

CNC
FRATERNITY



THEIR CRUEL
LOVE

CARI SILVERWOOD

NEW YORK TIMES AND USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

THEIR CRUEL LOVE

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DEDICATION

Thank you to all my readers over the last century. Okay it's not been that long, but it is close?

To those who encouraged my love of writing salaciously kinky romances, with biggus dickuses and creepy scenes that end up with the heroine tied up in the basement of a slightly murderous monster or two.

Many smoochy mwahs to you, and may your libraries, and ebook readers, be filled with well-thumbed fancy smut.

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ABOUT THEIR CRUEL LOVE

The nightmares come to me, night after night after night.

A stone table, hooded men, and a woman dying.

Have I killed my friend?

To find out, I apply for the same CNC training course I sent her to.

Two men agree to take me on and teach me how to be theirs. *Theirs... It's such a powerful word.*

If I say yes to all that they wish to do,

Will my heart still be mine or will it be theirs?

I must remember my true purpose – to find Milli or to avenge her.

Even if I have to paint the walls with blood. Preferably, it won't be my own.

Marcus Thompson

Phoebe Bartholemew, my god, I have her. She's mine to destroy.

I will grind her into the dirt beneath my feet, same as her family did to ours.

Razor

Handling Marcus and Phoebe is fun, if a little like juggling d*ldos and knives.

But this beautiful island is toxic and deviant killers hide among the guests. To leave this place alive, we need to unearth them before they put us six feet under.

Things you may wish to know:

Secret society, MfM, Standalone romance, smutty murder mystery

Contains CNC, extreme kink, homicidal violence, transient consideration of suicide, and one big hungry crocodile.

Find the full list of content warnings at

<https://www.carisilverwood.net/book-content-warnings.html>

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Phoebe

I twirl the champagne goblet against the light, cynically watching bubbles rise in the gold. I'm hoping the Thames will look a little cleaner viewed through vintage alcohol.

"You really want to try kink?" I ask. "I can think of a safer way than some rando on *whiplr* or whatever you call it. People have been murdered that way."

Milli scoffs and leans forward. We've turned the curvy blue sofa around to face outward. A cool breeze feathers her long blond hair.

I smile. The girl is beautiful in a stunning, beyond the vagaries of history and fashion kind of way. Leonardo da Vinci would've fought to paint her. I cannot ever match it. "Sometimes I wonder why you even stick with me." It's a truth, and I lower the goblet until it rests on the curled edge of the sofa cushion. The pastel-blue upholstery is soft against the sides of my fingers. Moisture from the glass darkens it.

"Idiot," she says quietly. "You know we're like this..." She holds up her hand, presses two fingers against each other. "And it's because we're both nutters. I like you. You like me. Some friendships just are."

"Hmph." I snuggle lower at an angle, my upper back smooshing the sofa, and stare at the birds gliding in the sky. "So—"

“I guess. Sure. What’s this better way to get myself kinked up?”

I snort. Kinked up is, probably, a made-up phrase. “I have this weird family secret. My father was a founding member of this conglomerate of uber-rich assholes who made this kink club they call the CNC Fraternity. I can get you into a party. Well, I’m fairly certain I can.”

Father died years ago, but I’d come across some startling photos and BDSM gear in the one locked room he’d dedicated to this obsession of his. I recognized some of the people in the photos. Sir Gregory, for one. I’d also found the accounts and the yearly donations Father had made, before my step-mother commandeered everything, including most of my inheritance.

Not that I gave a shit about the money.

I’d almost needed therapy when I found out, but he’d never been that present as a father. It was like finding out Santa wasn’t real—an expected destruction of a fantasy.

“Sure. Okay. Do it. I signed that modeling contract, and I’d rather get this out of my system before I get famous.”

I sit up and scream a little, staring. “You what the fuck?”

“Yes! I did it! Now pour me some more champers and tell me more about your kinky-fuckery dad because that is some kind of fucked-up.” She waves dismissively. “Even if I am just as fucked up. I wonder if it’s inherited?” A sly grin appears.

“Me? Shut up!” I eyeroll. A heated blush rains in for a few seconds before I shrug it off and grab the bottle from the ice bucket. “To the future!”

As she slides lower to match my position on the sofa, her white dress rides up her thighs. We raise our glasses to the gray-blue, Chelsea Harbor sky.

“To the future! And kinky fuckery!” I chug down the whole goblet, drowning something, as I do. The prospect of Milli leaving me alone to face the world, maybe?

Then I bounce off the sofa and do a one-hand assisted leap onto the railing, turning to face her as I stand, then I step

backward and drop into space. I fall but I'm watching for that railing. I know where it is. My hands catch the railing as I pass it...and one hand *almost* slips off. That's *not* planned. It's a whole scary millisecond, but I hang on and pull myself higher.

Milli screams, and I pop my head above the railing until my eyes show. I haul myself back onto the balcony and do a perfect ten dismount, a bow, and a grin.

"You bitch." She's patting at her chest, mouth wide. "You scared the ever-loving... Why? That was scary! How did you *do* that?"

"I was celebrating! And I did gymnastics. Remember?"

"Oh. Yeah. Next time, I'm pushing you off. I had a heart attack!"

Me, too. Fucking gymnastics classes were too long ago.

The aim was to *pretend* to drop past the railing, not to actually fall into the Thames and kill myself.

After I manage to get in contact with one of Father's old friends and an invite comes for her, the days flick by, and the date of the CNC event arrives.

"Take care," I tell her, standing on the broad front steps of the apartment block.

"I will." She blows me a kiss goodbye.

I do the same, then I throw my arms around her and squeeze. "Come back intact. I need you to pay the rent." I don't, not really. I'm not in any need of her money since I own the apartment. It was the one thing I kept. In some ways I don't blame my stepmother. She thinks I killed her son, and I guess I did, by proxy. I did very much want him dead.

I shake off the darkness in time to decipher what Milli is saying.

"Just pay the ransom for my ass, dear, and we'll be fine."

I wave as she gets in the waiting car and find myself wishing I was going with her. Admitting that feels freeing, as

if I'm suddenly lighter, as if I've told myself a secret that was bursting to get out.

Perhaps I am like my father and not normal. I have wondered. The thought of a man making me go to my knees and doing things to please him?

It's so wrong, and yet I have fantasized about it, many times. Ever since Marcus Thompson grabbed me by the throat and kissed me against a wall, then did exactly that—put me on my knees. We were seventeen, and I never forgot.

I close my eyes and breathe deep... I cannot go and do what she did. Just, no.

It would be bizarre. I imagine meeting Father's friends at a party, with them dressed in black leather and whipping each other. Sir Gregory must be too old for that? He would be close to sixty.

A week goes by, and she's due back and never returns. No emails. Nothing. My queries to her and Sir Gregory go unanswered. I haven't expected any contact from her until now. The event, whatever it is, was lasting a week. Some sort of introductory set of lessons, she'd told me.

It's probably nothing and has simply played a bit longer than she expected it would.

Two days later, Sir Gregory answers my queries and says he heard she went off with someone but doesn't know who.

After that, he stops replying, apart from telling me she's an adult and clearly having fun.

Another week passes, and the cops aren't interested in people missing for two weeks. She must have a sugar daddy, I am informed with a grin, by the officer at the station. Especially since she's having what they consider a rich person's smutty holiday.

I'm at a loss as to what to do. I discover how excellent I am at drinking as worry gets to me. My university degree in English lit and journalism seems frivolous, and I decide to ignore lectures. The birds are still out there, circling, crying, as

is the foul weather and the off-colored Thames. Super-yachts cruise by going seaward.

Another week, another crate of champers, and the apartment is very lonely. I'd forgotten how cheerful she made it seem, the number of times she held my hand while I sobbed, the long talks we had about everything from K-pop to Bernard Cumberbuckle to why the moon is not made of cheese.

Words come back to me.

To the future. People can get murdered doing that. Our last conversation circles like the damn seagulls.

Then the dreaming starts.

I wake, gasping, and it's early in the morning. *Two AM* on the clock. When I turn on the bedside light, I remember the dream, perfectly.

There is a woman whose face I cannot quite see, being watched by a gathering of men as she dies, over and over. I cannot stop it. There are more men than I can count, but they keep shifting, blurring, and their faces are shadowed. I'm not psychic. I don't believe in that sort of stuff.

It happens the next night, and then the next. I stop drinking, suspecting the wine in my system, but the dream continues to jolt me awake.

What if it is Milli in that dream, being killed to satisfy some snuff film fantasy of evil men?

What if I could have found her, and I did nothing? These are the questions revolving like a dark, deserted merry-go-round inside my head. I swear I can hear the residual tinkle of some childhood music box and the wooden painted horses atop the box.

Fucking horror movies. Fucking dream.

I bury my face in my hands on the fifth or is it the sixth night? The entire building seems to wait for me to do something; it's low-key buzzing with anticipation. I cannot take this, not more dread, not more of this prickling fear that leaves me chilled. My stomach crawls with nausea.

Is it a warning? A premonition? Or just my mind going crazy with anxiety?

I wish I could see the woman's face.

I must do something.

A hundred years ago, after my step-brother went off that balcony, I pushed the trauma out by taking up kick-boxing. Physical exercise helped far more than talking to a psychologist did. I was always wary of my words to them somehow reaching the wrong ears. Not that I confessed to a crime, but still.

I start going to the gym in the building, daily, and exhaust myself for hours. I text Seth, my nerdish friend from Oxford.

Phoebe: Theoretically, could one anonymously hack into the database of this CNC Fraternity? I want to find out what happened to Milli. She's been missing far too long.

Seth: Theoretically anything can be done. Give me more info.

Using an encrypted, untraceable app (until the FBI or similar cracks it) that he suggests, I send him a few names, email addresses, and anything else that seems useful—all copied from Father's files. A few days later, he gets back to me.

Seth: Whoa. Filthy stuff. OTOH it is a NO. I hack as a hobby.

This fraternity isn't some government body that's messy as a bowl of underfunded noodles. From what little I have gleaned, this is big, bad, and full of rich people who care about their lewd little wanky secrets.

We should probably burn this, self-destruct our phones.

Phoebe: Ha de ha. Burning mine as I type.

Seth: And our houses, our man-servants, and then run away to Brazil.

Seth does go a little overboard sometimes. He's a surprisingly well-put-together piece of lean mankind with floppy black hair and a fondness for live theatre. He's going to be wasted in web and game design. If I had any business acumen, I'd employ

him myself, maybe in a start-up that steals IT property and auctions it off to competitors.

The dream slash nightmare still comes to me, every single night.

Today...

Today, I wring my hands on the frosted steel railing and eye the river. It's not going anywhere. Well it is, but it stays too. Forever draining the diseases of London. The depravities, the crime, the sadness of a million, million people. God, I'm depressing as fuck. I need to be active and do something. Moping helps nobody. No one else is going to find Milli. Her parents are as useless as mine. Granted, Father is dead.

"Sorry," I whisper an apology to my real mother. She died soon after giving birth to me. I will never blame her for that.

The tears dribbling from my eyes are for Milli. Something is wrong.

"Okay, dream. Fuck. I guess I'm *it*."

I contact Sir Gregory again and bombard him with emails and texts. Finally, he answers and gives me a new number to contact. This is for the man she first went to—Razor. And then he tells me he is blocking me.

Yay, me. I give Sir Greg the finger, symbolically.

Razor. A rather ominous name and it cannot be his real label. I plan to say hi to him, and I really, *really* hope Sir Gregory heeded my plea and didn't tell this Razor who I am.

I don't want him or anyone else to know I am Phoebe Bartholemew of Bartholemew Jewelers PTY LTD, sold seven years ago after Father passed away, but still a nice, well-rated firm.

They'd think me rich and spoilt, when really, I'm only vaguely rich, horribly alcoholic, and a loser. I've spent so much of my net worth that my apartment is almost *it*. Granted, it's worth close to seven million.

Selling it to chase after this nightmare would be foolish.

Because I can be stubborn and stupid, I contact the family's favorite real estate agent, out of curiosity, just to ask what the going price might be.

I'm not going in unprepared like Milli, and I'm not enrolling for some week-long party of debauchery. First, I'm dipping my toes, testing the temperature of the water. There are things I can set up just in case someone tries to do something criminal. I don't plan to end up dead.

I have Seth, my hacker friend. I can kick in teeth, if said teeth are not too high off the ground. And I'm determined as fuck. I had to inherit something good from Father, didn't I?

I also have a collection of exquisite knives, a taste I acquired from Marcus all those years ago. Even at seventeen, he was keen on antique weapons. I heard he went into antiques after his family's business went bankrupt.

The display case in the living room doubles as a low, glass-topped table. I slide out the left-hand drawer and pick up the bowie knife then the Laguiole pocketknife. Would it hurt to take one with me? A better question might be, would it help?

*M*arcus: You have an applicant?

Razor: Yes. Someone using a false name.

Marcus: You want me there?

Razor: You know her. I figured you might kill me if I didn't say.

Marcus: I know 'her'. Fuck. I'll be there. Where?

Razor: An old place. Not my usual.

Marcus

I sprawl in the black armchair and almost fall out when it rocks. I lean over the side to discover it's tilting low, almost to the scratched timber floor, due to a leg being loose. The one window hasn't been cleaned this century, and leaves are stuck to the exterior. The fireplace contains what appears to be part of a bird nest, and everything in this study lies beneath a quarter-inch of dust.

"I see you've cleaned up for my visit." I run a hand through my short hair, judging by the flick that I need a haircut.

Razor drops a briefcase to the square desk that lurks beside the window. A raven sculpture lies on its side on top of the desk, and Razor rights it then sits on the desk edge. "I haven't been here for a year. Bought it as an investment, had a couple of parties here. It's good for horror roleplays at night. But

we're here because I didn't want the complication of this girl of yours seeing my main residence."

"Girl? One of mine?" I'm trying to decide who this could be.

It never fails to amuse me, hearing Razor talk. The smooth accent is a stark contrast to his tattooed neck and some dark make-up leftovers around his eyes. His chest is also tattooed, though it's never going to be seen at a board meeting of his biotech company. Neither are his pierced nipples. Or his greedy use of subs for all manner of perfectly filthy deeds.

I haven't seen him for seven or eight months, but he seems the same, maybe a little more brittle, if that's the right word. A little harder around the eyes.

"Here. Real paper copies for you." From the briefcase he pulls a clipped-shut plastic folder.

I rise to take it, but he tips the contents onto the desk.

Photos spill, showing a woman descending some steps. Her brunette hair curls slightly and toys with her shoulders when she turns her head. Age: twenty-seven years. No siblings. I know this without reading anything in his file.

I know her back-to-front and sideways, can recall the smell of her hair and the feel of her body moving against mine, the night we danced in her parents' apartment. The scent of a slightly perspiring female. A girl who wanted me inside her.

Until everything came unstuck.

Phoebe Bartholemew. I haven't seen her for years, but my brain trots out all the facts.

I remember her throat humming with a sub-vocal moan as I bit the side of her neck. That she is coming here, for reasons to do with CNC...my cock hardens at the thought of touching her again, of grinding her into the dirt while she whimpers and begs me to stop.

"Fuck," I mutter, poking at the papers and photos with my forefinger, shifting them as if by doing so I can get this problem to fix itself.

“I was right then?” He inclines his head, questioning without pushing. “My enquiries through my investigator came up with an old family rivalry between yours and hers. And that maybe you were an item in high school.”

“Yeah. After graduation, mostly.” I rub my chin, and the bristles scratch my fingers while a buried memory surfaces. “You have a good investigator. We were until we weren’t. Her step-brother died. It was ruled an accident, but her stepmother, Emma Bartholemew, called foul. She thought I’d pushed him off the balcony.”

I’d never confessed to it, and the reason for his fall had never been publicized. The police were not told. There was no video footage, but Phoebe knew what happened. From what happened afterward, she had spun some awful tale to her parents.

I shake my head. I’m not airing this now. “There is bad blood between us.”

“As I thought.” Razor shuffles the papers back into the file. “Sir Greg said she might contact me, and so I had her vetted. Her friend, Milli Derringer, came to see me a month ago, also through Sir Greg.”

“Is that why she’s here?”

“So he tells it. She thinks her friend is missing because of us, but the police dismissed her theory, and I only saw the woman at one party.” He pulls out his phone and scrolls through to an image, shows me. “Her.”

“The model who was curious about kink. Very sexy. Naïve. Just the way some of us like them. If she is actually missing, did one of us snatch her up?” This might be a security matter.

“Your call. We let this Phoebe talk then send her away and then you can see if there’s anything to her missing friend query?”

I remain silent. Send Phoebe Bartholomew away. It would be wisest.

“I can see it in your grim expression. The bad blood. No need to say why.” He flashes a smile then stands. In those designer jeans, chalk-white shirt, with those boots, he’d fit right in with a crowd of investors in his field. In mine, they lean more toward the older gen, Boomers through to Gen X, with a scattering of the younger. “It was odd from the start. She’s obviously not really interested in CNC. I’ll send her away. Do you want her to know we know who she is?”

“No. Don’t. To both. I am curious. I’ll sit in on this, and you can call me an adjudicator. It sounds official. We can always end this if or when we change our minds. Pretend she’s not known to us.”

His smile returns, slowly, then a hint of teeth. “You want to fuck with her. She will recognize you. We have thirty minutes to find a way to disguise you, unless you want me to cut you a peephole in the wall?”

I glare, sigh.

“Luckily for you, I have a skull mask in the props. If I end up training her, please tell me I’m allowed to bend her over a desk and fuck her.”

My glare intensifies, and I realize I definitely want to fuck with her, if I can, in the very worst and cruelest ways.

Razor laughs then leaves the room. I assume he’s off to find this skull mask. I decide not to talk when she is here. My voice might be enough to trigger recognition, and I really want to sit this out anonymously...at first.

I shouldn’t touch her. I draw a few deep breaths, thinking on the contradiction in that statement compared to what I wanted to do nine years ago, after she betrayed me.

Phoebe

I study the note on my phone then check the letter box. Correct house number and an exterior that speaks of years of neglect. I press onward through the garden, passing weeds, overgrown trees, and topiary shrubs that have been allowed to turn into contorted messes. Dead flowers lie splattered on patches of dirt or are perched, slumped and wilted, atop the spears of taller grasses. This paved pathway winds to the front door. Moss covers the cracked, lopsided pavers.

Calling this a garden is a step too far.

Am I stupid for doing this? Yes. Oh yes, I am stupid and, clearly, I need certifying.

Here goes.

I raise my hand, knock a few times. When no one appears, I reach for the round black doorknob and turn it, half expecting it to be locked, except it isn't. The shambolic garden has raised the possibility of an axe-wielding killer on the other side. I hold my breath and step through. Curiosity has me inclining my head and swiveling my eyes to either side to check the wide foyer.

A dark-suited guard comes gratis with the door. He approaches with a flat smile and solid tread. No axe, thank god. I wonder if he is deaf, or just instructed to ignore knocking.

“Yes, miss?”

I haven't been called 'miss' since school days. “I have an appointment?” My doubt comes through in my tone.

He eyes me pointedly. “Name?”

“Mine?” Of course he wants mine. I fumble for it, even though I made myself repeat it in preparation for this question. “Melissa Dawkes.”

“This way.”

I follow him up the hallway, passing three doors before he opens one on the left and ushers me through. A background fear is making me tense up, but I try not to show it, allowing only my fingers to do their dance—clench, unclench. I keep my face relaxed even as I see the two men waiting in this room.

A study, I assume, considering the bookshelves, and the desk with the raven sculpture and the leather blotter. Everything is dusty—desk, books, the pelican bronze to the left of the door I entered through...even the window ahead that shows past the desk that Man One is perched against. Smears in the dust on the desk surface tell me they had something on there that's now gone.

Only the men are non-dusty, and I imagine them sitting here for years, waiting for me, with dust percolating down.

“Hi.” I smile fleetingly, thinking to break the ice with angular-faced Man One.

Of course, Man Two is scarier. Though wearing faded jeans and a sweet pastel-blue shirt, he also sports a smoky-gray skull mask. Unreadable, invisible face. Why the fuck is he wearing that?

So I can't ID him in a police line-up?

He sits in a timber framed armchair that seems about to collapse. The upholstery says posh beginnings. The broken leg at the back says nobody in here cares.

They don't answer me. I suck in air through my nostrils, as quietly as I can, waiting. Roll fingers into fist, unroll.

Man One smiles and focuses on my hand. I swallow and stop fidgeting.

“Why are you here...Melissa?”

Is that pause before my name significant? Has Sir Gregory revealed who I am? “Are you Razor?”

“I am.”

“Why is he here?” I gesture at Man Two.

“He’s what we call an adjudicator.”

“Oh.”

I take a moment to catalog Razor’s attributes, wondering, in a technical sort of way, what he does to the women who submit to him. I’m also tantalized by this glimpse of the erotically charged fantasy world I’ve thought about for years.

Don’t. Just don’t.

Doing might be fun though.

I shake myself back to the present. He’s probably leaner than the four boyfriends I’ve had. I guess I prefer men with bigger muscles. Around his eyes are dark shadows, from what almost looks like a residue of stage make-up that’s dribbled partly onto his cheeks. Like the skull-faced adjudicator, he wears faded blue jeans, though his look more upmarket. That one button left undone on his creamy linen shirt shows the tattoo from his neck slithering downward.

Razor...my mouth twitches as I realize it mirrors his hairstyle. He’s gone gray-white, prematurely and on one side it’s razor-cut, but the left is long enough to be brushed backward. Like the chair, he’s doing his own thing and to hell with the expected. I doubt he’s broken though.

“Why are you here, Lisa?”

“Melissa.” I’m pleased I caught his error. I bet he meant to test me. “I’m curious about CNC.” It’s true, of course. I’m just not keen on throwing myself at strangers.

“In what way?”

Jesus. Is this an interrogation? Do they do this to all those who apply? “I heard you have a training course. For women who are curious.”

“Like you are?”

I smile, nod.

Skull Face sits forward, and I swear I can see his eyes gleaming with interest. Or with evilness.

“Yes. Like me.”

“We don’t actually have a training course—”

“What? But...” I cannot say Milli’s name. “A friend told me you have one?”

“We don’t. Who is this friend?”

I shake my head, scurrying to see my way through this. Is it a lie? If not, who told Milli they had one? “I cannot say.”

“Sir Gregory sent you. How did you know of his link to our fraternity?”

This is getting me nowhere. They are asking more pointed questions than I am. I’m stuck because I hobbled myself. Being honest was never possible though, not if this fraternity has members who make snuff films.

“You can’t teach me, anything?” I regret that question already.

“I don’t know enough about you, sweetheart,” he says softly.

Fuck. Too personal, yet that endearment is strangely nice and knits a little cord of connection between us, for a plaintive, needy second. My dumb-ass pussy actually clenched.

“I should go then.” Useless. This was stupid and useless. “Wait. So maybe someone lied to my friend...do you know who that could be? It’s important for me to know.”

“I have no idea who—”

Man Two stands and beckons to Razor, then he heads for the second doorway to the study.

“Stay there,” Razor says.

I’m not a dog. I rock forward. I’m tempted to go and sit on the desk, but I only frown, sternly.

He notices and smirks before he follows skull dude. They shut the door.

My heartrate is fast, and I’m feeling skittish and torn between running away and staying. I came here to accomplish something. Is there a way to still do that? There might be, but I’d probably have to crawl to the taciturn guy and lick his boots or something. *Ick*. If he’s a Dom, he’s completely unkeen on me. He’s rich and no doubt has a stable of willing women to choose from.

Then why did he, they, agree to meet me? Are they only here to pump me for info?

Marcus

“What are we doing here?” Razor holds out his hands and asks, when we are two rooms away from where Phoebe waits. This bedroom is far cleaner. I sink onto the four-poster bed.

I picture her still standing there, obeying that *stay* command that Razor casually chucked at her. Fuck me, that appeals.

He continues. “We are being false, and so is she. She’s trying not to tell us anything while mining us for info. Well? Do we abort?”

“No,” I croak. “No.”

“More, please. It’s obvious she’s not going to actually volunteer to suck our cocks. That bad blood between you must be pretty stinking bad, and yet you’re doing all this just to see her begging for information. Got a hard-on yet?”

“Several. Hard-ons on top of hard-ons,” I say absentmindedly. Razor is smart, and I never want to deceive him, even if my past is not going to be displayed to anyone else.

“You can explore this without involving her further. If the frat board is worried that we might have someone grabbing girls, we can still investigate without her help. Though I guess she might have some information you cannot find elsewhere.”

“That is a good point.” I think it through. “Also, what if she tries to get a police case opened? She has tried that once already.”

“She might. Stopping her doing that would require executive approval of more extreme action, I’m guessing? I’m not privy to what they do.”

Me neither, not precisely, but security issues keep me closer to that inner circle. “They won’t do anything, yet.” Unless she goes overboard. Unless there’s a risk she will expose them in majorly bad ways. Such as alerting the police to a link to abduction or human trafficking in the fraternity. “I say we reel her in.” I eye him. “Get her to come to a party with you. it buys us time to probe this.”

“Say what? I can see you beating me over the head with something if I touch her. Or probe her.”

“I won’t. Promise.” I stand, cross my heart. I cannot afford to get intimate with her. My sadistic self would have way too much fun if I let that part of me off the leash. Besides, do I really want to? Really?

Razor takes on that keen, interrogative look he wears when he is contemplating a new investment or biotech discovery... or a new girl.

I tilt my head, draw another slow cross over my heart.

“*Yeaahhh*. You’ll kill me. Challenge accepted.”

“What? What fucking challenge?”

“To get you to come in your pants while I do things to her. You break cover, interfere, and you pay me. Let’s say five thousand?”

I freeze for a second then have to laugh. “Done. Now all you have to do is get her to come.”

“Get her to come? *Ohhh*. To a party you mean. Easy.
Follow the master.”

I glower at his back.

Phoebe

When they return, I say the obvious. “I don’t know why you agreed to meet me if this course is impossible.”

I can’t see how I can get anything more from him.

Razor halts only a few feet away, with Skull Face at his shoulder. “If you’re truly curious, why not come to our next event? It’s a party in Spain, at a beautiful old castle, and there are hundreds of people there.” He leans forward, and I must resist my impulse to take a step backward. “You might find someone there to instruct you further.”

His pause and lower tone are full of sub-text. Emphasize the *sub*, I tell myself wryly.

“I’m also going to find out what you know about CNC. Even if you do nothing except watch, you will learn something.”

“I’ve looked it up, *ummm*, CNC.” I blink rapidly, and my gaze wanders down his shirt buttons as I grapple with this. Do I want to? What if we never make it to this party and I, too, disappear? “I don’t know if I can trust you.”

“Then why this query at all? Look, Miss Dawkes, you probably can’t trust me...not when it comes to CNC. I will push you to your limits and hold you there until you squeal.” His smile is near non-existent, but it manifests, slowly, as I

make myself raise my head and look at him. “Your answer, Miss Dawkes?”

My mouth is open. I close it. *Fuck. Fuckitty fuck.* I shut down my responses, keeping my breathing under control. “That does not sound safe, but that’s not what we are talking about.”

“Perhaps not. Sir Gregory will vouch for me. You can tell him precisely where we are going and set up a check-in for when we are done. If you don’t phone him, he can come after me. I should say *us*. The adjudicator will also be there, watching whatever happens.”

