore his words, knowing he's attempting to give me time to make my move. I pretend to push his hand away from my throat, grunting when he squeezes harder. I lift my hand to my hair, withdrawing a poisoned pin, using it to stab his hand.

"What did you do, you stupid bitch?" I buck and scream, ignoring Cinder's complaints that she needs more action to see and her vibrator. She really is insane if she thinks this will go on for any longer.

The waitstaff stand along the walls with food, waiting to be signaled. They all ignore the scene in front of them, intent on their jobs. I don't blame them when they have my step-sister as their employer. The pin is lost in the scuffle, but I purposely made sure it would roll onto the floor. Ayden will collect it later so that there's no evidence left behind.

Charming forces a kiss from me, and I take advantage of this by smoothly shoving the knife I held by my thigh into his throat. His eyes bulge as he lifts his head, choking on the collecting blood. I slide the knife across his throat, giving him a second smile. I'm barely able to move my head, but am still sprayed with the warmth of his blood. I expect to gag in the horror of it all, but the poison works enough that he loosens his fist around my throat and sags against me. Keeping my lips pressed together to keep the blood from slipping through, I push his body to the side. I'm more concerned with scrambling off the table than the dead man now staring up from it.

"Put the knife away and let's eat, Drizella. It appears you've granted me my divorce after all," Cinder giggles. "Ignore the body, someone will come

along for him eventually. As soon as Drizella sits, please begin to serve dinner.”

Not wanting to keep her waiting, I skirt around the table to slip into my seat.

“Look at me, Kitten,” Ayden murmurs. Turning to face him, I find he has a moistened napkin in his hand. Lips twitching into a poor excuse of a smile, I patiently allow him to clean my skin. The Gods only know what kind of horror show I look like. My skin must be covered with blood, judging from the spray of arterial blood.

“You two are sickeningly sweet,” Cinder mutters, rolling her eyes. “I don’t know why you’re bothering to clean her up, Ayden. Drizella’s dress is covered in blood, and Charming’s blood came out like a fire hose. Everyone knows not to get too close to an arterial spray if they don’t plan to wear it.”

“You’re absolutely right,” Ayden murmurs, putting the napkin down. “Should I instead take her outside and use the hose on her?”

I hold back a shiver because the guards once did just that after a grueling night down in the dungeons. I turn to face the table, and see Cinder smirking at me.

“My guards did that once, I found it rather enjoyable to watch as her screams died down. Maybe I’ll still hear you all scream tonight,” she says with a shrug.

I should demand that she let us go now that she has what she wants, but I’m not done here yet. Dinner is being served to the guards and soldiers as we speak, and I need to be patient. Even if the nightmares will keep me up.

Twenty-Five

GRAYSON

Silla is covered in blood, but at least the bastard's blood isn't near her mouth or eyes anymore. Her hands didn't tremble at all when she slit his neck like butter. I never thought I'd be hot and bothered by this, but my girl is a badass. Her eyes are slightly wide now, however she's doing so damn well.

I imagine that it's not easy to take a life. I never have, but I expect that to change tonight. We may have to fight our way out, even with the best laid plans. The food is placed on the table, but Ayden, Silla, and I refuse to touch it.

Cinder takes a bite, moaning happily as she stares at her dead husband, who still has his erection in death. His pants are down his hips, and our one saving grace is that he's still facing down. "The food is delightful. You really should have some. I haven't had to kill any of the kitchen staff in ages, and it's been so nice not to have to constantly train them on my likes and dislikes," she explains. "Charming was always very vigorous in bed, but I could never find my release. I began to stray before he ever did."

As usual, Cinder over shares about her sex life. I'm not in the least bit hungry, but I just incline my head to her in sympathy.

"Is it terrible I'm not sad at all? Hmm, this reminds me. Lana! Darling, you can come out now," Cinder calls out.

Great, the night is about to get even more fucked up. I'm going to need to light a candle to appease the Gods. I must have offended someone in another life.

Silla takes a deep breath before wiping all emotion from her features. I hate that she had to learn how to do this, but I have to agree it's a good skill to have. I have a pleasant expression on my face, while Ayden has his playboy maniacal smirk. I think Cinder likes him because she thinks that he's

as crazy as she is.

There's a part of Ayden that Cinder doesn't have, and it's a deep loyalty and love for the people in his circle. As Lana slinks into the room with her black hair and ruby lips, I wonder if the queen loves her, or if she's someone as twisted as she is to pass the time with.

Lana almost stumbles in surprise as she sees how bloodstained Silla is, but recovers easily. Her lips curl into a smile at Charming's dead body, and she smoothly slips into the chair next to Cinder.

"Hello my queen," she murmurs. "It seems I missed all of the excitement."

"No, you didn't. I'm sure there will be more to be had, there always is when Drizella comes to visit." Cinder sighs, as if Silla is the problem. "No one brought you a plate, so feel free to peck off mine, Lana."

Her lover preens at the attention, and I force myself to gaze dispassionately at them, hiding my disgust.

"Drizella, it's so nice of you to have dispatched Charming for your sister," Lana gushes. Silla pales a bit under the blood but shrugs. The Fuckateers chose ricin to kill the soldiers and guards in their food, increasing the dosage so they'll begin to feel ill sooner. There's no symptoms outside of nausea and vomiting, so it'll appear to be a stomach flu. They'll all be too busy in the bathroom or in bed to be able to help their queen.

"The opportunity presented itself," Silla says nonchalantly. We all agreed the drinks shouldn't be touched because it's important that we still be able to drink so Cinder doesn't get suspicious. If Silla doesn't eat, neither will Ayden or I, so it's easier for the queen to ignore it.

"Charming was very focused on putting a baby inside of Drizella, as you can see by his pants, Lana," Cinder laughs, motioning to Charming. Lana giggles, scooting her chair closer to her. The girl is so childlike, it disgusts me to imagine her doing anything sexual.

"Are you doing that weird thing where you don't eat again, Drizella?"

Lana asks, stealing a bite of food off Cinder's plate.

"I am," Silla says with a forced smile.

"You haven't been taking very good care of her," Cinder complains. "She eats better when she's regularly beaten. Don't you know anything?"

I know for a fact she's wrong but I nod sagely as if every word is right.

"Now that Charming is dead, what are your plans, if I may ask?" Ayden asks, steering the conversation wisely away from Silla.

I'm not sure if this is a wise decision yet, based on the excitement sparked in Cinder's eyes. There's a manic crazed look I'm not used to seeing on someone who is sane. Unfortunately, I've seen it several times on the Trio.

"I'm so glad you asked!" Cinder squeals. "First, I plan to kill the bitch Kinsley. She ought to know better than to rat me out to Charming. Then, I suppose I'll enjoy fucking whoever I want to for the remainder of the week. Drizella will of course need to stay with me, as she's now my appointed advisor."

Silla mentioned this, but I thought we'd have more time.

"Is the threat to the crown from the Underground stabilized now?" I ask curiously. "You asked us to find the leader, but I believe he's still at large."

Cinder shrugs. "I have a few leads I'm hoping will expose the leader of the Underground. So far, none of you have given me anything!" she complains.

"Someone's in trouble," Lana chants, her legs swinging in the chair. I really hope she's of age. The girl appears to be barely sixteen at the moment in her blue low cut dress. The only thing Cinder approves of on anyone else is the color, but I wonder if Lana is the exception.

"Shh, Darling. Don't spoil it for the others," Cinder cautions. I don't understand what's happening, but it can't be good.

"Who were the people on the chandelier?" Silla asks, canting her head to the side. She looks exactly like her step-sister right now, and I wonder if she simply learned the mannerisms, or if she's always looked like this. Gods, the

likeness is uncanny.

Cinder looks perplexed for a moment, as if confused. This woman is definitely not with it right now.

“Perhaps she means the pretty chandelier at the entrance, Cinder?” Lana asks helpfully.

“Oh! Yes, isn’t it beautiful?” she coos. “I have some auditors that have vexed me. I sent them off with their to-do lists, and they messed everything up! Why is it so hard to find good help?”

“I don’t know,” I murmur. I never really had people piss me off when I worked at FRC. Everyone did their jobs well. I expect this is Cinder asking for more than people are capable of doing.

“Anyway, I had a grand time torturing, killing, and displaying them. Did you recognize anyone up there, Drizella?” Cinder asks with a smirk.

Fuck, Ayden was right.

“One of them is an auditor who was watching our apartment,” Ayden remembers. “Drizella never met him, as she was out on an errand when he knocked on the door. He said he had something of hers?”

Ayden shrugs as if he took it as the ramblings of someone who is unwell, and not fact. Cinder gets an evil, calculating glint in her eyes, but is interrupted as she opens her mouth to speak.

“Your majesty, a moment please before I leave for the day?” Mr. Todd asks. Gods, I can’t wait for that rat bastard to go home so he can die. The Underground is in place to blow ricin through the vents of their homes. Anyone who lives at the castle will also die in this way. They’re masquerading as maids and valets in a joint effort to ensure Silla is safe to step into her place as queen.

“Of course,” the queen simpers. Ew, gross. Even Lana looks up in surprise, wiping the corners of her mouth with a napkin. “Please excuse me, I’ll return shortly.”

“What was that about?” Lana asks in surprise as Cinder sashays out of the

dining room.

“Not a clue,” I tell her with a shrug. “How does it feel to be out of hiding?”

Silla pinches me under the table, but I just smirk. I’ll spank her for it later.

“Honestly? Amazing! I’m tired of skulking around the hidden passages to know what’s going on,” Lana complains. She looks surprised at her admission, making me wonder if the Trio put other shit in the food. Lana was entirely too truthful. “Excuse me, I don’t know why I said that. Anyway, I hope Cinder is back soon because I need dessert and only her cream will do.”

Lana regularly overshares, so I know the last sentence wasn’t because of the food.

Ayden holds back a smile, holding down the corner of his mouth to keep it from curving up.

“You seemed surprised Charming was dead,” he tells her. “Are you sad to see him gone?”

“His cock was always hard, but Cinder is right, he never cared if I came or not.” she sighs. Eyes widening, she covers her mouth. “Please don’t tell her that. She’ll kill me, the queen is so jealous. He cornered me a few days ago, asking if I was fucking Cinder. I lied, saying we were friends. Charming made a point to pull me into a room whenever he saw me. I was hiding to appease the queen. We have trouble keeping our relationship a secret.”

The sound of heels tapping against the floor announces Cinder’s approach. Lana looks as if she’s about to swallow her tongue. Glancing at Ayden, I lift my brow when I catch his eye. There’s a twinkle in his eyes, and I decide to take this as an admission of guilt. I wonder if everyone else is a walking truth sayer tonight.

“Cinder has wanted Charming dead for a year, she just wasn’t sure how to go about it. His need to find an heir was fueled once rumors started that he has a possible nephew who has royal blood. Cinder has been trying to

recreate the tea you would give your step-father,” Lana hisses, taking a breath as Cinder steps back into the dining room.

Silla is shaking at the admission, her hand finding mine under the table and squeezing. I will gladly allow her to mangle my hand if it'll help her keep it together. I don't know how long we'll be stuck at the castle, but I feel like we're doing well since Cinder hasn't thrown us into the dungeons yet.

“Excuse my absence,” Cinder murmurs. “I was checking on one of my guests. The auditor was correct, he did take someone who belongs to you. He asked him to spy on you, and he refused. The poor boy misunderstood, thinking the decree was a suggestion.”

A guard who appears quite pale, stumbles in with a young man who's been beaten badly. His head is dropping down, he can barely walk, and appears to be holding his arm protectively against him. Why does he look so familiar?

Silla stiffens next to me, a look of horror on her face as she whispers something so low I can't hear. Ayden, however, does and curses under his breath.

“This young man was left unattended. Really, Drizella, you shouldn't leave your toys lying around. Gerome found him outside your apartment glaring at it,” Cinder laughs.

Oh shit.

Kal looks up, and I wince. His face is full of bruises, scrapes, and I see blood on his shirt along his left side. The way he's holding himself shows me he's been beaten and possibly has a knife wound.

“Cinder, what are you doing?” Silla rasps. “Kal is innocent. I don't understand why you would do this.”

“You were supposed to bring me the head of the Underground on a pike, and instead you're fucking him!” Cinder screams. She's slipping in her language more and more, the madness eating her alive. I wonder why she's deteriorating so quickly, or maybe she's just been hiding it really well.

“Is that what he told you?” Silla asks mildly. There’s no hurt in her voice, it’s clear Kal has been tortured, and a kid his age can’t be expected to keep secrets under that kind of pressure.

At nineteen I would have sung like a canary.

“I didn’t, I swear,” Kal says in a shaky voice. There’s tears filling his tone, but they don’t spill over. He’s really fucking stubborn, swallowing hard as he struggles to stand tall. “I’d never.”

There’s so much he isn’t saying with his words. *I’d never betray my brother. I’d never betray the Underground. I’d never betray you all.*

I arch my brow at Cinder, folding my arms across my chest. As expected, she withers a bit under my commanding posture. Usually, this wouldn’t do shit, but she’s off her game.

“What happened to a court of law, are we just pulling kids off the street now to torture them, Cinder?” I ask. “He’s nineteen, a child. There are laws that precede your term as queen about this.”

“There were photos of the two of them together,” she whines. “They look very similar, so of course they’re brothers. The masked ball Drizella went to made me search for photos of them together. People stated Drizella spoke to both of them, why else would she have bothered?”

“That’s the dumbest logic I’ve ever heard, respectfully,” I tell her. “We’ve been actively working to find the leader of the group, and she has a meeting with him tonight. Do you want her to be late?”

Cinder’s lips tighten, and she yanks Kal from the guard. “Go lay down before you fall down,” she snaps at the guard. “What the fuck is wrong with you?”

“Stomach bug,” he mutters, hurrying away, but not before releasing a noxious fart that makes me wince.

“Gods,” Cinder gags. “If you’re still alive tomorrow, I’ll flay the skin from your bones!”

“I’m so sorry, Your Majesty!” the guard wails as his boots pound against

the stone floor. Thank goodness for the guard that he'll be dead from the toxins racing through his system very soon.

The queen shoves Kal toward the table, scowling. "Something wicked is happening, and I want to know what it is. You killed Charming so easily, Drizella, how is that possible?"

Silla shrugs. "I trained a bit when I was in the reform camp, as it was part of my coursework. Coding, knife work, self defense," she explains.

"Sidney, Andrya, and I added it because we felt the Section B spies were dying too quickly," Ayden says in a bored tone. "Why bother training them if it's a death sentence? You pump a lot of money into those reform programs."

"That's true," the queen mutters. "I never thought I'd see those skills being used before by Drizella. She's just so dainty."

Cinder absently shoves Kal so that he's bent over the dining table, yanking back his hair. "If I kill you, would anyone care?" she asks him.

"Cinder, don't," Silla whispers. Ignoring her step-sister, she picks up a sharp knife, and ironically, it's the same one Silla killed Charming with. Fuck.

"Don't tell me what to do," Cinder says in a sing-song voice. "I'll ask again..."

She stabs him in the side opposite where he's already bleeding, and Silla gasps in horror.

"Cinder, please!" she screams. "He's done nothing wrong. If you do this, you are a monster."

"Sister, dear," Cinder laughs. "My mind is deteriorating. I'm not even completely sure this is real. Your name is Kal, isn't it? Let's start with something easy. Who is your mother?"

Blood roars in my ears because Cinder has to know that Charming had a sister. I beg the Gods to spare him, but I think they've become deaf to the prayers of those who live in Forbach.

"I'm an orphan," Kal bites out. "I grew up in an orphanage."

“Boo hoo. Doesn’t anyone have a happy childhood these days? My father was a pedophile, Drizella’s mother is a bullying narcissist... Gods, it would be refreshing if someone had a decent childhood,” Cinder snarls.

Silla’s jaw drops at her admission. “Wait, what? You’re not saying your father hurt you, are you?”

“I was his first victim,” Cinder says, rolling her eyes. “He was a prominent man in the community, was invited into everyone’s homes, and was a predator. I don’t know if your mother knew, or if she was just after his money. I hated you for years because you took my vengeance from me. I had dreams of killing him, and I didn’t have a chance to.”

“I’m so sorry,” Sila breathes, tears slipping from her eyes. “I had no idea.”

“Of course not. He was so loving, wanted to know everything about you, and married someone with two beautiful daughters,” the queen scoffs. “The man was the ultimate predator.”

Cinder twists the knife inside of Kal as if to remind him she’s here, and his light blue eyes well with tears from the pain as he grunts.

“Your Majesty, don’t play with your food,” Ayden tells her. “Let him go, purge this pain you so obviously feel.”

Oh Gods, the psychotic golden retriever is playing at being a therapist. What else can we do though?

“Don’t psychoanalyze me, Ayden. You’re gorgeous, but you can’t handle this level of crazy,” Cinder yells.

“Try me,” he says, rolling his eyes. “I pull the wings off butterflies for fun. Let the boy go.”

“I want to fuck in warm blood, Mistress,” Lana coos. “Kill the boy. The king has cooled too quickly. His cock is still hard. I wonder if it still works.”

Cinder laughs manically, pulling the knife out of Kal. “How many times have you fucked my husband, you little whore? I thought you loved me!”

Oh, this is going to be a lovers’ quarrel and a blood bath. Cool, cool. Fuck

me.

Cinder wrenches Kal's head back until he's gritting his teeth as he looks at her.

"Do you have anything to tell me before you die?" she asks, canting her head to the side.

There are no good choices as Kal bravely says, "No. Long live the Underground and the new queen."

There's a bated breath before Silla breathes, "No..."

Cinder swipes the incredibly sharp knife across Kal's throat, and then I hear a very male scream that can only be Falcon. It looks like we'll be fighting our way out of here after all.

Long live the new queen indeed.

Twenty-Six

KENZO

M*y throat hurts. Why does it hurt?*

I watch in horror as my brother's blood sprays from his throat. His mouth is open, but even from here I can see the fierceness in his blue eyes. I'm supposed to be protecting Kal, not the other way around.