I clear my throat then deliberately face away from them, pace toward the window. I pretend to stare through it. “What will happen there? Can you tell me anything about it?”

What if I find a clue or a person who has seen Milli? How many people could I speak to or show a photo to?

“Men, women, and every combination on the spectrum, fucking with each other, in every possible way. Sex and sadism. Shenanigans and lewdness. Blood, come, spit, and sometimes even burning flesh if someone gets branded. Did I miss much, adjudicator?”

“No.”

That one gruff word somehow puts a nail in my decision.

“Okay. I’ll come,” I say to the window.

A pity Sir Gregory cannot be a safety line since he’s blocked me. There is Seth. He can unleash digital hell if they mess with me.

“Good. The day after tomorrow, be here. No need to dress yourself in anything particular. It will be provided. Now. Stand over here so the adjudicator can take your measurements.”

I freeze. The adjudicator curses.

The curse startles me. “I have a lot of clothes. I’m sure I have something sexy and suitable.”

“If you don’t want to be touched, you will be wearing nothing,” Razor adds, dryly.

Someone else is being fucked with here. I sense an agenda I’m not privy to. Why is touching me so disturbing to this adjudicator? My nipples have risen and are pushing against my bra. I feel more *alive* than I have for weeks. More...hopeful?

Am I really going to go back to my nightmares, to moping and hammering the wall in frustration? I’ll be floating down the river, next. This is the ‘something’ I symbolically promised my absent friend. For you, Milli.

Though still shivering with goose bumps at my audacity and, to be truthful, at the sexuality implied, I go and stand in the middle of the floor.

“Have at me, sir.” I fasten the adjudicator with a smirk. “I’ll try not to move. Just be careful with my inner thigh measurement...sir.” Provocative? I hope so.

Skull Face growls then slowly unbuckles his belt and drags it from the loops. I’m horrified. He would not dare. He glares then looks down at my legs, while the belt swings from his hand with the triangular tip brushing the floor. He flicks his wrist, and the ripple of motion makes that tip quiver.

Oh god. My mouth dries but below, between my legs, the opposite happens. He wouldn’t, would he? “I—” The heel of my left foot is lifting.

“He wants you to spread your legs, Miss Dawkes. To measure you. I believe he is starting with your inner thigh measurement.”

“Oh. Oh, I see.”

This is marginally better than what I imagined. For the first time, I regret wearing a short dress and leggings to this appointment. The amount of cloth guarding me down there is not enough. Wanting to look sexy seemed a good idea. It was not.

The douchebag is calling my bluff and, I guess, means to use the holes in the leather as a guide.

The adjudicator grunts as I shift my legs, and he steps in closer.

I am tempted, almost beyond resisting, to snatch off his mask then thump him.

What if he touches my pussy while measuring me? Am I wicked to be imagining him wedging the knuckles into me *there* as he presses the belt to my inner leg?

His hand lands on my shoulder, and I make a small sound of surprise.

“Stay still, Miss Dawkes,” Razor admonishes.

Have I even consented? No. Sort of. Maybe. I gnaw my lower lip.

With his hand still on my shoulder, the adjudicator moves behind me. He is somewhat taller than Razor and heavier built. That shirt is tight at the shoulders and those thighs...I adore a man with thick, muscular legs.

For a second, I close my eyes only to find myself swaying as the lack of sight unbalances me.

I can *smell* him—that male aroma that’s probably part sweat and part pheromones.

I can even hear him breathe.

This is too intimate.

He grunts as he smooths his hand down my spine, slowly, as if counting every vertebra, and I shudder out a breath.

“You are such a good girl, Miss Dawkes,” Razor purrs.

I dare not say anything for fear of betraying my arousal. I might not survive this party, in more ways than one.

I’m expecting Skull Face to lower himself and begin to measure me, but he moves away and stops there, still behind me.

When I try to catch Razor’s eye, he’s looking past me at this so-called adjudicator.

“Not within your job description?” he asks.

Something snaps within and frees me. “I can supply you with my measurements.” Razor’s focus swings back to me. “I’ll text them. I wouldn’t want to make your adjudicator...” I pause deliberately then drawl out the last word, “...unhappy.”

If I was indeed psychic, I’d give more credence to the menace that seems to suddenly radiate from the man in the mask, but I cannot even see him, and he makes no sound. I’m imagining, again.

The seconds drip past while Razor fixates on me then he nods. “You do that. Text it today.”

“Sure.”

I’m off the hook. For now.

Except I’m going to one of their kinky parties at a freaking castle in Spain, and how am I to behave once there? I’m afraid, but not due to what they might do to me. No, I have an inkling, or make that I have a huge premonition, that I’m going to find this fascinating.

Keep the goal in mind. I need to find out what happened to Milli.

Perhaps that isn’t her in my nightmare, but something evil is occurring, to someone, if not to Milli. That nightmare means something. I sense it with every atom of my being.

Funny, but it’s actually satisfying to finally have a goal in life.

Phoebe

When I return to the apartment, I do as he says and text my measurements, but not my inner leg ones. Who does that? It's needed for a suit or pants, and I've never bothered with it. Then I wonder what will happen if I fail to supply it. Perhaps he'll simply drop me from the party.

Sighing, I track down a tape measure and figure out my leg length then send it off.

My phone dings soon after, and I cannot help chuckling when I see the reply: *GOOD GIRL*.

The man is on a loop with that, but it's cute, and I can understand the appeal of being told that, *if* one were in a relationship.

Logic is one thing but...

I can feel it—inside, there is this weird little glow from having Razor appreciate me.

Totally sick. In an omg creepy-sick way. I do not know him. This is not healthy.

Before I can overthink this even more, I text Seth with my own request. I've already in a vague way discussed what might ensue after today and am pretty sure I made his hacker heart happy too.

See you tomorrow around 3 PM. I end the texts with. Tell me if that's a bad time but I need this tomorrow.

Seth arrives dead on three PM, and I buzz him into the building.

At the knock a few minutes later, I open my door. "Bearing gifts?"

"Yes." He lifts a carry bag. "Where shall we do this, and do I get danger pay?"

"Let's see where this ends up." It is a point. I'm using him, even if he enjoys the mental exercise. "Follow me, my hacker guru."

I lead him into the living room and realize he's the first close friend I've had over since Milli. The champagne bottles are all gone, but the blue sofa and the view out over the Thames remain. The seagulls are here, also, along with their distant, sorrowful cries. The sorrow is probably just my interpretation.

"Just there." I indicate the glass dining table and pull out a chair for him.

Seth's long legs make me feel short, and I've often teased him about his resemblance to a crane. While he tips out the contents of the bag and slowly sorts out a few plastic zip-locked bags, I smile at the ringlets of his black hair flopping over his eyes. I can imagine him as a painter living in a garret trying not to starve while creating masterpieces.

My reliance on so few friends is telling. I've been scared of the world for too long.

Maybe I needed this, and that is such a dark idea, considering the cause.

Seth catches me frowning. "Hey. We are going to figure this out. Milli will be somewhere and okay. People don't just vanish on trips to Majorca or wherever."

"You mean they don't often. It happens. Also..." I draw a breath. He has to hear this. "Majorca. I told you that place, but

she might be anywhere. People think she went off with some rich sugar daddy.”

“But you don’t know. You obviously think it’s this CNC frat group. So.” He taps one see-through bag which holds a tiny, half centimeter thick, almost-flat USB stick. “USB stick and several colored casings that will disguise it. If you cannot plug it into a laptop that’s turned on and then extract it ASAP, make sure the casing matches. It might buy time. I only need it plugged in for a few minutes, depending on the speed of the USB connection and the device.”

“Okay.” This was James Bond stuff, but I figured it was doable. “It’ll depend on my situation, of course.”

“Yes, but plug it in and leave it there if you have to. Once the device is turned on, this will upload a virus and then send data to the cloud. That cloud connection pushes the data to another and then another. Untraceable, so if it stays in the machine, we can still get some data.”

“Good.” I lay my forearms on the table. “What about it? The USB itself. Is that not traceable?”

“Not anymore. Normally, yes.” He grins. “Take it as the gold standard of anonymous. It’ll tell us everything. Only that cloud account can be traced and then...poof, the trail vanishes.”

I nod, mouth screwed up but pretty sure he’s got this. “Then all I have to do is smuggle it into this party and onto a relevant laptop.”

I know how I’m smuggling it—internally. As long as they don’t probe me there, and they won’t unless they want a sexual assault charge—I’m good.

“You are devious, and I do have to wonder why you’d have this shit ready to go.”

“My hobby.” He shrugs and leans back into the chair. “Some things are irresistible, and collecting all sorts of hacking tools is my artform.”

“Well. I’m sold. You have other stuff?” I will have to pay him, somehow. This can’t be cheap, and I tend to forget

money. “I’ll pay you. You have bugs?”

“I sure do.” He begins to corral a few more bags. “This one here is...”

I listen intently, unsure if any of this will ever be used, but who knows, I might get lucky.

A text comes through while I’m listening, getting briefed on his gadgets, and it’s from the real estate friend. They’ve taken my query and run with it.

I reread the text, which directs me to an email and advises me to phone them to verify it is genuine. The last part is the best if I wanted to sell.

I have a buyer who is willing to go to 7.4 if you are willing to sell this month. I know you may not be interested but I thought it best to advise of the offer.

Seven point four million. That’s up from an offer last year on a neighboring apartment, by over a million.

I’m not taking it, though. I hope I don’t need it. I shouldn’t sacrifice this place to chase after something a nightmare triggered.

Seth has paused and is waiting.

“Sorry. Go over that last bit again?”

M^{arcus}

“After this, we go somewhere less dusty.” I pat the sofa arm so that a cloud puffs up.

This large room is unfurnished except for a few sofas around the edges and some low tables. Like much of this house, it appears to have been unused and neglected for years.

“I thought you had parties here?”

“Two roleplaying ones. We didn’t come in here. This is a dance floor.” Razor turns skillfully in place, spinning like a ballet dancer. He stops, facing the double glass-fronted doors.

Phoebe is late, but she hasn’t texted an excuse. Knowing her from past school days and a few secretive dates, this is just her being tardy. The door guard will send her through. I catch a sound as if someone walks along the side of the house. Is she reconnoitering? A young woman, alone, walking about a mostly abandoned house.

She knows we’re here.

I steeple my fingers. Phoebe was never stupid, just careless, and too carefree with money, with time, and all the other things most people value.

“Also stop with the teasing,” I murmur, loud enough that he can hear. “I am your adjudicator. If...if I decide to touch her—”

“Again.”

I stretch my mouth, mock smiling. “Play with her. *If* I do, then I lose the bet, but you’re gaming the system.”

“I’m not making it easy for you, Brutus.”

He’s using my CNC Fraternity name, which will be necessary tonight.

Razor keeps the same one for everyday purposes. I’ve never asked if he changed it legally. It suits the man. He’s associated with cutting-edge biotech and a business that he’s built from the ground up.

I consider his words.

He claps his hands. “Good. That’s settled. It would be fucking poor manners of you to not allow me to dangle carrots before you. Especially since the main reason she’s coming to this event is because you want to drool over her succulent, juicy—”

“Fuck off and be quieter.” I jab my finger toward the front door.

“She’s not here yet. Tell me. Why are you this invested in her? It can’t just be her body?”

“Am I?”

“You’re a part of CNC Security. It’s in the deal you were given. Is this really necessary or is it for your dick?”

“Well...she can’t get up to mischief while we have her with us. Though, do you really believe someone is trafficking girls? Millionaires...billionaires, don’t need that sort of mess.”

“Read the news lately?”

I shrug.

“Power begets corruption. People like to play in dark waters. When you can have everything that is legal, what’s left except the illegal? I’ve been with the frat longer than you, and I’ve seen things.”

“Huh.” He looks at me like I’m some innocent chicken, and he’s waiting for me to catch up. Which is new.

“As for her,” he adds, “her mischief, as you call it, is unrestrained once she leaves us.”

“Then we will keep her occupied.” Though I’m not even sure what I mean by that.

“Without you touching her?”

I grunt. He has a point. “I’ll watch you.”

“You’ll watch me play with her?”

“Double the bet then, unbeliever.”

“Done. Why are you doing this, Brutus? Why so needy concerning her?” He comes closer, raises his hand, and *Vs* his fingers, pointing at his face. “I’ve seen a hunger in her eyes, that *look* someone gets when something they’ve desired, fantasized about, is within their reach for the first time ever. But you? Why this girl? Revenge? Lust? Both?”

I blink. And I begin to doubt. I open my hands where they rest on my knees and stare at my palms. Maybe they have the answer. “You’re right.”

I’ll leave. I’m obsessing over her.

“I’ll go. I shouldn’t be doing this.”

“Oh, shut up and stay put. You sound like a sick puppy denied a fucking meal. She’s coming. *Shhh.*”

The man is infuriating. He hits a button, mashes it, then this? I dismiss my turmoil. I’ll deal with it later.

No... I’m in. Final decision. I’ll deal as the situation demands.

Her footsteps echo down the hallway then she pushes open the doors and enters wearing a black dress. It’s modest with a high, buttoned-up neckline, but she knows we have other clothes for her.

I press my lips together to remind myself not to speak then touch the mask to be sure it hasn’t moved.

“Come here, sweetheart.” That pet name again. My jaw tightens. Razor beckons, and she barely hesitates. He hands her the white shopping bag with the clothes wrapped in tissue paper. A gold ribbon flutters to the floor as he backs away. “Undress and then dress for us, here.”

Generous of him to include me in that. Phoebe baulks, looking from us to the bag. Already this is sending familiar tingles to my stiffening cock as the blood rushes in.

“Tonight there are a few rules. Obey them or stay behind.”

Her face stills. “You keep making up new rules.” Then she delves in the bag and pulls out the package. “Tell me them. So I can decide.” Her words are clipped.

“You can choose now. You can consent now or refuse, but after this, if you agree you obey the rules.”

The prospect of seeing her moving about at the party, watching and learning, being instructed to try things—it’s going to be exquisitely tempting. As a sadist, I like holding myself back, and this night will be the pinnacle of restraint.

I also don’t simply beat women who have angered me.

A small revelation: I want to find out why she did what she did. I thought I knew her, and I did not. I ache to find that out, as much as I want to do other things to her, to bring her down, humiliate her as she did my family.

I exhale, slowly. *No. Anger.*

“You wear what I say you wear.” Razor is detailing his rules. “You will come with me to observe others. You will try a few activities.”

She mouths the word *activities*, as if she’s wondering what those will be.

“Let’s limit it to four, maximum. And you will wear my collar and leash when I say to. That is to protect you from unwanted attention.”

After ten or twenty seconds where she pales and looks stunned, where I’m waiting for her to gasp out *no*, she nods, stiffly. “I agree.”

Well, well. Phoebe is dedicated to this, and I can't recall her ever being this zealous over anything. Has she changed this much?

This missing friend, Milli, is the key.

“Good.” He gestures. “Strip off the dress. This is partly a security issue. We need to know you aren't bringing anything extra. Phones and similar devices are banned.”

When she begins to strip, unbuttoning the dress at the front to reveal glimpses of a red bra, before letting the dress pool at her feet, I appreciate the mask and how it hides my face.

I've not seen her half-naked for seven years. I never quite got Phoebe Bartholemew into bed.

The lines of her stomach plunge into concealment beneath a triangle of red lace. Razor will certainly...ninety-nine percent certain, get her to remove those red panties later.

Not fucking her if I get the chance? My bet is going to be thrown to the winds. I know this for a truth, once I see her in that red underwear, and she turns as if to show me the gorgeous swell of her ass. Groaning aloud would be a mistake. I swallow and remain silent.

Her mouth twists. She gestures helplessly at the underwear. “I'd rather keep these on? Please?”

Fuck. I close my eyes. The mixture of desperation, hope, and begging in her voice has undone me. I have to resist adjusting myself or striding to her and grabbing her hair and... stuff.

Breathe.

“Adjudicator?” Razor asks.

I nod a *yes* to him, but beneath this mask I'm seething. Razor knows it, from his sly amusement.

While she raises the scarlet dress we've chosen for her, I make a note to myself to not sit beside her in the plane when we cross the channel. The dress falls down her; the cloth flows like thick red water, gathering above her breasts and hips for a second, as if to catch its breath before slipping

further. The skirt ends mid-calf in an irregular hem. Pearls glint from where they are sewn.

That dress will not be allowed at the party, of course. A submissive is rarely left fully clothed.

What if I reveal my identity to her, once there?

What would she do? Scream? Plead? I like the fantasy of her pleading with me, to stop me from doing something. Like whipping her.

Or fucking her in front of the CNC Fraternity. Some of them would know her family. That would be perfect. The bet with Razor is nothing compared to this.

As we head to the door to rendezvous with the limo Razor has had parked outside, my fantasy expands. Make her bleed for me and come at the same time. Make her cry my name as she climaxes with my dick in her ass, while tied up and unable to do more than whimper because I've gagged her with a humongous dildo.

Not bad. I'm going to Hell for this if I do it with malice in mind.

I watch the sway of her body as Razor ushers her out the front door. The guard holds it open.

We *are* supposed to be figuring out if women are being kidnapped by CNC frat members. But she must know very little. That her friend is gone, yes, but it's up to us to do the hard work and check the facts. And now I must interrogate Razor. His hints about criminal abuses by other members must be assessed.

Would I get a bonus if this led to exposing a bad apple? Or would I get shunned or worse?

Fucking with her is simpler...it's the delicious cream on the top.

My focus drops to her ass again, where the dress caresses her shape and gathers in her cleft in the middle. *Damn.*

Phoebe

I have stuffed the USB inside myself inside a Ziploc bag. Most people—make that anyone with common sense—would laugh at this, but everything else sort of oozed and fell out almost instantly. Even the small tampon-shaped screw-top container. Laughable, and I may end up with an infection...if I don't turn into a female digitally powered terminator.

I amuse myself no end. *Ha*. Humor makes the agonizing bearable.

I'm sitting on this sleek private plane next to Razor, with Brutus Skull-face in the seat behind us—I finally have a name for this man who seems more familiar every time I meet him. I worry that I will plop out this incriminating evidence while walking from the plane, or along a hallway in this castle we are going to. I have to keep it inside until I find a good laptop to plug it into.

Clench, girl, clench.

This is the best and worst distraction, when I should be thinking about how to ID the criminal who snatched Milli.

Except the nightmare has changed. Last night, I saw the woman's hair spilling onto the bed they have her pinned to. It's bright pink. Unless they forced Milli to dye her hair, this is not her.

Maybe all this was for nothing? Maybe it's just, purely, a nightmare? I hope so from the depths of my useless heart.

Milli has gone *somewhere*, though, and the CNC Fraternity must have the answer to her disappearance. Either way, I have a mission. I have a thing to do. No matter how embarrassing.

“Here is where we take some time to discover what you know about CNC,” Razor says in that smooth voice I've seen him turn so delightfully underground gritty and menacing. He's a kinky chameleon.

The eye make-up is gone. Up close, his eyes are hazel. The tattoos and the muscles you could use in an anatomy lesson remain. There's no fat on him, and his physique is what I'd classify as 'rock star on a month-long drug bender'.

“What do you want to know, exactly?” I hedge to buy myself time, smoothing the material on the lap of my dress.

Razor is lean but useful. I amuse myself with that analysis of his type.

Mmm. And with him sitting beside me, radiating body heat, my insides are liquifying. There goes my preference for muscle men.

“What is CNC to you?”

“Consensual non-consent.” I should elaborate. “Where you consent ahead of time to something and generally saying no does not make them stop.” *Them.* Fuck, that thrills me even—thinking it could be these two men. Even if Brutus is likely a twat. I'm more twisted than I ever assumed. “Them being whoever is your partner. And you might have a safeword?”

He nods. “You match up desires. Usually, you don't ask for something you hate. You can still have limits, which brings me to that. What are yours? What won't you do, sweetheart?”

Why does that pet name work for me? It's like being patted on the head, and my toes have curled in my shoes. Wide of eye, I resist answering for a few seconds, in case I splutter out some stupidity.

“I don’t exactly know?” I frown. “I haven’t done any real kink yet.”

“Nothing?” He leans in a little, watching from under his brow. “Not been tied up for example.” He picks up my hand and circles my wrist with fingers and thumb, letting them meet, locking them like a bracelet. Or a cuff.

The intimacy. The presumption. I pull away, and he holds me for a moment, then allows me to slide loose. That I liked it, that it sent a shiver through me, is not something I’m telling. I’m guessing he knows anyway.

“No.” That is way too husky a voice. I shake my head vigorously, ignoring the elephant in the airplane. “Not that even. I’ve had someone be commanding, I guess. They held my throat and pinned me against a wall, then pushed me to my knees and he...” I’m blushing, but I suspect that if I don’t offer the details, he will still make me. “He made me give him a blow job.”

“Thank you for saying.”

So polite.

“I didn’t say no. I didn’t say yes. I just allowed it to happen.”

The seat behind me squeaks. Mr. Brutus Skull-face. I assume he, too, is into BDSM. Are we fascinating him? Am I? To be more pertinent.

It strikes me, for the nth time, that I’ve allowed myself to get on this plane with two men I don’t exactly know, and we’re heading for a destination I don’t really know. I might be fucked. I hope not.

On the other hand...actual fucking is starting to appeal. I’m probably screwed either way.

“Your limits? You must have something you would hate?” Razor prompts me.

“I’ve heard of scat play? Poop. That’s a hard no. Pony play too. I mean that one I could...but it does nothing for me.” He nods. Okay I’m revealing my online research here, but this

man plans to make me...do some *activities*. I need to be honest. In this anyway, if not in the package inside me that's got my pussy scared. I rattle off a few other things I consider odd then pause to think.

He stops me in my tracks with. "Needle play. Blood play. Those?"

Fuck. I'm frozen considering myself with needles in me, in places horribly intimate and probably painful. Blood trickling down my skin in red tracks. I swallow as unobtrusively as I can, aware of my clit rising. "I don't know." Even I hear the squeak in my voice.

"A maybe then, not a hard limit." He sounds satisfied and his eyes stay on me, unmoving. I dare not shift in the seat. "Good."

What have I done?

Phoebe

By the time the plane nears Madrid, I am squirming in my seat, but not due to the men around me, although that does not help. The internal package is making itself annoying and niggles that it might just drop out to say *hi*. In a timely distraction, the one stewardess onboard comes over, bearing a tray of drinks. Brutus Skull-face rises from behind and studies the goblets, and I can imagine him growling, as if he's detected poison. Perhaps he prefers the blood of his enemies. I swear the room drops in temperature whenever he glances my way.

The bubbles percolating upward speak of champagne—the good variety, judging by the *Dom Pérignon* on the bottle. How can I resist?

Razor dismisses the offered drink with a shake of his head.

“Thank you.” I reach for a glass. Brutus leans in and places his hand between me and the glass. I flash a glare. What is this?

“What’s the problem?” Razor asks him. The stewardess retreats a few steps to await their decision.

Not my decision—theirs. It’s a sign of what is coming, perhaps. To have control removed from me. I’m still annoyed.

“It’s just one glass of champagne.” I half-rise then drop back into my seat when I realize getting angry will achieve

little.

“Wait there.” Then Razor draws Brutus aside and the other man demonstrates he can actually talk, and murmurs something.

“Why is he even here? I mean what’s with you needing an adjudicator? Are you on trial?”

“No, you are. He has a point.” Razor returns to stand before me. “The truth. How much have you had today?”

I shrug. “Three glasses but that was hours ago now.”

His mouth opens in a silent *whoa*. “Enough then. Perhaps later you can have more.”

“You have fucking rules on champagne access?” Swearing out loud is not usually my thing, well, not much, but this requires cursing.

“We have rules, full stop, on many things when it comes to our submissives and ourselves.”

Our submissives? I blink at him.

As if this is a natural gesture that needs no introduction or consent, he props a forefinger beneath my chin and slowly presses upward. I resist then allow the pressure, tilt my head. Our gazes lock. The air stills as he leans down and places his lips on mine in a way that warms every part of my body.

The heat rushes downward in a wave and it’s such an erotic shock.

When he lifts his mouth a moment later, the plane has hushed.

“Thank you for obeying. And no further swearing at me. Last warning on that, miss.” Then he seats himself and buckles in. The stewardess retreats further, and I’m aware of her making that precious tray of drinks vanish.

“*That* was arrogant of you.” Meaning the kiss. The words he just said, those were as bad.

“You’ll get used to it.”

Brutus clears his throat, loudly.

I shake myself loose of the haze and copy Razor, buckling my seatbelt. Fuck though. That was...interesting.

It's difficult to admit to myself, but I'm not just liking what he's doing, saying; I'm adoring it. My panties are alarmingly wetter than when I boarded. There is a strange seesawing balance between Razor attending to my needs, showing fascination with what I do and who I am, and shamelessly overstepping. I signed up for this. I think.

I lick my tongue tip across the seam of my lips, wondering if I can taste him. My clit bumps higher, and breathing becomes difficult.

That press of his mouth on mine did not qualify as a true kiss, yet I'm eating out of Razor's hand.

Behind us the adjudicator makes a lot of noise as he connects his seatbelt, but I'm busy side-eyeing Razor, admiring the artistry of his neck tattoo and also his striking side profile.

"Landing in ten minutes," the pilot announces, before he rattles off more information about the weather and our flight time. I'm barely listening because the thump of my heart is louder.

I shouldn't lose track of why I'm doing this. Milli is still missing.

Except, she would tell me to enjoy myself, I know she would. It's her to a *T*. I can do both, can't I?

Idly, I watch the lights of the city sweep closer beyond the window, sprinkling the land below. "Do I get to hear the name of this castle, Razor?"

"No. You'll be blindfolded in the limousine."

"Oh." And there is the scary part.

Razor's mouth curves enough to reassure me then he places his hand on the armrest and turns it palm up in a clear invitation. Big fingers. A man's hand. I haven't held hands with a man for a long time.

After the slightest hesitation, I place my hand over his, and he folds in his fingers, holding me, firmly but not too tightly. The susurrant of pleasure is unexpected. Overwhelming. My mouth parts as I look at where this minor cataclysm is happening.

Will he let me go if I tug? I am tempted. I decide not to, this time. Challenging his dominant acts might be fun, to see what reaction I get.

I pretend the hand-holding is a minor thing and lie back in my seat, but my hand remains trapped inside his.

“You’ll be fine.”

“*Mmm.*” I allow myself to simply feel his hand around mine. It’s as if he’s swallowing me into his persona, claiming me, and I’m reading far too much into this. I need to wake up.

I let out a long quiet sigh and move my fingers. He squeezes down. *Oh yes.*

I’m so very doomed but happy, even though at the back of my mind I’m thinking about needles, blood, and pain.

The journey in the limousine is unremarkable and mostly silent, apart from the background hum of the engine, and there was that blindfold. When I’m allowed to exit and the blindfold is removed, we are in a car park beside what centuries ago must have been a drawbridge. It’s been converted into a stone bridge and leads across a moat to a curved entryway. A line of faux lamplights shine above our heads to either side of the bridge and reflect off the dark water, below.

The castle is all arches and towers, stonework, and circular windows in hidden alcoves. A long, rectangular pool is the centerpiece in a garden we move through to access a deeper part of the conglomeration of structures. In the distance, beyond a wide archway that is the entry to a new section, the castle’s curtain wall crosses from left to right, obscuring the sky.