Fuck, why did you have to be so loyal? Why couldn't you have given up a name, something? A part of me says it wouldn't have mattered. Things were always going to end this way. I can't protect the people I love, and this is the Gods reminding me.

Gods, my throat hurts. The light fades from his eyes, and my screaming is interrupted by a sob. Blinking hard, I drag my arm across my eyes. I will properly grieve for him once I'm done here. Depending on how I feel after this, I may join him. Kal and fixing our realm have been my reason for living for five years. What do I have after I complete this mission?

Forcing my lungs to work despite the burning sensation in my chest, I stride into the dining room.

"I believe you're looking for me, Cindercunt?" I ask. My voice is raspy and hoarse, but I play it off well. I found one of the hidden passages after helping my people spread the ricin powder into the air vents of just the auditors who live in the castle and any guards who skipped dinner.

We are well on our way to victory, now. I'm unsure yet if the cost will be worth it. I stood hidden behind a tapestry to watch things, waiting to see if I would be needed. I should have stepped out earlier, looked harder for my brother, done something.

I'm drowning in regret, but that'll also have to wait.

"How dare you speak to me like that?" Cinder snarls, dropping my brother as if he's yesterday's trash. His head clunks down on the table, before

he slides to the ground. Silla winces from where she stands next to Grayson and Ayden, tears streaming down her face. My mistress's neck, dress, and hands are streaked and covered with blood, and I'm forced to wonder what I've missed. The front of her dress gapes open, though she was able to tie the top of it. Who was manhandling her?

Ayden gives me a sympathetic look before he buries it. I could have blinked and thought I imagined it. Seeing me, Silla forces herself to stop crying. We're both very alike: we can compartmentalize well. The problem is that at some point, the boxes have to be opened to remember those who have fallen. The darkness will wait, though this won't.

"Your time as queen is done," Silla says. Her voice is strong and measured, though her eyes are red with grief. "Meet Charming's nephew. You just killed his other one, Cinder. He is the last living heir now."

Cinder looks confused as she looks down at her hands, my brother's blood is still dripping from them. Throwing the knife she's still holding on the table, she shakes her head.

"There's no way I'd know that. The boy said he was an orphan," she scoffs. "You're guilty of treason to the crown, as evidence of your collusion with Drizella to take it from me."

Silla growls under her breath, moving to my side. Grayson's lip twists into a snarl of displeasure, but Ayden and he are quick to flank us.

"Did you not learn your lesson, Grayson? Is your brand not a proper daily reminder?"

"Cinder," Lana interrupts softly, pushing herself off the chair to stand. Damn, where did Cinder even find this girl? They have both racked up an unmentionable amount of grievances against Silla, and are both on my list to die. The pacifist died a quick death when my brother did, though the stories I've heard about them didn't help.

I don't see Charming, whatever happened to him occurred before I started watching the dining room. I imagine he's also dead if I'm the last heir, and a

threat to her.

“Your reign of terror ends, dear sister,” Silla says, taking a step forward. My hand grabs the skirt of her dress, tugging her to a stop. No more of our people will perish, especially not her. My very last tether to this world has to live, even if I’m not sure I want to after this.

We all collectively ignore the creepy black-haired girl, while still paying attention to her movements.

“You’re not well, Cinder, you said so yourself,” Ayden says gently. His voice is a balm, calm and soothing. It’s disconcerting, especially when he’s slowly pulling a knife from behind Silla’s back.

This is war, and these two will not be leaving.

“You should call for the guards,” Lana says urgently, trying again.

“The guard was ill,” Cinder says, her voice weak as she tries to process things. “Why...”

“I haven’t the faintest idea, Your Majesty. It could simply be a bug.” Grayson lies with a shrug. “Your husband is dead, people are making moves to deny your divorce. No one trusts you. How many times do people seek Silla’s advice over yours in a meeting?”

I glare at him, not wanting to make her the focus. His gaze is firmly on Cinder’s, and she’s hyperventilating with anger as she glares at him. It means that they both miss Silla as she pulls a long pin from her hair, hiding it in the folds of her dress. They planned for war and death, though not the casualties we’re facing.

None of us could have imagined that.

“You’re pissed at me, Cinder. What are you going to do about it?” Silla boldly goads her. She’s armed, but Godsdamnit I would be happier if she had something more substantial than a poisoned hair pin. Too many things could go wrong.

Releasing the fabric of her skirt, I doomsday list them all as she steps forward.

Cinder could stab Silla with the knife she just picked up from the dining table. She could punch and hurt her. She could kill her.

Someone grabs my elbow, pinching the inside soft skin. Hissing, it's barely auditory, but the pain helps clear my vision and the panic.

"She's fine, dog," Ayden mutters. "Let our girl work."

"In some ways, I feel sorry for you. Poor, broken, Cinder who never got her shit together. You break people the way you were broken. You had me defiled, took my voice away, just like your father did to you," Silla says derisively.

I definitely missed a lot earlier.

Cinder screams in anger, the sound piercing and angry. I'm surprised she hasn't tried to call the guards, but the writing is on the wall. We've been busy, after all.

"You know nothing," she growls, throwing herself at Silla.

I tense, pulling a knife from my belt, waiting for an in.

"There's a knife in her boot," Gray breathes in my ear as Cinder connects with Silla's body, knocking her to the ground.

Silla stabs Cinder in the neck with the poisoned hair pin, throwing it toward us so it can't be used against us. Ayden lunges for it, pocketing the pin, his eyes on Silla as she catches the knife as her step-sister attempts to stab her.

"You're a rapist!" Silla screams, pushing the knife away from her chest.

"No, no what? I'm not," Cinder's voice becomes small and confused. Little footprints run, and Ayden's eyes lift to track Lana racing away.

"Bitch, you're mine," he growls, giving chase.

"I hope the little psycho makes it hurt," Gray chuckles, his tone amused. I think the nickname is actually a tone of endearment.

"Yes, yes you are," Silla says, bucking and twisting her body until the knife is pinned over Cinder's head. "Power and psychosis have warped your mind. It's time for your reign to end."

My feet start moving before I even realize it to help her. Dropping to my knees, I shove my knife into the space between Cinder's ribs.

"I wish you a painful afterlife," I curse her, driving the knife upward toward her heart. "I wish your death could be more painful, but I do not take pleasure in loss of life. Even for those who are depraved clitheads."

Silla's lips twitch in ill-disguised amusement, her hands pinning Cinder's arms, her knees tightly clamping down on her body. Every desperate twist is met with a denial of movement until my knife punctures her heart. The poison is beginning to dull the sharpness of her eyes, her body losing its strength in her last moments. In theory it doesn't take long, but time feels suspended as I kill the false queen. She's never been mine, and I refuse to recognize her.

"Drizella, please," are the last words she breathes as I yank the knife out of her body after twisting it inside of her for maximum damage.

"Stand, Mistress. You don't need any more blood on you, my love," I murmur, rubbing her arm. Forcing her hands to relax, she allows me to pull her up to stand next to me. Life is draining quickly out of Cinder's body, her eyes quickly dimming.

"Ding, dong, is the queen dead?" Ayden calls out as he walks back into the room.

"Almost there," Grayson tells him. "Did you get the girl? She seriously creeps me out."

"The little black-haired demon is dead. I snapped her neck and shoved her in a closet."

Cinder whimpers, and Silla's hands fist.

"Now, now, Cinder don't be dramatic. You're the villain in this story, regardless of what made you like this. Let us all heal from your special brand of torture," Ayden tells her as he arrives by our side. As Cinder takes her last breath, her eyes wide open as if in surprise, he desecrates the body by spitting on her. "I believe we have things to do now, friends to bury."

I turn slowly, to look down at my brother's body, shuddering. Ayden is right. The rightful queen has to take her new place now that the rest of her opposers will be taking their last breaths. Picking up my phone, I start to place calls to those that I know in the newspaper and television industry, offering them an exclusive for making their way to the castle immediately.

History happens while you're asking questions, so hold them until we're done. I'll come back for my brother's body after we're finished. There's no one who will touch him, I wish to bury him on our estate before I disappear. Silla will have enough work on her hands than to attempt to mend my broken heart.

SILLA

It feels surreal. The halls are still, all of the servants having gone to bed early. Life is never easy when I'm under this roof, and I hate that I have a reputation for Cinder's worst nights. I somehow brought it out of her, and now I think it's because I remind her of Marcus Tremaine.

Goosebumps break out along my skin, making me shudder as I think about the horrors my childhood home held. It explains so much about how twisted Cinder became, but she was leading a realm of people who needed her. My step-sister deeply failed them.

Walking out of the deathly quiet castle, I'm met with a dark sky filled with beautiful stars. There is beauty in the darkness, you just have to look for it. Ayden links his finger through mine, sending me his strength.

"I wish this had gone differently," I whisper as we walk through the front courtyard.

"Me too, Kitten. He was so young, but damn brave." Ayden sighs.

Kenzo strides past us, the phone up to his ear as he speaks quickly. He's getting shit done, but there's a tension in his body that belies the confidence in his tone. He will crack, fall, and scream, but I don't want him to do it alone. There's a veil of grief and sadness around him, making me wish for a crystal ball and a time travel device.

Why don't these things exist yet?

"There's so much to do. Press, we need to bury the bodies, reestablish order... Oh Gods, what if they don't want me for a queen?" I gasp, my voice rising.

Kenzo's head snaps over to meet my gaze. Ending the call, he walks back to me, dropping to his knees in front of me. As his head tips back, my fingers touch the new, smaller collar around his neck. "They will all drop to their

knees in happiness, Mistress. Cinder was always a mistake. She was clearly mad, losing time, forgetting her heinous crimes against her people. I don't know everything that happened in that room because I was only present for a small amount of time, but I have no doubt you will be a fair and loving queen," Kenzo rasps. His voice is still hoarse from screaming, and I tangle my fingers in his dark hair to brush my lips along his forehead.

"If you believe I will, then who am I to argue?" I ask simply.

Kenzo gives me a wide smile, and it takes my breath away. He's so gorgeous. Then, as if remembering his brother is dead, he sobers.

"Yes, well, they'll be out front soon. There's nothing to do for the blood staining your clothes and skin," he says, standing. He towers over me, and now I'm left to drop my head back to look at him.

"It'll solidify our story," Grayson grunts from behind us. "I hate that you had to kill people, Dangerous Girl, but you had everything well handled."

"I did," I murmur, looking over my shoulder at him. Gray buries his face in my neck, despite the blood. "I'd hate it if something had happened to you all. I trained for this, I had my weapons, I was good."

"Still," Ayden growls. "We all played a part tonight in order to fool the queen. I was the playful psychopath she enjoys, and Grayson the stern one who doesn't give a fuck about things."

"You two were just playing at those things?" Kenzo snorts. "I was convinced as I listened to Grayson nonchalantly speak."

"An act, I assure you. I would have been escorting our girl to be scrubbed of Charming's blood," he rumbles against my skin. I shiver, squirming at the sensation. "Cinder has always reacted badly when Ayden or I show any kind of emotion for Silla. We even called her Drizella, mimicking Cinder. It's a dangerous dance for any of us. Isaac has the hardest time hiding his anger, so he had the least interaction with her."

"Long life to the new queen," Ayden says affectionately with a lopsided smile. "Let's kick this press conference's ass and then get you home to

shower.”

My lips part in protest because there’s so much to do, but Kenzo shakes his head, grabbing my hand to pull me along.

“One thing at a time, Mistress,” he reminds me. There’s a commanding tone in his voice, even as he speaks to me gently. Gone is the easygoing, laid back demeanor and in its place is almost a military presence. Complete the tasks, organize the troops, and feel things later.

Kenzo and I are a lot alike, and I understand the need to bury everything in an effort to survive moment to moment. I can hear people beginning to arrive on the other side of the gate and take a breath.

“Stick to the facts, Mistress. Speak from the heart. I don’t want to let them through the gates, so we’re walking through. I’ll ensure Underground members close the streets on both sides, though it’s too late to have much traffic right now,” Kenzo muses. “Still, we’ll have you stand on the sidewalk to conduct the press conference, while they listen from the street. I’ll be right back.”

He’s gone the next moment, leaving me blinking in his absence. “Wow,” I huff, mildly amused.

“Falcon is definitely on point right now,” Grayson says, impressed.

“Did you think he’d fall to pieces?” Ayden asks. “I watched him lock it all away for later. We all do what we need to do to survive. All I know is it hurts like a bitch when you reopen Pandora’s box.”

“Do you think he’ll let me help?” I ask in a small voice. “I’ll never forget his screams when Cinder cut Kal’s throat. Not ever.”

“There’s no 'let', baby girl. You shove yourself in and make your own space,” Grayson grunts. “Get through this, and we’ll find our way. We’re adopting him.”

The way he says that settles me, and I nod. He’s ours. I know they weren’t sure about him before, but he’s solid.

“Silla! It’s time,” Kenzo calls out to me, and I force my legs to move.

As I come up next to him, I tug him down to speak in his ear. We don't know much about each other yet, but it'll come. The welling of emotion in my heart means the words are real, and that'll be enough for now. "You're so loved," I whisper in his ear. "I wanted to tell you that. Should we pull you out of the heir closet?"

Kenzo startles in surprise, his strong arm wrapping around my waist. I did what I could, but this dress needs to be burned. I also need to make sure my breasts don't spill out since I was barely able to tie the top together. Gods, maybe this press conference is a mess. I look like a horror show.

"You honor me, Mistress. Stop fidgeting, you look like the warrior you are. I don't know everything that happened, but I know blood splatter, and that you'd have to have been underneath Charming to be drenched in blood the way you are," he whispers, his lips by the shell of my ear. Kenzo has always appeared the pacifist, but he also trains all of his recruits, and he knew exactly where to stab Cinder to find her heart.

There are so many sides to this man.

"Stand tall, and go address your people. You have my permission to tell them anything you'd like," Kenzo says, dipping his head down to kiss me. His lips are firm and soft, the kiss a touch desperate and savage. When he lifts his head, it's as if it didn't happen, his midnight blue eyes clear and determined.

It may appear that he has it all together, but there's a vicious energy under his skin. His skin almost vibrates with it.

"Go, my queen," he says, opening the gate for me.

Grayson and Ayden follow me, and my hands touch the top of my dress quickly to ensure it's still holding its own. If I could, I'd kill Charming again for this.

"Quiet down, please!" Grayson roars, making my lips twitch as everyone gasps. The man has a big voice to go along with that big dick of his.

Stepping forward, I watch as three Underground members ensure to stand

near me. One of them is Noe, and I incline my head toward him.

The street has been closed down, and I wonder how many of them would be willing to join me in service to the queen. Our military presence is nonexistent now, after all.

“Thank you for coming out so late,” I tell them. I’m still self conscious about my voice, but it’s part of me now. “There are things tonight that need to be addressed, and I know most of you know the name Drizella Tremaine as one who is always in trouble. Unfortunately, perception isn’t the truth.”

Three of the members of the press hang their heads in shame, knowing I speak the truth. My arrest wasn’t even real, but so many of my life events have been twisted for the pleasure of the press.

“I have been a victim most of my life, my mother and Cinder have never been kind to me. The queen attempted to sell me to someone as his wife, but I refused, so I was arrested for prostitution.” The gasps dramatically fill the air, but Grayson clears his throat so they’ll stop. “It’s difficult to commit prostitution if you’re a virgin, wouldn’t you say?”

“The point is, the last year and a half of my life have been some of the hardest of my life. I have seen exactly how cruel the queen is, she has had me raped and beaten, all for her own enjoyment. Tonight, she was willing to let King Charming rape me so he could impregnate me with an heir,” I explain. “Please hold your questions to the end, as I’m not finished yet.”

“I am done being the victim, so your now dead king lies somewhere within the castle,” I tell them, my voice rising. “King Charming has two heirs he refuses to recognize from his sister. Lauryn is his older sister, and was married off when she was fourteen. Does anyone remember her?”

They all shake their heads, but an older man raises his hand. “I do, Miss Tremaine,” he announces, raising his hand. “She was always so quiet, with midnight black hair, and blue eyes. Her parents were very protective of her, and it was said there may have been something wrong with her. My mother worked as a maid at the castle, and saw her often.”

“There was nothing wrong with my mother,” Kenzo snaps. Ignoring the surprise he’s created, he continues. “Growing up, they thought she had panic disorder, but it may have been something else. Large groups of people made her uncomfortable, so my grandparents did what they could for her. She was married off when she was fourteen to a man who offered his naval fleet, and moved to the island of Naroi. The heirs to the throne were lost after that.”

“How are you here now? Is she alive?” the old man asks tearfully.

“She is. My mother stole me away because the man she married was abusive, and then gave me to an orphanage. It was safer for us to be apart. She had one more child, doing the same with him. Mom is in a facility for dementia now. She did her best by us,” Kenzo explains. “Paranoia keeps one alive when the King wants you dead.”

“So there are two true heirs,” the old reporter says, shaking his head. “How will that work now that the king is dead?”

“I don’t want the crown, and Queen Cinder murdered my brother tonight in cold blood,” Kenzo says. “Your queen also is dead as well, as I took her life as my revenge, though nothing can change his death. I am also the leader of the Underground, and my mission in life is to find you a true queen, one worthy of the crown. Silla knows all the ins and outs of the kingdom, the treaties, and the people’s plights. My name is Kenzo Monroe, but I am abdicating my claim to the throne so Silla can be the queen we all need.”

“I’ve been sequestered for much of my life.” I sigh. “I had no idea initially how terribly hard everything was for people in the kingdom, but it has weighed on me. I want to update how food is produced, create more jobs for people, and make Forbach a good place to live in. Queen Cinder’s bloody reign is over.”

“You’re a child,” a reporter scoffs. “What life experience do you have to be able to serve as our queen?”

“Plenty, you bloody oaf,” Kinsley, the duchess, states, surprising me. “Sorry to jump in, Your Majesty, but may I be of assistance?”

“Please,” I tell her, trying to find my balance. Last I heard, she had gone home to the west coast, which is a four hour drive.