Inside is a small foyer, with hallways to either side and another before us that leads to a spiral set of stairs. People wander by, dressed as if for cosplay in themes that range from demonic warrior and mythological creature to plain jeans and shirt. The women are often semi-nude, clothed in silk, lace, and leather, in costumes that match their partners. Razor ascends the stairs first with Brutus behind me.

There are men who seem the lesser partner, and genders that seem impossible to define, between and beyond male and female. I'm sure aliens would fit right in here. A dark-skinned astronaut with a purple tentacle penetrating one side of an artfully smashed helmet, passes us, going down the stairs. Three women in harem costumes follow them. I stare then resume climbing.

I stand out in my red gown. I realized this the moment we crossed that bridge.

Cries of pleasure and pain mark our ascent, echoing, growing louder.

The stairs end in a balcony wide enough to house restaurants. Tables, chairs, sofas, and other furniture I haven't a label for, share the balcony with people doing lascivious things—fucking, voyeurism, eating, screwing while eating. A man in a hound head with leather mittens pads by on a leash. A woman in red latex and outrageous spiked heels pats his rump.

The balcony circles above an expansive floor below, dominating it, allowing rude but distant study of the sex, sadism, and god knows what else is occurring below.

“Fuck,” I mutter, having stopped dead.

I've seen oodles of porn online, but this is nuts. I wish I had a camera as well as time to simply sit and use a vibrator.

“Come here.” Razor clicks his fingers then Brutus does something he's not yet tried—he pushes me forward, with a finger in the middle of my back. No. Wait, he did caress my back once before when Razor urged him to measure me.

I walk to the sofas-and-table island Razor has claimed. However, he doesn't sit but draws a package from a familiar bag he's been carrying...another tissue-wrapped set of clothes.

"Yours. Get changed here, please, and take off everything first. Then we will go on a tour and find you some activities."

He drums that out as if installing plumbing or asking for toast.

I frown. Take off everything? *Crap. Oh crap.* My USB package is *there*. I do not need this. A little panicked, I survey our surrounds and the people who will see me if I strip, praying I know none of them. They're strangers, so far. But this castle is huge, and the members of this CNC Fraternity seem plentiful. From the voices and accents, they hail from all over the world.

Chances are someone here knows me. My father was sociable to extremes.

"I have this dress," I trot it out, weakly.

"The clothing rule." One eyebrow rises. "You obey the rules."

The wording comes to me: *you wear what I say you wear.*

Then he shakes out the clothing, frees it from the tissue paper.

I take it from him and suck on my bottom lip. It's a nervous gesture I was sure I'd lost years ago. "Wow. Really? This? It's miniscule."

"It leaves in view precisely what I wanted it to."

A pair of small black wings with black arm loops will fit over my shoulders, but it's the rest that worries me. It's basically a one-piece body stocking with a mostly open back. It also has no crotch.

How dare my pussy do that familiar tingle as I stare at my costume. It likes the idea of flaunting itself. I'm wicked. So fucking wicked.

Can I do this? It's nothing compared to the debauchery downstairs. And up here. Next sofa island over, a woman on all fours is being eaten out by another woman, while a man with horns on his head, and red body-paint, fucks her, hard. Her moans escalate in volume, and she tenses and shudders into an orgasm. The woman beneath her keeps licking. The man drives into her again and again.

I stare at them then drag myself away, back to my dilemma.

"I...I need to use the bathroom though. Desperately." I shoot him a pleading look. "Please? Can I get dressed there?"

I do have to use the restroom. I also have to get rid of the USB. If they see that...

If I have no idea what will happen, but it will not be good. And I have this need to not disappoint Razor. Which is just screwy.

I'm starting to like him more than is healthy, considering my mission and his satisfaction when I did not nix the notion of needles being stuck in me.

"Go then. Just this once. In future, you will have no modesty if I say so."

"In future?" I gape.

He smiles and gestures. "That way. Ask someone if you get lost."

I hurry off, vowing not to ask any of these disgusting immoral extroverts. But I may watch a few as I pass them. I'm not panting, am I? I am staring though.

My mouth is constantly open on my winding trip through and past the sofas and tables. Especially *that* table, where she's been bound on her belly with her limbs strapped to the table legs, and they're taking turns flogging her back and fucking her mouth and rear.

Oh my god. I need a sedative, or a vibrator, or someone to do that to me.

I already do have the last.

But...how am I ever going to find the person who took Milli? It seems impossible.

And then I enter the bathroom and find someone has left a laptop on the ornately carved table in the middle of the tiled floor. It's Fate, surely. If I'm fast, I can do this.

Phones and similar devices are banned. Duh. I hadn't connected that to this, until now. Stupid of me. Whoever this is, they are not a normal guest, and this will likely be my only chance to use the USB.

I enter a cubicle, and there is only one other occupant here. They must be the laptop owner. With minor difficulty, I remove the packet from my pussy, toss the plastic in the bin, and quickly sneak outside again to plug the USB into the laptop. I only kept one cover, and it's white, due to a lack of storage room inside me. Seth was terribly optimistic. Granted, I don't think he knew where all that plastic and metal was going.

By the time I return to the cubicle, undress, and then dress in the raunchy black angel costume, the laptop and its owner have left the bathroom.

I almost feel relieved. I've done what I can. Whoever that was, they are a member. If luck is with me, it will work. The chances are a thousand to one it will yield any information worth chasing up. I will stay alert, but I'm certainly going to have to steel myself for using my final trick, after this night is over.

Luck, though. Fate might intervene. I will hope.

I stare at myself in the huge ceiling-to-floor mirror, minorly aghast at the panties-shaped hole, at the lack of fabric in that most intimate place. I cover myself with one hand and turn in place to see what is showing. My nipples are visible through the sheer fabric, like little beacons of sex.

Considering my pussy is totally out there, I can live with my areolas being naughty.

After a minute of steeling myself, I exit the restroom.

As I walk by them, people turn to look. I'm new, that must be it. They don't know me. I am only another mostly naked girl.

I'm nothing unusual. I swallow, nervously.

Razor and Brutus watch my approach. They're both seated, arms draped over armrests, like Roman emperors appreciating a summoned slave. I can both see and feel their gazes drifting over me, from breasts to belly to lower. I should get used to this, but I know my clit is swelling and my pussy feels *alive*. If I bend over...it will be obvious.

Fuck. And if they command me to do that?

Act...casual, I mockingly tell myself. As if.

My hips seem to sway more than is normal. This costume makes it easier to walk flirtatiously.

My nipples are rigid and rub into the stretchy fabric. This walk of filthiness is turning me on—being watched by men and women, by anyone who wishes to inspect me. My slippery arousal may be visible if they look closely.

I zero in on Brutus and try to identify the gleam of I-don't-know-what in his eyes. Menace? Possessiveness? Pure lust? The skull mask hides his identity. His hair is thick and black, and I think he's mid to late twenties but there are specks of gray.

I know him. I think I know him—my subconscious seems to nudge me toward this realization. I will somehow unmask him before this night ends.

They might fuck with me. They may actually fuck me. I'm rather praying it will be so. But I will see his face.

Then Brutus utters a word. One word. "*Jesus.*" A rather religious word for in here, but the rampant admiration pleases me. Then I know. It clicked into place.

I stare at him, at the skull mask that made him seem inhuman in the low light, outside, when they removed my blindfold.

I know who he is. He used to swear and alternate his *fucks* with his *Jesus* and his *God*.

He has changed quite a lot, but this is him...isn't it? This man is heavier built.

Now I'm doubting again.

The only way to be certain is to remove the mask.

His CNC Fraternity name of Brutus is Roman and ancient in origin, the same as Marcus. It is exactly what he'd choose. It's also allied to that somewhat intimidating word—brutal.

Phoebe

“Here.” Razor crooks his finger, and I go to him, automatically. I’m still unsure why giving up control and obeying his commands appeals and even turns me on. This little thrill races through me as I get close. It’s anathema to feminism but fits right in with my erotic fantasies.

I think it’s because I trust him not to abuse this? I’m still rolling that around in my head, when he pats his knee and says, “Sit here, face outward.”

Startled, I jerk to a halt and eye that knee then his face. While I was away in the restroom, he applied the dark eye make-up I’d previously seen, carefully drawing trails that go down to his cheeks. It’s as if he has cried black tears. It suits him, somehow, with that tousled gray-white hair to one side of his scalp while the other half is shaved short.

He’s waiting, patiently. I go to him and turn and sit on his thigh, aware that everything is escalating faster than I expected. This had better not be an ‘activity’. I’m so not ready. Only one layer of cloth is between my bared pussy and his skin. I’ll leave a damp spot on him.

Nervously, I survey the crowd. Most have gone back to their own proclivities, thank god.

“Good girl,” he says softly then circles my neck with something. I glimpse a black leather collar with blunt spikes

with a little silver angel swinging from the front. He buckles it, then attaches a silver leash.

“Up now.”

I’m fucking collared and leashed, and it’s hard to breathe as I rise and follow him as he walks away. The leash sways, connecting me to his hand, the metal links gleam, and my clit is as hard as, well, as a clit can be.

Brutus stalks at my side, now and then studying me. Is he Marcus? I’m unsure again. If it is, he’s playing this anonymous act like it’s vital.

If it is him, he knows me. Yet neither man has said so. The possible reasons swirl, and I’m almost dreading finding out the answer. I wasn’t kind to him, back then, toward the end.

We half circle the balcony and stop near a small stage where two naked women are bound with their hands stretched high to a tall post. A man is flogging them both, alternating from one to the other. Their gasps, yelps, and moans are like music interspersed with the smack of the leather. Their backs and asses are striped and splotched with red. They teeter on the balls of their feet—it’s either that or let their bodyweight pull at their arms.

Between their butt cheeks a small diamante circle reflects the spotlight aimed at the stage. Butt plugs, of course. He steps in and pulls those almost out then fucks the toys back into the women, slowly. The posts are close enough that he can use a hand on each plug at the same time. Again and again, he worms them partially out then reinserts them.

“Soon,” he states, “I’ll be putting my cock in there.”

“No,” one of them whimpers, bowing her head against the post. “Please, no.”

“And you’re first, for daring to deny me.” He smacks her ass then bites her shoulder. She shudders but when he yanks her backward onto him, she squirms her ass into the bulge at his groin, grinding on him. Her mouth falls open, her eyes shut, and he bites her neck then walks more bites down her

back. When he reaches her ass, she's groaning, and her legs are spread, on full tiptoe inviting more.

He laughs and backs away, picks up the flogger and flicks it out for another round. The second woman watches, fascinated.

I am equally enthralled. I wake to the realization that Razor is behind me. He slips his hand past my hip and flattens it over my belly, then pulls me back into his body.

"Like that?" he asks then adds, when I'm slow to answer, "You answer me promptly when I ask, or I will be forced to test you like this." His hand leaves my navel, cruises lower over the body stocking. I know where he is headed, and yet I do nothing. I only watch, throat closing in, as he reaches the hole in the fabric then slides his hand between my legs.

I close my eyes, holding my breath. His fingers have partially separated my folds, then one slips further, deeper, and almost penetrates me. Only his fingertip enters...teasing me as he nudges it in tiny circles.

He removes his hand, raises it. I stay where I am, resting against him, fully aware of his erection nestling into my spine.

I hear him suck his fingers, and I shiver. Where has this man been all my life?

"Your cunt is nicely wet. Good. Miss Dawkes, I'll record that as a *yes*. Moving on."

The four-letter label for that part of me is ridiculously shocking when said out loud, here.

A tall man to one side of us smiles at me and winks.

I stagger as Razor walks away, because I was leaning into him, then I follow, again.

Fuck. I'm not just screwed. I'm ready to lie down and lick this man's feet...make that his boots, then grind myself on them until I come.

We tour the balcony, going from one group to another, and I guess there is enough happening up here to make downstairs

unnecessary for my education. The slipperiness below leaks from me and smears the tops of my inner thighs.

Whippings, bondage, knives. I'm not sure where to look next. A woman is spread wide on her back on a square, human-sized footstool and she's having her pussy lips sutured together. She's alternating between wincing and screaming, while also having her nipples sucked. I'm horror-struck until one of the men kisses her. With her free hand—the other is tied beneath her—she wraps her fingers in his hair and kisses him back. Another suture is inserted, and she jerks but keeps kissing.

“That’s a no,” I blurt. My mouth and eyes stay open. This evil, intimate, sadistic operation is just bizarre, but I can’t look away.

“Is that an absolute truth?” Razor asks. Again, he’s behind me.

“I...” *Is it?* “I don’t know? That’s barbaric!”

“She’s not being irreparably hurt. It is a kink some have.”

I’m unconvinced. “Really?” I watch her writhe a little. The kiss goes on until he returns to engulfing her breast with his mouth, and she arches. Without meaning to, I have put my fingertips in my mouth and touched them with my tongue.

“A maybe then. Good.”

“My...what? Hell no, I didn’t mean that!” That exclamation of dissent has probably been heard, but we’re moving on.

We stop at the woman I saw previously, strapped facedown to the round table. She is still being played with. A woman is feeding her sips of wine while a man applies a vibe to her other end. They’ve stuck something inside her ass that’s tied to her hair.

“Anal hook,” Razor informs me, without being asked.

“Oh,” I whisper. “*Mmm.*”

“A yes then.”

He's saying that too often, but I don't have the guts to contradict him.

Somewhere deep inside me, a thought has been cruising like a small hungry shark. I *want* to be made to try things. It's a whole new type of excitement.

We move on and on, and I'm overwhelmed but the idea that some of this could be done to me, without on-the-spot permission? Razor is probably right.

Throw me into the fire. I want to see if I can burn.

It's insane, except people are happily doing it to each other.

Pony play. Puppy play. Those get a no. Kitten play, a yes. The balcony is a bacchanalian Pan celebration of every kink I've ever seen, and many more I never dreamed of, even in nightmares.

Our next stop is at a semi-circle of sofas where two women are lying face down with their hands bound under them. Metal and blood shine on their skin. Needles have been thrust into their backs in lines. On one of them a line reaches to the top of her butt. One woman is gagged. The other is not. Her expression of pure bliss, the smile on her lips, is a revelation. She loves the pain, though perhaps there is more to it than the pain. I don't know.

They've even arranged an outer semicircle of seats for people to voyeur from.

"Want?" Razor's simplest question yet.

I look down at him where he sits on a three-seater sofa then look back at the women. I press my teeth into my lower lip, thinking, then I nod. I cannot deny it this time.

"Let's watch some more then, with you sitting on me."

My eyes feel wide as they can be as I eye his lap. As I begin to lower myself, he adjusts my aim then halts me with one hand on my hip, the other beneath my ass.

"No, spread your legs to either side."

That will be so revealing. My pussy is soaked and will be dripping if I sit on him. I frown and half-turn, eyeing him over my shoulder. He waits, not forcing this as I hover. This isn't CNC but then, I don't know yet if that will work for me.

I inhale then open my legs and sit. My feet don't reach the floor. In this open position, with air brushing me and my entrance easily accessed, my clit wants more. My excitement has focused there. Razor runs his hands up to my breasts and cups them through the angel costume.

Now, I can hear his breathing. He sounds like he, too, is having problems.

I smile. Well, now. If I wriggle on him, that hard cock poking along my butt cleft will be getting teased no end.

So...I wriggle.

"Girl." He grunts.

Brutus has been standing near us, and now he steps in, looms. I look upward in time to see his hand reaching. "Bet's yours," he growls harshly, before his mouth lands on mine and he starts to devour me. His tongue plunges in, past teeth, exploring my mouth, taking. He has grabbed my hair and twisted, and I can't move.

I don't want to move. I'm in the middle of this raging storm of lust, and then someone's fingers push into me below. One of them is fingerfucking me. The fingers go deeper, and my pussy clenches.

I splutter. My eyes roll back; my groans barely make it out past Brutus's possessive kiss. I gasp as he releases my mouth and takes what feels like half my neck in his teeth.

Then Razor laughs. "Wait. Stop, you fucker."

I'm panting, thoroughly a mess, probably dripping onto Razor's thighs, and these men have me needing to be fucked, so hard.

Brutus stares at me and stays there, leaning over and seemingly ready to laser me with his eyes, or kill me with desire. I'm unsure which.

I'm panting, and I've twisted my fingers into the side of Razor's pants leg *and* the front of Brutus's shirt.

"You're going to rise enough for me to stick my cock in you, sweetheart." Razor pushes me higher, and I actually manage to stand. Brutus backs up, glowering. He wipes his mouth, his nostrils flaring, and I remember the taste of him. My legs wobble.

They're going to fuck me here.

"I..." I look at Razor, then at the crowd around us. Only half are watching the needled women. The rest, they stare at me. I'm panicking, suddenly. Do I know that woman? I think I've seen her at a party at our house. Goosebumps run down my arms.

And suddenly I'm not so keen.

This will not go down well, but I lean near to Razor's ear, and I whisper, "Please. Not here. I know her." My eyes do more pleading as I straighten.

I want to. I want them. It isn't that. Maybe I'm not meant for this public display. I twist one foot on the floor, feeling like I did back at school when I forgot my homework.

Razor tilts his head. His expression seems to soften. "Sure." He clicks his tongue. "But...we will punish you for this."

Brutus folds his arms and nods in agreement. *Bastards*. Which is when I notice how he'd torn off the lower part of the mask so he could kiss me. He has thick, cruel lips. That time Marcus pinned me to a wall—his mouth looked like this. My gut feeling suggests he's planning to do things to me to live up to the brutal in Brutus.

A matching smile decorates Razor's face, and I look from one to the other. "Tweedledum and Tweedledee?" I say it quietly, knowing I'm pushing my luck.

Razor reaches up and grabs my ass. He gives me a shake then a hard pinch that makes me jump. "We have a brat in the making. We'll have to get inventive with this punishment."

The grunt from Brutus sounds unhappy.

Fear swirls in my gut, mixing with the excitement already there.

Punishment. What will it be? I'm a little stunned, but I've instantly flipped back into lust. *Sucks to be me. Not.*

These two men plan to do *things* to me. I'm over the moon as well as scared. This will be a first. This whole night is a first.

“Brutus, we can find a room here.” Then he stands, twitches the leash. “Follow. I get ten K remember, you asshole.” He says that to Brutus.

They really had a *bet*? They had a *fucking* bet!

*M*arcus / Brutus

I'm not a man who would ever come in his pants watching a woman, but that is as close as I'll ever get to doing it.

Phoebe Bartholomew, being made to submit, baring herself to the world, and letting Razor and me be her dominants. I am speechless. Which is lucky. The more I talk, the more she seems to study me, as if she's twigged and figured out who I am.

I will have to say, eventually. Not yet though. I want to take her down several more notches. I want to see her begging to be fucked, and more, much more.

Then, only then, will I say.

Her ass sways as I follow her, almost too much, which makes me wonder if she is teasing me.

Those costume wings, I'm not so enamored of them—they conceal her body and I want to see all of her. I want to upend her on a bed and stick my tongue in her cunt while Razor whips her tits. All night, my imagination has been running through a field on fire with every sadistic, humiliating kink I've ever eyed or tried.

Phoebe will be streaked with red cane marks and handprints and splattered with come, soon—fucking soon. Her throat under my foot with her moaning, her legs spread, her cunt dripping with arousal and come.

My cock throbs, again. It's being tortured by my fantasies. I give it a hard squeeze as Razor unlocks the tall set of white doors. He smirks at my hand then ushers her through.

We've been given a reserved room.

Before she can get comfortable, I grab the back of the wings and haul her to me, pull off the arm loops, drop the wings to the floor. When she tries to get away, I wrap my hand about her throat.

"Nice room," I say, casually.

It is. We have a king-sized bed with crisp white linen and a lush red bed cover. Perfect for spredeagling a woman. A wide window opens out over the curtain wall, showing the harbor and the city lights. A balmy breeze wafts in, past the thick-leaved succulents on the windowsill. Bougainvillea grows from a pot that hangs just beyond the window, spilling bright pink flowers into the night.

Nothing matters except this woman in my hands, her pulse thudding under my palm. Her nervous swallow stirs my dick to greater heights.

"How shall we fuck you, let us count the ways," I murmur to her ear before kissing the top of her head. I lightly squeeze her throat. "Do we have any implements, any gear in here, Razor?"

Phoebe puts her hands up, hesitantly at first, then she cups the knuckles of my throat-caressing hand. I should've guessed she would like this.

The last time I touched her, seven years ago, she sucked my dick while on her knees, after I ordered her to, after I kissed the hell out of her, bruised her mouth...like I did tonight.

"A whole array." Razor opens a tall timber cabinet, revealing a wall of whips, canes, safety scissors, ropes, and more.

"I am in awe."

"And so is Phoebe." He's watching her, intently.

Her real name? He's used it.

She jerks her head, centering on him, then tries to speak. I shift my hand and cut her off, muffling her. “*Shhh*. Not yet.”

I check him out—and realize it was on purpose. “Why?”

“It was time. There is space for only so much deception in this sort of relationship. If you want to use Melissa as a CNC name, you can,” he tells her. “To us, you’re Phoebe Bartholomew. You should have known we would check your ID, your sexual status, and tests.” He smiles. “Yes, we can access your medical data. You’re here. We see you for who you are, but I think you’re okay with that by now.”

Then he waits. Razor is good at waiting. I’ll give him that.

I release her mouth and she moves her head to look at me then at him again. Finally she nods. “Okay.”

“You wanted CNC, that’s what we aim to give you. Also, okay?”

She squirms against me, and on purpose or not, she rubs her ass into my cock. I think it’s nerves—why she’s moving—but I suck in a breath then shift one hand lower to cup her breast.

Slowly, I revolve my thumb over her erect nipple before I lean down to gently bite the angle of her neck a few times. Already, she shows red there—from my last bite.

Her soft moan and the slight sagging of her bodyweight tell me her answer.

“She wants it.” I turn her to face me, keeping her throat in hand so she cannot get away. “Say it.”

“And your truth?”

“Mine?” She wants my name. “Later, I promise.”

Phoebe looks at the floor between us. “I do want this, but first I want—” Then she quickly raises her hand and is almost at my mask.

Laughing, I grab her wrists and spin her. “No. It comes off when I say.”

“You’re not just an adjudicator!” she spits out.

I force her toward the bed, drop her there, and kneel on her ass, still holding those dainty girl-hands. “No. I’m not.” I call to Razor, “Cuffs.”

“You said truth!” she squeaks that past the bed material her face is buried in. Her head is half-turned, and she struggles to get loose.

“When I say, you get to know. Later tonight, I said. Do we need to gag you, Phoebe?” I give her a shake; my hands are now locking down her elbows.

It’s the first time I’ve said her name to her, for seven years, and it smarts. It stings me with bitterness. I’ve got her in my power, and she doesn’t quite know it.

I will make her know, soon. That moment must be calculated so I can extract the ultimate sweetness of revenge. I bare my teeth and give her another violent shake. “Answer!”

Razor frowns at me.

I draw a few breaths and nod to him. Anger is just improper here. Punishment, that is valid for wrong-doings, but not anger. It makes me think. I vowed to not get angry with her. Let the punishment suit the crime.

Easily said. Not so easy to do.

“No gag,” she finally gasps out, and the movement of her perfectly pink lips, where they’re smooshed against the quilt, makes me consider kissing her.

Takes me a second to remember she has agreed to CNC, tonight, with us in charge, and no gag.

“No talking then,” I tell her.

Razor clears his throat.

“I’m good,” I tell him. He eyes me, nods. “Put the cuffs on her.” I jerk my chin at the cupboard, and he goes over and unhooks a pair.

Phoebe is under my hands, my power. My knee is on the bed beside her. I can see her face, her eyes swiveling so she

can see me.

Problem is, how do you punish a girl for her family financially ruining yours?

Or for blocking me seven years ago.

For not letting me in to console her or to understand why she did what she did.

Razor arrives and locks her hands in those handcuffs. “They’re padded with leather,” he points out.

“Uh-huh.” I straighten. Still. She is new to this. My urge to be safe overrides my need to mindfuck her and make her scream. “Don’t wrench your hands about too much in these, Phoebe.”

I rest my hand on her back as Razor rips the costume at the waist, leaving shreds hanging but her ass completely bared. Her legs still have smaller pieces of the body stocking attached and I have to appreciate how Razor pulls those off—with his teeth as he moves down her, biting those legs.

She squeaks and wriggles, then actually shrieks at a harder bite. I keep her pinned, feeling her muscles move under my hand.

What a rush, and we’ve barely begun.

“Fuck, man.” I inhale. “You primitive.”

He stands beside me. “Clover clamps. Where? You can spank her or cane her or whatever. This punishment needs to be good. Am I right?”

We lock eyes for several seconds, while she’s beneath us, panting, recovering. I know what he is thinking—can I be safe punishing her? Will this be enough for me? I study her rear then pinch her ass, marking her there same as Razor did early. Both will leave a bruise. I increase the pressure.

When she shrieks and kicks her heels, I release the skin then put my hand between her legs to find her cunt entrance. Once two of my fingers are thrust knuckle-deep in her, I note how she’s quietened, and her eyes are half-closed and eyelids

fluttering. Her arousal spills. Her pussy is so damn wet and ready.

“I told you, Razor. I’m good.”

The bastard raises his eyebrows.

“I am safe to play with her.”

“You’d better be.”

I fuck Phoebe twice with those fingers then lean in and say to her. “That doesn’t mean this will be easy. You did some bad, bad things, girl. We’re going to fuck with this pretty head of yours as well as your ass, your pussy, and this adorable mouth.”

I jam my fingers deeper, and she whimpers. “Her pussy is clamping down on my fingers so hard, Razor. I might need a winch to get them out.”

He chuckles.

My revenge, I’ve realized, is a whole other ball game. For now, I’m happy just being my usual sadistic fucking self, and I’m no longer sure I ever lost my desire to keep her as mine, my girl, my fucktoy, my pinata if she so wants to be, in every possible way.

My girl I can wake up to in the morning.

Crap.

I extract fingers and wipe them on her back then sit down on the bed, still pinning her. I put my wet hand to her mouth. “Clean me.” Her pupils are dilated pools of blackness, and my heart begins to fucking ache as her tongue comes out and she starts to lick and suck her own juices from my fingers, delicately.

She’s small. I’m big. It’s delightful to manhandle her when she’s lapping up my dominance and her arousal like this.

I want more. Don’t I? I’m not built to just be an angry asshole. It weakens a man, makes him less.

I eye Razor as he wanders back to the cabinet for those clover clamps, a cane, and several things I can’t quite see. I’m

contemplating if a deeper, more meaningful relationship with her could ever be possible. So much has happened. And Razor looks terribly keen. I don't fancy fighting him for her.

I'm also a little afraid to reveal who I am.

*M*arcus/ Brutus

Razor returns with an arsenal of fucktoy weapons. Though he deposits some on the floor where she cannot see them, he places a large black dildo on the bed next to Phoebe's face. Her grimace is instantaneous.

"Safeword," he adds, perching on the bed on the other side of her. "You can have one tonight. Most here operate without them once they know their subs. Yell *no* all you like, and we're going to ignore it. Say *donkey*, and we stop. Got that?" He takes her hair and levers her head higher, directs her his way.

"Yes."

I slap her nearest ass cheek. Her gasp is loud. Razor watches her face.

"Spanking... Why not. You need some mild warming up. Brutus?"

"You first. Let's swap her back and forth, and she can suck on the neglected man."

I rise and start to strip. Everything can come off.

Razor guffaws, loudly. "Fuck. I don't think that counts as neglected." But he gets his knees under her legs and drags her over his lap. I'm only shirtless by then but I unzip and sit down then sidle close enough that her head is in my lap. I pull out my cock and give it a few strokes.

“Aren’t handcuffs a pain, Phoebe.”

She squints up at me then looks annoyed at my cock being almost up her nose.

“*Eww.*” She eyes my erection.

Using her hair, I position her mouth over me then grab a breast to prop her up with it, so her neck isn’t under strain. “Open that slutty mouth.” I plunge her mouth downward but my dick misses, slides past, because she shut her mouth. “She spoke and seems reluctant.”

“And we haven’t even started punishment.” Razor reaches back past the bed to the floor. His hand comes up with a pair of clover clamps, which he passes to me.

I grin and drop to my knees on the floor so I can see her tits, quickly fasten each clamp to a nipple.

“Holy fffffuck. Oh god! Oh...”

A vibe starts, and she stops dead with the cursing, her face transforms to transfixed bliss. I tug on both clamps then reseal myself. Razor turns off the vibe and starts spanking her, quite hard for a novice at this. The noises she makes, her jerking, the way he stops every few spansks to finger her...it keeps me fascinated until the ache in my dick reminds me of my other purpose.

I drag on her hair and position her again, over my cock, then push her down. When she splutters but curls her tongue over me, I swallow through the pleasure and tuck a pillow slightly under her shoulder. “Keep that up until I say stop, or else this.”

I put some pressure on those clamps, and she gasps around my cock, spraying drool, then shudders.

Between the spanking, the fingering, and what I guess is a strange rising pleasure from her tits due to the clamps, we keep Phoebe aroused and hurting.

We swap places, stick her mouth on us, use her for long enough to make her ass thoroughly red. Her sobs are plentiful. Her moans and bubbling past our cocks are also frequent, and

we might be edging her, but I'm bursting to come too. My dick will pop off and head for the stratosphere.

"Make her come?" I suggest to Razor, after I deliver five more spanks.

"Sure."

Though he passes me the vibe, I ignore it and put her on her knees on the bed, still sucking on the man's cock, still handcuffed. I shove two pillows under her to keep her higher. He reclines halfway, onto his elbow; his eyelids are at half-mast as he watches me kneel behind her with that dildo in hand.

I part her thighs, slapping to make her spread them, then slowly force the humongous dildo into her cunt. It keeps trying to creep out, and she's making all manner of squeaking noises and trying to walk her knees away from what I'm doing.

"Stop that." I take hold of the chains attached to those nipple clamps and draw them tight until she squeaks, then wait for her to whimper and cease to struggle.

No safeword has been said. I'm grinning at this.

Phoebe Bartholomew, you are fucking mine. I draw a breath then do what I've been dreaming of doing all night. I pull her thighs wider, exposing her pussy and those glistening swollen labia, with the dildo stuck between them like an arrow that hit the target. I extract that dildo, toss it to the bed, and start to lap at her cunt and clit. When Razor shoves the purple vibe at me, I apply it to her slippery clit and plunge my tongue into her, over and over.

Her thighs are quivering within seconds and she's clearly going to explode into climax easily. So I pull away the vibe and take another two clamps from Razor. I clamp these to her outer labia, and she stiffens and kicks her heels...until I sit on her legs.

"Bad, bad girls get punished," I whisper, plunging that dildo into her, again and again. Then I use the vibe, with her stiffening in waves, her trying to hump the pillows, with Razor immensely amused and pulling her off his dick so he, too,

doesn't explode. We loop this, repeat, rinse, making the girl more and more desperate.

I edge her to eternity, until she's blubbering and begging—but not in words I judge are clear enough. Not that she's supposed to talk, but I'm way past caring.

“Want me to let you come?” I ask this over and over. We spank her and switch positions to fuck her mouth again. The dribble on her thighs from arousal is copious.

When she's looking overcome and wrecked, with her leg muscles and belly jerking, her back arching, when she's crying out for us to let her come... I lean over her back to lever up her head and ask a question to her tear-streaked face.

“Beg me. Fucking beg.”

Then she finally whimpers and says, “Please, please let me come.”

I fuck that dildo in again and let the vibe go full blast.

She stiffens and cries out, spasming and making choking noises in the most overcome display of a woman orgasming I've yet seen.

Punishment? I don't know. But I drag her legs apart while she's still twitching, put her flat on her belly, and position myself between her legs. I thrust in fully deep in one go. I stay there, fucking her, while Razor pulls up her head and upper body to his level and stuffs himself into her mouth.

She resists not at all, but after a minute, despite the handcuffs keeping her hands at her back, she edges her knees under her, and tries to arch her back and present her pussy for me.

I grunt and thrust and flatten her. “I'll say when you can rise, little bitch.” None of this fucking *sweetheart*.

I don't want her to love this, exactly. I want to take her and fuck her into oblivion tonight. This won't be the last time, I promise myself, as I begin to ram myself in harder, harder. The wet sounds when I spear into her become even more obvious. Her moans with each thrust are driving me crazy. That

sensation gathers in my balls and spine, and I jam in and pour myself into her. *Mine, finally.* I bare my teeth and grind deeper, watching her wriggle under me and gasp into the sheets. I'm tempted to bite her, but I fear I will go too far, so I stop myself.

Razor has pulled her off his cock and is watching.

Finally, I prop my hands on her ass and pull myself from her, watch the spill of come from her pussy. I fuck a finger into her then sprawl and crawl forward, shove that finger into her mouth. She's sweaty. Her eyes are closed, but she sucks weakly on my finger.

"Done?" Razor asks, laughing.

"For the moment. You're planning more?"

"Obviously."

Her head turns, rasping on the sheets, and she eyes us, blearily. Wetness trickles along the edges of her eyelids. "No. Noes. I'm done. I'm fffnuncki—" I'm amused as her tongue tangles with the words.

"You're done when we say." She groans at that, but he flips her over and removes the clamps from her breasts then her pussy, only tsking when she squeals. "Now. Where was I?"

"It's nice to see another sadist at work. Drink?" I slide off the bed, go to clean up in the bathroom, wash my face. "Champagne?" I yell over my shoulder.

"No. I'm working, as you pointed out."

I turn and see he's laying out needles and antiseptic.

"No." I wag my finger. "Later, because I want in on that, with my dick in her while you do it."

Razor lifts one eyebrow. "Fine. I'll just cane her a little then fuck her ass?"

"Go for it." I deviate in my path and saunter to the fridge, open the door. "It's Bollinger?"

"Still no."

“Fussy bastard.” And I turn to look. He’s sitting on her breasts and has removed the handcuffs but is refastening them at her front. Phoebe tries to struggle upright but it’s not getting her anywhere.

No safeword, still, I note, as he ties the cuffs to the headboard then stands over her on the bed and looks down at her. Of course, by now, we’re both naked. Phoebe has nothing left of the angel costume except shreds of it about her breasts and neck. Much of her is reddened from the spanking and the clamps, especially those breasts and nipples Razor is eyeing.

I should have a quick shower.

He lifts her legs and surveys her red ass with a sigh. Phoebe rolls out her bottom lip, looking sad. On purpose? Maybe.

“I can’t cane you. Not after all that.”

Instead, he gets innovative, ties her ankles up beside her hands, then masturbates over her. The spurts of come jettison all over Phoebe, marking her ass, her belly, even her face.

Drawn by the messy display, by her ass pulled high almost inviting a reaming, yet he did not do that, I return to the bed. “Going easy on her?”

“Definitely. Go shower, get your drink.” He unlocks and unties her, and when he lies down and spoons, she cuddles back into him, her eyes closing again.

I frown at them. Am I actually jealous of this? I fucking am. “We all need a shower.”

“True.”

Phoebe opens those eyes, and I remember marveling at the translucent grayness of them in the past, and she looks directly at me, and she pouts. I guess that’s an invite? I kneel on the bed and crawl to the sticky, come-covered pair then lie down facing her.

When I stroke her hair, she smiles and draws a long, deep breath. I settle in to watch her for a while and her breathing is slowing and she goes to sleep, I think?

When I frown a question at Razor—I'm thinking shower, he's maybe thinking needles—he quietly shakes his head, mouths the word *later. Okay. Fine.* I rest my own head on the pillow and keep on watching this sleeping girl. This is strangely satisfying, deep down, near my heart.

I'm still going to stick some needles in her.

Phoebe

We wake during the night and shower together. It is strange sharing a shower with two men who've just done such filthy things to me. My ass keeps reminding me of the spanking and the water hitting my nipples makes me hiss until the sharp pain from some minor abrasion dies away. Having their hands on me, though, that is a whole new pleasure. They swirl the soap over every part of me, then pin me to the wall, laughing as they make sure it has gone everywhere. They even dry me with the thick towels. We share a glass of Bollinger, a snack, then crash on the bed again.

Brutus is still masked, though he removed it in the shower, while turned away. I'm sure I caught his reflection in the glass. I'm now ninety-nine percent certain this is Marcus. I think we're both pretending I don't know who he is.

Few words are exchanged. It is all touch, quiet threats and laughter, skin on skin, and a few sultry kisses.

I lie on my side reliving this as the light increases, seeping through my closed eyelids.

One man has his arm over me, weighing me down. The other man, probably Brutus, lies at my front.

"Time for round two," he says softly. I open my eyes. Definitely Brutus. The mattress shifts.

Round two sounds ominous. I shove my elbow under me despite Razor's arm and manage to lever myself upward. Brutus is already at my feet then Razor moves and pushes, turning me until I'm forced onto my back. With his large hands swallowing my ankles, Brutus spreads my legs. I haven't a hope of stopping him, though I try. I twist my hips and almost kick him.

From somewhere, Razor produces the handcuffs, and he locks my hands into them then ropes them to the headboard above my head. The timber has convenient anchor points. I scowl at them both and try to kick Brutus again when he seems to relax.

He hasn't and merely hardens his grip.

Lazily, he studies me, my heaving chest then the apex of my thighs where my pussy will be on display for him. I'm already panting from the exertion.

All grumbly, with a cold hardness in his voice, he asks, "Where do we want the little slut?"

"Oh!" I'm mortified.

Razor chuckles and puts his hand over my mouth. "I think a gag, definitely."

"And needles. And ass-fucking."

"*Mmpf!*" I kill them with my eyes, but they ignore me, while Brutus goes over to the wall cabinet, where he finds a black ball-gag with a hole through the middle—a hole too small for a dick, I'm hoping. Despite me madly tossing my head, they pin me down and buckle it on.

That I can actually resist to my little heart's content, make them *make* me, is exhilarating. I *get* the thrill of CNC. Obeying someone, knowing they want you enough to control you, that's a whole other rush. But it's *nothing* like this.

This is my realm.

"You can still talk with that on," Razor informs me. When I only glare, he leans down and takes my nipple in his teeth

and begins to bite. The pressure slowly increases to close to agonizing. I stare, dumbfounded, shrieking through the gag.

When I blurt out a muffled, “*Onkey!*” He withdraws onto his knees and grins.

“There. Now you know. You want to fuck her ass, Brutus? I want her belly up. We can tie her ankles up there again, to start with, to let you have access.”

“I noticed it was a promising position.”

They get all clinical and organized while I dart my gaze about, watching, a little horrified, except now and then one of them stoops between my legs to give my swollen clit a lick or a suck, as if to remind me this is not going to be all pain, no pleasure.

At times, I have to gasp and shut my eyes, especially after they tie my ankles to the headboard, with them spread a few feet apart, and that dildo is squeezed into my pussy. An inch, two inches...more. Enthralled, I watch through the frame of my legs as Razor coaxes it inside me.

“Lucky you’re flexible,” Brutus says, from where he has set a box filled with packets of needles on the bed. The box rocks as he comes closer. Then he swabs in a cold line, going down my body, beginning with the undercurves of my breasts and ending where a slim triangle of pubic hair points toward my pussy.

I’m on edge, if aroused, definitely nervous, watching everything they do. My mouthful of ball-gag is distracting. Before I can see what he’s up to, he places the swab aside then fondles my breast.

Razor has stopped teasing me with the dildo. It’s so large my pussy is trying to clench down and is barely succeeding. “That’s good. How many shall we try you with, Phoebe? Five?” His voice is soft. He’s purred that, as if he’s contemplating turning into a tom cat.

“*Uck off,*” I gargle and shake my head, determined not to make this easy.

“Was that her swearing at me?”

“Yes.”

“There is here too. I might put one here.” My clit? He stoops and sucks on me, his tongue circling, stirring me, and I squirm my ass on the bed, spread my thighs a little.

He wouldn't dare put a needle there? *Please no.*

I stare then cannot help sighing then gasping, as desire coils and builds. Wriggling toward his mouth is impossible to resist. Or rather, trying to. I push at him but can barely move. He's sucking and licking in just the right way, circling my clit with his tongue again, dragging on me harder, then a little harder.

That rhythm...

He flutters his tongue tip.

A sound that's half a moan, half a whimper escapes me. I plop my head back onto the bed. He's working at me there, sucking, and begins to fuck me with the dildo. Then he stops and pushes a lubed anal plug into me, pushes some more, through the tight ring of muscle in my ass, until it pops inside.

I'm too turned on, too fucking tied in place, to want to do anything except *feel*.

And though I flinched at the strange fullness, I've tried anal before. It's not new, *needles* are new.

Then his mouth resumes what it was doing and captures what seems my whole clit inside it. I groan. My legs jerk, pulling at the ropes, and the headboard creaks. I gape and try to look again, then give up. It's as if he's turned himself into an electric pump as he pulls on me with that mouth. The suction is glorious. I try to arch, but I'm doubled over, caught, can barely do anything except make helpless noises.

Quivering, mouth open, I tense, and ecstasy peaks. It fractures, spills, and I roar into a perfect little orgasm. The ropes tighten as my legs strain at them.

Razor stills but stays there, his tongue lying over my clit. I'm panting and wondering what the fuck. I was expecting more...more pain first.

My breast was still being fondled, now it's grasped firmly in Brutus's hand, encircling it. He claims it with that crushing grip. My thighs twitch and go through another spasm, courtesy of coming.

"Be good," he tells me. I blink at him.

A second later he pushes a needle into the underside of that breast. I'm lost, cannot breathe. Razor sucks on me again, confusing me, but the lance of pain has my attention. I can feel the bar sitting there, going through my breast skin. I crane up my head, glimpse his wrist, but the needle and his hand are not visible.

"She was good," he states.

But I'm whisper-swearing through the gag, feeling spit accumulate. I swallow it and I sigh.

I'm contemplating them sticking needles in a line down my front when the plug is removed then promptly replaced by what feels a slightly larger one.

"I'm washing. Her hole is ready for you." Razor gets off the bed, walks to the bathroom.

"Her hole. *Hmmm.*" Brutus sounds satisfied, smug.

I wriggle my ass, unsure if I'm liking that label. It's degradation, I guess. I never signed up for that. Water is running in the bathroom.

Brutus comes to me across the bed, kneels closer. He presses my leg down, leans in over it, then kisses my nose. "Your perfect little asshole is about to get my cock fucking it. Remember this, Miss Phoebe Bartholemew. How you took my cock up there and loved it, came on it. Probably begged me to go deeper, all the way to your throat."

My eyes are stuck open. If this is Marcus... I burble out *fuck you* but it's more drool than words. He only smiles and stands up on the bed, stroking his cock, slowly.

When Razor strolls back in, Brutus unties my feet from the headboard, letting me lower them, and I stretch my back.

Casually, he places his foot on my throat, standing with his hand on the wall above.

“Don’t move. Stick a few more in her tits, Razor.” The calmness in his tone has me swallowing against the pressure on my throat. “Before I fuck her.”

“Why?”

“I want to see her face.”

I half expect Razor to say no, to protect me. Instead he chuckles. “I get that.” The big dildo fell out long ago, but now he replaces it with some new, smaller one and puts his knee there, making it stay put. I know he’s rummaging in that box, pulling out needle packets, but I’m locked onto Brutus’s eyes. Neither of us looks away as Razor swabs me again, just below where the first needle is stuck in me. Then...I’m hyper-aware this time. I know, I know what is coming. He pinches a fold of skin and pushes the needle in. Not fast, not slow, just... amazing. I shut my eyes and feel my clit swell.

“Oh, our Phoebe does like this.”

I let out a shuddery breath and lick my lips. How dare he speak a truth. God, this is...fucked.

“Yeah,” comes from above—Brutus. I sneak a glance through partly open eyelids. He’s still watching me, fascinated, though he’s also drawn to where the needles pierce me. He shifts his foot slightly but still anchors me down.

I want to see if there is blood, but I cannot look. Not yet.

Subtly, I tug on the handcuffs to test them. *Trapped. So perfect.* My choked sigh when the third needle enters is probably loud. A humming vibe touches my clit—that would be Razor, and I gasp and elevate my hips, seeking more.

The needles, the vibe. They’re playing me, and I’m loving it.

Another three needles and Brutus mutters *fuck*. The vibe gets cranked up and delivers a higher, thrumming, clit-wobbling power, and I cannot take more.

I gasp and cry, spluttering, thrown into another climax, blinded and spasming as it blows my thoughts apart.

I'm breathing hard now, but I don't open my eyes, willing to bask in all these sensations. The blood, if there is any, it can wait.

"*Jesus H,*" Brutus swears, still above me, his foot no longer on my throat.

Then the bed vibrates from his weight shifting, and he turns me onto my side, making the needles feel too real and too big, for a second...though the pain is a beautiful throb. This kind of hurt is the best. He sits on my hip and removes the plug. Then he lies behind me. I feel him position his cock and start to probe then to push. My asshole widens as he penetrates me. I'm stuck in another moment, my heartbeat thudding slower, where the world pauses as his cock inches in, hurting me, stretching me.

I cry out past the gag, and Razor unbuckles it, looks at me.

Brutus grunts and shoves, then thrusts himself in what feels like half a mile, then he stops.

I'm panting, connected to him by this animalistic rite of fucked-up sex.

"We're good," he says, and he swears and gives me another poke.

My mouth is wide open, and Razor is still staring at my face. I close my eyes as Brutus begins to rock, in a little, out a little, his cock forging deeper.

"She's opening up," he grunts out. "Fine."

Another thrust and I'm riding this wave of utter bliss that settles in from nowhere. His cock in me, the needles, the dildo that's crowding my cunt, while my clit is remembering the power of that vibe. I'm half-moaning with every breath and every thrust inside me, and with my eyes closed it all feels so...much...better.

"Get under her. I need her face-up. Fuck her that way."

They move me around, arrange me. The men spread my legs and tie my ankles to the lower bed corners once Brutus is under me. His cock hasn't left me. Somehow, he even managed to fuck me a few times as he shifted.

"This cunt asshole is so slutty," Brutus says in my ear as he reams me, matter-of-factly shunting in and out, with one arm wrapped over my chest, above my breasts. His words don't quite make sense, and I'm too far gone to really care. I'm simply waiting, waiting for more of those needles to join in on the fun.

Though Razor has his nuances. He pulls out the dildo, drags all the needle gear close, then puts his cock to my pussy and pushes himself in. The stretch, the pressure of them both inside me, it's enormous, almost more than the dildo, except this time, I have two men, and they're fucking me.

Then, they both shove into me.

"Fuck! God!" I shake and my hands twist in the rope. I can speak again, and I'm very religious this morning.

I almost giggle at that, but Razor is speeding up. I have the two of them inside me, a row of needles down my breast and stomach, and now he's slowed the screwing and is swabbing the other side, beginning at my breast again.

I'm gasping, not sure I can take much more without melting, and I'm not even sure the world will be the same after this night.

The wave of bliss rises, steadies, as he inserts more needles, and their cocks seem to echo that miniature possession of my flesh. Bliss is keeping me in its swaddling hold as they do what they will, plant an entire crop of needles, fuck me hard, taking, taking, giving both pleasure and this uncanny pain that I now know I love. The pain blends. It transfixes. It makes it easier to concentrate on what matters—this. To be here, lusting in the moment.

Every new insertion lends another rush. Peaks and lows arrive, and more peaks.

The needles are also evidence of their dominance and their possession.

Now, blood is visible.

Where the needles have been stuck into me, blebs and trickles of red arise on my skin. There are thin red smears. I'm high but not enough to orgasm. I'm in awe, rocked as they fuck me. Taken. Filled. There are the thuds, the grunts and gasps, the wet, rude noises of unrestrained sex. Truthfully, restrained, tied up, and handcuffed sex has just rocketed to the top of my favorites.

When Brutus then Razor come in me, leaving bruising fingermarks in my hips—as well as the other marks of their sadism—I'm exhausted but ecstatic in a soft, rapturous way.

Freed of the ropes and handcuffs, I reverently bump my fingers over the metal trail.

They cradle me, snuggle in with their heated male bodies, but leave the needles where they are, because I want to see, I tell them. Razor is careful not to get too near my chest and sprawls across the top where the pillows once were.

“I'm dangerous,” I whisper to him, smiling. “I should get you to leave them there to ward off men like you.”

He shoves two fingers in my mouth to shut me up, then pulls himself closer and kisses me.

Brutus is already up close and spooning. I worm around to find that mask there, or what's left of it.

“Now,” I say quietly, watching him.

I can tell he's frowning from the creases around his eyes, but I reach tentatively for the side of it, and pull it off his face.

“Marcus.” I knew but one is never certain until it hits you. Until you see. The row of needles is still decorating me below. The small hurts in my ass, the bruises are there. Much of it from him. “You.”

“Yes. Me.” Then he takes my throat in his hand, and he kisses me.

I'm glad. I'm not sure I have the strength in me to begin to explain the past.

And then I think. *Coward.*

I need to ask. I must.

“Why?”

“Why what?” He walks fingers up me, from low down on my belly, weaving past the needles, to my left breast.

“Why not tell me?”

“You hid from me.”

“For different reasons. My friend is missing maybe dead due to your...” I wave my hand. “Your fraternity. I didn't know you'd be here, but you knew it was me.”

He nods, begins to circle my breast, brushing over my skin, spiraling inward until he reaches my areola. I hold my breath as he does this. Then he's busy watching it rise and fall as I inhale, exhale.

Razor interjects, “I'll take those out while you two chat.”

The wariness in his tone and manner says he figures we're on eggshells over here. He shifts lower then begins to slide each needle from its position. I try to ignore the pulls, but it's impossible. Pain stirs, slithering like a friendly snake.

“Okay. Here goes. I used a mask because I wanted to fuck with you.” Tension reigns in his expression—eyes, jaw muscles, all is stilled and tight. “I wanted to bring you down and hurt you.”

Oh crap. “Why though? No, wait.” I wince as Razor pulls another needle. “I get it, I think. I know I ghosted you. I even blocked you, after a while. I'm sorry.”

A severe frown settles on him—the corrugations stark on his forehead. “It's not just that. You must know it is not just that.”

I am actually a bit lost. Something else is bothering him—enough to almost want to toss me into the dirt. This is why that cruelty seemed to bubble in him, ready to explode. But there

is some uncertainty there. I still know him well enough to see that.

I should tread carefully.

“Gareth died. I had to pull away. I needed space. I didn’t know which way was up back then, not for months and months. He was my stepbrother and I...I killed him.” My voice cracks. I thought I was done with this. “I kicked him, he tripped over that stupid pot plant...” I eye the ceiling and see it happen again. It lived rent free in my head, once upon a time. I pinch my lips together than make myself relax, *one, two, three*. “Then he fell—tripped on a pot plant, fell.”

“First time I have ever heard *anyone* say you killed him.”

I shrug. “It wasn’t a good thing to confess to the cops. I kept quiet.”

“Did you know I was beneath your balcony when he fell?” I shake my head, shocked. “You didn’t know that because you told me to go home in a text. In several texts. But I heard what was said, by him and you. He assaulted you, Phoebe, and yes, he fell and died, but then I suddenly became nothing of worth? You made me your fucking fall guy. Also.” He shook his head, ferociously. “You’re explaining away...forgiving him? He sexually assaulted you. What the fuck?”

“I don’t forgive him,” I say quietly. And this is why I was almost not going to start this conversation. The sadness is returning.

“And what your family did to mine?”

I’m frowning. So is this the extra thing he holds against me? “What did we do? This makes no sense. I did nothing to your family.”

Silence reigns while he looks to be processing this. “Do you truly believe that?”

“Of course.” I’m bewildered but I need to find out more.

Then it hits me. My step-mother...if she thought his family hurt hers, she would take up arms and destroy them, if necessary. That woman could not be trusted.

“*And* you quit talking to me to mourn for that prick?” He swipes a hand through his hair. “Sorry. Sorry. I didn’t mean that like I said it.”

“You did. Understand this though. Yes, I hurt you, ghosted you, but I was so confused, so guilty in my own head of murder and of attracting him when I shouldn’t have. I know now that was dumb, but it is what I thought. I was in agony. *Everything* seemed wrong. It was easier to just...go away from everyone. My stepmother blamed me even though I never confessed to her. You’re the only one who knows the truth.”

He looks puzzled. “And then I left you alone too fast. I gave up. I should’ve pushed but I was seventeen and hurting too. I thought you’d decided I was useless and the best fall guy.”

What fall guy? “I blocked you.” I wince then look back at him.

Razor has finished extracting the needles and is watching us as if we’re a tennis match.

“*Hmmm.*” Brutus rolls off the bed and goes over to the window. He’s suddenly putting distance between us. “So here is my problem. Do I tell you what your parents did to my family? Why I’ve been aiming to humiliate you, mindfuck you, grind you underfoot as I fuck the hell out of you?”

His ire has been restoked and is burning hotter. He sounds disgusted. I sit up on the edge of the bed, still naked, still bloody, with come on me.

A shower seems a decade away right now. He hates me, after all of this? It’s a dreadful blow. And only now do I see how much this night has done to me. I wanted to see both of them again, and again. I could see a future with us together.

“Tell me then. Please.” I’m gripping the sheet to either side, trying not to cry.

“You’re clueless? I’ve been blaming you for fucking years for ruining my family. I thought you’d told them I killed him. Did you not know how your family destroyed ours. Really?” He walks back to me. “How is that possible?”

My mouth is open and yes, the tears have arrived. “No. I did not,” I say, though my throat has trouble getting out the words. “I’m sorry.”

I should ask him, how could they do that to his family, but deep inside, I know. She would have, if she wished to.

“Yeah.” His mouth purses. “I shouldn’t have done this. Now I feel like I should say sorry, but there is no way in Hell that I am doing that.” Then he collects his clothes off the bed and the floor, and he walks out the doors, slamming them.

Fuck. “Well. That is that.”

“Give him time, Phoebe.” Razor is the voice of sanity. “He’s being an idiot, but you two have a lot to sort through.”

I flip him a desultory gesture. “I’m going to shower then leave this place.” I stop dead. “How do I do that?”

He eyes me, no doubt wondering how far he should go with this. “I will arrange your return to London. I’ve got your dress here.”

“Good.”

As I walk away, he says more, “Did you enjoy tonight, Phoebe, until this?”

I halt again. “I did.”