“After my conversation this morning with the king, I had a feeling things were going to take a turn.” she sighs. “I’m sorry I couldn’t warn anyone.”

Kinsley stares at Kenzo as she says this, and I realize they’ve been working together.

“You all know who I am. Queen Cinder asked to speak to me last week, demanding a divorce from the king. She couldn’t explain exactly why, but she was adamant. I asked for a meeting with her advisor, and she stated Drizella was up for the role,” Kinsley explains.

I fight off a shiver as I remember that day.

“This young woman knows the ins and outs of our kingdom. She also understands the worst of what Forbach is, as she has experienced it,” she continues. “I am throwing in my approval. We can reevaluate in ten months, no sooner. The coronation of our new queen will occur in three days. This will give us time to bury our dead. A stomach bug has attacked the castle and the staff have been fighting it off the last few days. I’m just lucky it didn’t affect me since I was just there recently.”

She really does know more than I expected. I make a note to ask Kenzo about this later, though it’s one of many things on my list of things to do.

A reporter raises his arm, and I glance at Kenzo. If he tells me this man is an asshole, I will refuse his question. Instead, he nods, and I wait to judge for myself.

“Forbach Sentinel here, Jessy Peril. No one has heard anything about you in over a year since you were pinched for your crimes,” he begins. I arch my eyebrow at him, causing him to flush. “I mean, alleged crimes. Crimes which were pinned on you. Was that the Queen’s doing?”

“Yes, I refused to marry someone who was almost three times my senior. Cinder wanted me out of the kingdom, and since she couldn’t have that, she had me remanded into the reform camp,” I explain. His quizzical look makes

me glance at Grayson who sighs heavily. Cinder has kept a great many secrets from her people. “After that, she kept me locked in the dungeon along with my consorts.”

I want to make it clear to everyone that the twins, Sidney, Isaac, Grayson, and Kenzo are around to stay. Kinsley’s fingers twitch, but wisely, she doesn’t say a word. It’s a bit different from the norm to take more than one lover as queen, but I don’t care. If the people of Forbach can live in polyamorous relationships, then so can I.

“Wow,” Jessy breathes. “All of this time our queen has been hurting you? We never asked about you...”

“I was the party girl who was constantly in trouble. I wouldn’t expect it.” I shrug. “Most of what is printed by the press about me is incorrect. I would hope from here on out we can work together to rebuild Forbach to what it can be. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I need a shower and to burn this dress.”

It’s dark, so I don’t think they realize I’m covered in blood.

The reporters thank me for my time, inclining their heads and bidding goodnight to their queen. I think they just broke me. I manage to nod, dismissing them with a wave, but I was not prepared to hear that. Gods.

“It’s a surreal feeling, isn’t it?” Kinsley says softly. I nod furiously, as it fully hits me that I’m completely responsible for an entire realm. “Kenzo and I have been working together over the last three weeks. Cinder was noticeably off, but I had no idea how deeply the madness had spread.”

“No one did.” I sigh. “Whatever you do, please don’t go into the castle right now. It’s not pretty.”

“I’ll send men over to you,” she says, walking me back inside the gate. Kenzo, Grayson, and Ayden follow, their eyes tracking for any threats. “From what I understand you’ll need to restore your military presence?”

“Yes, you’re correct. Unless there’s something I don’t know, I don’t believe we need so many guards and soldiers on the property,” I tell her. I’ve always been uncomfortable with the amount of guards on the Queen’s

Mission. They felt like a form of protection detail that meted out punishment.

“Cinder used her Mission to scare people,” Kinsley reveals. “If you weren’t paying taxes or doing something, she’d send them for a visit. I have learned a lot the last few days, and I’m ashamed it took me so long to look closer. My apologies, Silla.”

“Thank you,” I whisper, overcome by her apology. “It’s been a long night, and I think it’s starting to catch up to me.”

“Of course, let me make a call and bring help in for you. Clean up, take a break. You deserve it,” she says, walking away for privacy purposes.

“You did so well,” Ayden praises me, kissing my forehead.

“Did Kenzo slip away?” I ask, realizing I don’t see him.

“He went inside to get his brother. Kenzo wants to bury him and lick his wounds.” Ayden sighs. “There’s nothing wrong with it, I’m just a bit worried about the man’s mental state.”

“Me too,” I mutter. “I don’t know if I should push or let him be.”

“Both,” Gray tells me, tugging me into his side. “You’re going to go home, shower, and then go find him. Andrya, Sidney, and Isaac are finishing up their assignments, and then will be heading here. Everything is under control.”

“I... shouldn’t I be here? What kind of queen am I if I chase after him?” I hiss.

“You’re a happy queen,” Ayden mutters. “I will not allow you to sacrifice your happiness for the crown. You can have both, do you understand me, Kitten?”

“I do,” I say, taking a shuddering breath.

Kenzo walks out of the castle, a blanket wrapped around his brother’s body in his arms.

“I need to say goodbye to my brother and get my head right, Silla,” he says, a strained smile on his lips. There’s something dark in his eyes, a sadness I well know.

“Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do,” I tell him seriously, my words echoing Ayden’s from days past. “I recognize your darkness. The world needs you. I need you.”

His eyes close, and he swallows hard. “Godsdamn, Mistress,” he growls. “Why are you doing this?”

“You called me Silla, and I have not relinquished my hold on you. You’re mine,” I say haughtily. I need him to hear my words. To fight.

“I’m doing the best I can,” he rasps.

I lean up, kissing his cheek. “You don’t need to do it alone,” I remind him.

Blowing out a breath, he nods, and walks away.

Fuck. “Kitten, we need to get a car. I already tagged his pants so we can track him,” Ayden says urgently, startling me from my thoughts.

“Damn, you work fast. I tagged his coat,” Grayson chuckles.

I shake my head at them, feeling incredibly grateful. “Cinder should have a fleet of cars. I just don’t know where. I had no reason to go to the garage,” I explain.

“Miss... Majesty,” a man stumbles over his words, hurrying over to me. It’s a transition for me as well. As he comes closer, I recognize him as the groundskeeper who helped me. “I can take you to the garage and get you the keys as well if you’d like?”

“I would love that, thank you. I very much appreciate your help the other day as well. I wasn’t expecting to be pulled inside,” I explain, walking next to him. Grayson and Ayden follow, one next to me and the other behind me.

“I was so worried about you,” the groundskeeper frets. “When you didn’t emerge from the castle, I called Falcon immediately.”

I nod, grateful that he did.

“There are six royal cars available currently, and one is being serviced,” he explains as he opens the garage. Flicking on the lights, he gives us a moment to blink away the spots. Even though the path here was lit, the light

in the garage is much brighter.

“Ayden, I’m thinking one of the black SUVs would be best. What do you think?” I ask, staring at the cars. There’s a van, two utility vehicles, a convertible, and two sedans.

“Agreed. Give me just a moment, and then we can be on our way,” he murmurs. There’s a million reasons he would check the cars. Trackers, bugs... gulp, a bomb. Fuck, is this my life now?

“Remember your promise, Silla,” Grayson grunts, wrapping his arms around me from where he’s standing behind me. “Breathe.”

I swallow hard and breathe. The black spots I’m so familiar with were starting to make their appearance again.

“This will become procedure anytime you go out from now on,” he rumbles. The groundskeeper left two sets of keys out and then left. There’s so much to do, I don’t blame him. “It may feel overwhelming because it’s a big change, but we already track your beautiful ass. Why wouldn’t we take our security measures to the next level?”

“You did a really great job of making that all seem less crazy.” I sigh.

“Alright, this one is safe,” Ayden calls out. He was contorted underneath the car, making me shake my head. He slithers out, gliding to a standing position. “Let’s get a move on, Kitten. We have a boyfriend to stalk.”

This is my life, welcome to the shit show.

Twenty-Seven

KENZO

My head is a mess. I bundled my brother carefully in the back seat, and drove home. I don't even remember the drive.

Now, staring at our home, this feels wrong. I don't want to bury him here. Slamming my hands on the steering wheel, I scream out my frustrations. There's no one to hear, not even my brother. Sniffing, I wipe my eyes, trying to think about the last place I was happy. I can't do life without him. I don't know how to do this...

Sucking in a breath, I make sure the car is in park and get out. I have some things to grab for what will be our final journey together. Stalking to the shed, I pull out a shovel, emergency bottles of water, and a tarp. Closing everything up, I say goodbye to the house.

Repacking the car, I unwrap Kal so I can first wrap him in the tarp and then the blanket. It just feels wrong to let him leak everywhere. I always carry scissors and duct tape in the car, so I use them to secure everything. Maybe in another life I was a serial killer?

Picking up my brother, I carefully put him in the car, secure his body between the seatbelts, and then return to the driver seat.

My phone starts to buzz, but I ignore it, turning on the car slamming into drive. I'm driving back to the pretty seaside town we went to with my mistress. It's not far, and then it'll all be over.

ANDRYA

I can't get through to Kenzo, and I'm starting to worry. Silla went to shower with Ayden, while we started cleaning things up. I have a checklist, and I'm directing the staff to the rooms that will need body retrieval. Everyone works efficiently, appears to have guts of steel, and the rooms are being cleared quickly.

Grimacing, I growl at my phone.

"Andrya, we don't have time to replace your phone, Baby. Don't throw it," Gray chuckles, kissing my forehead. It's such an odd feeling, but I melt into his arms. "What's wrong?"

"I have a really bad feeling is all," I sigh. "I can't get a hold of Kenzo. Every call is going to voicemail."

"Alright," he rumbles, pulling out his phone. "I checked the tracking earlier, and he was on the way to his house."

"You have tracking devices on him?" I ask curiously.

Shrugging, he opens the app. "Kenzo buried his grief to help ensure Cinder died and Silla would rise to the throne. A highly pressurized metal box can only hold itself together for so long before it explodes," Grayson says. He's not wrong. "He's still at the house, Andrya. I'll keep an eye on him, alright?"

Nodding, I blow out a breath. My nerves are showing. It's been an intense day, and now it's over. It's barely three in the morning now, but the castle is buzzing with activity. Everyone who survived the purge is working hard, not one person is grieving the queen.

Sidney is currently interrogating Cinder's maids to ensure we don't have any issues later. Soon we'll be moving into the castle. I want to be able to sleep peacefully. Any of the maids who passed the inspection are now

stripping the sheets from Cinder's bed. I won't sleep in there until all evidence of her existence has been wiped away.

Diving into the fray, I lose track of time. "Andrya!" Grayson roars, making me whirl around to find the next person trying to kill us. My heart is in my throat, my skin crawling. "We gotta move, girl. Hand over your checklist."

As I wildly look for someone to pass on my work, a man steps forward. "I'm the duchess' man. I'll take care of the rest of this, miss," he says in an even tone.

"Thank you," I breathe, handing him my clipboard and pen before chasing after the booming voice. Fuck, what could have happened? "Grayson!"

He pops his head around the corner, his arm wrapping around my waist to throw me over his shoulder. "I have longer legs. We gotta go," he grunts.

"Can you tell me what's wrong?" I gasp. I'm not used to being thrown around, though it doesn't bother me. I just know there has to be something wrong for his legs to be eating up the ground beneath us.

"Isaac! Have you seen Sidney?" Gray calls out.

"I'll get him. Are we going somewhere?" Isaac asks.

"We're following a wayward traveler. We gotta hurry," Gray explains, opening the front door to walk out. I can hear Isaac's feet pounding up the stairs and I'm about to lose my damn mind with questions. "Kenzo left his house and is headed away from here. There's no reason why he should be driving that way. Where could he be going?"

Where would I go if I was severely depressed? The sound of water and the breeze off the cliffs fills my mind, making me bite back a curse.

"What if he went to the town we were at the other day? Peony!" I remember.

"Why would he go there?" Grayson muses, his eyes scouring for someone who may have the garage key. "Does anyone have the garage key

for the royal cars?”

“I do, Sir,” a groundskeeper says, stepping forward. He’s not the same person that’s part of the Underground. I met him earlier today.

“Thank you, we need to go out for a bit, but need a car,” Grayson murmurs. “Can you help us?”

Nodding, he walks us to the garage, opening it. Grayson places me on my feet, and I blink to help with the dizziness. “Don’t leave us!” Isaac calls out, and I can hear feet pounding on the stone pavers.

“Keep up then,” I tell them, grabbing the keys to the SUV, and tossing them at Grayson. I need to learn how to drive. Maybe I’ll learn with Silla. I know she doesn’t know how to either.

Getting into the car, I glance at Grayson. “Do we need to check for bugs and all of that?”

“Yeah,” he sighs. “I’ll ask Isaac to do it.” Leaning out of the car, Grayson says, “Can you please make sure the vehicle is clean?”

“Gods, yes. Get the fuck out of it, right now,” Isaac growls. I scramble out of the car while Grayson rolls his eyes and gets out slower.

Isaac does a quick check for things, and I arch my brow. “What all are you checking for, Isaac?” I ask.

“Bombs, trackers, and bugs,” he grunts. The groundskeeper gasps, and I look over at him. “These cars are checked over several times a day, and very few people have the key. Traigor gave me his keys before he left in case you all would need them.”

Traigor is the groundskeeper I met. “That all tracks,” I mutter. “Thank you.”

I’m practically bouncing from foot to foot by the time Isaac is done, and Sidney careens breathlessly into the garage. “Fuck, I was worried you’d leave me. What the fuck is going on?” he gasps.

“Get in the car and I’ll tell you,” I tell him, getting back into the vehicle. I’m done waiting. He better get moving. Anxiety prickles along my skin,

making me feel like a live wire. I know deep, dark, unrelenting sadness and despair, and I think Kenzo was tossed deep into that pit. Silla doesn't need to lose another person. Please, please let us get to him in time.

Isaac, Sidney, and Grayson pile into the car, and I bite my lip. Are we overreacting?

"I think Kenzo is headed to Peony," I burst out. "He was at his house, and then he jumped back on the road headed in that direction."

"It would be a nice resting place for his brother, but the cliffs there make me nervous with his state of mind," Sidney says carefully. Grayson is already pulling out of the garage, and I'm glad the groundskeeper rushes in to lock things back up. "Call Silla and tell her we're picking her and Ayden up."

"On it," I mutter, pulling out my phone. I hope we make it in time. Come on, Kenzo, don't do anything you can't come back from.

KENZO

The ride into Peony is curiously peaceful. It's predawn, so there weren't any cars. Snow starts to swirl around the car as I arrive at the small town, but I'm not really worried about it. It's too soon in the year for the ground to be frozen.

I'm able to drive the vehicle right up to the forest, grateful it's too early for the people who live in the clearing to be awake. Hurrying, I get out, unbuckling my brother and picking him up. I threw all of my tools into a bag in the trunk, so I can easily ease it over my shoulder. Ignoring the open doors, I start trekking into the forest.

I probably won't need the car again. I'm sure there's someone who can use it more than me.

A ghost of a smile flits across my lips as I remember Silla's screams as she ran from us. I wanted to remember a happy day, though Kal was mostly confused that day. Maybe it's selfish to bury him here, but it's so beautiful and peaceful. It felt wrong somehow to bury him in our backyard.

The cold wind stings my face, whipping my hair into my eyes. It's a little longer than it usually is, I never got around to getting a haircut.

Finding a small clearing surrounded by trees, it overlooks the ocean. The wind is worse here, whipping around us both. I put a heavier jacket on, but it still cuts through. Carefully putting down my brother's body, I pull the shovel out of the bag, getting to work to dig him a hole for his final resting place. While the ground isn't frozen yet, it's harder than it usually is.

Soon, I'm beginning to sweat, and I throw my jacket off. The wind tries to rip it from me, but it's too heavy, and it thunks to the ground. I wonder if we're going to be getting a snowstorm soon because while the snow is light, the sky is almost a blue tinged gray. It's super overcast, the sea slamming

into the cliffs. I can feel the light spray even from where I'm digging the hole.

Jumping into the half dug hole, I finish digging it. The sweat freezes just as soon as it begins to form, making me shiver. I need to make sure I finish burying Kal before I fucking freeze. Climbing out of the hole, I pick up my brother. I uncover his face for a moment, closing his eyes.

"I'm so sorry," I rasp. "I should have protected you better. I failed you. I'll be back with you soon, and I promise to make it up to you."

I carefully drop him into his grave, unable to see as my eyes well with tears. The overwhelming force of my grief makes me bowl over, stealing my breath. I can't believe he's dead. Kal was so brave in his last moments, staring straight ahead where I was hidden and refusing to tell the bitch queen anything.

Gasping, I wonder if the pain will ever end. I feel as if there's a knife carving through my chest. I know Silla told me she wasn't letting me go, but I really think she should. I can't protect her. The best I can do is set her up with a mass of people who can. Kinsley will help her be the best ruler possible, Sidney and Ayden will help Silla with the lack of food situation, and all of her lovers will ensure she's loved. The Underground will make wonderful soldiers in her new army.

I made sure to speak to them all before I went to the castle last night, since I didn't know what to expect. Fuck, would I have changed anything if I knew?

Straightening, I wipe away the never ending tears. Why am I even bothering?

Shoveling the dirt over my brother's body, I struggle to ignore the sound as the hole fills. He was nineteen years old. Kal should be dating, partying, enjoying life. He'll never get married, have children, or do anything ever again. I know he was sheltered, and talking to women was difficult for him.

I wish I hadn't invited him to the masquerade to help measure Silla's

mettle. I wanted his opinion, and he was always the nicer brother. I'm an asshole.

Losing myself in the process of my work, it takes me a moment to realize I'm done. Tossing the shovel to the side, I mindlessly walk over to the cliff's edge. It really is beautiful, the ocean wild. I hope Kal will like being buried here, especially on sunny days.

I vaguely hear screaming around me, but it's not me. Dazed, I note that my feet are really close to the cliff's edge. Just the shift of my weight will take me right over. I feel as if I'm outside of my body as I think this, weighing whether or not it's worth the effort to shift forward.

"Kenzo! No!" Silla screams, sliding next to me and pulling me down. I gasp as my legs go out from under me, and slam onto my ass.