“Then all I ask of you is to not forget that. Remember it.”

Phoebe

Razor has organized everything, and for that I am grateful.

The flight back is mostly silent, apart from the flight attendants' polite inquiries and the plane's background sounds. Even the torrent of voices and the hustle and bustle of London after we land seems merely...noise. I don't have the spoons, as they say, for thinking about anything except the disaster I've retreated from. Though escaped from might be the better phrase. I escaped with wounds, and they've sunk deep inside, locking themselves in with barbs. They're spreading poison. I'm afraid I will never ever dig them out. No matter how angry he was, I still want him back. Weak, I'm weak.

I have to scrub tears from my face in the middle of the airport.

I cannot help thinking about how Marcus must be feeling. Is he sad? Angry? Is he still disgusted? I think half the disgust is at himself.

Razor could be right. Given time, we could heal this.

I hope so.

I need to—I *must* fix this, and right now I have nothing. Endlessly, I wheel a small suitcase through the throng of happy arrivals as they scurry to find their luggage. The little burr of the wheels and the weight on my arm reminds me that this is my only companion—a suitcase. The limo taking me

back to my apartment has a taciturn driver who only glances at me a few times in the mirror.

He drops me off near the steps that climb to the Towers entrance.

The security guard is on a wander through the foyer and barely notices me. I'm invisible.

I've decided what I must do. That is a start. I will sell my apartment and use the money for a better purpose than slumming around being a spoilt rich, depressed bitch. That is how Milli would've described me...would describe me. I have to believe she's alive.

In the elevator going up, I'm alone. I let out a sigh that fills the space and masks the machinery noises for a few seconds.

I'm lonely. The ache in my chest brings more tears.

I thought I'd found some people to care for, people who might come to truly care for me.

Guess I was wrong.

The chime as my electronic key unlocks my door is the only sound in the carpeted hallway.

Pushing through the door, levering the solid thing open, makes the lights come on.

"Hi," I tell my apartment, smiling wanly.

Selling this place will be like burying a dead pet. The day drones by. I sleep the sleep of an Egyptian mummy that's had too many tomb robbers annoying her. Then I jerk awake in the dark, staring at the shadows on the ceiling. It's sometime past midnight, and the nightmare is back.

When next I wake, it's early and the tomb-mummy deadness is still with me. My feet are filled with cement. When I crack open the balcony doors, the sun floods in through the gap and hurts my eyes. A few small boats drift below. It's Monday morning and the streets out there will soon be swirling with people getting busy on their way to work, or maybe getting coffee so they can work in their apartments.

I pad back inside to find something better than underwear so I can venture into the world.

Nine-to-five work is not for me, and it never has been. I'm swearing off university study too. I'm going to sleuth out what happened to Milli, and it's not just because I need an aim in life. I want to know, even if it means finding her dead.

"Fuck. Morbid bitch." The nightmare did not cheer me up, strangely.

With a mug of tea in hand, with my elbow leaning on the balcony railing, I look out over the city skyline and remember being here with Milli, laughing, talking, being good friends. I return to the fridge and find a bottle of Moët. I pop the cork on the champagne and raise a toast to her against the morning sun.

"I will find you, girl. I will." The bubbles mock me. *Sure you will.*

Given liquid courage by three glasses of the Moët, I find my phone and text Marcus.

Can we meet? Talk?

I'm thinking of whether I should say more but am worried I'll ruin it, when his reply comes in.

Marcus: *No.*

"Well. There it is. One big fat rude *no.*" I swig some bubbly. *Fuck him.*

By the third or maybe fourth glass I'm even more sure. I will do this. I'll sell the place and use the money to find her. But first, I will try one other way to contact that asshole. I drop onto the indoor sofa and thumb my way through the letters in Google search.

A quick search of his name plus *antiques gifts* turns up the name of his business. The map shows it's near Kensington Gardens which seems upmarket. The imagery, though, that has me doubting. Buying into the CNC Fraternity is costly. How can he afford it from that one shop? Maybe I'm missing the good profitable stuff he does. Maybe he sells privately. It's not

as if I'm an expert in making money from antiques. The *Antiques Roadshow* is my main source of knowledge.

Something is poking my rear on the sofa, and I fish it out from beneath a cushion.

Resting in my palm is a small shopping bag containing a silver-and-enamel mermaid wrapped in tissue paper. I remember this. Milli gave it to me the day she left for her adventure. I promptly lost it in the sofa. How caring of me.

I tip it out, my heart swelling as I marvel at the delicate artistry. There are minute scales on her tail, a belly button, a sweet smile. Milli put thought into this gift. The crazy thing is, I bought her an identical one from the same jeweler and gave it to her the same day. When I saw it in the display case, I knew it was meant for her. We've always had silly moments like this where we synch over emotional stuff.

Maybe this is why the nightmares are happening—because it truly is her.

I do not want that to believe that.

Tears well and blur my vision. I inhale, swiping across both eyes with the hand holding the mermaid.

I will find her. I must. Some problems get into your blood, sink in among those swirling red corpuscles, and they never let you go. Not chasing after them will leave you feeling like a worthless piece of humanity, fit only for pond scum. I'd never forgive myself.

A week later I sign the papers on the sale. That fast. I shake hands with Neill King, the old family friend who also sells real estate, wave as he heads out the door toward the elevator.

My family has too many old friends, and none of them are really my friends, but I trust him more than some rando picked from a list. "Six million is a low price," he said, with my hand poised to scribble on the line. "You can get seven point four, and I told you so. Wait two weeks and it can be done. But you want a really fast sale..."

I did, and so I sold for six mill. The longer I take to start this rolling, the more likely bad things will happen to Milli. Two more weeks when it's already been a month? No.

Something bad must already have happened. That conclusion is inescapable. The dread is a sick mess roiling in my stomach. It hurts badly when I imagine what could have been done to her. Is she buried, lying in a ditch, drowned at sea, fathoms under? I still have to try. The one good thing about the Marcus debacle is this. I'm back on track.

Still... The next day, I visit his antique shop and wander by, staring in the window, over the old furniture and the sculptures, across a landscape of ancient things.

After half an hour of strolling by, sipping coffee, and watching, I'm sure he isn't even there. Whatever he does, it appears his father runs the store, day by day. If I tried tomorrow, I might find him here. I'm done with that. I'm so very done.

My last chance to mend things with him before I launch my attack on the CNC Fraternity has been blown away.

I scroll through my texts on the way home. There are invites to parties, from other students in my now-neglected course of studies. Three queries asking where I am, from other friends I made. Seth has sent me a text too. I leave that to read last because it's likely important. I have a habit of procrastinating when it might be painful. I doubt it's going to enlighten me.

At the bottom I find Milli's final text...somehow unread.

"What the fuck?"

The limo driver glances back at me. I ignore him and reread the text.

The date says it must have been held up by some glitch. It was sent the day I expected her home.

Milli: *Going away for the weekend with a hot Dom or two. An island retreat. Be back with the gossip soon.*

The emojis plastered all over the text are so Milli. It looks like a color explosion, and I smile. All this does is cement my determination in place. Onward to Seth's.

Seth: *That USB sent only a burst of data then stopped. I had it prioritize files with anything like death linked to kink or BDSM terms. One image came through. A screenshot with Killer Crew Club as the descriptor. This. I can't geolocate it.*

The image is two cropped images, one above the other. The top part is a house roof with palm fronds above the roofline, while the lower image is a room—a darkened room with an actual stone table or platform in the middle. There are manacles at the four corners and a dark stain in the center. The heads of three people show at the bottom edge. All are wearing hoods. They might be props and not men, but I think I know.

This room comes from my nightmare.

Fuck. The chill spreading makes goosebumps prickle down my arms and across my shoulders. My nipples stand up. I shiver. *Winner.*

Killer Crew Club. This thing is fucking real, but I have a plan. I have a cunning plan. *Haha.*

I look again. It might be a movie scene?

Then I see Seth's words below the image.

I couldn't find this bottom image on a deep internet search either. It doesn't seem to be from a film set or similar.

Where is it then? Somewhere tropical, for starters. The main thing about this struck me immediately. This is hard data. I can use this at the meeting I'm going to.

Dress for success. I figure my stark-black tailored suit with its ostentatious badges and the heavy silver rings on my fingers will advertise that I am not to be fucked with. The pants are close-fitting. The black boots with silver spikes on the heels give me some extra height and scariness. I dyed my hair bright purple at the ends in a dedication to the woman in my

nightmare. It is a touch metalhead, but the CNC Fraternity doesn't strike me as being staid.

When I'm ushered in through the double bank of doors, I see I am right. Most of the people here are dressed to look pretty, to alarm, or to look like they own the world. There are only a few business suits on the men, but also two haute couture suits on the women, with outlandish shapes to their collars and sleeves. I chose wisely.

A U-shaped table stretches before me with the ends facing the doors where I stand. I advance but stop before I enter the wings of the table.

I count fifteen people with about a quarter of them women. All of them wear masks. Masks are in fashion, today, or they prefer to conceal their faces from me. It's a little creepy. I keep my shoulders back, my gaze steely—or as steely as I can manage.

“Welcome to the third board meeting of the CNC Fraternity, this calendar year.” The man sits directly opposite at the far end of the *U*—the head of the table, I guess. He bangs a steel gavel, twice, then sets it down. His voice and greying hair betray him as elderly. His mask is a white façade. “To what do we owe your visit, Miss...Bartholemew?”

“Do I not merit introductions?” Best to be a bit provocative and act domineering. They are playing coy by concealing themselves.

How many know me? It is a question I already thought through, and I may never know the true answer.

“No,” he smoothly adds. “This is your first attendance. It might be your last. We prefer some anonymity. State your business.”

“I fear you misunderstand me.” I tilt my head and smile. “I've re-activated my father's family membership. I am one of you. I am now a board member. I had hoped—”

“That we will discuss soon. State your reason for being here, please. Miss Bartholemew.”

Panic rises, like a breath of wind stirring dust in a vast desert. What have I missed? I can feel the latent threat in his words.

Imagination. I shake it off, steady myself. “I am here to recommend, no, to urge that we instigate an investigation into the disappearance of Milli Derringer, who came to one of your...”

I trail off as a woman to his left holds up her hand, palm outward then loudly clears her throat. Her headdress is a magnificent nest of red snakes; her mask is black. From the shoulders of her red dress, a fan of black spear-shapes rises and frames her head.

“You cannot reactivate your family’s membership.” Her voice is being artificially altered and sounds robotic. With the millions she must have at her fingertips, she could sound like a siren. Who is this? I nibble my lip then stop that blatant betrayal of my nervousness.

I swallow, slowly. “Why? I was told of no such obstacle.”

“Because”—a pert smile graces her mouth then vanishes—“you are a submissive. Only dominants or switches are allowed to sit on this board.”

My mouth is open. I close it, frowning.

“It’s simple.” She sits back in her chair, and I spot a name tag on the table before her. *Queen O.* Some of the others have those tags. Invented names, from what I can tell. “You were at the event in Spain. We know what you are. We even have some awareness of what fetishes and kinks turn you on. If we need more information, we will ask your partners.”

Fuck. If she is correct, then why did they admit me to this meeting?

“You were admitted because we are curious. Your family name is well known, as is your attendance at the Spanish event,” says Mister Gray Hair.

I need names. Who are they? They identified me? Then they know what I did for Marcus and Razor, in public. Worse, they know what was done *to* me, or some of it.

A blush sears my face.

“Yes. We knew who you were,” draws a younger man nearer me, second from end of the left wing of the table. Slumping slightly in his chair, he drops one booted foot on the table. No one blinks. His bright blond hair dips as he smiles. “I appreciated the display.”

“Fuck you,” I sneer, then instantly regret it. He only grins more broadly. “You want to know why I am here? Milli went missing after attending a CNC event, about one month ago. The police refuse to do anything, but you should be afraid. If she remains missing, if she turns up dead at the hands of a member, your organization will be investigated.”

The silence that descends pleases me. Why give a fuck about what they saw me do? I don't. It is done. They've all done ruder, kinkier things, of that I am sure. And they will not like it if the police stick their noses into their affairs.

“What proof do you have?” asks Blondie. He isn't masked, but his supercilious, pseudo-dominant air is grating on me. He rocks his table-planted boot back and forth.

“Proof? The invitation to come to the training event in text. The contact, Sir Gregory. All the dates. Her last text.” I shrug. They took away my phone before bringing me here, insisted it was standard procedure for these meetings. “If you'd return my phone, I received a message today from my IT expert that sheds more light on this.” The IT title sounded good. Seth won't mind. “If I show—”

I look around as Queen O raps the table then again flips up her hand. “Stop there. I wish to discuss aborting this meeting before information is revealed that may compromise us. Granted?”

“Granted.” The intoned answer echoes across the room and seems unanimous.

“What? Why?” Frantic, I whip my head around, scanning the members then whatever or whoever is behind me. Nothing has changed. Only the staff member in a black suit remains at

the door, hands clasped before him, behaving as if this were normal.

I return my focus to the table and the members are staring at me, in silence. “What are you doing?” Maybe if I yell my information?

“Robard! You will not speak further, Phoebe Bartholomew, or this will go poorly for you. An adjournment, please. Remove her from the room, Robard.” Queen O stands.

Objecting is an option, until it is not. *Go poorly* seems ominous because this is a boardroom of millionaires and billionaires. I let Robard guide me out the door and stay there for about six minutes, while they debate what to do with me, I assume.

When I’m allowed back in, Queen O, she of the medusa headdress, approaches me, along with Mister Gray Hair, my theoretical head of the board.

“Can I speak now?” I ask loudly. The chairs are emptying, and the members are exiting using a rear door. After selling my apartment and using the funds to buy in, now this? Was it wasted? More to the question, can I get a refund? Where do I go from here?

“Stay silent!” Queen O points at me as she strides, as if her hand is a rocket she plans to launch.

The sounds coming from behind tell me Robard hasn’t left. I back sideways, wary of what he might do.

“Gag, Queen O?” he asks.

“If she talks when told not to, yes. It would give me great pleasure to have you gag her.”

Her and this... *Fuck*. The man from the top chair is Sir Gregory. As he comes closer, he removes his white mask and tosses it away.

They stop before me. With Robard to my left, looking ready to do whatever they ask of him, I subside. I raise my hand in confused protest, and I’m breathing raggedly, despite not actually running anywhere. I’m not made for this kind of

angst. The rest of the board leaves. The rear door clicks shut. At least I know Sir Gregory.

I take a step backward. What do they think I am about to say? If they fear my message from Seth, then they know what it is. How though? I gave up my phone, but it is passworded and locked with facial ID.

The snakes on Queen O's elaborate headdress writhe as she pushes the attached mask higher. Animatronic snakes in a headdress is overkill, even for this board of kinksters.

I let my gaze settle on her face as the mask clears it. Slowly, she sets aside the mask, smiling enigmatically as she sees my expression turn to shock.

Her!

Oh shit oh crap. My expert credentials for identifying masked people have just been downgraded. Emma Bartholomew—the viper queen, my friends from school called her. The medusa mask is so apt. Her thick red hair is arranged in a bun, else I might have grasped her identity earlier.

“Mother? Really?” I scowl at my stepmother, then the door guard. “And you are a long-lost uncle, I suppose? Half my family and friends are here, why not you,” I say bitterly.

“You may leave, Robard.” Sir G nods, and the man retreats, closing the door behind him.

“Just us then. Fuck this. I'm sitting down. I don't think I can take more standing up. I might say I'm disgusted, *Mother*, but that wouldn't be new.” Even as I sit on the chair, I shudder, recalling the event with Razor and Marcus. “I pray you weren't there, in Spain?”

She may not be a blood relative but imagining her watching me almost come while sitting on Razor...ewww.

“Of course not, dear, thank heavens. I rarely go now, not since your father passed. I know the *technical* details of your attendance. If anyone shows me pictures, I'll have them shot.” She pulls up a chair and sits. Sir Greg chooses to remain standing.

If she was the dominant partner, Father was her submissive. Or perhaps a switch? It's an uncomfortable revelation.

I bend over my lap and rub my hands across my face. "What the fuck are you doing here then? Why stop that meeting? Stop playing with my life! *This* is a real problem!" Tears try to flood my eyes. I stiffen, and for once I hold them back. "My friend," I say quietly, "she may be dead. I want this fraternity of yours to fucking find out what happened to her!"

"Demands, Phoebe?" She tsks.

I'm studying the floor, unwilling to meet her eyes. The main doors open, and Robard scuttles smoothly in, judging by his passing shoes, then he leaves again.

I grit my teeth and raise my head, glaring, and discover Queen O, my stepmother, brandishing the bright screen of my opened phone. "Oh."

"Yes. *Ohhh*, Phoebe." She snaps shut the lid of the small lockable box that must have held my phone and places it next to her headdress. "This message from Seth is dangerous. I had word." She taps her ear. "You, shouting at the board that the police might investigate us if you tell them *things*." She winces then waves a hand dismissively. "You're such a foolish girl. They can own you a thousand times over. Easily. With small change."

I blush again. "I'm not foolish."

"You are. You are."

Sir Greg keeps his hands shoved in his pockets.

"Tell me more then, oh wise stepmum." My sarcasm has returned, a vestige of years of her haranguing me, insisting I do this and that. About the only thing I am glad she made me do is to learn how to shoot a gun. If only I had one now.

"I know you hate me, and I'm not terribly keen on you, Phoebe, but give me a moment while I itemize what has just happened."

I frown and wait. The long-ago days of returning home from school to have my offences recited are coming back to me.

“Homework time?”

“Near enough.” She inhales, smooths the lap of her red dress. “Right. One.” She taps a finger, counting. “You march in here expecting this board to pay heed to your flimsy ramblings. Two. You have no real evidence. Three. You plan on making threats that will result in unknown punishment, for you. We can be ruthless.”

My eyes are wide, and I’m probably looking stunned. “What do you mean?”

“You think that we cannot punish people who make threats?”

“You can’t be serious?” Except I know she is deadly serious.

“Shush, girl. Four. You signed an agreement without reading it thoroughly. None of the fee you paid has to be refunded, even though you cannot be a board member. Three million, down the tubes, as you might say.”

“I wouldn’t ask for it.” I’m protesting just to seem defiant. This is exactly like homework, but worse. Three mill gone for nothing is just fucking horrible, even to me.

They punish nuisance people? My face contorts in anger.

“Are you saying Milli became a nuisance to the board and you all...vanished her? If that—”

“No, I am not. Sir Gregory?”

“No. We didn’t,” he says.

I barely remember him from when he last attended one of Father’s affairs. His eyebrows are sharp, gray wedges, his face lean and long. He’s tall, perfectly British, and handsome. Suddenly I’m imagining him as a sugar daddy. Not my kink, but he might be someone’s. After today, I may need therapy, again.

I pinch my lips. How can I believe them? I have fucked up though. I've lost millions and am no closer to solving this.

“So. Back to business. I am actually mildly impressed that you are doing something to help your friend.” She what? My stepmother continues. “Whether she is alive or not is currently unknown. But I do know that the fraternity may have a problem that appears to be linked to similar unauthorized disappearances of young women. If you want to find out more, if you are willing to do some dirty work, and by dirty, I mean put yourself into dangerous situations?” Her mouth forms a fleeting smile, and she leaves that question dangling.

I must wonder if me dead or hurt amuses her. “If?” I prompt, my interest is stirring. *Mildly impressed* is a huge compliment, from her.

“Then I and the three other founding members, of which Sir G is one, will employ you. Tell me this. Is there anything else you can contribute to this meagre pile of evidence you brought?”

“Well.” I hesitate because I'm sure she will throw me into an asylum if she wishes to. If she can. It is entirely possible she's planning to get rid of me through this exercise. “I've been having these nightmares of a woman being sacrificed by men. I think it's a snuff film. I think it's what happened to Milli.” Though I really don't want to believe that. “Every night for weeks and the room it happens in, it matches the image that Seth found.”

I press my lips together even more firmly. I wait for her to call it nonsense.

Instead, she blurts out, “Fuck.”

I lean in, my hands clasped between my thighs, wondering what provoked this burst of swearing from her. “I'm not a psychic. I don't know why I'm seeing this.”

“Of course you don't.” She pauses, and the stillness on her face betrays a new-born concern, then she adds, speaking carefully as if afraid to miss something, “I am filing that as an absurd coincidence and so should you. It changes nothing.

However, there is a short segment of a film that we have obtained, and only the four of us have seen this. It appears to be a snuff film showing the death of someone who came to a CNC event then vanished. Do you still want to be involved?"

I nod, soberly, all too aware of her scrutiny. "I have never wanted your approval. I do not *ever* want it. I'm doing this for Milli. Only her. What do I have to do?"

Even as I volunteer, questions remain in my mind.

Is she trying to get me killed?

Why is she trusting me? It seems so odd.

And then, *there are much simpler ways to punt me off the face of the earth.*

Which means this is genuine and extremely dangerous, but maybe she won't mind if I don't return.

She snaps her fingers, and Robard goes outside. I hear him walk away down the hallway, then footsteps return. Several people are returning.

"You will have to be a submissive," my stepmother is explaining. "Which should be easy for you. If we can find the place where this Killer Crew does whatever it does, you must consent to whatever these two men I have summoned ask you to do. You need to act the part. You will get us the information we need so that we can take action. I will not have the fraternity smeared, or our people killed for funsies."

Funsies. I smirk at her use of the slang.

I nod then turn and peek over my shoulder as three men enter.

I had an inkling as to who this would be, and now I see I was right. Marcus and Razor stand with Robard.

Marcus already looks ready to kill someone. This is not surprising. I inhale and hold that breath, wondering what to say to break the ice.

"You?" He's looking at my stepmother. Marcus shakes his head. "Hell, no. Not if you pay me a million. Not you. Not

her.” Now he jerks his chin at me. “If I’d known you were one of the board members here...” He wrinkles his nose and mouth in distaste. “I’m leaving the fraternity, now.”

Razor shrugs at me, and I swear I can detect amusement in the crinkles about his eyes, and the rising of an eyebrow.

Marcus, Razor, and me. I have a suspicion I am meant to be the bait on this investigation. If this somehow gets off the runway, if my stepmother convinces Marcus to cooperate, I will *not* simply be bait.

I open my mouth, thinking of saying so, when Razor ambles over. He stops by my side then play-acts zipping his mouth. When I hesitate, he casually places his hand over my mouth, molding his fingers to my face with his palm resting on my lips. My breath stutters, my heart does too. My toes do that secret clenching they do when I’m unexpectedly turned on. I shoot him a pretend frown, and he shakes his head, lightly.

I can’t help that my tongue dips out to touch his palm, but the increased intensity in his stare amuses me, excites me.

I’m really starting to want this to happen.

Marcus stops whatever he was saying and turns to look. And when Razor straightens but leaves his hand over my mouth, I’m feeling lost. It’s possessive. It is deliberate. He clearly knows Marcus back to front, and he’s goading him.

And now I have two men staring at me; only Marcus is sending daggers. Fuck me though...just...fuck me.

Thank god my stepmother can’t see inside my head because I’m getting painfully horny.

Phoebe

“None of us are children, Marcus Thompson.” My stepmother is admonishing him. “Before we make hasty decisions, let me add some...facts that might sway you.” I like how she uses *we*—it makes it sound like we’re in this with her.

Razor removes his hand from my mouth and rests it on my shoulder, letting me watch this battle play out in full, high definition.

Although his glower is steaming the air between them, Marcus spreads his hands and waits.

Which is when I discover how much I enjoy watching this man be chastised, a man who recently fucked me into oblivion. A grin threatens to erupt, and I twist my mouth straighter.

“Deliver the goods on this and you and Razor will receive three million pounds to be split between you.”

He barely moves.

“And you will receive extra remuneration, in proportion to the losses your family suffered when their business collapsed.”

Now his face contorts, but I can see his puzzlement beneath the rage. “What? Why? Why now, Emma Bartholemew? After you fucked us over.” He slashes a glance at me, and I get why he might think I’m involved.

My vigorous head shake of denial is barely over before he's addressing her again.

“Well?”

“Would you accept that compensation, Marcus? I am not going to give you any further reasons.”

“I don't even know if I can trust you.”

I want to slap him. *Take it!* But I understand why this must seem a poisoned chalice. You cannot trust her, not in general... but, I guess you can trust that what she says she will do, she will do? That's convoluted, but it sums up my relatives in one word. Our family logo could be a Rubik's cube crossed with a maze.

In the past that meant her almost destroying us.

“I can assure you that my word is my bond. This is a once-only offer. It won't be put on paper. No signatures, no recordings. Only the people now present have heard.”

I have to give my stepmother credit, she looks undisturbed, relaxed, her hands are loose, and her face is in repose. Nothing about her says she's worried.

“So, I get restitution but no reason why?”

“Correct.”

“Fuck. I will never be anything except disgusted by what you did, and I know it was you. I demand an apology at the end—when we return.”

She doesn't reply at first. I watch Marcus' nearest hand clench into a fist.

“You will have one, at the end. Not because I feel I should. I have one life goal, Marcus—reward the worthy. Prove yourself worthy. Do the job, get the reward.” She looks around the room, including me and Razor in her small speech.

I'm not entirely sure what has happened here. Is she forgiving us for the sins and trespasses she once thought we'd committed?

“The past is gone,” she adds, as if it’s some sort of punctuation mark.

With a last brush of contact as his hand leaves my shoulder, Razor strolls to them. “I’m willing to do this if you are, Marcus.”

Marcus grunts. “I’ll do it with one other stipulation. No interference with what I and Razor do with your stepdaughter.”

Me, he’s talking about me as if I’m not here.

“Agreed.” She nods and neither my stepmother nor Marcus look my way.

I’ve become an object to be traded.

Protesting would seem ridiculous, considering the effort I put into making this happen. Besides, I know that what he plans to do with me might be cruel, it might be painful at times, but it will be...interesting. Inappropriate as it is, I’m recalling them tying me to the bed and fucking me, and spanking me, and much, much more.

I gulp and remain seated, invested in whatever comes next. Objecting? I’ve tossed it on my mental bonfire.

“I’m not happy with this,” he continues. “You’ve roped me in, forced this on me. I detest manipulation, especially coming from you.”

She inclines her head. “I understand, but you should realize that all of us are manipulated by those above us and those around us. It is life.”

“True.” Now he looks to me. “And you, Miss Phoebe? Full CNC, from now on. Only Razor will save you from my excesses.”

I consider that, my eyes narrowing. I don’t believe him. I’ve seen him exercise restraint.

I pretend to need time to consider my answer. “I will agree to it, starting when we arrive at this island, when we find out where it is. Just know that I will not be some simpering

rosebud. The investigation into the vanishing women will always take priority.”

“Good. I wouldn’t expect anything else.” His hard, knowing smile skitters tension and a menacing tingle down my body.

“Let the battle commence,” I say as I stand. I bend my knee and raise one booted foot behind me. I lick my forefinger, then run that finger down one of the spikes that sticks out from the side of the boot, and I make a sizzling noise.

Razor laughs, silently, a grin splitting his face.

My stepmother sighs and also rises, uttering a dismissive “Fucking children,” before collecting her mask.

“That is going on my list of your bad deeds.” For a moment, the devil is dancing in Marcus’ eyes, as it was when we played in that bedroom in Spain. The mean but awesome devil—the man who put his foot on my throat while he watched Razor needle my breasts.

The moment melts into a puddle of hot, sticky seconds.

I’m sure he wishes he could come over and do something to me, right now. Instead, he clamps down on his emotions and turns to my stepmother and Sir Greg. “Where are we going?”

Emma tucks the mask under her arm; the snakes protrude and wriggle. “That, we do not know. We’ll look into that image, make inquiries of our members, and get back to you.”

“Wait. I may know,” Sir Greg says, thoughtfully. “I think Bastion has been there. I recognize the roofline and the palms from a photo he once showed me, but not the room. It was not advertised as a Killer Crew event, I think.”

“Really?” Emma sounds as shocked as I am.

“Yes.” My phone was left on the table, and he taps the black screen. “He may know who can get you in.” Then he pulls out his own phone and walks away, calling someone. “Bastion! I have a query. Can you get me an invite to that island you went to last year? A year ago, yes. Good. Good.

Not for me, no. For Marcus Thompson, for Phoebe, who you just saw, and for Razor. When? Okay. Thanks. Send the details through my other phone.”

He ends the call and strolls back.

“Not next weekend but the one after, there is a party. You’re in. Or he’s fairly sure you will be. If they are making snuff films there, if...then we have our place. We will have *them*.”

“Gregory, you are our savior.” He gives her a small bow and a hand flourish. My stepmother picks up my phone and weighs it in her palm, contemplating the dark screen. “That was simple. Now to see if you three can find our murderers, without getting murdered yourselves.”

She has said that far too calmly.

“You make it sound like we’re off to a knitting party, Mother.”

“Well, I suppose it could be.” She smiles, brightly. “If they carve out hearts with crochet hooks.”

How does one prepare for going to a kinky party where any of them could be murderers of one’s friend? I spend the time before we depart saying goodbye to my apartment, having my furniture and stuff I don’t currently need sent to storage, and visiting Seth. Luckily, or not, he lets me stay with him.

Though I dearly need some ultra-hot hacking tips in case I have an opportunity to use them, that’s not practical. I have to choose between replicating the USB-shoved-up-my-vagina trick or doing the same with a spare phone. A phone? Just in case my own is confiscated, apparently.

The problem is that even I have trouble keeping something that large up there. It is a no.

Seth is not Q, and I am not 007.

I decide on the USB, knowing I may have to toss it away in an emergency.

For a week and a half, I share Seth's cramped flat, wondering how I'm going to get through this if Marcus hates me and drinking champers when the sadness needs drowning. The days tick by. I could have been partying somewhere, could've looked for new accommodation, or found a lawyer to try to get my money back. *Try* being the operative word when it comes to the fraternity.

Mother was impressed by my new focus, but I feel rudderless as well as annoyed she praised me in her back-handed way. Even Seth seems to have absorbed my ennui. I hardly see him. As the days ooze past and the departure day looms, I suspect he's avoiding me.

The nightmares are still happening. Most mornings I wake with a thudding heartbeat, as if someone is jackhammering inside my chest.

It's the day before I have to be at the airport, and I'm sitting on a creaky chair, on his small balcony with the rusted railings. I'm observing suburban London life in all its glory, with a headache gnawing at my temples. That might be from the sleeplessness or from my partaking of too much Moët. Below, people walk small dogs in the bleary Brit sunshine. A van pulls up to deliver something and a white terrier pees on its wheel while the owner chats with the driver.

I'm not Rambo, Bond, or some assassin coming out of retirement. I'm a girl who can kickbox and shoot a gun, and also drink like a fish and pole-dance. My last two skills are not ones I boast of. On reflection, I do them to say eff you to my remaining non-blood family—Mother.

Life goes on.

Is that enough? Can we dig up the truth with pole dancing and champers? Maybe if we shoot someone in the dick, we will. I raise my glass to the street and then on second thoughts, I raise it again. "To you, Milli." I'm going to find out soon.

M^{arcus}

Juanda International Airport

The restroom door swings closed behind me, and I emerge into the special lounge the fraternity has arranged for us. Razor and I are sitting close to Phoebe but not beside her. There is a gap between where we sit and the other passengers. We arranged that so we can talk without being overheard. Fourteen or so others are waiting here, dressed casually—men and women in almost equal numbers. If Bastion is here, the one who gave us the heads up, he has not come over to say hi.

My stride is a little awkward at first—not surprising—then I hit the casual gait I want to show. I keep it going until I reach Razor and sit down.

Relieved is the word. It's been five minutes since I violated myself. How many more hours of this?

I cannot believe I just did that—am doing it. Even though I've practiced for a week, shoving a small phone up my ass will never be a good thing, in my humble opinion. Not grimacing is difficult. This had better be worth it.

“You okay?” Razor asks.

I nod, curtly. “Haven't talked to Phoebe yet?” I jerk my chin her way. She has the airport windows and the sunlit runways and planes as her backdrop, and looks stunning, in a yellow dress and black leggings.

“No.” He looks at her. “You wanted to wait until we arrive before saying hello.”

“She made that stipulation at the meeting. Everything starts when we get to wherever we’re going. I’d rather fuck with her then.”

“Okay.” He takes out his phone and starts reading something.

“Stock market? Research?”

“The fuck, no. I do have fun. It’s a novel by John Birmingham—*Shattered Skies*. Quite good, if you like sci-fi.”

I grunt and shift my butt on the cushioned seat. “Maybe later.”

“Your last chance to read an eBook, actually.” Still reading, he points at an attendant with a forefinger he lifts from the phone. “All our electronic devices are going to be confiscated after we land.”

I stare at the man indicated, but I’m not really seeing him. What Queen Fucking O and her IT man predicted will come true. The phone up my ass might be handy if I don’t shit it out too soon. Whether this is worth it for what she’s promising depends on many things. I trust her as much as I would a snake carrying an AR-15.

“Are you wondering, as I am, why all these very rich people have agreed to take plane flights for a day just to go on a kinky holiday?”

“It does seem likely they expect a really good time at the other end.” His eyes are packing a sudden seriousness.

“Yeah. Something you can’t get on your doorstep. Something illegal, maybe.”

“*Mmm.*” He goes back to reading. “Soon, we will find out. Relax.”

Relaxing is impossible due to not just the phone, but to the monster I’m now allied with. I may have sold my soul *and* my ass to Emma Bartholemew. At the slightest sign this is going south or that she has been messing with us, for her own profit,

I will ditch her. Which side of that equation Phoebe ends up on depends on her.

The difficult part is figuring out The Truth. Is there even a murder to investigate? I wish I was certain. Even Razor...

I check him out the corner of my eye. He's still reading, still as calm as a man going on a normal plane trip. Even he makes me doubt. Can I trust him one hundred percent? If this is really some snuff film event, revealing it to the world might unleash a nightmare of epic proportions.

At the other end of a three-hour plane flight on a Gulfstream jet, at a small, unidentified airport, helicopters wait to transport us on the final leg.

We're shepherded straight to the second chopper but are left milling on the tarmac while they load our cases. No one grumbles, even when we are frisked for more devices after they've collected our phones and laptops. It's odd how casually this is done. My fellow passengers are accustomed to luxury and deference.

When three men in black approach wheeling a trolley, and when that trolley turns out to be stacked with hoods, an ill feeling settles. Are we being kidnapped? When they come to us shaking out two hoods, Razor is ice cool. A few of the passengers are already hooded. If they are okay with this, we should be?

Unless this is a show for our benefit? The others might be acting?

Fuck. There is no way to tell.

I draw a deep breath as they lower the hood over my head and bring night to my day. Mouth and nose holes are adjusted, and when they ask if the position is okay, I nod.

This is getting scarier. Whoever organized this event is determined to make it difficult to guess where we are. Somewhere near Indonesia or Australia is my best estimate. Unless we've gone north.

“I wish I knew constellations,” I mutter, not caring who hears me.

My ass phone is getting impatient to see the world, but I sit on it, literally, and I pray for a restroom at the end of this flight.

An hour or two later, we arrive and are unhooded. Our chopper has landed on a pad that connects to a jetty that is connected to our island. *Ta-dah*. This might be a jewel in the middle of the ocean but it’s also a long-ish walk to the shore. No fucking restroom, yet. I squeeze my ass muscles and pray the rescue cord attached to the plastic sleeve hasn’t been sucked inside me.

The island waits, rising from a clear blue sea in a perfect representation of paradise. Fish frolic, flicking their tails beside the chopper pad. Waves are rolling in and frothing at the shore. This is a small, curved bay, with two arms, two forested spits of land, reaching outward to either side. Higher up, gray-black stone shows through the treetops on the one hill.

Where the trees peter out and become the beach, a timber-and-pale-stone building begins and steps upward with the land. The roof is corrugated, white metal that comes to a high peak here and there. An architect who loves a scattered, modern look of varied surfaces has been playing here.

“Welcome to Fantasy Island, though maybe this is Survivor,” Razor drawls from beside me, just loud enough to be heard above the rumble of the waves creaming up the white sand beach.

“Let’s go find her.” *And a bathroom*. After that we can worry about survival, and about fucking Miss Phoebe Bartholemew.

Another helicopter hovers, waiting to bring in more guests. Our chopper rises after we’ve cleared the pad then whirls away, kicking up spray from the water in a wide circle.

Razor points at a huddle of five or six people already partway along the jetty and shouts over the noise of the blades,

“She’s in the yellow dress!”

“I know.” I’ve been concentrating on my own ass, which is probably a crime, seeing how the wind is flicking at the edges of that dress. She’s removed the leggings. Every so often, the wind gusts and reveals where her gorgeous leg joins the sweet swell of her rear, and a hint of black panties. “Fuck.” I let out a sigh. “I, we, can do things to her now. I’m going to need a list.” My imagination is sitting up and sniffing, ready to go on the hunt. “I think she’s giving us a reason to chase her.”

“Tally-ho then,” he suggests. The timber of the jetty echoes dully underfoot.

“Instead of chasing, let’s see what sort of leverage we have.” I approach one of the greeting staff returning with us, a man with a tablet in hand and a stern, square face. “Could you, or one of the staff, run after that girl in the yellow dress and get her to wait for us, there, on the jetty?”

He nods. “Yes, sir.”

“Tell her she will wait there, or there will be an early, and very public punishment.”

“Of course.” The man jogs away.

“Think she will obey?” Razor asks.

“If she runs, we can keep her on a leash the whole time? I’m sure she will love that.”

“I heard some of the others talking. They recognized her. And the ones who don’t know her, soon will. The prospect of watching the stepdaughter of Queen O be degraded, flogged, and fucked in public apparently excites some of them? Who knew?”

I laugh. “Fucking dirty bastards.” Then I shove my hands in my pants pockets and resolve to get into something more tropical soon. I’m already sweating in this heat.

“Indeed. And she is waiting. I get dibs on the first BJ. I think I can *feel* her mouth on my cock, that tongue—”

“Shut up. Asshole.”

Now, Razor laughs. The man is messing with me.

She's let the others go on ahead but is not looking at us. Alone, in that bright dress, with sunshine flaring around her...I swear she might be from a painting. Which makes this seem unreal, dreamlike.

Yet I'm seconds from doing something I've wanted for years. Spain was an entrée, with an unsatisfactory denouement.

This is the real shit.

I kept the collar in my pocket for this first day, this first minute, this first second of our possession of Phoebe. And now my dick is aching.

Then the phone reminds me of where it is. I curse mentally. This was such a stupid idea. This place is probably just going to be a week of kinky mindfucks and bacchanalian orgies. And sadism. Do not forget the sadism.

I can't help but devour her as we close in. My eyes are paying homage to her curves, but she is deliberately not looking at us. This really needs something special, some words said, some ritual but...I'm gritting my teeth because of the phone.

The fucking phone. If no one is getting murdered here, I've tortured myself for no reason.

There is a restroom or shower block ahead, at the start of the jetty.

Halleh-fucking-lujah.

I grab my wheeled suitcase off a porter, then snap, "Bring her to the end of the jetty and have her kneel there," to Razor, then I go on, past her, marching toward that shower block. That was far too abrupt, and Razor must be wondering why. Let him wonder.

I finally emerge, relieved, having taken the phone from my ass and showered. I buried the waterproof case the phone was inside deep in the trash. Thank god the retrieval cord with that

small flared end was still in place. Going to the ER for this would be a hell no.

Phoebe is waiting, kneeling in the sand with her dress demurely tucked close to her thighs, and she's fuming. This, I like. Razor stands over her like some security guard who's caught a petty thief nicking stuff at a concert.

Wearing a pair of surfer-style black shorts I packed and a T-shirt, I stroll to them, having calmed myself. The black collar hangs from my fingers; the gemstones on her new tag glint as it twists. The sunlight bounces off the sand, off the sea, and the fucking sky.

I'm squinting, despite my sunglasses, but I know this will lessen as I get used to the climate. Beads of sweat roll down the side of Razor's face. Even Phoebe looks shiny sweaty, which somehow adds to her sexiness.

"Were you running from us?" I wait for her brattiness to bring her to the precipice of peril. Excuses to punish her shall be extracted, daily, or else I am not Marcus Thompson.

"No." Her pout makes her mouth look fuckable.

"She was," Razor muses before he reaches down and scruffs her with a handful of hair near her nape. Her gasp is ignored, and he pulls her a foot higher and tilts her head upward at a harsh angle. "Yes?"

Phoebe's scowl is epic.

I grin. "It all starts now. This collar goes on you, Phoebe. You're ours."

I show her the collar and that pretty, gem-encrusted tag.

Gently, I turn the tag with my fingers, so she can read the words spelt out in capitals and tiny diamonds against the black background. *FUCKTOY*. One word, because it emphasizes the special degradation and uniqueness of what she is and will be.

Her mouth opens, and indignation blazes from her eyes and from every line on her face.

She says something in a low, girl-growly tone. Razor lowers her to her knees again then leans down and replies,

quietly. Then he kisses her. Her hands unclench, and instead of small tight fists, her fingers straighten then re-curl, wavering. She doesn't touch him. Her indecision shows in that small gesture.

My hardness, my vow to endlessly fuck with her, both mind and body, softens in that moment as I watch him kiss her.

I'm wishing my mouth was there.

I step in and clear my throat. It irritates me, how I'm prepared to kick Razor somewhere, painfully, if he doesn't move the fuck away.

Phoebe

“This isn’t CNC,” I whisper harshly, furious at how they’ve appropriated me without asking me *anything*, and because this is secondary to finding out Milli’s fate.

“It is,” Razor says, and his fingers are still twisting my hair, hurting me. “Everything we do will be for you as well as for us. Tell me this isn’t turning you on, sweetheart.”

Then he leans in and crushes my mouth to his, with that hand controlling my hair, holding me in place. His mouth moves on mine. Kissing is so intimate, so perfectly enthralling. We share the same heated air. The sounds. The wetness. The taste of him as his tongue thrusts in and explores, as he angles his head. The assurance in his taking, the way his hand shifts and tightens against my scalp when I softly moan. *Fuck. It’s all good.*

He’s said a truth I cannot avoid. This is for both of us.

He keeps kissing me, even after Marcus says something then thumps his shoulder. Then he pulls away. I’m struggling for orientation, for where this is going. For how I ended up on my knees on a beach somewhere unknown.

I did want this, long ago, I remind myself, before I let myself fall into a puddle of self-derision at Seth’s place.

As he straightens, Razor shifts his hand to circle my throat in a subtle caress, then he locks his eyes to mine before he

releases me.

I slump a little, my knees spreading in the sand and with my hand steadying me to the right, sinking into the beach. Marcus is before me with that collar ready, only now he's the one looking eminently furious. A giddiness takes me as I see what's happening. He is jealous of Razor. A hint of that was apparent at the meeting but here, now, it may as well be written on a banner floating across the sky.

“Done?” he asks Razor.

“I thought you might like a taste before you collar her.” His hand lightly brushes over my hair then moves aside.

“In my own time.”

The seconds languish while Marcus studies me, and people are walking by behind me, but I cannot turn to look because I'm caught as much as he is. I want this desperately now. Resistance can be fun, but I will submit to them because I don't want to miss out on one second of this...whatever it is.

I also need answers about Milli, but these two desires can co-exist.

The collar remains in his hand. The text on that tag is beautifully rendered but wearing it will mortify me, and he knows it. “What did you say to her?”

“She said this wasn't CNC. I told her it is and that everything we do here will be for her as well as for us.” His mouth twists. “Then I asked her if holding her while I kissed her and lectured her was turning her on.”

I'm blushing, but maybe the summer heat will disguise that.

Marcus barely moves but around his eyes crinkle. “I'd say it did.”

“We match well.” Razor spreads his feet a little further. The sand creeps up the bottoms of his boots. “Her kinks are ours, so far. Aren't they?”

He's addressing me. I swallow, feeling my teeth shift on each other as I wonder how to answer. Then I say it,

begrudgingly. “Yes.”

“After you walked out, she said what we did to her in Spain...pleased her.”

He’s spewing what seem like my secrets, and I frown. “Can I get up now?” And why am I even asking?

“Jesus, fucking no.” Marcus steps in and waits for me to do something. The challenge is there.

I lick my lips and then, I subside. I’m curious, and I want to feel his hands on me, fastening that collar.

“Seems we’re in the good-girl phase again,” he says, wryly. Before I can think of a comeback, he goes to one knee and begins to circle my neck with that collar, to buckle it on, his thick fingers sliding over my skin, along my jaw. Then he runs those fingers up my neck to my mouth.

Heart thudding, I part my lips enough for him to slip his fingertips inside. He brushes them along my lower lip, and the world shushes while he does so, barely telling me of the seagull noises and the wash of the sea as he hooks those fingers into the corner of my mouth.

His voice is soft in my ear, and the hairs on the back of my neck rise in goosebumps. “Now you are ours. Our little fucktoy for a whole week. Ours to fuck. Ours to bite.” And his teeth graze my neck. My breathing stutters, stills. “Ours to needle, to tie up, and cage. Ours to show off to the others here, stripped bare. My turn,” he adds and then...and then he kisses me.

Oh, my. I find myself holding him, my hands on his back, clutching at his muscles through the shirt.

When he rises, I’m breathless again, and aching, and I’m imagining all the perversions that this week might hold.

“Come.” He holds out his hand, and I take it. He pulls me to my feet then picks up his luggage. To my surprise, Razor has my other hand in his. We continue our journey to the main building ahead, using the timber walkway.

Everyone else has passed us, which is a blessing. It means no one else gets to hear all the rude suggestions being batted back and forth by these two men.

My men? I guess they are, temporarily.

By the time we reach the grand entrance, where glass doors allow us to see inside to a wide-spaced, two-story foyer, Marcus and Razor have decided I'm not allowed to wear panties with a dress, for the entire week. They release my hands and wait, arms folded, clearly expecting me to strip, here, now.

A receptionist sits behind a broad desk watching us through the glass, and another staff member waits just inside the double doors. This is almost a minor event compared to what I did and wore in Spain.

I hum for a second, staring back at them.

Fuck this. I may as well give in now. I fear they will bend me over something and spank me otherwise. So far the tiny USB has stayed inside me, and isn't annoying me this time, but being spanked could be a problem. I'm sure they'd not resist fingering me.

My heated face is still an issue, but I reach under the dress at the back, edge down my panties, then I wriggle them lower and down my legs.

Marcus holds out a hand, and I give them to him, trying to ignore the hawklike attention I'm getting from the door attendant. We have a voyeur, it seems, who likes watching me be embarrassed. This is like a game, a very sexy, arousing, mind game.

And it is so fucking addictive it frightens me.

Phoebe

Reception is barely a formality and after we give our names and sign in, our room keys are handed over. Razor spends way too long reading the fine print before signing, of course. I can feel the assessment of the nosy doorman as I waltz away, deliberately wagging my ass. My nakedness under the dress feels odd and wicked, but no one here is going to mess with me, not while I'm escorted by these two guys.

I may as well amuse myself by teasing him.

The layout is straightforward—a central hallway with branches to left and right at each level. We are on the second terrace upward, reached through that central hallway that has a short flight of steps between each level. The ceilings are high; the air is cooler than outside but not freezing.

“They must have generators for all this, and a cellphone tower?” I muse as I walk past the men where they've stopped at the door to their room.

Razor snags my elbow, and I'm jerked to a halt. “You're with us in here.”

“Na-uh.” I show the room keycard, wave it before Razor. “Mine is there.” I have to try them. I'm actually nervous about us all staying in the same room, yet I've awakened to the potential in this situation. Pushing their limits is my new, exciting game.

“Hah. She thinks.” Marcus unlocks their door.

“Cute but no. How can we torture you if you’re in another room?” Razor tows me with him, and though I try resisting, he’s much stronger, and my wrist burns when I yank. Sighing loudly, I cave and follow them in, towing my bag.

The bedroom is large and furnished with standing lamps, bronze erotic sculptures, and a super-sized bed covered with a speckled aqua-and-mauve quilt. A door-sized gap between the bedhead and front glass wall must lead to a bathroom.

To the left, a low wall separates this bedroom from an area with sofas and a coffee table. Opposite, across the expanse of the bed, a set of room-spanning, glass doors gift us with a spectacular view. I put a knee on the bed and crane forward so I can look. Beyond the doors is a timber-decked patio then the view drops over the resort rooftops and the treetops to the deserted beach, and then to the ocean.

I feel a quiet peace in this moment.

If Milli came here, a thought whispers in to say, perhaps this was a good place...

A good place to die? My brow wrinkles at that jarring addendum.

“Unpack,” Razor says.

The men are commandeering space but leaving me some in the long cupboards. I start to unzip my bag and cannot help but eye them surreptitiously. I’ve agreed to this, really, being here with them, being theirs for a week. This is unpredictable, and if anything like Spain, I may get my mind blown as well as my body groped, fucked, turned upside down. This is a realm apart from my life in Chelsea watching the Thames and all the detritus of civilization float by.

I shake out the dresses I’ve brought and begin to hook them into the coat hangers then hang them in the cupboard. I really should visit the bathroom ASAP.

“We can have a talk after this.” Marcus picks up a sheet of paper from the slim, greenish table that sits beneath a half-length mirror that’s attached to the partial wall. Green-washed,

carved dolphins leap across the back of the table. Released from his hand, the paper floats down and he taps it. “Itinerary. Daily. We should keep this secret, Razor?”

“Yeah.”

Their amusement is clear. “Secrets, boys? The staff will tell me.”

“Boys?” Razor pushes up an eyebrow then throws the last of his clothes into a drawer, slams it shut. “We definitely should have a talk.” He comes over to squeeze my ass. “Rules? Do we need some, Marcus?”

Marcus grunts. “Thinking.”

“Slow, man, slow.”

As if they haven’t had time to think.

Rules. If they want me to kneel for them daily or some shit, what will I do? Choose one: spit in their face. Not likely to go down well. Obey them? Boring. Run away? Hmmm, this needs work.

Marcus never even bothered to hide that paper.

I drop my shorts, my little skirt, underwear, and my tops into the drawers. The thick jacket and leggings stay in my case. Mercifully, they warned us this place was hot. I’m not sure I’ll get to use all this considering this is a kink event. Should I ask? Nope.

My first rule: don’t ask them permission for anything.

Casually, I amble toward the glass frontage, aiming to read the paper as I pass then continue to the bathroom. The room is dead quiet. Razor comes up behind me and wraps his arm around my throat, pulls me into his body, kisses my ear.

“Where are we going? You’re not trying to read this?”

“Read what?” I whisper back, side-eyeing the paper. I get to DAY ONE: *Dinner and introduct*— before he angles me away.

“Shower time. Dinner is in an hour.” With his arm still about my neck in a mild headlock, he grabs the paper,

flourishes it at Marcus then flings it backward. Where it goes after that, I'm unsure. "But first. Talk. And undress and maybe sit on my cock while we do that."

My dress is pulled off over my head almost before I can blurt, "Maybe?"

I'm mostly naked. And...I flick my gaze along the glass front, searching.

There are no curtains here, nothing to shield our room from the outside, though the glass might be able to be darkened. When he undoes the clip on the bra and slips that off, too, I put my hands over my breasts. I know it's silly, but I turn, frowning and presenting my rear to anyone out there. He's dropped to the bed and is sitting there, dragging off his shirt, kicking off shoes, then sitting up to pull off his pants.

"I won't make you suck on me." The lack of humor in his expression, and words, is disconcerting. "But you will sit on me. Not so you can come, or me, but to get things established. First of all, you want this. If you don't..." That trailed-off question is intriguing, telling even.

Do I want this?

Marcus has crawled over from the other side, and he doesn't even undress, apart from already being shoeless. He just unzips and takes out his erection, and he waits, sitting upright, cock upright, too—startlingly so.

I'm left standing. Staring at two large, erect dicks. "Fuck," I mutter.

"Think of it as signing on the dotted line," Razor explains, still humorless, and he takes me by the hand, yanks me closer, until I stagger forward and am between his knees.

His hands are on my ass squeezing, caressing, and I'm nonplussed at how rapidly my body is saying yes, try it, *fucking try it*, like he says. My body is close to desperate. My head is catching up.

Can it hurt? I must be mad because I climb onto the bed, and onto my knees. I swish my hair backward over my shoulder and edge closer.

“There you go.” Razor adds quietly as he hitches me higher then lowers me. Both of us are silent as he enters me, and I’m sliding downward, gasping a little. I’m swearing as he opens me with that cock. It feels glorious, as it tends to, this first penetration. Marcus leans over and kisses my shoulder then my arm before Razor wraps some of my hair about his fist.

“Wait. Wait!” Fuck. That USB. Clearly his dick hasn’t noticed it all scrunched up and jammed into my cervix. I grimace. “I have to go to the bathroom.”

“Why?” He sounds suspicious.

“Because.” I’m not meeting his eye and my hair gets twisted, painfully. “Ow!”

“Why? Again.” He thrusts himself hard and high so that I squeak and push at his thighs, trying to escape that dick. “I can feel something in there, and I’m guessing it is not an AWOL IUD, because you don’t have one.”

“Fuck.” I close my eyes. Does it matter? “Okay. I smuggled something in and forgot it was there. Let me remove it? Please?”

Marcus is laughing so hard he’s going red, and I shoot him a vicious glare, but Razor has grunted agreement. He lets me inch myself off him. I push my fingers inside myself but can’t quite reach it.

“Fuck. I can’t. Can you?” I give Razor a hopeful and begging look. He tips me onto the bed on my back. When I open my legs, he pushes two fingers inside, and I’m trying to not see this as sexual, but it is. After some uncomfortable rummaging and poking, he hauls out the package.

He tosses it aside. “A USB?”

I nod. “Just in case I get the chance to... You know? It has code on it.”

Marcus is still laughing. I haven’t seen him this cheerful about anything for ages, the bastard.

“Not funny.” I tell him.

“Oh you have no idea how funny it is. Now can we fuck her?”

“Absolutely. *You* will explain later, Phoebe.”

I try to look contrite as he picks me up again. With no warning, he guides me onto his cock with perfect accuracy, then drops me the last inch. He even shoves down on my thighs. I gasp at the shock, at my pussy being abruptly penetrated and desecrated by impolite dick.

I sink my nails into his legs and shudder. Then...sensations slowly blossom, flowering into pleasure. My clit swells. My nipples tighten. How is it his cock feels so much better than his fingers?

“Stay,” Razor grunts, his eyes locked to mine. “No moving. I’m making a point.”