"Are you fucking insane?" I yell at her before immediately feeling bad. "Mistress, the realm needs you, what the hell are you doing?"

"Saving your miserable ass," Sidney says, dropping down next to me. "As gorgeous as the scenery is, I don't think a watery grave suits you."

"Don't joke," Silla sobs. "You were just going to step off into the abyss. You can't do that!"

I didn't want her to see that, and I really didn't think she'd need me. Shoving my ass back so I'm firmly on the cliff, I haul her into my lap.

"I set you up with everything," I tell her, rubbing at her tears. "You have a military that will kill for you in the Underground, people who love you, and Kinsley to go to bat for you with the fuddy duddies."

"You bastard," Gray mutters, sitting in the vacant space where my mistress was. Ayden, Andrya, and Isaac join us, and I just sigh. I really did think about this more than I thought.

"How did you even find me?" I sigh.

"We tracked your ass," Ayden snorts. "Gray and I both put trackers on you before you left the castle. It was clear you weren't thinking clearly, even if you are a damn evil genius."

“At first, I wasn’t sure what to expect from today,” I explain. “And then... Kal died, and I thought, what’s the fucking point? I handed you a kingdom, and walked away.”

Silla slaps me across the face, and I’m so shocked, all I can do is gawp at her.

“You don’t get to decide that,” she growls. “I understand despair, grief, and unending pain. Andrya understands it as well. We’re still here.”

“I almost wasn’t,” Andrya says softly. “It’s a little better now that you’re here. I’m down to three showers a day instead of nine, and I don’t stare at the razor blade like it’s the answer to all of my problems anymore. It won’t go away tomorrow, Kenzo. It does get better, though.”

Silla twists around to look at Andrya with a proud smile. “I love you and I’m so proud of you for saying yes to life every day,” she says. I feel even more like an asshole now.

“I almost didn’t.” Andrya sighs. “The guys helped a lot, and when I was at my lowest point, they all insisted on moving into a room together. It was tight, ridiculous at times, but they did it.”

“Your hands roam when you sleep,” Grayson smirks. She flushes with embarrassment, and he just chuckles. “Sidney just made sure he slept next to you.”

“I almost felt guilty for her hand going down my boxers,” Sidney snorts. “None of us were very interested in sex back then.”

“I’m... getting there,” Andrya admits with a small smile. “The point is it’s braver to stick it out, to live each day even though it hurts, then to walk off the cliff. We can’t always see that. I hear Kal was incredibly brave in his last moments, and the best way to honor him is to live since he can’t.”

I close my eyes, unable to fight the tears. “You all fight really fucking dirty,” I rasp.

“We’re not good people,” Isaac says. “We are, however, damn good people to have in your corner. You’re stuck with us, your mistress, and the

damn dog collar.”

I sputter out a laugh even as my chest heaves with sobs. Burying my face in Silla’s neck, I allow myself to feel every fucked up thing I buried yesterday. Her jasmine scent wraps around me, helping me remember what I have to live for. My mistress holds me tightly, her warm tears hitting my skin. Hands touch my back, and they let me cry, no judgments.

I’ll never be the same again. Sniffing, I lift my face realizing the weather is even colder, and the snow is falling harder.

“You’re not dressed for this weather, Mistress,” I grumble, trying to get up, but my foot keeps slipping.

Grayson and Isaac get up, hauling me onto my feet with Silla in my arms. “Thanks,” I grunt. “I couldn’t find purchase on the damn gravel.”

“That’s another reason I’m taking Silla over my knee tonight. I can see it now, *Queen of Forbach sails over the cliff before her coronation*. Gods, girl, you’re going to give me gray hair,” he grumbles as we start walking back. Sidney grabs my shovel, while Ayden picks up my bag. Andrya stops next to them, staring at the gravesite.

“Did your brother have a favorite type of flower?” Andrya asks, chewing on her lip.

Stopping next to her, finding comfort in Silla’s weight in my arms, I nod. “He loved daffodils,” I tell them. “They’re also my mother’s favorite flower, and it was nice that they shared that without realizing it.”

“Do you need to tell her?” Grayson asks, worry in his eyes.

“No, she’s deteriorating so rapidly, she sometimes wouldn’t know who we were,” I explain. “I’ll continue to visit her as usual, but telling her would simply confuse her.”

“I’m sorry,” he offers and I incline my head.

“We’ll come back in the spring and plant flowers for him, set up a headstone,” Sidney says with a nod. “The twins and I can replant every year, until they start coming back on their own.”

“I... thank you,” I say, my voice cracking in surprise and emotion.

“You’re adopted,” he shrugs, as if that explains everything, and maybe it does. The crunch under our feet is the only sound as we trek back to the car. Silla tries to convince me to put her down, but I refuse.

I just want to hold her for a bit as I come to terms with what I almost threw away.

Twenty-Eight

ISAAC

We've officially adopted Kenzo. I lean my head on my fist as I watch everyone sleep. It was almost eight in the morning by the time we got home to the apartment. We told him we'd go with him to pick up his stuff at his house tomorrow, since we plan to move into the castle tonight.

Silla is sprawled out over Kenzo, and he's wrapped around her. Tonight was a lot. We were so close to losing both of them. Fuck, every time I begin to drift off to sleep, I imagine them both going off the side of the cliff. I'm with Grayson, I want to tan her ass red.

"Can't sleep?" Ayden asks, yawning. I shake my head, scowling. "I can't say the last twenty-four hours have been easy. I keep seeing this girl I used to know whenever I close my eyes. Andrya, Sidney, and I enjoyed partying hard before we started teaching at FRC, and the girl got turned around. She went right over the cliff, the screaming waking us all up. Fuck, Silla could have cut it too close."

"Yep," I grunt. "All I can see is Silla crushed by the waves and the cliff. I know she wasn't thinking, but Gods, I'm so angry."

"Silla knows," Grayson says sleepily next to me. "You can be pissed, but changing what she did means we could have lost Kenzo. She doesn't deserve to lose anyone else."

"Why do you have to be so damn logical?" I complain, leaning into him.

He chuckles, hugging me. There's so much body heat now, even without a heater, he fell asleep without a shirt. "We have a long day ahead of us, Baby," Grayson reminds me. "What do you need to be able to fall asleep?"

"My brain won't shut up." I sigh. "I'm tired, but a doomsday reel plays every time I shut my eyes."

"Why don't we wear you out then," he murmurs, pushing my shorts down

my hips.

“They’ll... hear,” I whisper breathlessly as his hand wraps around my cock.

“Ayden, be a good boy for me and give me your boxers,” Grayson chuckles. Ayden doesn’t think twice, pushing them down to hand them to Gray. I’m confused for a moment before he balls them up and shoves it into my mouth. Thankfully, Ayden showered before he got into bed, but my eyes widen as my nose flares at his amber scent. “Now you can be a good boy for me while I fuck you to sleep, can’t you?”

Gods, that sounds really good right now. I shouldn’t with everything going on, but as he pulls off my shirt and wraps his hand around my cock, I decide to say fuck it. Life is so short, I’m grabbing it with both hands. Grunting through my gag, I shove my boxers down, giving him more room.

“That’s it,” Gray murmurs, kissing my shoulder. Ayden twists to find the lube carefully, handing it to him. “Hard and fast it is,” he chuckles.

Ayden leans back, rolling his palm around the head of his penis to collect his arousal before coating his length with it. I guess I’m getting a show and a fuck.

The top of the bottle snicks open, and I can feel the cool liquid drizzling liberally between my ass cheeks. The crinkle of a condom sounds loud in the quiet and I shake my head furiously. Throwing it to the side, Grayson bites my shoulder hard as he lines his dick up with my puckered hole.

“I’m going to fill you so good, Baby,” he murmurs, thrusting his hips so that his cock begins to disappear inside of me. The burn grounds me, my head dropping back as I groan. Gray spits into his palm, beginning to stroke and fuck my dick with it.

Ayden watches quietly, his eyes rolling in pleasure as he masturbates. We all seem to be voyeurs at heart, which makes me hotter. Grayson’s other arm wraps around my waist, his knee pressing into the mattress for some leverage as he buries his face into my neck to stifle his own noises. I can’t do anything

except enjoy the sensations flooding through me.

His cock inside of me and his hand on my dick are all I can focus on. They become my entire world, and even Ayden fades into the background, his soft grunts and moans barely audible.

“Fuck, Isaac, you’re so damn tight,” Gray growls, his voice teasing the shell of my ear, making me shiver. He’s so big, I can barely breathe as he stretches me. “That’s it, take it all, Baby.”

I want to take it all, fuck me I really do. I’ve been so keyed up between anxiety and camera monitoring to make sure everyone really did go home. I watched all of those men and women take their last breaths after breathing in the ricin, feeling nothing. They were all a hazard to my girl, so they had to go.

“Focus,” Grayson mutters, squeezing my balls hard. I grit my teeth against the gag, muttering obscenities in my head. Damn pain dom. He’s a lot rougher on me than he is Silla, which is good. Our girl is still too tiny for her own good. Gray’s hips drive his cock further inside of me, and his wish is mine to fulfill. All I can think about is how good he feels.

The pain fades, and I push my hips back into his, encouraging him to fuck me harder. His teeth graze my neck, making me shudder. I wouldn’t be surprised if I have a bruise there later. I kind of enjoy wearing the evidence of our sexcapades, not that I’ll ever tell him.

The dull sound of skin slapping against each other and Grayson’s hand stroking my cock fill the room. I’m sure no one else wakes up because of how exhausted they are, and Silla sleeps hard anyway.

“Come for me,” he coaxes, twisting his hand at the head of my cock. It twitches, loving the attention he’s giving me. The back of my legs and spine start to tingle, and I grunt, knowing I can’t hold it back. Grayson rocks his pelvis, whimpering as he tries to hold back the roar I can feel building in his chest.

Fuck, we’re going to wake everyone up.

“Godsdamn,” he pants. I want to tell him just to bite my shoulder to stay quiet, but I still have Ayden’s boxers stuffed in my mouth. Gray wasn’t gentle, and my cheeks puff out from the material. “You’re such a good little cock whore for me, aren’t you?”

I moan behind the gag, because I absolutely am. I crave the feeling of his cock in my ass, his cum as he paints my insides, and the release it triggers inside of me. His pleasure and mine begin and end at the same time. It’s a side of me I never realized until I let myself go with Grayson.

“Fuck, fuck, I’m coming,” he grunts, still working my cock perfectly. My head drops back, groaning as my hips spasm, thrusting into his hand. “Sorry about this...”

I don’t know what he means until he bites down on the fleshy part of my shoulder, muffling his roar as he pumps me full of cum. Grunting, my eyes roll, and I lose the battle, coming hard.

Grayson continues to work my cock until I sag in exhaustion. My eyes are already closing, and I barely stir as Grayson gets up to go to the bathroom. My breath is already evening out too when he returns to clean me up with a wet cloth.

Wrapping his arms around me, we pass out together.

SILLA

When we finally rise from the bed, it's close to three in the afternoon. Ugh, we slept the day away.

"I guess it's moving day," I mutter, yawning.

"I'm not sleeping in Cinder's old room," Ayden shudders with derision.

I snort, getting out of bed. "Absolutely not. Dibs on the shower. Who wants to save water with me?" I tease.

Kenzo lifts me into his arms, kissing me hard.

"We can probably fit one more," he says, surprising me.

Sidney snorts. "The dog boy can share, look at that," he says. Kenzo merely tosses me over his shoulder, his strong arm clamped over my thighs.

"Snooze, you lose!" Kenzo calls out, striding into the bathroom and slamming the door. I can't help but giggle. This is going to be an adjustment, but I don't think they'll mind.

Sliding me down his chest, I grin up at him when my feet touch the floor.

"Hi," I murmur, staring at him.

"Mistress, it seems I get to wash your hair all by myself," he murmurs. "Isn't that lucky?"

Shaking my head at his antics as he lifts my shirt over my head, I step back in to hug him.

"I'm here," he reminds me, hugging me back. "I'm not going anywhere. Slept like shit, but I'm sure that's just how it'll be for a while. It'll make me happy to take care of you. Let me?"

"Always," I murmur, meaning it.

Kenzo pulls off his clothes, having fallen asleep in one of the guy's joggers and T-shirt. He also carefully lays the collar on the counter, making sure it's safe. He didn't look very certain about sleeping in the bed with us

last night, but finally sighed and climbed in next to me. Andrya cuddled me on the other side, and then Sidney sandwiched her between us. It all just worked.

I push my underwear down, letting it pool at my feet. Padding to the shower, I turn it on so it'll warm up. Kenzo nuzzles my shoulder, wrapping his arms around my waist.

“Did you sleep well, Mistress?” he asks softly.

“I always sleep hard,” I admit. “I haven’t had a nightmare in ages, but I think sleeping with everyone helps me.”

Kenzo nods absently, nudging me into the shower. “I slept better than I deserved to.” He sighs. “I feel a little lost right now. I did everything I set out to do, and now I don’t have a purpose.”

“Should I give you one?” I ask, tilting my head back so the water will soak my hair. Kenzo’s splayed palms cover my hips, caressing my wet skin.

“You can give me anything you wish, Mistress. I’ll happily take it,” he promises.

Grabbing the shampoo bottle, he tugs me out of the spray of water. Turning me, he squeezes some of the product into his hand, working it into my scalp. Sighing, I can feel myself beginning to go boneless. This is one of my favorite things, the other being endless orgasms.

“You sound happy, Mistress,” Kenzo chuckles.

“I think I forgot what I was going to say,” I confess. “This feels amazing.”

“Then simply enjoy it, and you can tell me later,” he reassures me.

He carefully turns me around, tilting my head back to wash my hair, then begins to condition, starting at my ends. Kenzo’s tender ministrations make my eyes start to droop, so he kisses my forehead, propping me against the wall so he can shower quickly.

“Come here, Mistress, I’ll wash your body before we rinse and then get some caffeine in you,” Kenzo says.

“Yes, please. Everything you did felt amazing.” I sigh.

“I wish I could do other things that would feel even better, but we don’t have the time,” he laments. Kenzo efficiently lathers my body, tweaking my nipples teasingly, chuckling in that manly, sexy way that makes me shiver.

“Pet,” I whimper, writhing against his hardening cock against my back.

“No time, Mistress,” he reminds me, rinsing me off. As we get out of the shower, I have an idea, my brain slowly coming back online.

“So about giving you a purpose,” I murmur, beginning to dry my body off.

Kenzo’s brows draw together as he grabs his towel. “Yes?” he asks.

“What if I made you the head of the military?” I ask. “They’re essentially your men and women anyway. You’ve trained them all, they are used to taking orders from you. Why shouldn’t you?”

“I... I don’t have a reason to deny this position,” he says, surprised. “Do you really think I can? Up ‘till recently I was a pacifist, after all.”

“Doesn’t matter,” I tell him, wrapping myself in a towel. Moving to the sinks, I pick up my toothbrush as I think. “You know when to choose violence and when diplomacy is the best course of action, right? You’re not a hot head.”

I put toothpaste on the toothbrush, and briefly run it under the water before beginning to brush.

“I believe I’m only a ‘hot head’, as you say, when your safety is at stake,” Kenzo muses. “Otherwise, I’m pretty calm. I taught myself to fight out of necessity. First because of my home life, and then because I wanted to change things in our kingdom.”

Spitting and rinsing out my mouth, I nod. “I also want to change the way our orphans are treated. There has to be a better system for placement. How many children did we just orphan with our actions yesterday?”

“Not as many as you’d think,” he says. “Cinder only chose auditors who were single without children to do her bidding. Also, any guards or soldiers

we dispatched also had significant others who were responsible for childcare, as they weren't home very often since they lived in the barracks."

"I need to make sure I send those men and women we just widowed money." I sigh.

"You know they were all vile," Kenzo mutters.

"Oh, yes, I do," I agree. All too well. His eyes darken, I'm already moving on. They can't hurt me anymore. They're dead.

Striding into the bedroom, I bite my lip. I never want to look at another shade of navy blue again. Pulling out a green long-sleeved dress with a slit up the side, I toss it onto the bed along with a thigh knife holster, and flat, brown boots. I don't plan to be a normal queen, may as well set the expectations up correctly.

Kenzo's jaw drops as I release the towel from around me, his eyes bouncing from the clothes to me.

"I'm going to go find clothes, and I'll send one of the guys in to replace your knife for you," he says, amused. "Forbach will be talking about you for years, Mistress. I can't fucking wait to see what you do."

He walks out of the room, leaving me to smirk in his absence. Queen. Holy shit.



THE CASTLE IS in a flurry of activity when we arrive, driving both vehicles in with our things. As if waiting for us, men and women who serve as maids and workers follow us into the courtyard.

"Your Majesty, we'll unload everything if you'll just tell us where?" one of the women asks as I get out of the car.

"That'll be a little difficult. I haven't decided where we'll be sleeping. May I speak to Margot, the house manager, please?" I ask.

Nodding, she takes a step backward. "I'll lead you to her. Right this way,

Your Majesty,” she says.

Unfortunately, I don’t know her name, but I’ll find out after speaking to Margot. Kenzo and Sidney fall into step with me as I follow, and I know it’s for my safety. We still don’t know what to expect, or if there are any hidden enemies who were loyal to Cinder.

“Please tell me we aren’t sleeping in her room, Pet,” Sidney mutters under his breath.

“Not for all the money in the world,” I promise.

“Margot?” the girl asks, popping her head into her office. It feels odd that she wasn’t there to greet us, and my lips purse in displeasure. I haven’t had much reason to interact with her, as Cinder had morning meetings with her.

Thankfully, the skulls and the horrible chandelier have been cleared from the entryway, and the bodies have been removed from the castle. Small steps to airing out the madness Cinder left behind.

“Yes, girl, what? The new queen will be here any time, and I have to make sure things are up to snuff. There’s been too much upheaval, I won’t be losing my job now, too,” Margot grumbles.