I’m pulsing around him, I know this, clenching down. The deep intimacy of this man’s cock being buried to the hilt has my heart thudding, my eyes fluttering closed, and I’m claspng at him wherever I can find him. It takes seconds, several of them, and I’m almost counting those heartbeats, before I can swallow, close my mouth, and focus.

“Yes?” I ask, my voice huskier than would be good, if this were truly some document-signing-on-the-line thing. “Your point is?”

“Inside you,” Marcus drawls. He tugs on my hair while Razor has cupped my right breast and is using his thumb to almost brush my nipple. “Spain was very regimented. We tied you up, fucked you, needled you. This is different.”

“Uh-huh.” A scintillating reply.

I’m getting tempted to move with Razor teasing me like he is, almost touching my nipple, but mostly not quite doing so. Mostly.

I’m hypnotized by his thumb, then Marcus tugs my hair again, and I shake my attention free, kick my brain into gear.

“Go on?” My pussy is rhythmically grabbing onto his cock, and I’m sure he can feel it too.

Razor squeezes my breast, hard. Pain rises and there is laughter in his eyes as I groan and squirm on him. Entranced, mouth opening, I stare down at his hand and at where we are connected—cock in pussy.

“You’re a pain slut,” he observes. “Nice. However, stay there. As Marcus said, this is different. We think we should play it by ear, just we need to settle that none of us is aiming to harm the other...except for the good things, like piercing, needles, maybe whipping.”

I’m sure my eyes are wide. I know I haven’t blinked. I nod, and his grip lessens then firms again. His other hand arrives about my throat. I close my eyes.

“That’s distracting,” I whisper, but I’m happy like this, feeling, everything in tiny details. If Marcus rose and decided to fuck my ass while I was here, I doubt I’d protest, and I’m imagining that now.

I open my eyes, grimace, and finally Razor lets go of my breast. “So. No harming. I have kickboxed, and I promise not to use it. Or my poledancing.”

“Okay.” He nods, smiles. “Marcus?”

“Ditto. Though I’m more into Japanese swordplay. I promise not to stick anyone with the katana in the hallway. We need to be careful if we play any rough games—if you run or fight us, we must all be careful.”

Fighting them? I nod, processing that idea, even though I knew CNC might be *anything*—whatever one chose to make it. “There was a sword there?” I can’t recall any.

“Yes.” Marcus nods. “A *soshu* katana.”

“It is a fine one,” Razor agrees. “From the thirteenth century.”

I grunt in reply, curious but rather more engrossed in what we are doing than I am with a sword from back then.

I’ve finally, sort of, grown used to just sitting on him when Razor slaps my thigh and lifts me off his cock. He nods at Marcus.

This is so weird, but even that extraction is enough to make me want a cock back inside. *Withdrawal symptoms*. I smirk at that thought. What my pussy wants, it gets. I crawl to Marcus then go to seat myself on his lap, my knees spreading as he pulls me over. His cock pops inside, he pulls me down onto him, and plants himself deep, with a *thump* that jars my teeth before I am aware it's about to happen.

“Fuck!” Again? These two.

I'm grimacing because the last inch actually hurt, for a moment, and I bow my head, panting. Slowly, I straighten. His hands are still forcing me to sit there, with my ass as flat to his thighs as possible. Then he wraps both arms around me, and we're hugging while connected.

“Good girl,” he murmurs. “Fuck indeed. You got what we said? No kicking hard, nothing damaging. You can run, hide, but the name of the game is to enjoy this.”

I suck in a few breaths, my face buried in his shoulder, and I nod. “Sure. How will you know though?” His cock feels as if it's swelling, pulsing, now and then.

“How will we know if you're enjoying it?”

“Yes.”

*R*azor

I'm lying on my side, propped on my elbow, when she asks, how we will know if she's enjoying it. "Just tell us if you aren't. Loudly and in detail, and use that safeword." I add the latter because we will, naturally, ignore a simple screamed *fuck off* or *stop* or *no*, or even *you're hurting me*. Those are in the normal purview of CNC. "We know enough of your kinks to give us ideas."

And what was that safeword? I have to think hard to recall it.

"The things we can do to you, the places we can go." With the edge of a fingernail, I etch a wavering line up her thigh, leaving a red mark. Her leg is already quivering, locked as she is to Marcus. Her face is smooshed into his chest, but she opens one eye and blinks at me, petulantly. I smile back. She pokes out her tongue.

"Just enjoy this, and don't damage us," Marcus repeats, unaware I've just indulged in some minor sadism.

"This place runs on voyeurism though. Don't expect us to let you hide like in Spain."

She mouths a swear word, a fuck, I think.

"There is someone on the jetty watching you, right now, watching you being a little slut, creaming on our cocks." If only there was. The angle is wrong.

“*Nooo.*” She buries her head in Marcus again, and he laughs and fucks himself in and out of her, a few times, then flips her over onto her back but stays inside her, with her wrists pinned high, beside her head.

She seems stunned and only grinds herself upward. Those little sounds she makes, when he does some more forceful but slow thrusts while he holds her down...the wet sounds of her arousal as he shoves in. *Christ.* I could survive on those noises for a week, jerking off to them.

“The last rule, the rule that rules all the rules, is that we can change them, any time we want to,” he tells her, slamming into her again. His teeth are showing. Marcus is looking nicely demonic.

She tries to get loose and writhes under him, twisting, her arm muscles straining. It gets her nowhere. Finally she huffs and gives up, subsides, breathing hard.

“There. And not one, real protest from you.” His assurance sounds evil, even to me. Then he covers her mouth and keeps his palm there, watching her while he keeps, leisurely, fucking her. And she’s watching him back as if compelled to, making muffled pitiful grunts. When he slips that hand lower to pin her throat to the bed, she still watches him, her breasts upthrust by the position of her hands above.

They have a past these two. It makes me wonder what is going through their heads. It used to be revenge in his. Revenge mixed with lust and nostalgia. Not anymore? It can be hard to tell with him.

Watching them, I’m getting jealous.

Sometimes, she reminds me of a pretty, delicate doll, while at other times, like a second ago, when he switched positions and trapped her under him, a fury surfaces that throws everything to the winds. She looked like a warrior ready to kill.

It’s a contrast I like. The predictable is boring.

I rise and shove at Marcus until he pulls out of her, leans to the side, and gifts me her wrists. We swap places. Once I’m

between her legs, I penetrate her slowly until I'm fully seated inside her. She's whimpering, clearly wanting more. Only then do I take her fast and hard—making her gasp when I go extra deep, and moan and flex her fingers. I switch and hold those wrists in one hand like Marcus did, then I carefully brush some hair from her eyes.

I wait for her to come down from the high of fucking.

After a while she asks, quietly, her chest heaving, “I thought, we weren't really—”

“Coming? Having full-on sex? We're not.” I'm messing with her, even if orgasms are off the plate.

The plans on that paper for the dinner mean I want to wait. Playing later, only making her hot and aroused now, is enough. I pull out and slip down her, making sure to keep her wrists trapped either side of her butt.

Then I kneel and give her clit some quiet but thorough attention with my tongue. Her thighs clamp in on me, squeezing.

“If you do that much longer...” Her face screws up then she shuts her eyes and shudders, as I keep sucking on her swollen clit. “I will be, you know?”

“Coming? You won't.” I rise, free her hands and wipe my mouth.

She lies on her back and her tongue dips out. She's panting, watching both of us, back and forth. Marcus is being lazy and pulling on his dick, but without much dedication.

The swell and heavy muscles of her thighs—for a woman—remind me. “I'd like to see you kickboxing, one day.” And I really would. It'd be like death ballet and elegant, I figure.

“Oh?” Her eyebrows rise. “It's a date.”

“Good. Now, go shower. We're all doing it together.” Same as that night in Spain. The shower is big and an open one with no screens or doors. I can soap her up. Once in the shower, I think I'll suck on her a few more times, to get her really horny before the dinner. Marcus can play with her other

end, that pretty mouth. I'll let him hear the moans and kiss her while I finger-fuck her and tongue-tease her clit. My cock swells some more at the thought.

I wait for her to obey, and she leaps up then pads ahead.

She puts a hand on the front glass wall, half-turns. "I have to pee first."

I watch her ass sway as she moves away with the shine of her arousal showing on her thighs. Marcus has turned over in bed and is doing the same—watching her.

"Nice fuckable ass." I cock my head, and for the first time I notice the glass outer wall extends into the bathroom. This place really loves voyeurism.

Without looking back, Phoebe stops to hold up a hand then one finger to us and I laugh.

"Our ass," Marcus adds, then quietly, "Our fucktoy."

I like the sound of that, with the *our* added. "Want to watch her pee?"

"No!" she shouts.

Marcus laughs silently, chest shaking. "If it fucks with her head, I'll try most things."

"You *are* a bad boy."

"Guilty." He flexes his stomach and jack-knives forward, bouncing off the bed onto his feet. "Incoming!"

I hear a string of swearing and am sure she's trying to pee as fast as possible. I grin as he marches in, and she shrieks.

The rapport between them is obvious. The years of hatred are melting away quickly in this hothouse of sex and kink. If both of them aren't hoping for something deeper and longer-lived than a few days of fun, I will be shocked. A pity I cannot say the same for myself. I wish I could.

M^{arcus}

I run a comb through my towel-dried hair, adjust my shirt, then pick up the binoculars I packed because one never knows when one will need them. Especially on a mystery island. The phone I smuggled in is already deep in my pocket. “I’m going out for some fresh air. I think I’ll look at those ruins.”

Phoebe is slipping the long black dress over the crotchless and equally black bodysuit. That lingerie has holes in all the wrong, or right places. Razor bought it for her. The slinky dress won’t be on her forever, tonight, and I cannot wait to see her reaction, but now... I need a little space.

“Don’t be too long.” Razor taps his vintage Rolex. That watch is worth sixty thousand pounds—I sold it to him a year ago.

“I won’t.”

Phoebe turns. She’s picked up some bright red lipstick. “I’d come with you,” she begins, “But this dress would suck walking through the trees.”

I nod and leave. The door sighs behind me and clicks shut. I need to get my ducks in a row as they say, as well as my kinky ex-girlfriends.

Phoebe has volunteered me into investigating a possibly murderous cabal as well as hooked me into fucking her brains

out. The recent bed scene springs back into my mind in vibrant color and sound, along with the scent of her pussy.

I adjust my crotch and keep going up the central hallway. The small timber door at the end opens onto a path that meanders into the jungle behind the complex. From the sounds of splashing beyond a translucent green wall with wavelike impressions, there is a swimming pool here, to the left of the path. I run my fingers over the cool glass as I walk by. I'll explore it another day. Throwing Phoebe in would be fun.

Jungle and ruins first.

The track is surfaced with gravel and stone and winds up the hill, between palms and towering pines. I elected not to wear the suit jacket to this dinner, and even though it's close to five PM here, the outdoor heat and humidity are stifling. I strip off the shirt, too, leave it draped over a small sign pointing upward. My shower might have to be repeated.

According to a leaflet left on our coffee table, this name-redacted island has been owned by almost every colonizing empire. The French, Dutch, British, even the Germans. The ruins above must hark back to them? And to have had any population at all, there must be a fresh water source.

When I emerge into the clearing crowning the top of the hill, the view is spectacular. Apart from the trees that get in the way, I can see for three hundred and sixty degrees. Every direction shows only the sea with no sign of other land. To what must be the west, wispy pink and orange clouds float against the sky and the lowering sun.

To my right, a cell tower rises another ten meters. A vine winds its way up one of the metal legs, sprouting bright purple blossoms.

This place is pure tropics. A sign down at the beach underlines that.

**DO NOT SWIM HERE. BEWARE OF CROCODILES
and JELLYFISH.**

We are not in Finland; that much I do know.

I have about twenty minutes before the dinner starts, but I doubt they'll penalize me if I'm late.

I switch on the phone and wait for it to start up.

No signal. Nothing in any direction. I don't even have the option of an emergency call. Of course, that might improve. I switch off the phone. If I find a charger, I can leave it on. Since they've confiscated our phones, why isn't the tower turned on for the use of whoever owns this island?

I step over foundation stones that are blackened, cracked, and mildewed. The circular arrangement makes this likely to be the remains of a stone tower. Though a padlocked, steel trapdoor in the center makes me curious as to what it leads to, the roar of waves draws me to the other side. There, someone has erected a block and tackle—perhaps to do restoration work.

I climb the stone blocks below the block and tackle. Then I step down onto a broad, grassed area beyond, where a railing guards a precipice. Past the railing is a rocky outcrop then an abrupt drop-off. The wind rises off the ocean and ruffles my hair, gusts in my ears, deafening me.

Only I, the sky, and this land share this space. And the disorderly sea where it smashes into a small cove far below, sending froth and water sluicing upward. It curls into a slim gap where sand shows briefly before it's submerged by onrushing water which is soon sucked outward. The suction and submerging comes in cycles, though the tide barely covers the last few feet of the sand.

The wind flutters again and I squint outward, across the sea's darkening surface. I should return before the sun sets. If I wait too long, they'll send out a search party. I'm not sure of the official sunset time.

In case I missed something, I use the binoculars to scan the horizon. Still nothing. I haven't come up here to discover new lands. Idly, I watch some of the waves crash ashore.

Phoebe was always fun to mess around with at high school. We had ideas back then, a future together, maybe, or so

I was hoping. Wanting into her pants was only part of my designs. I wanted her, full stop. Then her brother died at her hand, or rather at her foot, apparently. Then everything went to shit.

Here I am, obeying her stepmother on the chance she follows through with her reward and brings back my family's fortunes. I'm never going to feel right doing this. I've already relentlessly pawed through all of my decisions, even brought it up with Razor. Nothing will make this feel right. Not that part of it. Helping Phoebe, yes, that is good. I hope it doesn't come down to guarding her from anything bad here, but if she is correct, it might.

And if we find nothing, what will her stepmother pay me? Nothing?

That part worries me. I need an alternative if I find out Emma intends to betray me. But how will I know if she does? How? I wish I had insurance.

None of us is a detective. We might find *nothing*. Absolutely nothing. Which makes the other reason for being here is even more legit—making Phoebe mine, again, with or without Razor.

My fucked-up problem is, I'm not sure I want her for more than a trophy now. Which makes that wrong too. I'm fucked if I fuck her and fucked if I don't. I snort at my logic, wipe away the tears brought on by the wind blasting my eyes, then raise the binoculars again.

Down below, on the sand, something catches my attention.

It is white and it has eyeholes. Part of a small skull has washed up onto the bed of sand and it's looking up at me. A chill lodges in my stomach. Shocked, I stare at it, focusing for what seems ages, watching it be half washed out then shoved in again, as if the sea is torturing me on purpose. Finally it's drawn out and never returns.

Five or ten minutes must have elapsed.

Do I tell someone about this? What are the chances they'll launch a boat or call the police, wherever they might be?

Small to zero. What if I tell the murderer without realizing? And I couldn't even snap an image. I have no proof.

I did see it, though, and from my knowledge of preserved skulls, I'm thinking that was a female's skull. It's BS of course. I don't know the sex of it. All I know is that someone died on or near this island and their body or head has been in the water long enough to be picked clean by the fish and the crabs.

That could be a fisherman or someone who fell off a cruise ship. It might be a well-preserved piece of a British sea captain from the nineteenth century.

It could also be a woman killed here. Or a man.

It could be anyone. It might even be a grand stinking great clue.

This fucking island will be the end of me.

I watch for a little longer just to be certain it's gone before I give up and return down the trail.

When I reach our room, carrying my shirt, it's obvious I need another shower, and the dinner started fifteen minutes ago. I start to rush then decide to take my time. The one thing I do know is that the fun will happen later in the evening. Before I leave, I grab the handcuffs from Razor's kit. I lay them flat and folded over my palm, and trace the circle of shiny metal, then I stuff them in my pocket.

Now I'm ready. Just wish I could fit the spreader bar in my pocket too. *Hmmm*. I grab a few other small things before I leave. I can be the fifty shades of MacGyver.

When I enter the room where the dinner is being held, a man is up the front, announcing the start of the CNC activities and extending a hand to the table where Phoebe and Razor sit.

"First come, first served!" he announces. He gets a laugh from that, though it looks to me as if no one has come, yet.

Well then.

I pause in the doorway.

Dessert is arriving. Everyone has their own private table, with the tables arranged to form a ragged circle. Since I decide to cross the empty middle to ours, every eye swivels to watch me. Even the servers, bearing trays of creamy and indubitably delicious desserts with wafers of chocolate lodged in them, stop and stare.

Why do I feel like I'm a dying cowboy in a desert who's just walked into a conference of vultures or bloodthirsty vampires? Voyeurs, that's why. And none of them has had the courtesy to start getting naked first.

Because Phoebe is the new main course or appetizer? Or the sweetest victim.

The air of expectancy in here is strung taut and waiting to crack. The skull in the surf washes about in my memories. How many of them are privy to murder? Some? Many?

We need to blend in to get anywhere with this inquiry.

I'm fine with that. I nod to a few as I pass them and note that Bastion is the man with the mic. Phoebe's mad stepmum showed me his picture. His blond hair is swept back with a few carefully arranged unruly pieces left to make him look wilder than he probably is. As I approach the table beside ours, I wink at a pepper-haired older man and his sub who seem about to get busy. He's put her to his knees beside him and has his hand on his fly.

I reach our table.

"Razor." He nods at my greeting, straightening from where he was saying something to Phoebe, up close and personal. "Why is she still dressed?"

It's a valid question. My chair is on her other side, but I ignore it and drag hers out, while she protests, of course. Then I scoop her off her chair and place her above Razor's lap, kissing her once—because she's impossible to resist this close—before I drop her.

He has predicted my move and pushed his chair outward to accommodate her.

The drop is a little high, and he grunts at the impact.

“Her wrists,” I snap, and she whips her head around, startled by my abrupt move into bondage, domination, and possible sex.

“Fuck, Marcus!” Razor might be annoyed by the dick-jarring drop, but he’s grabbed her wrists.

I cuff her hands behind her. The clicks as the cuffs fasten down are so very familiar and speak straight to my dick.

Cuffs fastening are like a trumpet to a centurion on the frontline of his legion.

Like the clack of the starting gate to a racehorse.

Or the snap of a belt on a woman’s naked ass to a Dom.

Crap. I realize I forgot her dress. I may have to cut it off her, and I don’t have scissors.

Phoebe

Razor kisses my hand then lifts his fork to my mouth before he says, quietly, “Taste this.” He slides it between my lips in a display that feels sexual—as if I’m being fucked by this fork.

I chew the morsel of steak, swallow, and nod when he asks if it’s good.

Marcus still isn’t here. His chair is a mute reminder of his absence. Dessert is next, and the violinist finishes his rendition of something classical. My stepmother would slap me for not recalling it. I’m feeling more than a little horny, courtesy of our bedroom frolics, and the fucking, and of Razor handling me whenever he wants to.

His hand slides over my thigh and he squeezes the muscle, his fingers far too close to my pussy. I’m hyperaware of my lack of underwear and have to draw a breath to steady myself.

Is it shameful that I’ve discovered a love for being kissed in public while he fingers me, discreetly, beneath the table? I will be leaving this chair wetter than it was at the start of this meal.

A man steps onto the stage that’s beside our table, and the violinist bows and walks away, unhurried. He is serene and has perfectly acted the part of a musician performing at an upmarket restaurant, as if this is not some secret island that may have been the location of snuff films.

The food was divine too.

Rock lobster, wood-roasted in saffron rice was my main, though I made myself eat cautiously, in small quantities. Whenever I looked up from eating, I found someone staring, as if they wait for me to do something. I don't think I will like what that *something* might be if it goes beyond discreet fingering.

Though what I have allowed is a few rungs up the ladder of exhibitionism compared to my past. I am thoroughly shocking myself.

Razor chose porchetta with buttermilk braised leeks and spiced roasted cauliflower. He also picked a scotch fillet steak with field mushrooms for Marcus. We shared some rather than let it remain untouched. I can't fault the food, only the people.

I suppose I'm a novelty.

"Do you know any of them?" Razor nods at the fifteen or twenty people in here. There seems more than arrived on the helicopters.

"I vaguely recognize a few from financial deals with my parents when I was a teenager. Assholes, every single one," I add quietly "The nice ones were the ones whose names I memorized, not these. None of these."

"It figures."

"What do you think Marcus is doing?"

"Whatever he wants to. He must have come across something useful."

"Or he's been murdered." I say it lightheartedly, but I am getting fretful.

"That's a little too morbid this early in the week."

I only shrug. "You haven't seen my dreams."

"I know. Later, I'd like to hear you describe them in detail. I'm curious about why you think they're connected to reality." He gestures vaguely. "To here."

“Okay.” I take a sip of water though it’s not my favorite beverage. “You’ve probably heard it all by now.”

The champagne is good. I had a glass each of two varieties until Razor frowned and waved away the rest. Making a fuss here seems...dangerous, and I will allow his interference. Just this once, I promise myself, though I know that if either of my men insist, I may be doomed to a non-alcoholic island getaway.

I’ve given them the controls to my body.

And now Marcus stands in the doorway, and the speaker says something inane that I don’t register but he gestures at Razor and me.

The vanilla crème brûlée that Simon spoons into his mouth, at the adjacent table, is making me jealous, but now he clicks his fingers, instructing his submissive to descend to her knees. I don’t remember this guy from my past, thank god, only from entrée when he leaned closer and introduced himself.

His eye contact as he reaches for his fly makes me uneasy. If I’m a voyeur...and I think I could get into it, this creepy man is still not on my watchable list. The waiter returns and deposits my precious crème brûlée before me then goes to Razor.

They discuss something I don’t catch because I’m preoccupied.

Marcus has strolled the entire length of the middle floor to reach us.

I incline my head and smile when he stops next to his chair. He greets Razor then adds, “Why is she still dressed?” as if that’s a given. He yanks out my chair.

Stunned, I find I’m holding the dessert fork as if it might make a nice weapon for disemboweling the man, then he scoops me off my chair. The fork rattles to the floor. Despite my squealed curses and wriggling, Marcus drops me onto Razor’s lap.

Instructions are flung and more *fucks* erupt from Razor, while my hands are captured even as Marcus acts as if he's a god arrived to bless or chastise me. I stomp on Razor's foot with my high heels, kicking and wriggling as they hold me down. Behind my back, metal ratchets down onto both my wrists.

Razor hisses. "Fuck, calm those heels. Or else."

When I growl and buck against his arms where they're wrapped about my breasts, he leans in and bites. His teeth sink into the muscle above my shoulder, lighting me with pain. That, combined with how he has me caught in the crush of his arms, and with Marcus noisily shoving back the table so he can seat himself on the edge to watch...

I fight for a few seconds longer, but every breath, every heave of my chest pushes against the iron-bar rigidity of Razor's arms, and I shudder and give in. With the toe of his shoe he dislodges my high heels so that they clop to the floor.

It is not these men who concern me, though, it's the others, watching us.

Bastion stands midfloor with his arms folded, looking lecherous. I know him. He's Blondie, the arrogant one who had his boot on the table at the frat board meeting, long ago, in London. He's also the one who coughed up an invite to this island event to Sir Greg. And if he's powerful enough to be the MC...my slightly random thoughts trip over each other. What is real here?

My eyes must have been darting about because Marcus says, "She's worried about our watchers, and here I am drooling over the idea of you penetrating her asshole while I do other filthy things to her."

"Fuck you," I murmur. "Just...spank me or something?" I'm begging, but really this scares me.

He whips a napkin off the table and twirls it around my head, then knots it at the back into a blindfold. I can't see anymore.

Strangely, within a small amount of time, it helps calm my panicking heart.

“We need to give them a show,” he says, whispering in my ear while he works the dress out from under me and Razor helps him. “You want this to work? Us investigating them? We need to make them happy.”

I get that. I see the logic...and also, he’s thumbing my nipple through the dress while Razor is now indulging his teeth with other pieces of my neck and shoulder. I’m getting bitten, everywhere, and my toes are curling. My eyes close, slowly, beneath the blindfold. I wrap one foot partway around Razor’s leg and hear him chuckle against my skin.

The dress is pulled free of my butt and Marcus takes it higher, over my face, down my arms. The diaphanous fabric ends up rolled and gathered at my back, above the handcuffs. Which means, I’m only wearing the bodysuit that barely covers anything important. It has no crotch, and one of the men is methodically tucking the bodice beneath my breasts, baring me to everyone in this room.

My clit wakens, again. Not that it ever went to sleep.

These men are demons.

Nice, debauched, fuckable demons.

Is it terrible that I want them inside me?

“Did you find anything at the ruins?” Razor asks, as if we are only doing normal things.

We’re not. We absolutely are not. He cuddles me closer, his arm around my throat. “You said I could fuck her ass?” He’s worming his hand under me, probing, tilting me sideways so as to make me easier to access.

“I did,” Marcus answers. “I found nothing much of interest. Here, on the other hand, is this girl called Phoebe. Need lube?”

“On the other hand...” Razor laughs. He pulls his hand from beneath me. “Yes, I will.”

I hear the squelch of lube being squeezed out.

I'm beginning to think dessert is not going to be eaten tonight. I swallow and try to flinch my butt away from Razor's slippery fingers.

"Not there? Please?" I whimper as one finger finds the spot and probes and circles.

"It's going in, you know this. Wiggle all you like." It slides into me, and I gasp and stiffen. "There. What's *nothing of interest?*"

"Sky. Ruins. A padlocked trapdoor in the middle. No, I didn't force it. Make her sit on your cock while I make her come." Marcus takes one of my very erect nipples between finger and thumb, and it feels as if he's crushed it flat. I keen, trying not to be loud, and buck forward as I try to escape him. Razor tightens his arm about my neck.

A second later, a clamp squashes onto my nipple. *Now*, it's crushed.

This time I scream, briefly. And he's whispering to me as I jerk and shudder and hiss. "You can take it. You can take it." I can, I realize. Then he does the other nipple.

I decide that swearing *fuck* over and over is enough, and I'm panting hard and doing that even as Razor grumbles out more words.

"I'm not trying to fuck her sitting. Do your thing as you wish to. I'm putting her here."

I'm raised and bent over the table, settled with my clamped breasts pressing into the hard surface. It is a lesson in pain, and in not squeaking endlessly.

I'm distracted by the sound of a condom packet being torn open, then a cock tries to enter my pre-lubed asshole.

"Relax, sweetheart. It's happening and in front of this worked-up crowd. Half of them are fucking each other now anyway."

A vibe starts to buzz and is touched lightly to my clit. Marcus is under the table. Automatically, at the rise of pleasure, I spread my thighs, just a little. Then even further as

its pushed into me firmly. My thighs start to tremble. I'm opening my mouth and making noises I will be ashamed of later.

Marcus is definitely evil.

I'm stiffening and ready to come, despite Razor trying to shove his cock in and the small pains as it's worked into me, stretching my entrance. I can almost *feel* my ass relaxing as the buzz from the vibe rumbles deep, turning me on so hard, so quickly. I gasp into the tablecloth, my feet are pushing at the floor, and I'm going up on tiptoes.

The gap below the blindfold cloth lets me see, some. A spoon tinkles as it gets pushed aside.

I'm groaning, and so fucking close to coming.