My lips twitch, amused now that I know she didn’t know I was here yet. She’s no doubt going to be pissed when she realizes I’m standing right here. At least she wasn’t awful in her judgment of me.

“She’s here. The new queen is next to me, and wishes a moment of your time,” the girl says, curtsying quickly before rushing away.

Margot is silent, and I move to the doorway. “Margot,” I murmur. “I need a few things done before we can fully move in.”

“Of course,” she says, standing quickly. “I’m so sorry I wasn’t there to greet you. I didn’t realize you’d arrived.”

“Only just,” I explain. “I need a large bedroom that did not belong to Cinder. It’ll need to fit a large bed, several closets, and an attached bathroom.”

Margot thinks, biting her lip. “I’m afraid the only room like that is

Cinder's old room," she muses. "What is the problem with that room, if I may ask?"

As I said, I didn't spend much time around Margot, and it's very possible that she doesn't know the full extent of my traumatic past with my step-sister.

"There are ghosts who I'm sure still exist within the walls, and I'd prefer not to ever be visited by them," I tell her instead.

"Who exactly is your Queen, Margot?" Sidney snaps. He was interrogating castle employees, and I immediately can see that they've had a run in. Sidney was very thorough apparently with his interviews. He always is.

"Queen Drizella, of course," Margot says hurriedly. "Or rather, she will be after her coronation. I will need to bring in some of the royal builders to restructure rooms to ensure we can accommodate you, Your Majesty. What wing would you like to reside in?"

"The east wing," I tell her. It's still the royal wing, but well away from Cinder's old room. "The room will need to have seven closets, so if several rooms need to be turned into one, that's acceptable."

"Seven," she breathes.

"Where else are my consorts to live?" I ask with a smile. "Can you show me to the east wing so I may choose the rooms we'll be adjusting?"

I can make my way up there myself, but I don't plan to. I can see Margot needs to be needed, and I have no problems delegating. Nodding, she takes her keys with her as she walks over to us.

"Right this way, please. Would you like to close up Cinder's old rooms?" she asks.

"It's getting colder outside," I muse, ignoring Margot's concerned glance.

"Yes, winter will be in full swing in the next month," Sidney agrees, giving me the space to think.

"Cinder has a lot of heavy wooden furniture. Let's chop all of that for firewood—"

“With all due respect, Your Majesty, the castle has plenty of firewood,” Margot says, confused.

“Not for us,” I laugh, waving my hand as if to dispel her words. “It’s for the royal city. I want it to be distributed to those who need it. Any clothing is to be repurposed as well. Her clothes were always well made. Take all of the stitching out of it so that people can make new items with the fabrics.”

Looking a bit dazed, she nods, turning to grab a clipboard, paper, and a pen. Making her notes, she glances up.

“What else, Your Majesty?” She asks.

“I want the same done for all of those who passed away from the terrible stomach bug that came through. Scrub the clothing, and then repurpose the fabric. We will have my personal military reporting after my coronation, so those rooms will need to be cleared as well. There are barracks on the castle grounds, correct?” I ask.

While I didn’t want guards living so close to the castle initially, I think in the beginning it’ll be necessary as we settle in. Threats may be a problem in our first months or even years.

“Yes, Mistress,” Kenzo pipes up. “The castle grounds are vast. The barracks are about half a mile from the castle itself. I think we may want to ensure they’re no further than that for a time.”

“Agreed,” I say with a nod. “That’s all for now, let’s go see the rooms. I’m sure I’ll think of things as we go.”

“Of course,” Margot says professionally. She must think I’m bat shit crazy or just really odd. Except, Forbach’s last queen was actually mentally ill, so I can only be a step up.

Moving through the halls, we go up the stairs to the east wing. I don’t know where the others are, but I’m sure they’ll find me eventually. My anklet is around my wrist today, so I’m not worried.

“How large are the average rooms on this wing?” I ask.

“They’re fairly average. We may need to custom make your bed if you’re

looking for something that'll fit seven people," she explains. There's no judgment on her face, she's just in 'fix it' mode. I can see why she's the house manager.

Walking us deeper into the wing, she opens several rooms.

"I think these three rooms may work if we tear down the walls," she says, walking inside one to open the blinds. There are bay windows in this room, and it's filled with light from them.

"This space is beautiful," Sidney muses. "I can see some nice hanging plants in here as well. A book nook in one of the windows with a seat?"

Margot gazes between us, pen poised to make notes.

"Yes, I would love that." I sigh with a nod. "This would make a wonderful living room area I think."

"As you wish," she says. "I also think you're right. There's a lot of light in here throughout the day. Let's look at the other rooms, because each is a little different since this is on the third floor, and in the middle of the castle."

Moving to the middle room, Margot pushes the door inward, opening the drapes here as well. There's two windows in this room, but the ceiling is vaulted here. There's a view of the woods outside as well, and I find myself loving it. I can only imagine how open and beautiful it'll be when we have everything finished.

"Is there a fourth room?" I ask hesitantly. I really like the idea of a wing to ourselves right now.

"The other rooms are storage spaces directly across from these. However the room opposite the third room could be accessed, and then we can open it to encompass the hallway there as well," she explains, her mind whirling.

"Can we see it?" Sidney asks. I can see him beginning to imagine it as well. And since the rest of the rooms are storage, we can eventually take those over for children's bedrooms. Grayson loves to cook, maybe we could have a kitchenette built on as well as we take over this wing. There are so many options.

“Absolutely, please follow me,” Margot insists. As she shows us the rooms, I find myself nodding. It’s more than enough space for the seven of us to sprawl out in, and much larger than the apartment we were in.

“I would love to convert these into our new home,” I decide, sighing happily. “We’ll sleep in another room in the meantime, maybe with several beds pushed together?” I shrug, I don’t care as long as we’re together.

“Done,” she agrees. “Do you know what you’d like to do with Cinder’s old room? It’s a large area of the castle. Do you want it locked up?”

“No,” I immediately respond, surprising myself. “There’s really great light in there. Sidney, what do you think about using this area as your office with the twins?”

Sidney grins. “You, my dear, are a genius. I love that idea. We’re away from the rest of the castle as we conduct experiments and work on things.”

“Take it easy on taking over the world, Love,” I tease him. The most adorable blush rises in his cheeks, making me giggle. Ayden’s roses and the funds raised by this may be able to help in some way as well. I’ll make sure to talk to him. “Gods, there’s so much to do!”

“One thing at a time,” Margot reminds me, bustling us out of the rooms. “Have you all eaten dinner yet?”

“No,” Kenzo speaks up, shaking his head. “I don’t think I could eat in the dining room though.”

Margot takes it in stride, walking down the hall, expecting us to follow. “There are three dining rooms in the castle. Would you like to repurpose that room?”

“We may need to,” I tell her. “I don’t think I’ll be able to eat there either. I’ll have to decide. We don’t have a proper conference room in the castle, maybe we can redecorate it for that purpose.”

Margot makes another note, and soon we’re sitting down to dinner with everyone. I explain what we’ve been doing, and Grayson smirks.

“So you are thinking about babies?” he teases me. I bite my lip and shrug,

and growls fill the room. I'm in love with cavemen. Andrya's giggles fill the room, making me smile.

I love her laugh so much.

"I'm thinking about our future," I admit. "I need to make sure anyone who's a threat to us is taken out, and that we're safe. You're welcome to practice as often as you'd like though."

"It's nice to hear laughter in the castle again," Kinsley says, walking into the room. "Are you settling all right?"

I stand, inclining my head out of habit. "We are, thank you. Join us?"

Kinsley sits at the table, and the waitstaff bustles in with trays of food. Sidney and Ayden check over the food, sniffing and giving small tastes. I suppose this is my life now after having killed my enemies in exactly this way.

"All safe," Ayden concludes. "It's also delicious."

Grinning, I serve myself some food, turning to Kinsley. "I got some things done, planned our new living quarters out, and my mind is whirling with a million different things."

"Tell me all about it," Kinsley says, taking a bite of the chicken.

"Ayden, how is your rose business doing?" I ask, turning to him.

"They're well taken care of and business is booming. Why, Kitten?" he asks.

I'm not going to stand on ceremony with them, so Kinsley will have to deal.

"I want to do something good with the money you're making from this, if you agree," I tell him.

"Alright. You wanted to do something for the orphans. You also want to help those living on the streets, so where are we allocating to?" Ayden asks, beginning to eat.

"Can we allocate to our orphans, reform the homes they're going to? I want there to be a therapist in each orphanage for counseling, with someone

regularly checking in,” I explain.

“A series of checks and balances,” Kenzo agrees.

“Yes! I want to do better for them, offer them a good education as well once they leave the orphanage. If they want to follow a trade, that’s fine as well,” I tell them.

Together, we make a plan for reform that actually works in that area.

“Ayden, Sidney, and Andrya, is there anything you can do to help our crops? Apparently they’ve been failing recently, but there’s no reason why,” I say.

If we’re all together, may as well work on some of the ideas and concerns wearing holes in my brain. They suggest checking the soil before making an action plan, and the rest of dinner passes in much the same way.

“Cinder has a reform camp about six hours away,” Grayson pipes up. “The place was more of a breeding ground to create the best spies, but that was Cinder’s project. I don’t see a need for that now, unless there’s something we don’t know.”

Kinsley’s brows draw in as she thinks. “Explain the ins and outs of this place, please, Grayson?”

Grayson, Ayden, and Isaac take point in explaining, while Andrya and Sidney pipe in as needed.

“She made this entire program underneath our noses,” Kinsley mutters. “Damn. I don’t see a need for this program, unless we use it to infiltrate some of the areas we can’t always be in.”

“I know there are still constables and heads of provinces who are shady people.” I sigh. “I do need to travel eventually to these places, but I want to ensure things are a bit more stable here before I do.”

“I agree with you. Why don’t we use the spies the way Cinder should have been?” Kinsley agrees.

Dinner finished, we move to the parlor, working on things until bedtime. Things feel as if we’re moving in a good direction, now to hope coronation

day goes well.

Twenty-Nine

ANDRYA

Silla wanted to walk the grounds today, since she's never been able to before. Sidney and I were curious as well, so while Isaac wired the castle for security with Ayden, Grayson and Kenzo worked on other things, we're going on a hike to explore.

"I still get lost in the castle." Silla sighs, shaking her head. "This still feels so surreal."

"It feels right in so many ways, though, too," Sidney tells her. "You have suffered so much at the hands of the crown, you know how bad things can get, which means you will do better."

"You all have so much confidence in me, but my head is spinning. I can't believe the things Cinder told me. Was her father actually sexually abusive? Gods, I feel sorry for her, but at the same time—"

"We don't have to be a product of our trauma, Baby," I remind her. "Cinder could have made different choices, but she didn't. Grayson is working with Kinsley now to redirect FRC and how they're trained. Longer training time, but we will still be using people who have legitimate crimes that don't require prison time. I'm thinking five years of service and then they'll be released."

"I think that's fair," Sidney muses. "Cinder was burning through her spies by giving them impossible jobs. If the recruits know there's an end to their rehabilitation time, they'll be more willing to make it work."

"Agreed," Silla murmurs. "I wonder what's in these woods?"

Sidney frowns as we cross the wide clearing. There is military equipment back here, and I wonder if Cinder had training back here.

"I need to ask Kenzo if there's a way drills can be done somewhere else." Silla sighs, as if reading my mind. "It just all makes me uncomfortable. I

know most of the people in my guard will be from the Underground but...”

“I’ll make a point to ask,” Sidney confirms. I love how much he takes our concerns to heart. All the guys do, even my brother. I’m still figuring out Kenzo, but he seems more closed off since his brother died.

“Let’s go on an adventure,” I laugh, grabbing Silla’s hand and pulling her into the woods.

I didn’t even know this was here until I checked out the rooms that will be ours in our wing. The view is beautiful, but I don’t want to see the military equipment either. It sounds like first world problems, but I still have flashbacks from my time in the dungeon.

Silla is wearing a heavy wool jacket, gray pants, with a long-sleeved, deep purple sweater, and boots. She has several knives hidden on her person, and I think this will always be her life from now on. I’ve even started carrying weapons on my person, in the form of poisoned clips in my hair and a knife in my boot.

The ground is hard beneath our feet here, and I swear it’s colder here than it was in Peony. The twigs snap beneath our feet, and the wind whips through the trees. Shivering, Silla looks up.

“I swear I smell snow,” she says, wrinkling her nose.

“It’s supposed to snow today, so we shouldn’t go too far,” Sidney cautions.

“We won’t freeze,” I tease him. “Don’t you wonder what’s in these trees?”

“Unless it’s you two running, screaming from me as I chase you down while I’m masked so I can fuck you, not really,” he says drolly, yet still stays close.

Giggling, Silla shakes her head at him. “That was oddly specific, but is that an option once it’s warmer?” she asks.

“It very much is. I’ve been fucking my cock with my hand in the shower to that particular fantasy.” Sidney smirks.

“Uh, yes, please?” I whimper.

Sidney wraps his arm around my waist, pulling me to him. “You want that, Sweetness?” he growls, wrapping my hair in his fist. Sidney barely pulls, but my head drops back so he can ravage my lips. His usual scent of herbs wrap around me, and I relax into his arms.

“I love how relaxed you are,” Silla says, smiling, kissing my cheek. She has an adorable hat pulled over her ears, and it’s slouchy enough to fit over her bun.

Pulling away, I agree. “Something about things falling into place helps all of the unease I’ve felt. The guards are gone, and my heart just feels at peace.”

“Bloodthirsty little thing,” Sidney says, baring his teeth at me as he releases my hair.

“Pot calling the kettle black.” I grin. Continuing through the woods, I see they go really far back. The sky opens and snow begins to fall. Silla sticks her tongue out to catch a snowflake, her cheeks flushed and happy. We deserve happiness.

“Silla!” Grayson calls into the woods, and I glance at Silla’s wrist. Her tracker peeks out from under her coat.

“I think this property is large enough that he’ll always have to track you down,” I chuckle.

“I’m playing in the soon to be snow!” Silla calls out to him.

His footsteps are heard as he walks toward us, his legs eating up the space between us. “It’s going to come down later today, but we can make snowmen and have a very unregal snowball fight when everything is pretty and covered in white,” he says.

“I can’t remember the last time we had a snowball fight.” I sigh happily.

Grayson throws his arms around Silla and I, ensuring we start to walk back to the castle and out of the cold. Protective caveman, though sweet.

“There’s a lot of things we haven’t done in a long time,” he admits. “Tomorrow is going to be a busy day, but everything is tied up and done for

now. Ayden is already planning a greenhouse, Sidney."

"Thank fuck," Sidney says. "I don't understand how a property this size doesn't have one with so many people to feed. At the end of February I need to see what the state of the soil is like in the farmers' fields to ensure we have decent crops. However, in the meantime, I want to work on getting community greenhouses built in each of the larger towns and cities. Those who help in the construction, planting, and harvesting will have food to eat. Obviously, we won't need that much help, but I want the community to work together in this."

Silla nods, thinking. "We can find a way to make this beneficial for the community, since there will be children or older members who aren't able to help. I remember not everyone worked the crops at FRC, but you had more than enough help," she reminds him.

"That's true," Sidney muses. "What about shifts of people, then? You're right, I don't want someone with a black thumb, either, who will kill my crops. I'll have to think about it."

We walk back through the grounds, workers stopping to incline their heads at their future queen. Silla just takes it in stride with a smile and a nod, though I can see the color is high in her cheeks. It may not all be because of the cold.

"You found her," Kenzo murmurs. He's wearing a pair of comfortable cargo pants and a long-sleeved shirt.

"I did." Grayson smirks. "I'll always find her."

"Stalker," I mutter, earning myself a gentle swat across the ass. Gasping, my eyes widen up at him, but he ignores me. My core tightens, and I bite my lip. I really didn't think I'd like that. Huh.

New experiences will always happen with this group, I guess.



GRAYSON AND SIDNEY turned the movie theater into the perfect date night without batting an eye.

“How long have you been planning this?” Kenzo grunts, shaking his head. Giant pillows litter the floor, there’s a small popcorn machine, pizza, and candy on a table as well.

“We live in a castle,” he snorts. “I mentioned to Margot that I wanted to surprise Silla with a fun night in the movie room and offered my suggestions. She told me to go attend to my duties, and she’d attend to hers.”

“Man, that woman is crotchety but seriously efficient,” I say in awe.

“We’re not going to be bothered for the rest of the night. Also, the door locks, so if we fall asleep in here, it’s not a big deal. Silla’s coronation is at noon, and then there’s a small party afterward with some of the dignitaries,” Grayson explains.

“More dreary parties.” Silla sighs.

“No, Kitten, I assure you it’ll be quite different,” Ayden corrects her. “Before, the parties you went to were horror shows or places you wanted to escape. Tomorrow celebrates the beginning of something new and exciting. A queen Forbach can be proud of.”

Silla blinks rapidly, and my brother smiles at her in sympathy as he picks her up into his arms, dropping back into the fluffy clouds of the pillow. Squealing, her tears turn into peals of laughter, which is exactly what he was going for.

“So, what are we going to watch?” I tease Isaac. He is notorious for falling asleep whenever we start a movie. He gives me an even stare, arching his brow.

“Are you teasing me for never being able to stay awake?” he asks, lifting me off my feet.

Grayson pulls my boots and socks off my feet, and then I also find myself sailing into the pile of pillows.

“Oof,” I grunt. There’s so many pillows, all of differing firmness. It

creates the perfect bed. We all may actually fall asleep here.

“May as well join the circus,” Kenzo rumbles, throwing his shoes aside as well.

“Silla, what do you want to watch? Any preference?” Sidney asks, toeing off his shoes and socks to crawl onto the fluffy cloud with us.

“I know you’re going to laugh at me...” Silla begins.

“I would never.” He grins, laying on her chest. Her boobs really are a great pillow.

“I want to veg to a romantic comedy. I don’t really care what we watch,” she admits.

Food is distributed, the movie is turned on, and we all snuggle together. Silla giggles so hard at parts that she snorts, Isaac falls asleep on my shoulder, and Grayson runs his fingers in little designs only he knows what they are along my thigh. I squirm, making him chuckle in my ear.

“Am I bothering you, Baby?” he whispers along the shell of my ear. I shake my head furtively, barely breathing a sigh of relief as Isaac snores lightly, turning to curl on the pillows. Silla looks over at us, making me smile.

“You okay, Silla?” I ask, and she nods.

“I think they fell asleep on me too,” she giggles.

Kenzo is curled at the bottom of the pillow pile, breathing deeply. I’m glad he’s finally sleeping, because he was a bit fitful last night. My brother has his arms wrapped around Silla’s waist, his head on her stomach. Sidney, of course, fell asleep on her breasts. Lucky ass.

“I’m stuck,” Silla says wistfully.

“If you wiggle up, they’ll let go, thinking you have to pee,” I suggest. “I’ve slept between the two of them for years.”

“That’s actually a really good idea,” Grayson murmurs, turning to kiss my neck. He’s feeling extremely affectionate, and I’m not mad about it. Whimpering, I writhe in his arms.

“That looks like fun,” the little shit I call my girlfriend teases, wiggling and pushing her way up. Grunting and huffing, she’s a little breathless as she gets loose, crawling up to us. Just as I knew they would, Sidney and my brother snuggle each other, my lips twitching in amusement.

“Hey, Baby,” Silla says, cuddling next to me. My arms immediately open to her, my nose burying in her neck.

“I bet she smells delicious, doesn’t she, ’Drya?” Grayson rumbles into my ear. Fuck, this man’s voice is ruining my panties.

Breath rapidly coming faster, I pant as I nod. “Yes, Daddy,” I breathe. I’m turned away from him, and Grayson groans.

“Oh, honey. Don’t call me that unless you mean it,” Grayson says.

“What do you want, ’Drya?” Silla asks, moving away to gaze into my eyes. There’s just enough light from the movie still running for us to see each other.

“I want this,” I confess. “I’ve been hot and bothered for days, and I’m tired of denying myself.”

“Does that mean I get to taste your pretty pink pussy as Gray fucks you?” she whispers, her lips brushing mine.

I whimper as Grayson presses his erection against my ass, slowly grinding against me. “Is it true, Baby? Do you want my fat cock to fill your tight pussy?”

I gasp, feeling as if I’m going to combust from his words.

“Yes... I’m wearing too many clothes,” I moan.

Silla’s hands glide up my torso, pulling my dress up with it. Raising my arms, I allow her to undress me. Reaching for her, Silla shakes her head.

“You’re our focus, Beautiful,” she murmurs, kissing me. Grayson’s fingers unsnap my bra with that ridiculously hot one handed motion, and soon that’s gone as well. “How quiet can you be for us?”

Gray chuckles at Silla’s question, his hands squeezing my breasts as he continues to slowly thrust against my ass.

“Please,” I whisper, not knowing what I want, but there’s an ache building inside of me.

Gray pinches my nipples, making me cry out softly, my back arching for more.

“Tell me if you don’t like something, Baby Girl. Can you do that? Let us help take this back,” Gray says, kissing my neck. I feel as if I’m burning from the inside out, and I want more.

“Yes, more,” I beg him.

Silla laves at my nipple before sucking hard on it.

“That’s it, Silla. Our girl can take a little pain, can’t you,” he praises. She grazes me with her teeth, and fuck if it doesn’t feel good. I want her head between my legs, doing the same to my clit.

My breath wheezes, chest beginning to heave as they work together. Grayson squeezes my tits hard, while Silla sucks and bites me.

“I need to taste you,” she moans.

“Get naked,” I insist. “I want your fingers deep inside your cunt while you eat my pussy. Please.”

Silla nods, pulling her clothes off quickly. She’s as desperate as I am, and Grayson clicks his tongue in amusement, pushing down my leggings and panties.

“Such greedy girls,” he coos. I kick off the last of my clothing, fully knowing I’m being a brat. Grayson palms my ass, rubbing it, pulling my cheeks apart, letting the air hit my pussy. My breaths quicken in anticipation, and I’m almost worried I’ll hyperventilate.

“I know that look,” Silla says, pressing her body against mine. Her skin is so soft, I can’t get enough of her as I run my hands down her back, grabbing her ass.

“What lo—” I don’t get to finish my sentence as Grayson cracks his hand along my ass. Gasping, I can’t put words together to complain as his fingers trail through my arousal.

“There you are, so fucking wet. Are you our good girl?” he asks, pushing his fingers inside my tight channel.

“Yes, yes,” I chant, hiking Silla’s leg over my hip to slide my hand between us. Pushing my fingers inside of her, I rub the palm of my hand along her clit.

“This... wasn’t the plan,” she gasps. Grayson kisses my shoulder, gently nipping as he rubs his knuckles against my bundle of nerves.

“There is no plan, Dangerous Girl. If it feels good, then that’s what matters. Andrya, your pussy is choking my fingers. I’m not sure if I should be your first after so long,” he laments. I wait for him to pull away. But Grayson pushes a third finger inside of me.

He takes my breath away, and I focus on Silla’s noises to center me.

“Breathe, Baby. That’s it. That’s three fingers, my cock is at least one more,” he murmurs into my ear.

“Fuck, you’re big,” I gasp.

“He is, but it feels so good, ’Drya,” Silla says, her hips grinding on my hand. She’s so wet, her arousal is beginning to run down my palm. My free hand grabs the round globe of her ass, encouraging her to keep going. “He’s stretching you, isn’t he? Fuck, Baby. I want to watch as he pushes his way inside you while I suck and lick you both.”

Keening, I’m unable to keep back the noise at the visual. “Gods, you have a dirty, perfect fucking mouth,” I tell her. “Yes, I can take it, Gray... oh!”

Gray moves his hand so his fingers are deeper inside me, the palm of his hand grinding down on my clit. My eyes roll, and Silla moans, burying her face in my neck.

“You smell so good,” she says, sucking on my jumping pulse.

“’Drya always smells like lemons,” Grayson grunts, releasing his cock from his pants, so I can feel him between my ass cheeks as he rocks between them. Gods, he’s not only big, he’s thick, and I can feel his piercings as they rub along my skin.

Fuck, I want him so badly.

“If you want his cock, you need to come, Baby,” Silla whimpers, her fingers digging into my skin. Her walls are beginning to flutter, and she’s flushed with exertion. My girl is so damn close. “Come with me, Andrya. Please please, fuck me...”

“Listen to Silla, Beautiful,” Grayson goads. “I bet she’s so close.”

“She’s soaking my hand,” I gasp. “All I can smell is jasmine...”

“I wonder who will come first,” he teases. All of a sudden, Grayson curls his fingers inside of me and I see stars. Fuck, I can barely think, and now he wants to make this a competition?

Gods, this man is going to kill me. Silla thankfully let her hair loose earlier, and it curls down her back. Pulling her hair hard so she arches her back, I suck on her delicious tits. I continue to finger fuck her tight little pussy, loving how she writhes in pleasure. She can’t move away, all she can do is feel.

“Clever,” he whispers in my ear. Grayson pulls his palm away from my clit, and I whine in disappointment. “Shh, good girls get rewards.”

“I’m such a good girl,” I complain.

“Keep sucking Silla’s tits,” he growls. Grayson gets his other hand between Silla and I, rubbing my clit hard. My legs start to tremble, and I no longer can tell you why I was complaining. Shuddering, Silla and I tie this non-contest, gasping as we come. She gushes all over my hand, and I continue to fuck her through it.

“A little competition never hurt anyone, did it?” he murmurs, pulling his fingers from my pussy. “Open.”

My lips part as I try to remember how to breathe, and Grayson pushes his fingers into my mouth. “Suck, Beautiful. Clean your mess before I fuck your messy pussy.”

His words make me shudder, releasing Silla’s hair, so I can cuddle her close as I suck and lick his fingers.

“She’s such a good girl,” Silla murmurs. I preen under her praise, and I can feel the curve of Grayson’s lips as he kisses my throat.

Pulling away, Grayson removes his clothes, moving back to wrap his arm around my waist and line his cock at my entrance. “If you want me to stop at any time, hit my leg, okay, Andrya?” he says gruffly. I can tell he’s holding a tight leash on his needs, and I nod furiously.

“He needs words, Andrya,” Silla reminds me.

“Yes, yes, I understand,” I tell them, shoving my ass at him eagerly. Gods, I appreciate his care, but I need to be filled right the fuck now.

No sooner than the words leave my mouth, Grayson’s large hands encase my hips and pull me down onto his cock. Oh, oh, shit. Flipping onto his back, he grabs my thighs, shoving my legs up as he works himself inside of me.

Silla crawls until she’s between his legs, her eyes wide as she stares. “So fucking hot,” she whispers. “Your pussy is so swollen and pretty as he fucks you, Baby.”

Rubbing my clit, she pushes up my hood before wrapping her lips around it and sucking. Shifting, Grayson wraps his arm around my thighs, continuing to bounce me on his cock so he can cover my mouth and stifle my cries. I can’t do quiet right now.

“That’s it, Baby. Tell me all about how it feels,” he chuckles into my ear. “You’re strangling my cock, and every time Silla sucks on your clit, you clamp down even more. You’re being so fucking perfect for me.”

Grayson spreads his legs wide thrusting into me from below. His piercings light up my nerve endings, and blows my senses wide. I’m extra aware that I’ll have bruises on my thighs from his fingers, and know I’ll wear them with pride. I loved sex before, but I lost my way. I don’t see the men who raped me as Grayson whispers words of encouragement as he fucks me and I hear Silla lick up his cock.

“Andrya, you’re drowning Grayson’s cock, you smell and taste so good together,” Silla moans.

I give a strangled cry at her words, wanting to hear how it affects her as she plays with herself.

“Fuck your pussy, Silla,” Gray commands. “I have a feeling Andrya wants to hear how fucking drenched you are.”

Whimpering, I crane my neck, and watch as her fingers disappear into her pussy.

“I wasn’t invited to the party, and I’m a little sad about it,” Isaac grumbles, sitting up as he yawns. His glasses are slightly askew, and it’s adorable.

“Isaac, come fuck me, Baby,” Silla moans, her mouth going back to work on Grayson and I.

“I don’t have to be asked twice,” he mutters, crawling quietly behind her. Pushing down his joggers that he changed into after dinner, he teases Silla. I moan as I watch, knowing from experience he likes to butt the tip of his cock against her clit. “Poor, Beautiful Girl. Your walls are clenching along your fingers, aren’t they? Let me in, Little Hacker. I promise I feel so much better.”

Silla whimpers, removing her fingers, and her fingers dig into my thighs as Isaac fills her. Between the guys, they fuck us hard. Silla uses her teeth to edge me closer to my orgasm, licking intermittently to take away the sting. Blackness starts to take over my vision, but I’m not scared. Fuck, Gray and Silla are going to kill me.

Grayson’s cock continues to pump inside of me without mercy, and my thighs begin to shake. My breasts bounce with each thrust, and I whimper and moan as a pressure begins to build inside of me. Fuck, I’m going to squirt. Silla’s thumb rubs my clit, and it all feels so intense.

“That’s it, Baby,” he growls. “I want you to cream all over my cock and Silla’s face. When Isaac leans in for a taste after he comes to clean off my dick, I want him to be able to taste you.”

“Godsdamn your fucking dirty mouth, Grayson,” Isaac pants. “Fuck,

fuck, fuck. Andrya, I want to see you drown his fucking cock. You look so good bouncing on him. Such a brave, Good Girl. I'm so proud of you. Come for us."

His words make my eyes roll and I clamp down on Grayson's cock, the pressure too much for me. I let go, hurtling toward my release, squirting all over Silla and Grayson.

"Fucking gorgeous," Isaac moans. His hand moves in between Silla's legs, pinching her clit hard before covering her mouth. She gives a strangled scream, her body giving out on her with the force of her orgasm. She lays her head by Gray's leg, Isaac riding through the force of her aftershocks, painting her walls with his cum.

Holy crap on a toaster, I can't believe they all slept through that. We're all exhausted, and it's been a damn long week. Gray doesn't bother to pull his cock out of me, instead wrapping his arms around me as he struggles to catch his breath.

"You okay?" he pants and I nod.

"I'm amazing," I breathe, earning myself a grin.

Isaac pulls out of Silla, gathering her in his arms to lay next to us, and Gray turns on his side. Snagging the corner of a blanket, he throws it over us.

"Love you all," he mumbles into my neck, already falling asleep.

Silla's eyes are closed, her breaths already deepening into sleep. Isaac smiles at me over her head, kissing her head. Everything is starting to click into place, and I can't begin to describe how that feels.

AYDEN

Today is coronation day, and the castle is a flurry of activity. I got a surprise when I woke up and found Isaac, Andrya, Grayson, and Silla in a naked pile of limbs, but mostly I'm incredibly happy for them. My sister has been struggling for months, and this was a big step for her.

A knock on the door was the beginning of our day, and we haven't stopped since. Isaac and I have checked every camera several times, making sure it all worked, and there was no way to hijack our feed. I pulled in two Underground tech support people, and taught them the system in fifteen minutes.

Now, I'm smirking as I watch them stare at it wide-eyed.

"This is amazing," Traci mutters, shaking her head. "We'll make certain to cycle through the cameras up until the coronation, and then keep our eyes on the area surrounding it. Nothing is touching our queen."

Lionel nods, looking over at me. "She'll be as safe as we can possibly make her," he promises.

"That's all I can do." I sigh. "Thanks guys."

Striding out of the room, I join Isaac as we rush outside for the coronation. It was hard to leave the security room, but my place is by her side, and it always will be. We'll iron out the issues in Forbach, but know it's not going to happen overnight.

The coronation is happening in the town square, which isn't far from the castle. The procession already has started, and Silla drove in with Kenzo, Sidney, Grayson, and Andrya. They're all well armed, including Silla. I made sure to strap a knife to her thigh before rushing off to check the cameras.

There are five cameras in the square, all trained to sweep the area. Silla's guard is spread out as well. Regardless, I still have a rock hard dread in the

pit of my stomach.

“She couldn’t possibly be any more well protected,” Isaac mutters to me, trying to tone down my anxiety. “Get it together, we need to join her on the stage.”

We are all dressed in Silla’s colors, which are black and lilac. Our ties are lilac colored, while our suits are all black. It is tradition in Forbach for the King and Queen consorts to be crowned. While our situation is a little different, Kinsley was still adamant about this. I wonder if anyone will call her Queen maker under their breaths after this, since she did have a hand in helping Silla.

Climbing onto the stage, which is a large platform, we join our family. Silla is dressed in a lilac and deep purple dress, the material resembling a corset and then waves of fabric as the colors fade to the bottom in an ombré effect. Her hair is twisted into a waterfall of curls over her shoulder, and she takes my breath away. Don’t take my man card for this, I have a sister, and a sensitive side.

Silla appears calm, but I’m close enough to see the slight tremor in her hands. The square is currently empty, the people being allowed in at a controlled pace. I didn’t want the stage rushed, and Sidney also agreed this would protect Silla best.

Knowing our procedures are being followed, I turn to look at Andrya. Her blonde hair is up in a braided bun, her blue streak well hidden. Her lilac dress is one tone, with long sleeves. None of us are wearing coats, even as the snow falls around us. Thankfully, there’s a canopy over the stage, and Kinsley insisted on heaters strategically placed on the stage, so none of us are shivering. Andrya looks royal and beautiful.

I suppose, we all clean up really well. Sidney made certain to trim his goatee, Grayson cut his normally unruly curls, and Isaac styled his hair before forcing himself not to play with it. I swear, his hair is usually sticking up in all directions from running his fingers through it when he thinks.

Kenzo's eyes are out on the crowd as they walk in, the skin pinching slightly as he watches.

Today could be dangerous, it's why I'm so on edge. Forcing myself to breathe, I remind myself we have this handled. Once everyone is settled, I'm in awe at how many people are here. The square is huge, and there's a park a few feet away from it, where people also gathered. There are media crew here to record the entire historical moment, and I get choked up for a moment. We really fucking did it.

Kinsley looks every bit the duchess as she lifts the microphone to her lips.

"People of Forbach, we have had a difficult few years. Some have suffered more than others, but today we come together in a gesture of good faith and hope. Silla Tremaine is someone whose kindness doesn't need words. She deeply feels the plight of her people, and is desperate to help. As you know Cinder was her step-sister, who felt the need to torture and abuse her and her consorts," she begins. "They understand how terrible our now deceased queen could be, and are already taking steps to change things."

"Like what?" someone in the crowd yells, and Silla takes a step forward before she registers that she did.

Kinsley raises her brows in question, but Silla nods. Handing the microphone over, she waits to see what our soon to be queen has to say.

"Forbach is my home," Silla says. "I fought hard for the pleasure of staying here, was incarcerated without cause, and tortured. There are so many beautiful things about our kingdom, but there are also terrible things. The cruelty within our military and Queen Cinder's auditors is an example of this. A terrible stomach flu swept through the castle, and those people no longer live. I know our crops failed this year, so my consorts and I want to ensure there's a greenhouse in each major town and city. Then, we'll find out why the crops failed and fix this."

"None of this will happen overnight, simply because our problems are many. However, together we can find solid, long term solutions. I need a

little grace if I misstep, as I am unfortunately human,” she says with a small smile.

The crowd chuckles, and people look more relaxed.

“It took us years to come to this place, so it’ll take a little time to fix things. I know we still have corrupt people in power, so that’s something that’ll need to be addressed,” Silla admits. “Forbach is strong, and I have found kindness and compassion within many of you. Please remember that strength and truth will change things for the better.”

Silla hands the microphone back to Kinsley, who winks at her, while her head is turned away from the crowd. The crowns are brought out, and a bunch of sacred words are said that are lost on me. I’m instead drinking in the sight of our beautiful girl. Her words are the ones echoing in my mind, their truth ringing through. Silla is clearing the path for a strong future, and our job is to help her achieve her goals.

Two of the biggest things are food and more work for people. I know Silla is also trying to find a way to lower taxes, but Cinder was a greedy queen. There’s a moment of surprise when Kenzo steps forward, and he bows to our girl to show he doesn’t want to lead alone. Instead, he will help Forbach walk into the future hand in hand with her. He’s always insisted that our realm needs a strong female voice as their queen.

As the ceremony comes to a close, a crown heavy on my head, I’m mesmerized by how perfect hers is. I don’t think I can think of a more perfect queen.

Long live our new queen.

Andrya smiles sweetly, pulling the pins out of her hair as she twirls Silla around. As her hair tumbles down her back, the usual blue streak in her hair has been replaced with lilac. Silla’s lips part before she giggles, throwing her arms around Andrya. The crowd cheers even louder, and we converge around Silla and Andrya, hugging them tightly.

To new beginnings, and a bright future.

Thirty

SIX MONTHS LATER

SIDNEY

Staring out at the fields, I sigh thankfully as I see they're overflowing with crops that will soon be ready to harvest. I am personally overseeing the fields within a three hour radius of the Queen's City from now on, because I'm in charge of agriculture for the realm. The royal city was renamed, and the citizens enjoy living in the same city as their queen.

Any towns farther than three hours away, I record a video podcast for farmers. Information should be free, and accessible to all.

Over the last several months, I figured out why the crops weren't growing in the soil, and it's because someone changed the pH of it by contaminating it. This was purposeful, meant to cause strife among the people. The first thing Kenzo did when he found this out was leave the castle to interrogate his people. I never thought he was at fault, but couldn't calm him down.

"They didn't do it," Kenzo says to me, looking dejected.

"Did you expect them to have done it?" I ask, confused by why he is so sad.

"No, but it would have been easier to pinpoint the source." He sighs. "It could have been anyone now. How do we keep someone from doing this again? People were starving!"

Honestly, anyone could have done this. I don't know if the perpetrator is dead or still an issue. Now that the soil is fixed, there's abundant food, and we can start ensuring there's food in the winter months as well.

"I can't believe this," the farmer of this estate says, staring out at the fields next to me. "I couldn't get anything to grow here. I really thought I was

cursed with a black thumb.”

“No, nothing so dire,” I tell him, my lips tightening slightly. “The soil was purposely tainted, though I don’t know by whom. May I suggest a camera system over the fields?”

“Yes,” he agrees. “I can’t afford to have another bad year. My crops feed a large portion of the Queen’s City, and the guilt has been eating at me.”

“It wasn’t your fault,” I reassure him. “The crops look amazing, and everyone’s going to be very well fed. We’ll also be able to preserve food for the winter as well. We’re good.”

Smiling gratefully, he strides off, muttering about a security system.

“I can send you some suggestions,” I call after him.

Spinning around, he yells, “Gods, yes, please. You’re just saving my life left and right today, Sidney.”

Snorting, I wave him off, heaving a sigh of relief. Leaving the fields, I leave instructions with one of the farm hands, ready to go home to see my wife. The six of us got married to Silla last year, solidifying our bonds. I’m not saying a piece of paper was necessary, but we really wanted to give Silla a proper wedding. Andrya adored every moment as well. She also said that even though she has relationships with Grayson, Isaac, and I, she is happy to only be married to Silla.

Getting into the car, I turn the ignition, and call Ayden on speakerphone.

“*Hey, you about done yet?*” he asks, and I can hear him tapping on the computer. The rose business is currently paying for the construction of greenhouses in every larger town and city in the realm. Slowly, our plans are coming together. It means taxes don’t need to go up, and people really love them.

“Yep,” I respond, putting on my seatbelt and shutting the door. “I just finished checking the crops at old man Turner’s estate, and they’re perfect. This is the last farm I needed to look at, so I’ll be home in about an hour.”

The castle is finally our home after making various adjustments to it. The

dungeons, for example, were cleaned out, and any remaining prisoners were retried for their crimes. We released those who simply pissed Cinder off, offering rehabilitation for those who needed it.

It's been a bit of a clusterfuck if I'm being honest about it. Seeing Silla and Andrya's eyes reflect the remembered horror was awful. Ayden, Grayson, Isaac, and I found solace in helping people move on, but I know not everyone can do that.

"Earth to Sidney," Ayden teases me.

"Sorry, caught up in my thoughts." I smirk. "There's a Spring Festival happening today, which means Silla will clear the castle to give them a free day. We'll be alone to get up to our own fucked up devices."

"Fuck yes," Ayden growls. I wince at how responsive my cock is when it comes to him, shifting uncomfortably.

"Can you grab the masks from my bottom dresser drawer? Also, make sure the guys clear their schedules for the afternoon. We're going hunting," I tell him.

Ayden whoops and hangs up on me, which makes me bark out a laugh. Andrya mentioned the weather was nice when we went on a walk the other day. I'm taking that as a sign she's ready for a chase through the woods with us.

Settling in for a long drive home, I spend the time adjusting my cock as I fantasize about the fun we're going to have today.

GRAYSON

“Guess what today is?” Ayden asks, dropping a bundle of black fabric over my paperwork.

Closing my eyes in annoyance, I reopen them, hoping the excitable, psychotic golden retriever is gone and hasn't piddled on my carpet. Damn, no such luck.

“What's today?” I ask.

“Come on, you have to pick it up!” he complains.

Blowing out a breath, I carefully lift the fabric he threw on my desk. There's cut outs for the mouth and eyes, and I realize it's a ski mask. My lips curl into a smile as things begin to click into place.

“Don't tease me, seriously?”

“Yep, you should tell the girls to wear sturdy boots and short dresses. It's just weird if I suggest it,” he snorts.

Rolling my eyes, I stand. “Alright, any idea in this huge ass place as to where I can find them? I try not to track my wife down until I have to,” I rumble.

“Liar,” he says, calling me out. So I tracked her into the tub, and then joined her last night. So what? “Try the library. They were working on something earlier with Kinsley.”

Fuck a duck, I don't want to have a conversation around her.

Leaving the masks, I grumble to myself, ignoring Ayden as he laughs to himself. The crazy fucker knew exactly what he was doing. Clomping upstairs, I bypass the endless rooms for the library.

Popping my head in, I nearly sag in relief when I see that Andrya and Silla are alone.

“Hey,” I greet them with a slow smile as I walk in. Their eyes heat as

they gaze at me, and my cock thickens. Not yet, but soon.

“Do you want to go for a run in the woods?” I ask slyly.

Andrya leans forward, brow raising. “Is this a run filled with fuckery, or a boring nature run?”

“Please be the first,” Silla begs. “I’m sending all of the staff into the city. I want some fucking, I mean fuckery.”

“Are you feeling needy, Dangerous Girl?” I tease her, stalking toward her. Wrapping my hand around the column of her throat, I tilt her head back, slanting my lips over hers. Silla whimpers into my mouth, arching for more. I barely give it to her, growling into her mouth.

“Oh fuck, I almost came,” Andrya mutters.

I huff out a light laugh, resting my forehead against Silla’s. “Boots, a dress, and no panties. Go to the woods and start running. We’ll be wearing masks, and will make you actually come.”

“Yes, please,” Silla moans, and I rub the jumping pulsing in her throat.

“You know what to do,” I coax, stepping away.

Andrya and Silla glance at each other, jumping up and running out of the room. Gods, yes. And the hunt is on.

I find Isaac next, knowing Sidney and Ayden probably began this entire thing. He’s holed up in his office in one of the towers. I think the reason he chose this room is because it’s the farthest he could get from others. Isaac still hates people.

“Hey,” I grunt, rapping on the door with my knuckles as I push it open.

“Hey, yourself,” he says. “Unless you’re here to suck my dick, I’m busy.”

“So what I hear you saying is that you don’t want to chase Andrya and Silla down and fuck them in the woods because we’re left mostly alone today?” I ask, smirking, crossing my arms over my chest.

“You... wait... really?” Isaac gawps at me. I think I broke him.

“Yeah. Masks and all. Let’s fucking go,” I demand.

“Fuck, I need to change,” he snickers. Running out of the room, I’m left

alone in his office. Closing everything up, I hunt for Kenzo next.

KENZO

I'm watching everyone leave the castle in a steady stream, and I worry about security. The last person is Noa, who salutes me before locking the gates, walking away with a whistle. If he's leaving, then I know we're perfectly safe. It took a month or two for him to get used to the military life, but he is now very vigilant about the queen's safety.

Turning, I find Grayson leaning against the stonewall of the castle, watching me.

"Need something?" I ask, surprised he's not holed up in his office. The days have been long and busy lately.

"Nope, we're going to have some fun." He smirks.

Silla and Andrya burst out the front door, grinning wildly. Andrya's bright purple stripe catches the sunlight as she steps out into the midafternoon. They glance at me with a calculated look. They're both wearing short dresses, the bottom brushing their asses as they walk. Calf length boots complete their look, and then they're running away from us.

Kal's death turned the predator in me on, and I raise up on my toes as I watch them.

"Wanna chase them?" Ayden asks as he walks out with Isaac. They're both wearing casual clothes, perfect for hunting. I lick my lips as I nod.

"Fuck yeah I do," I grunt.

"Let me in, assholes!" Sidney yells from the gates, leaning in on the car horn.

Ayden yells back, "We're all booked up! Do you have a password?"

"Motherfucker!" Sidney screams, making me snort with laughter. They're ridiculous.

"May as well let him in. We have a hunt to begin," I remind him.

Grinning, Ayden lets Sidney in. His car shoots around the corner, and I snort. I'm sure he's going to abandon it outside of the garage. Ayden quickly locks the gates back up, pulling masks out of his back pocket. The weather is still cool enough to be pleasant. It's the perfect afternoon to fuck my wife in the woods.

Catching the mask as it's thrown to me, I slide it over my face. Isaac, Grayson, and Ayden do the same, jogging together to catch up to Sidney.

"Hurry up," Sidney complains, grinning as he sees us and catches his own mask that Ayden throws at him.

"Here we go," Grayson rumbles, his lips curving into a cruel smile. I thank the Gods every day he's a good man. This isn't a side of him that gets out to play very often.

I know Silla fucking loves it, and so do we.

I can't see her or Andrya as they've already disappeared into the woods.

"Damn, they're fast," I chuckle.

"I once told Silla if she was going to run, to make sure she runs fast and hard, because I'm fucking coming for her," Grayson growls.

Holy fuck. I can see why that's such a turn on. My cock is already at half mast. I don't know where I stand on my attraction to men, but the growl is really hot.

Gray's strides are longer than ours, and soon Ayden's whooping and yelling as we enter the trees. The squeal of screams from the girls echoes through the trees, scaring the birds, making them explode into motion. I have a feeling everything in these woods will be running from us today.

I can hear the girls, but I'm unsurprised I can't see them. Their footsteps appear to separate, and they're moving in different directions.

"Who's going where?" I ask, my head swiveling in opposite directions.

Grayson's feet stumble for a moment as he listens, and then burst into motion, running for the left side of the trees.

"Andrya has a shorter stride," Ayden smirks. "She went right. Our girl

went left.”

I start running, my ears trained on Silla’s footsteps and breathing.

Taking in a deep breath, I yell, “Such pretty little lambs for the wolves. I’m gonna eat well tonight!”

Ayden chortles. “Run hard, Kitten! I’m gonna fuck you into the ground.”

Silla squeals, the sound definitely echoing, but Ayden is correct. She ran to the left. Isaac and Sidney break away from us, running after Andrya. They yell and cat call, raising her excitement and screams as she runs.

Tick-tock, girls. We’re coming.

ANDRYA

No one reminds you how uncomfortable it is to run when you have big breasts. I have short legs, so my heart is pounding, and they're scrambling to get as far away as possible. Do I want to be caught? Fuck yeah, but it'll be more fun if they have to work for it.

The guys start whooping and yelling, and my ears start to ring as I run. I'm excited, horny as fuck, and just a little bit afraid. It's not a bad kind of fearful, it's the anxious excitement of knowing someone is about to hunt you down and fuck you.

My brown and purple dress stands out like a sore thumb in the forest, my knees kicking up the hem as I jump over fallen logs and brush. Silla and I separated to make it harder for them to find us, but not before she kissed the shit out of me. I'm not worried about the wrong men finding me, they're smart enough to know the difference between our strides. Especially my brother.

That asshole has been playing hide and seek with Sidney and I since we were kids. He knows I suck at this. It doesn't help that I release a piercing scream when a flight of birds bursts into the air when I run into a small clearing.

"Fuck!" I scream, chest heaving.

"You suck at hide and seek, Sweetness!" Sidney yells. Fuck, why is he so close? Godsdamnit.

Legs pumping, I leave the clearing behind. I haven't been in this section of the woods, but I'm not scared, not about getting lost anyway. Sidney is right behind me, and there's another set of running footsteps behind him. I'm not sure who it is, but they're lighter than Grayson's.

My braid is getting pulled loose from the branches pulling at my hair, and

I duck at a particularly low-lying branch. I can hear yelling and whooping in the distance, as well as Silla's screams of excitement. I'm really glad I said yes already.

I duck behind a large tree, trying to control my breathing. It has to sound like a damn freight train, though. I'm really not someone who enjoys exercising unless it means I'm promised an orgasm at the end of it.

I think my lungs are pissed off at me. It's fine, I promise it's for a good cause.

The trees go quiet, and I can't hear footsteps anymore. Straining my ears, I attempt to listen for any clues of where they're coming from. My arm is grabbed, and I scream. A shove from behind pushes me onto the ground, and then a heavy body sits on my ass. I barely have time to twist before my cheek is shoved down, my arms pulled tightly against my back.

"Were you waiting to get fucked?" a growl whispers into the shell of my ear. Shivering, his voice is so low I can't tell who it is, the black ski mask covering his face. Fuck, why is this so hot? His cock grinds into my ass, making me whimper. I know that cock. Fuck, it's Sidney.

"Yes," I moan, playing along. The masks heighten the excitement and I'm sure my thighs are drenched.

"Such a pretty little whore," another voice growls. "Running through the woods as if you weren't begging to get caught."

The weight on my ass and legs disappears, and my dress is already rucked up, the cooler air exposing my ass. I'm not wearing panties, whimpering as a finger rubs along my core.

"Fuck, so damn needy. Little whore, you're dripping already. Do you want me to fuck that needy cunt? Do you deserve to have your pussy licked?"

My breath huffs out impatiently, straining against the hand holding my wrists tightly against my back. "Please, don't be mean," I whine.

A hand cracks along my ass, making me cry out.

"You'll take what's given to you and nothing else, won't you, Baby?"

“I... oh, fuck,” I shudder. Why did that feel so good?

“Hmm, I think you liked that, Little Whore. The things we’re going to learn about you today, I can’t fucking wait,” he growls. I’m pretty sure this is Isaac, especially as his hand squeezes my ass.

“On your knees for us, that’s it,” Sidney praises as I scramble up, my ass up in the air and my cheek still pressed to the cool ground. It may be spring, but it’s still cooler in the woods.

“Such a pretty pussy,” Isaac groans, his tongue licking me. An embarrassingly needy cry comes out of my mouth, but I can’t be bothered because it feels so good. Pushing two fingers inside of me, he grunts as he rocks them inside of me. “That’s it. I need them really wet. Fucking drench them, Little Whore.”

Shuddering, my pussy gushes a bit for him, making the asshole chuckle. His tongue rolls over my clit lovingly, attentively, making my skin feel tingly as my body gets closer to an orgasm.

And then it’s gone. Mewling in complaint, I’m greeted with another swat along my ass. Isaac makes me squeal in surprise, especially as he moves to lick my asshole.

“What, what are you doing?” I moan. A thumb is firmly rubbing my clit, and I can’t tell who is touching me right now.

“Can I play with your ass?” Isaac asks, groaning as he presses his thumb against my hole and slowly pushes his way in.

I freeze, waiting for it to hurt. I wasn’t touched there by the guards, but I thought I wouldn’t be interested at all. Instead, I start to relax, moaning as it starts to feel good.

“Yes,” I gasp. “It feels good.”

“Such a brave girl,” Sidney murmurs, sucking on my clit.

Working together, they suck and finger fuck me into an orgasm. My head feels lightheaded from it, my chest heaving. Hands release me, slipping out of my ass and pussy, pushing my dress over my head.

“On your hands and knees, I need your pussy to strangle my cock, Little Whore,” Sidney growls, smacking my ass.

Gasping, I scramble to follow his demand. I’m so damn eager, and I don’t care who knows it. A hand wraps in the braid, pulling my head up to see Isaac’s thick cock. Licking my lips, I open my mouth, uncaring that I’m naked when they’re still mostly clothed. Isaac merely pushed his joggers down.

“Fuck, I can’t wait to make you gag on my cock. Are you our pretty little fuck toy?” Isaac doesn’t let me answer, pushing himself deep into my mouth.

Sidney pushes his curved cock inside of me, making me grunt as he stretches and fills me. His hands spread my ass, and I have a feeling he’s admiring how well I’m taking him. Damn, I really am a lucky girl.

ISAAC

My eyes glance up at Sidney as my head falls back. Damn, Andrya's throat is so damn tight. Her lips are spread wide as she swallows, my cock twitching as she gags.

Sidney rocks deeper into her pussy, admiring how well she takes him. From this angle, I can see her pussy lips swell around his dick.

"Fuck, that's a damn gorgeous sight," I grunt. "I hope you enjoyed your orgasm, Baby, because fuck toys don't come until we do."

Sidney meets my gaze, his hands firmly staying on the globes of her ass. "Oh, our pleasure dom is taking over. Gods, Baby, fuck, you're so wet," he groans.

Glancing down, I see Andrya's eyes glowing in pride. "You're so bad," I chuckle. "Cock teases don't get to come either, Baby."

Andrya whines, but I thrust my cock deeper, just to see if she can take it. Fuck, yeah she can. Andrya meets my thrusts with wet sucking, her throat swallowing around my dick. Her eyes begin to tear up, and I gently swipe them away with my knuckles.

"That's it. Take it all. Do you hear Silla's screams? I wonder if she's been caught yet? You stopped running, is that so you wouldn't have to run anymore? Or to keep us from waiting so long to use you?"

Sidney chuckles, pulling out and then thrusting his cock back in. His movements pull Andrya up and down on my cock, making me smirk. We have our own version of tug of war here, and I'm here for it.

"I bet it was because she couldn't wait to be filled with cock. I wish you could feel how fucking amazing she feels, well... why don't you?" he asks.

Pulling Andrya on her knees, he ignores her gasp in complaint as my dick pops out of her mouth. Spreading her legs wide, Sidney fucks her wet hole.

“Come fuck me with her?”

“I think that’s the most interesting way that I’ve ever been proposed to,” I tease him, crawling toward them.

“Wait... together?” Andrya wails. “How?”

Holding her face in my hands, I kiss her. I don’t want to make her do anything she doesn’t want to, though I really want to feel how tight she’ll be if I push inside of her alongside Sidney.

“Have you ever had two cocks fuck your gorgeous pussy before?” I ask her, nuzzling my nose against hers.

“No, oh Gods. I don’t think you’ll fit,” she moans. A blush of arousal covers her chest and neck, and I drop my head to suck her nipple into my mouth.

Sidney rocks and fucks her, bouncing her breasts into my face.

“Want to try?” I ask, a sly grin taking over my face.

“Oh, yes,” she whimpers, her hand wrapped around my biceps as Sidney fucks her. Pulling away, Andrya whines as he leaves her empty.

“Shh, my Needy Girl. I got you,” I promise. Lifting her, I impale her on my cock without warning. Her eyes roll with pleasure, her nails digging into my skin.

“Yes, more,” she moans.

Sidney is right behind her, his tattooed cock in his hand as he nudges the tip of it at her entrance.

“It’s going to hurt for a little while you stretch for us, Sweetness,” Sidney cautions her. She’s so wet, he’s already able to push slowly inside her pussy. “Breathe for us, and since you’re being such a good girl, I’ll play with your clit. Do you want me to make you feel good?”

“Yes,” she breathes, dropping her head back onto his shoulder.

It feels odd as Sidney’s cock slides against mine. I’ve never done this before either, but damn does it feel good. He rubs her clit, and ’Drya’s legs wrap around my waist.

“You’re so tight, and I can feel Sidney’s cock as he pushes inside of you,” I tell her, kissing her neck. Sidney kisses her lips, and she writhes in our arms as he works his cock in her wet, sweet, tight pussy.

“Fuck, I feel so full,” she gasps. I grunt, teasing and pulling on her nipples. I want to distract her so she can enjoy herself. Soon, Sidney is all the way in, and I grab a palmful of her ass to lift and drop her gently on us. “More,” she begs.

My other hand squeezes and tortures her breast, holding her in place as Sidney and I take turns thrusting and fucking her. Sidney continues to torture her clit, rubbing and teasing her.

Her screams are beautiful as she finds her release, and we follow with a roar. Fuck, today is the best day ever.

SILLA

Well, they definitely caught me. Grayson is currently in my pussy, laying on the ground and masked. Ayden's eyes roll into the back of his head as he fucks my mouth, and Kenzo kisses my neck behind me as he strokes his cock. I'm completely naked, and feel like a damn goddess as they worship me.

"Your pussy looks beautiful, stuffed with cock. I'm going to fuck Grayson's cum back into you after he fills you with it, Mistress. Damn, I want to watch your belly swell with a baby, am I crazy for wanting that?" Kenzo asks, squeezing my heavy breasts.

"Fuck, I want that," Grayson mutters, thrusting into me from underneath. "Damn, can you imagine how gorgeous she'll look riding my cock when she's pregnant?"

These men are amazing, insane, and oh fuck. Kenzo reaches between Grayson and I, rubbing my clit as I ride him. The feeling is overwhelming, making me groan around Ayden's tattooed cock.

"That's it, Kitten. Come around Grayson's big cock. You feel full, don't you?" Ayden smirks, his fingers digging into my hair. Andrya and I both ditched the multitude of weapons we usually carry in our hair and under our clothes. No one is here, just our men making our toes curl.

At first, I was scared. The masks add this dimension of fear and excitement to the experience, but I know they won't hurt me. Ayden curls his hand around my throat, stealing my breath as he dominates my sight. All I can see is him, my nose pressed against his pelvic bone as I suck his thick dick.

"Fuck, I can see the indentation of Ayden's cock as he fucks your throat, Dangerous Girl," Grayson groans, sitting up to suck on my breasts. I'm

helpless to do anything but feel everything as he bounces me on his cock. Something deep inside of me starts to tighten, and my body breaks out into a sweat.

Oh Gods, I'm going to come. Ayden refuses to let me breathe, and I relax my throat as my body is imprisoned by the three of them.

"I'm so close, and I know you are too. Come, Kitten, and I'll let you breathe," Ayden taunts. I don't even have enough air to whine, as Kenzo pinches my clit. I'm floating on a cloud of joy, shuddering as I come. Ayden pulls out of my mouth with a shout, allowing me to gasp out a breath, mouth open wide as he shoots ropes of cum onto my face. I'm pretty sure Grayson ends up with some as well, but he wipes it off and sucks off his fingers. Fuck me.

"Mmm, sweet," he mutters, continuing to fuck me. Kenzo chuckles, kissing my throat. "Damn, I'm going to come. Fuck, fuck..."

I feel Grayson stiffen, his eyes rolling as he roars. His release paints my insides, making me moan. I'm going to be such a fucking mess.

"Mistress, I do believe you're mine now," Kenzo says, lifting me off Grayson. I'm still facing away from him as he impales me with his cock. I'm a little sore, and whimper as I take him all. "Such a good girl for us. Do you have any idea how much we love you?"

As Kenzo worships my body as Grayson and Ayden watch with a grin, I gather I know exactly how much they love me.

Thirty-One

NINE MONTHS LATER

ANDRYA

It's snowing outside! I grin as I look out the window at a winter wonderland. It must have started last night. Biting my lip, I decide to wake everyone up.

"Silla," I whisper, crawling back into bed to lay on top of her. Our girl sleeps so hard, I doubt she'll wake up otherwise. She gives a soft moan, her eyes slowly opening.

"Yeah, Baby?" she whispers. I love sleepy Silla. She's soft and warm, making me want to cuddle and fuck her. Dammit, no. Focus!

"There's a blanket of snow outside. Want to come play?" I coax.

It's a few weeks away from Christmas, and I'm excited that we'll get a white Christmas. Once the snow sticks, it'll be snowing for a while. Her eyes light up, and she nods excitedly.

"The snow pants are in the closet," she squeals. It's so cold, Grayson insisted on getting them to be ready, knowing he wouldn't be able to keep us out of it.

"What's going on?" my brother asks sleepily, cracking open an eye. Silla and I are already up, scrambling to get to the closet to change.

"It snowed," Grayson says, sitting up to look out the window. "Before coffee? Girls, really?"

We're already pulling on snow boots and pulling on hats and mittens.

"Mistress, don't forget your scarf." Kenzo sighs, standing up. He's in a pair of joggers and a long-sleeved shirt, because he said it was cold. "I'm almost dressed anyway, I'll go out with them if you want coffee, Grayson."

“Nah, let’s do it. Nothing like dominating a snowball fight.” He smirks.

Grinning, I grab Silla’s hand, racing out the door. I want to start our snowball arsenal.

“You’re a little shit!” Ayden yells after me, but Silla and I simply giggle as we run down the stairs.

“Gorgeous day for a bit of time outside, Your Majesty,” the house manager calls after us.

Silla’s eyes go wide at being caught running as queen, but shrugs. They’ve reached an understanding, and the house manager has embraced Silla’s way of doing things.

“The guys will be right behind us,” she says as we move toward the back door.

“I’ll go get Grayson his coffee then,” the house manager snorts.

Smirking, I push the door open. Life is really good at the castle, so much better than I could ever have imagined. The people are happy in the kingdom, and while it’s not perfect, things are improving.

“Race you there!” Silla squeals, breaking away from me to run. I’m so glad I put on a sports bra this morning. Chasing after her, I tackle her around the waist, and we both fall into the fluffy, white snow.

Laying there for a moment, we giggle as we make snow angels before sitting up and beginning to make snowballs.

“Out of the snow you two!” Grayson yells, drinking coffee in a travel cup.

“Yes, Daddy,” Silla and I say, scrambling up.

“I’m on the girls’ team,” Kenzo calls out with a grin. The guys trek across the backyard to us, looking warm and ready.

“Andrya has a terrible arm,” Ayden whisper-shouts, making me roll my eyes.

“I don’t. You want me to blow my load over a few paltry insults. Get in line. You can’t be on my team,” I respond archly.

Grayson almost spits out his drink at my words, making me giggle.

Soon, we're all set up in teams, running and yelling. I have a bucket of ammunition, and I have no trouble pelting the shit out of Ayden and Isaac.

"Her arm is fine!" Isaac roars, shaking his head of snow.

Silla's teeth start to chatter a few minutes later, and Grayson calls a halt to our antics.

"Inside we go," he chuckles, picking Silla up in his arms. "Silla still isn't used to the cold."

"Mistress, I'll get you a hot chocolate," Kenzo says, always helpful.

"We should change too," I laugh. I'm pretty sure my clothes are completely wet. Fuck me it was fun though.

Isaac helps me pull off my boots, lining up at the door. Sidney wrestles off Silla's with a grin, going so far as to pull off her sodden socks too.

"Straight upstairs," Grayson says, placing her on her feet.

"Thank you for playing with us. That was so much fun," she chatters.

"Come on," I tell her, pulling her to the back staircase.

"Have you gotten your period yet?" Silla asks as we walk. "I'm waiting for mine to come, but you usually get yours a week before me."

I think back, slowly shaking my head. "Shit, I don't think I have. I mean, it wouldn't be the end of the world... Do you think we should both take a test?" I ask her.

Nodding slowly, she shrugs. Silla stopped taking her tea a few months ago, and when my birth control rod needed to be replaced a few months ago, I didn't bother.

"May as well," she agrees. We have both been hoping we'd be pregnant at the same time, and with the amount of sex we've been having, it may happen.

Changing as we walk into our rooms, Silla rushes into the bathroom.

"Come pee on a stick with me?" she giggles, holding out a pregnancy test.

“It would be my honor, Baby.” I grin. I make light of it, but I really am excited about this. “The queen herself should go first.”

Silla rolls her eyes, but pulls her pants down, doing the weird pee straddle to make sure the stream is on the stick. I giggle as she finishes, pulling a disposable cup from the cabinet.

“Ugh, really? Baby, that would have been really helpful to have shared with the class,” Silla complains, putting the cap on the test. Finishing up, she flushes and washes her hands.

“Work smarter, Beautiful,” I tease her. I do a much better job of peeing into the cup, and then dropping the stick inside. Washing my hands after I clean up, I slowly dry them.

“Holy shit, we could really be pregnant,” I breathe. Silla grabs me around the waist, and we hold each other as we wait the requisite time.

“On three?” I ask.

“Wait, wait! What if one of us is pregnant but the other isn’t?” Silla asks, her eyes wide. Her hands shake but I shrug.

“It’s not a race, we’ll be happy for whoever it is. Let’s see,” I insist.

Picking up the pregnancy tests, I blink at them. There’s two lines on both tests. Does that mean...

“What’s going on?” Isaac asks, leaning against the wall. “You’re taking forever.”

Silla and I wordlessly hold up the tests, and he looks from them to us.

“Does that... Hold on, there’s two lines. That says pregnant, right?” he asks, slightly dumbfounded. His eyes are wide as he stares. “Holy shit, are we going to be parents?”

“Yes!” Silla and I squeal, starting to cry.

Isaac hugs us, whispering, “Best gifts ever. Thank you so much, you’re both incredible.”

Tears prick his eyes as he pulls us out of the bathroom. “Let’s go tell them,” he grins. “I hope you know, Grayson is going to be even more

protective now.”

“Gods, he really will be,” I mutter. I really do adore his protective ass, though.

“I found them,” Isaac sing-songs as he walks into the dining room with us.

“Everything okay?” Ayden asks, his forehead creasing in confusion.

Gods, we still have the tests gripped tightly in our hands, and I can feel the tears still staining our cheeks.

“Yeah,” I begin, my voice cracking. Ayden stands up, worry clear on his face.

“It’s good,” Silla says, tears starting to well again. We hold up the tests as Silla tearfully continues. “We’re pregnant!”

The roars of excitement scare the staff, making Kenzo’s people rush in as well. Imagine their surprise as we hug and cry.

We may not be as crazy as Cinder, but we’re our own special brand of insanity.

KENZO

ONE YEAR LATER

I'm hiding behind the wall, watching everything that's happening. It's a memory I well know, but can't ever wake up from.

Cinder is talking, but my eyes are on my brother's face. His eyes stare at the wall I'm behind, making me wonder if he knows I'm here. I want to give myself up, beg Cinder to let him go, but the decision is taken from me.

Cinder wrenches Kal's head back until he's gritting his teeth as he looks at her.

"Do you have anything to tell me before you die?" she asks, canting her head to the side.

I beg my brother silently to say nothing, even as my feet stick to the floor in dread.

"No. Long live the Underground and the new queen."

There's a bated breath before Silla breathes, "No..."

My sweet, beautiful, Mistress knows what my brother means to me. Kal is everything.

Cinder swipes the incredibly sharp knife across Kal's throat, his blood flowing as she gives him a second smile. His eyes never waver, brave to his last breath.

"Kenzo!" my mistress whispers. "Wake up, my love."

My chest is heaving as my eyes open, tears streaming down my face.

"I know, Darling. I'm so sorry," she says softly, wrapping her arms around my waist.

My nose buried into her soft hair, the scent of jasmine and sunshine

wrapping around me, grounding me in the present. It's been almost two years since Kal died, but I still have nightmares that wake me up.

"Come with me," she tells me, as she sits up. "Let's find something that'll help."

There's only one thing that helps now after a nightmare, so I follow her. The others settle back to sleep, well used to me by now. They know Silla's got it.

Padding through to one of the rooms that was previously used as a giant closet, it's now a nursery so the babies will be close to us at all times. A night light is on, lighting up the room with constellations. There are two windows that Silla had made, and Kallista and Garrick are two of the happiest babies I've ever seen. Looking down into their cribs, my lips curl into a small smile. These two are thick as thieves.

Silla and Andrya had remarkably easy pregnancies, which surprised me with how hard her periods are. It makes me want to keep her pregnant at all times. When I suggested the name Kallista, Andrya's eyes lit up and she immediately wanted it.

We've all become a family, and it really has helped heal my spiral into depression. I never want to be in a place again where I feel as if stepping off a cliff is a better option than fighting to live. I could have missed out on so much.

"I love you, Mistress," I whisper. Kallista turns to her side, her arm thrown out dramatically. Her antics make me chuckle. We didn't bother with paternity tests, since there's no need when we are the wedded consorts to the queen. All children Silla will have by us are legitimate and will be recognized by the crown.

"I love you," she says, leaning into me. "You are my light. Everything is perfect, and I love our life together."

Kissing her forehead, I agree. The kingdom is light years from where it used to be, and Silla has relieved all dignitaries of their positions who are

shady fuckers. The rest will be taken care of by the spies she's sending out to infiltrate different towns, cities, and offices. Between them and Isaac and his hackers, I don't think corrupt people have a chance to continue to flourish for long.

I'm proud of what we've accomplished, and to think my relationship with Silla all started over a misunderstanding at a masked ball. As I kiss her I watch over our babies with her, I'm so grateful she allowed me to crawl for her.

Did you enjoy this retelling? Amber and I have a Dark Repunzel retelling coming soon! Preorder here:

<https://a.co/d/4KJdjAi>



Stolen Eclipse

AMBER NICOLE
JENN BULLARD

Afterword

How did I do? Did I scare anyone? I couldn't kill Kenzo, he's one of my favorites! I really wanted to highlight the found family aspect. No matter when you join the family, to be loved and accepted is everything. Thank you for reading!

If I made you cry, laugh, and curse me out...please consider leaving a review.

Acknowledgments

Oh my goodness y'all. They say new adventures take a village and this is so true.

Thank you A.K. Graves for telling a tiny pixie that her words would be fun to read! I literally started writing a few weeks later.

Thank you Amber Nicole for telling me that I could do this, being my sounding board when I felt like I was stuck, and telling me to keep going. Thank you for editing my books and making sure everything works.

Thank you Sarah Klinger PA for kidnapping me, and then kicking me out of the baby author nest. You are such an amazing cheerleader.

Thank you to my stabby alpha/betas! I love how so many of you voice and messaged to yell at me as we experienced the twists and turns of this story. The yelling helps my evil muse.

Thank you Hope for bringing life to this cover. I knew it was perfect the moment I saw it.

Thank you to you, my readers, who continue to take the leap with me and trust me to fix things by the end. My sadism knows no bounds, and I'll find new ways to rip your hearts out after falling in love with my characters.

About the Author



Jenn Bullard is a tiny pixie author that loves to read. She has three daughters and is married to her cinnamon roll— her Griffin. She is a stay at home mom with a healthy appreciation for things that vibrate. Most of the time, Jenn is ruled by her characters: they drive, she just tells their story. If Jenn could tell her readers anything: it's to follow your dreams. She wouldn't be writing if she hadn't.



Also by Jenn Bullard

The Unwritten Truths Duet

<http://Books2read.com/livingwords>

<https://books2read.com/Takingchances2>

The Darkest Nights Series

<https://books2read.com/TheDarkestChord>

<https://books2read.com/TheSweetestNote>

<https://books2read.com/TheLostMelody>

Cinderella step-sister re-telling

<https://geni.us/cinderellasstepsister1>

<https://geni.us/cinderellasstepsister2>

Other Works by Jenn Bullard with Amber Nicole

FF, dark step sister: The Midnight Confessions

<https://books2read.com/TMC1>

Secret Society, Virgin MCs, RH, Taboo student/Teacher: Locked Souls Society

<https://books2read.com/Lockedsouls1>