Then...said cock pokes me, breaches me and fucks itself inward, sliding all the way. The vibe is switched off, and I'm pleading for it again, begging, even as Razor finds a smooth rhythm and rams himself in a little harder, pulls out, in again. The table moves with each thrust.

Then a tongue is applied to my clit.

"Oh god!" I splutter into the cloth, wetting it with drool as my face is squashed and slides. My thighs are parting, flexing, stiffening as I'm forced toward orgasm, again, and everyone is surely watching us, or me.

"That's my girl," one of them says, and that evil mouth sucks and keeps sucking, the tongue tip lying on my clit.

I buck and shudder one last time, bowing upward off the table as I come and come. The handcuffs are hurting my wrists because I'm straining.

Then...I'm lying there recovering, panting hard, and the men switch places. Razor has pulled out of me.

"It's me now, girl," Marcus says, spearing in as I let out a small yelp. "Be good for me too. I need to come inside this hole and make it mine."

"Ours," Razor says. The squishy sounds are from his hand, I think. He's jerking off? A moment later come splatters over

my face. “You can christen her ass, tonight. I did her face.”

His hand smears across my cheek, wiping off come, and I’m thinking he’s cleaning me, until his fingers turn up, pushing inside my mouth.

Marcus is still deep in me, but I’m done. I’m exhausted, and my muscles feel too weak to let me do anything more than open my eyes and breathe. Then, he grunts and grabs both of my ass cheeks, strangling them as he jams himself in until he’s fully against my ass. From the way he’s staying there, with his thighs pushing at me, from the sensation inside, he’s coming.

“Suck me off, Phoebe. Clean me up, and I’ll take off those clamps,” Razor reminds me.

“Fuck,” I mutter, somewhat raggedly. “I forgot those.” I wince, because now I feel them. My nipples were being twisted and tortured, and I let that fade into the background. I push out my tongue and lick at him, lazily.

When I’m finally allowed upright, the clamps are plucked off, and I stagger into Marcus. I think it’s him. Then he says something like, “Good girl,” and I lean on him until he holds me.

“Don’t take the blindfold off, please? Not until we—”

“Sure. I’ll carry you out. Let’s go, Razor.” He easily picks me up with his arms beneath me, then starts walking. I’m still handcuffed but I guess that can wait.

Does it make any difference that I cannot see the crowd who might have watched me being fucked? I think so.

Maybe another day I will look and watch others, after being exposed like this. Maybe. I don’t have to. After all, there are three of us, and I’m certain Marcus and Razor enjoyed themselves. Smiling at that thought, I wait until I hear the dining room doors shut.

By brushing the blindfold against Marcus’ shirt, I nudge it partly off my eyes then peer up at him. “Tell me the truth. Did you like what we just did?”

“What? Are you delirious? Did you hear what she just asked?”

“I did.” Razor has removed his buttoned shirt and slung over his shoulder. The dark make-up around his eyes has run. He definitely could be a fallen angel, or a stunt man for that role. I’m still admiring the shift of muscles on his stomach and the metal in his pierced nipples, when he reaches over, grabs some of my hair and says, in a lovely, deep, threatening voice, “This one needs spanking for daring to say that.”

Marcus chuckles. “I agree. Soon as we get to the room.”

“Or here? Here is good. I’m using my belt.”

“*Heyyy*. I disagree, you two. No. Absolutely not!”

But Razor is already unbuckling his leather belt, and I’m wondering what this will feel like and how long they will suffer my loud objections.

Which is how I end up temporarily gagged while being punished with a belt in the middle of the hallway. I’m still handcuffed and on my knees with my head down, for my back has a shoe pressed to it by one of the men then the other as they take turns. A staff member goes by and slows to watch before continuing, and so does a couple that emerges from the dining room.

I watch them pass but I’m too enthralled with what Razor and Marcus are doing to care. The belt strikes are harsh and painful but the aftermath of each one leaves my skin humming.

They leave me lying on my side afterward, spaced out and weirdly happy.

“You came fast in her ass,” Razor says. “Also, want room service? You missed the steak meal.”

“I was jerking off while I used the vibe on her and ate her out. Besides, who wouldn’t come fast, in there.” He points a thumb my way. I stick out my tongue, determined not to lose my rebellious streak.

He walks to me and whacks my ass, one more time, then gets out a handcuff key.

“And yes, room service. They’d better have it. Are you going to behave for us?” Marcus stares down at me where I’m lying cuffed, my face smooshed to floor.

“As much as I can be?”

“Ha. It’ll do. I need an excuse to punish you anyway.” He unlocks the cuffs and helps me up, tucks me under his arm, kisses me on the top of my head. “Let’s go, dumpling.”

I eyeroll at the *dumpling* label. If he keeps using that I will be thumping him.

Razor gives me an odd look, then joins us. He sneaks his fingers into mine then he turns, halting our procession. He cups my face with both hands and kisses me until I’m sighing and kissing him back, using tongue.

“You’re happy?” he asks. “With everything?” He reaches behind me and gently touches my rear where the belt must have left wheals.

I nod and go up on tiptoes to give him another small kiss. Then the three of us keep walking as if that was nothing.

It was definitely something.

I’m filthy dirty, sore, and half naked, but definitely feeling the glow of profound happiness. And what an unusual day this has been. For me, anyway, if not for them. I snuggle my head into Marcus’ side and adjust where my fingers lie within Razor’s hand.

Marcus scrounges up room service, though it’s basically leftovers from the feast we just attended. I’m guessing the kitchen staff and other employees are somewhat limited here.

When they wheel in the trolley with his scotch fillet and dessert, I’m reminded of my own lack of dessert. And champagne.

“Can we get a bottle of—” I start to ask the woman as she reaches the door.

“No!” Razor shouts from where he’s sprawled on a sofa trying to get something on the TV. “Don’t bring her any.”

“But—”

“No. The great Razor has spoken.” Marcus shoos the woman out and shuts the door.

“Then I get some of your dessert?” I’m hoping here but he shrugs.

“Half only.”

I pick up a spoon.

“When I eat my half.”

“Fine.” We’re all in our underwear, and I’d never dare wear this in front of room service in a normal hotel. I join Razor on the sofa, and Marcus brings his plate and starts sawing through steak while Razor channel-surfs the widescreen TV.

I’m stuck between the two men and this, sitting between them looking for a movie to watch stuff, it seems both mundane and exhilarating. I haven’t found my feet, haven’t truly touched ground in this relationship, when Razor slides his arm behind me and pulls me close.

“*Bullet Train?*” he asks.

It’s a mad ensemble of people and plotlines, and I’ve seen it before. “Hey. Why not?”

He presses play.

“I was thinking that we should talk about the island. About what Marcus found. What we might look for next?” The place cannot be that big?

“And that USB. We need clarification on what your pussy was doing with one.” I was rather hoping he’d forgotten that. Marcus angles his head to smirk at me then leans back into the sofa, still chewing. “Tomorrow morning though? I think we’re all going to be jet-lagged. We should sleep.”

“Yes.” I can see his point.

“That is absolutely a good idea. The next thing they have scheduled here is tomorrow afternoon. We have time.” Razor tosses the remote to the low glass table.

“Which thing?” My voice squeaks. I’m a little in awe of these two. I love being made to do things but am I going to survive a week of kink with them, let alone a possible murderous someone who lurks among us? “What is this *thing*?”

“You’ll be fine.” Razor squeezes me against him, breathing warmly in my hair as he speaks. “Sore and bruised, with a few needle holes in you, but fine. You’ll only need a wheelchair for a few days when we get back to London.”

I snort at his description. “Lord preserve me. As they say.”

“More like Marcus and Razor preserve you.” There is amusement in Marcus’ voice.

Bullet Train has started, and I decide to watch and say nothing more. Besides, Marcus is right, I am feeling dead tired. Being dead anything here seems bad, and then I yawn, as if to show how correct Marcus is.

Later that night...

I jerk into reality, screaming, though my mind is also still walking in nightmare territory, and two arms pull me back down onto the bed. Two men tell me I’m going to be okay. Razor and Marcus. They ask me, quietly, whether it’s the nightmare, and I answer *yes*. I refuse to talk more than that. It’s late, I’m used to it. “Questions tomorrow,” I murmur.

Having them with me though, it’s good. I worm closer to their heated bodies and feel their strength, hear their breathing. My hand fits over someone’s hairy forearm when he reaches back to touch me. I leave my hand there.

I could get used to this.

Though I really wish the dreams would stop. If we work out what’s going on here, they’d better stop. I remember to whisper a promise to Milli, like I do some nights.

Knowing I have them beside me, I fall back into sleep, only slightly haunted by flitting memories of the purple-haired woman dying.

Phoebe

A rush wakens me—the rush of being filled by thick cock. The unique and awesome thrill of being slowly fucked into the mattress while I’m still asleep draws me into the morning. I must have turned over onto my stomach, or they turned me, because the man’s weight presses rhythmically onto my ass as his pushes in, pulls out, then spears his cock back in and stays there, inside my pussy—and throbbing, I can feel that. He stays there, near motionless apart from that throb, perhaps because I let out a gasp.

My hands shift as I clutch the sheet beside my head.

I might be imagining the throbbing.

The side of my face rests on the corner of someone else’s pillow, and I blink, focusing.

One of the men is between my spread-open legs. He smacks himself down, his cock going inside me to the hilt. After a few more forceful pumps, he lowers himself onto my back, squashing me. A pillow is laid across my face. With his elbow leaning on one end, he keeps me under it, then he starts to fuck me harder.

His grunts mingle with my own sounds as my arousal surges. It’s impossible not to be turned on when my pussy is being forced open, stretched, fucked down.

I try to push up with my palms, but his solid weight on my entire body makes moving impossible.

I can still see sideways, I can still breathe, and Razor is to my left.

“She’s awake.” He’s merely inches away and puts his thumb to my mouth, pushes further until it meets my tongue. I suck on him, then bite the tip, my eyelids wavering as Marcus drives into me. Razor grins and stuffs more fingers in my mouth until I’m stuffed full at both ends.

With another loud grunt, I feel the swell of come inside, the tension in his muscles, and a final grind on my pussy. Then Marcus pulls out. “Yours.”

The fingers are no longer in my mouth.

I’m still processing what’s happened when Razor grabs my ankles, hauls me to the end of the bed, then starts to fuck me. For some reason I dragged the pillow with me, and I put it back over my head. I like the darkness, like hiding under it, while they’re doing this to me.

There is a beautiful satisfaction in simply being filled with their come and taken, in being the female they come inside because I’m theirs.

I like this. I *love* it. Objectification, I guess.

I groan as he gets even busier, more brutal in his thrusts, and I stick my ass higher, wanting more of this.

“No squeals?” he asks, firmly into his methodical violation of my pussy.

“Keep going.” I’m surely muffled under this pillow, but I guess he hears me. Besides, I open my thighs and waggle my ass to encourage him. I’m huffing at the violence and passion. I can feel my arousal leaking out, then being shoved back into me along with Marcus’ come.

Razor lifts the pillow, stares.

“I like this,” I whisper, just to be clearer.

“I fucking noticed.” Then he unleashes a flurry of hard thrusts that make me bounce on the bed. He swears, stiffens, and releases jets of come into me. I lie there after he pulls out, my eyes closed. I’m quietly absorbed in enjoying the aftermath, and breathing, just breathing.

Never ever would I have thought I had a fetish for being used and filled.

When he pulls out, I stay where I am.

Marcus throws himself down next to me, shifts some of my hair with his forefinger from where it covers my eye, and I smile sleepily at him then roll into his chest for a cuddle.

We lie together like that until Razor joins us on my other side. “Shower?” he asks.

“Soon. I like just being like this.”

“Full of come?” He smirks.

“Yes. Kind of.” I pick up his hand and suck on a finger, same as he had me do. “Yum.” And being here, between them.

Phoebe

This is an infinity pool where the waterfall edge spills into nothing, and the side forming that edge is glass. I dive under and look through the glass over a drop that runs all the way to the ocean. Bubbles dribble from my mouth. I'm praying the glass doesn't crack. It's an expensive affectation, considering how few will visit this island *and* bother diving below.

I pop back up and rest my arms on the edge, bobbing a little due to the minor waves kicked up by Marcus swimming lengths. A fringe of decorative palms cuts the sky with their serrated leaves, draping shadows across the rippled surface of the water.

The pool is mostly empty—I guess it's way too early in the morning for most of the deviants in this place to be exercising or even lazing about in the sunlight.

Treading water, I survey the paved area, the many alcoves and hiding places, and the lawn-covered strips. Simon the pervert has somehow dragged himself from his bed. Pervert covers everyone here, I remind myself.

He's lounging in a pair of crotch-hugging, budgie smugglers. I've always found that term for swimmers weird. We stole it from the Australians, so I guess that explains it. The outlines leave little to the imagination. Not that my vibrantly purple bikini conceals much. Due to the water's coolness, my nipples poke at the fabric.

Apart from Razor, Marcus, Simon, and I, there are only two women. A redhead with an irregular bob cut, a menagerie of bright tattoos on her arms, and what seems to be her Domme. She lies on her stomach. Her hands are beneath her chin. She's naked and is getting something painful done to her and, every so often, her mouth twists. Her companion appears to be sewing red ribbon into her back.

It is pretty. I decide not to inquire. It might give my men ideas.

I stroke my way to the opposite edge, where Razor rests among our three sun lounges.

I lever myself onto my forearms and peer up at him. "If we stay too long in this sun, we'll be pieces of burnt toast." I mumbled it, my chin bumping on my wet forearms as I spoke. "Is it nine yet?"

"Almost."

Marcus swims to my side then hauls himself out, dripping, the water polishing the lines of his muscles in the sunlight. I admire his heavy legs and the swagger of those hips as he pads over to grab his towel, leaving a trail of wet footprints on the pavers.

My lounge is the middle one. The remains of our continental breakfast sits on a table behind the lounges.

Once I'm out of the pool and have dried myself off, I eye the last pastry. "Dibs the last croissant."

The men sit on the edges of their lounges, facing mine. They shrug but, as I pass, Marcus snags the side string of my bikini bottoms. I halt, frowning amiably.

"We've decided the no panties rules means no swimmers either."

"Off with them." Razor agrees.

"Oh. You..." I glance about and it is clear no one here will give a fuck, except maybe Simon. Is it worth arguing? No. I eyeroll just to register my attitude. "But we are discussing strategy?"

They nod, like a pair of bobbing dolls.

Quickly, I strip off both top and bottoms, letting my breasts free, giving the men a pair to ogle. “You’d think I’d never let you see these before.”

“I get amnesia over tits,” Marcus says.

“Is that what does it?” Razor smiles.

Though shaking my head, I pull my lounge back a few feet, so we have a rough circle. Then I seat myself. Now their eyes lower, looking at my slim arrow of pubic hair.

“If I spread my legs, are you two going to be able to think?”

On the other side of the pool, the redhead with the laced back is grinning at our antics while her Domme, or whatever she is, looks over too.

“More spanking or the belt?” Razor suggests to Marcus.

“Discussion, please?” I clasp my hands together, truly begging.

“I can probably resist using your ass for something for half an hour?” The derisive comment comes from Marcus.

“You have an hour,” Razor says, and I’m unsure if they’re joking but, we have a window.

“Good. Now. The agenda.” We’re far enough away from everyone else, I think. They shouldn’t be able to hear us.

They’d better not be able to since what we’re going to say might put us in danger. Anyone here might be involved. Could Simon be a murderer or those women?

I hunch over, resting my forearms on my thighs, then casually point a finger and indicate our fellow guests. Quietly I ask, “Is this the best place to discuss this?”

“Well.” Marcus considers the question. His legs are spread broadly, manspreading like men do, and he picks up his towel and scrubs it through his damp hair. I consider staring at *his* crotch, just to, well, point out the double standard but, no. “If

we were worried about bugs, here is less likely to have them, and there is background noise. So I vote for here.”

“Right. Agreed.” Razor pulls his lounge even close to ours. “First. That USB?” He waggles his eyebrows.

“You would ask that first. Simple.” I open my hands. “My friend is an IT expert, and he codes. That USB will help us extract relevant info from a computer, if I find one, then send it to the internet, providing it is connected.”

“What if there is no internet? It just stores it on the stick?”

“Some. I’m not sure what or how much it stores.”

“So that’s your pussy drive covered.”

I groan at Marcus’ lame joke, then Razor speaks up.

“I have something new. I almost forgot that a waiter said something to me at the end of the dinner, then I found this tucked under my plate.” He reaches back and pulls a small, folded note from his shorts, unfolds it. “I don’t know what this is, except for a list of two letters. Here.”

He spreads it flat then stares at it for a second longer, as if there is something symbolic about this paper. I might be overreaching there. Razor holds it out so we can read it, in the middle between our chairs. A printed column runs down the page and he keenly eyes me. Does he expect me to say something, see something?

One pair of letters stands out and I touch the spot. My hand is shaking, which is stupid. This may not mean anything.

“Hey, it’s okay.” He squeezes my hand in reassurance. “I noticed that, Phoebe, but it is only two letters. They might be initials, but they don’t have to be.”

“I guess not. Still M.D.” I murmur. “Those are Milli’s. And all of these are crossed out.”

“That doesn’t mean she’s dead. Even if this is her,” Marcus hurriedly adds the latter.

I only grunt, and he gestures then beckons. “Come here.”

Muttering, “You just want me there because I’m naked,” I go to him and sit beside him. The lounge creaks.

Marcus wraps an arm around my waist. “I admit you being naked is a plus.”

“Moving on,” Razor says. “The waiter said this place is scaring him, and that he was leaving me a note. I didn’t see him put this on our table though.”

“He said that? Wow.” I shrug. Marcus’ arm does feel good around me. I lean into him some more. “I missed it too. I couldn’t see past the blindfold.”

“Thank you, Sherlock. So we have a weird list and a scared waiter. I guess that’s it until I can ask him what this is. Marcus, the ruins up there, behind us, you didn’t say much about it last night.”

“It was quite a hike getting up there.” His voice rumbles directly to my ear from where I’ve momentarily rested my head on him. His skin is damp, but so am I. Whether intentionally, or not, his hand that was at my hip drifts lower to cup the side of my ass.

“Should we go up there too?” I think I will anyway, with or without them. “This island must be small. Is there much on the other side past the hill?”

“Just a sheer cliff and some small inlets that’d only drown you if you made it to them. The surf would pull you under. Maybe to the right side of the hill, there could be a path? I didn’t look there.”

So much about this island seems connected to death. Or to kinky sex.

Marcus keeps going, listing things as if he’s trying to remember what he saw. “So there was that padlocked trapdoor, pretty much in the middle of the foundations of an old tower. A block and tackle that is modern. Nothing much else.” He shakes his head, clearly thinking. “Nope. That was it.”

“If we force the padlock...” Razor muses. “No. It would be obvious. Maybe leave it until the last day here.”

“Yes. Or if either of you can pick a lock, without tools?” The men shake their heads in answer. “Hey, just so you know, I’m glad you’re willing to believe me on this. A nightmare isn’t much.”

Marcus turns and looks down at me. “Confession time. I’m not a great believer in the paranormal and there is also what your stepmother said. They have part of a film. And your friend is missing.”

And her initial might be on a death list. “I can’t fault you. I wasn’t a believer until this. I’m still not sure I am or want to be.”

He nods, soberly. “Understandable. I’ll keep an open mind. If anything else tees up with your dream, you might make me a believer. Razor? Thoughts?”

“About psychic dreams? I’m on the fence, teetering. I know more about Phoebe’s stepmother. Emma Bartholemew is hard as nails. I’ve known her for years.” There is an intensely serious tone in Razor’s voice, which is new. “I guess I trust her? Though I know both of you have reasons not to. She and Hulk are...were a big part of the CNC frat being functional. I’ve seen wealth fuck up so many of them.” He smiles at us. “Sorry. I’m just working through my thoughts.”

“Well, you still came here. Thank you. I guess I should talk about my nightmares.” Marcus’ fingers have ended up curled over my thigh and in my lap. I slap them, lightly. “No. Not now. Down, boy.”

He leaves them there, and I try to pry them away. No luck moving them either.

“Jesus. You do ask for it, girl. Keep going. Nightmares, remember?”

Razor is politely staying out of this. Or he’s voyeuring, considering the raising of one eyebrow.

I sigh and give in. “They come almost every night. The room it happens in seems below ground? The manacles and the stone table are there, same as in the photo we recovered. The number of men watching varies. I see them from the back.

I think they're men, but who knows." I stare past Razor, trying to gather all the info from my memory. "They don't always wear hoods, but the woman always has purple hair."

Razor nods toward mine. "So why did you dye yours to match? That's tempting fate."

Like I might be the next person sacrificed? "It felt right. I was honoring whoever it was died. Keeping them alive in here." I tap my finger on my temple.

"Okay. Let's assume I believe, for now. Were they using any weapons? Knives. Guns?" Marcus pauses then continues, "Any tattoos on anyone? Marks on the wall?"

"Nothing." I shrug. "It's a dream. Even I think it weird that I'm obsessing over it... Rough stone walls though?" That detail seems new. I might be extrapolating, mixing up details I saw in the photo.

"Uh-huh. So is that it? Have we covered everything?" Marcus swivels at the waist, shoves his hand under me, then lifts me fully onto his lap and looks as if he wants to kiss me. His lips brush my temple, my hair, warming me, and I shiver.

I study him, narrow-eyed. Arousal is impossible to suppress when we're like this. "I knew I shouldn't have gotten naked."

"But you still did it."

Razor stands. "Are we at the bending-her-over-something stage?" He looks around, perhaps checking for suitable benches. I place my finger across Marcus' mouth as if shushing him.

"You pair are going to lose your kink card if you keep being this vanilla." I've never used that term aloud, only typed it, and I'm hoping humor will distract them.

Hell freezing over is statistically more likely.

He snaps at my finger, bites it, then releases it. "Razor, I do believe our Phoebe is complaining about not being tied up and used as a cum dump while wrapped in plastic, or needled."

"That can be fixed."

Thank god I haven't mentioned what that Domme is doing.

"Wait!" I wriggle as Marcus stands, and he growls at me to be still, or he'll drop me. "There was something I wanted to say." I glance about. The commotion has attracted the attention of everyone else here, so I speak softly. "Next event, while everyone is thinking about other stuff, we should explore the places that are not guest rooms. Kitchens and offices? Storage rooms too."

"Maybe. That is a good idea, but it could get us thrown off the island, same as forcing that padlock. Let's shelve it for the moment." Marcus starts to walk.

I frown. What else can we do that qualifies as investigating?

If we find anything here, it won't be laid out in full view. And I think we all understand that murderers don't hand you the clues and take selfies with you. Well, Simon might?

"Hey, Razor. I meant to ask you where you got to earlier this year?" Marcus half-turns, swinging me. "You vanished for half the year."

Razor is often the becalmed ship in the middle of emotional storms, but now I detect a hint of regret or sorrow in the downturn of his mouth.

"I almost married a woman. It fell through."

Fell through? That must be a condensed description of what must have been traumatic?

Marcus stops walking. "Sorry to hear that."

"Me too." Though really, I feel left out of this conversation. The men have known each other for a long time. I am, by comparison, a bug splattered on the windshield of their travels.

Marcus hefts me, rearranging me in his arms, then briefly kisses me on the mouth. He has sex on his mind, and I'm mired in maudlin thoughts. I blame the list that was handed to Razor. It must mean something and, like they say, when you hear hoofbeats think horses not zebras.

Murdering horses, in this case. Fuck, I'm definitely over-reacting. It was only two letters.

"Not here?" I plead with Marcus when he eyes a picnic bench in this pool area. My pitiful pout works, and he keeps going toward the gate.

"We are going to have to get you over this lack of exhibitionism. Back to our room then, pronto."

"Yet here I am, naked."

"But without cock inside you." Marcus tsks.

"Tonight," Razor says, cryptically. "Tonight will do it."

I do not like the sound of that. I sigh. "Not more fornicating in front of everyone?"

Though Marcus scoffs at my F-word, neither of them answers me, but I can read the room.

I'm beginning to wonder if the generators here run on come and orgasms.

Phoebe

A parade has been planned for tonight. I'm told this once the hour it's supposed to begin draws closer. A secret like that can only be kept for so long before it has to be told. I'm supposed to wear some diaphanous slave girl costume. Already my head is boiling with minor annoyance. I may like being forcibly dicked down by these guys, but roleplaying like that is never going to be my thing.

Which is why I sneak away on the pretense of going to admire the beach.

Although this white, cotton-dobby dress minus panties may not be climbing gear, I did slip on some gym shoes. I'm checking out that set of ruins with my own eyes. And after that, I'm going anywhere else I can, before the men catch up to me.

The island is small, so being found is probably inevitable.

On second or third thoughts, after I close that rear door as quietly as I can, I decide to explore the right-hand side of the hill. The path that goes straight up the slope is terribly visible from below.

If there are graves here, they will be on the less trafficked parts of the island. If there has been more than one person murdered. If.

Everything we are doing here is based on ifs.

If my nightmares mean anything.

If snuff films have been made here and people were killed.

If they didn't simply throw the corpses to the sharks and crocodiles.

If Milli is really gone.

The back trail that goes from the resort to the hill also passes the pool enclosure. I'm hoping the men don't decide to check on me at the beach too soon. Earlier in the day, a large crocodile swam past in the shallows near the beach, its dark shape rippling against the sand in the clear blue-green water. The croc was a monster at least five meters long. That it ventured here, in the middle of the ocean where there seems nothing for it to eat, is apparently not that unusual, according to other guests.

Going there at night for a moonlit stroll would be foolish.

Then and there, I decided to only swim in the enclosed, very artificial pool.

The track splits to the right quite early, and I jog along it for a while since it is quite flat and even. Although it continues around the base of the hill it seems to end at a slender beach, after which the rocky shoreline takes over. I sit and rest on a grassy knoll, using my dress to shield my skin from the small rocks. Grass stains may be the least of any damage I suffer here. Dozens of thin shrubs with tiny pink blossoms scatter themselves between where I am and the top of the hill, but I can easily see through them. Much of the island's flora seems to have scrunched its leaves and branches smaller, as if hiding from the sun. I don't blame them. I'm sweating, and I've only come a short distance, and it's late afternoon.

The ruins would have been a more interesting bet, though I'd have risked being seen far too early. I can only see the cell tower from below. There is a ledge of rock below the top of the hill. That and the glimmer of sunshine on metal makes me think there might be some sort of railing up there, where there should only be cliff face.

A padlocked trapdoor would have to go to a room, and such a room might have a window in the rock face? I will have to check that out, too, but not today.

I head back to the resort and creep in through the door. By now, they must be wondering where I am. Likely, they will look for me out the front, worried I've wandered too close to the water.

That thought makes me nibble my lip. What if I panic everyone?

Well, I might, but I needed to do this, and what I'm planning next.

I head for where I think the kitchens might be located. This area would be less searched if they are yet searching. The lack of phones makes telling time difficult, though some guests have thought to bring watches.

The sound of cooking, muffled voices, and the clanging and scraping of metal pans and implements tells me I've found the right door. The sign on it says STAFF ONLY.

Silently, I push through then follow a narrow corridor that bypasses a kitchen and six or seven staff who are preoccupied with their work. Two doorway-sized openings need to be sneaked past but at the end is an actual door. A stainless-steel door.

I pull and it opens, revealing the thickness of the door. The blast of cold air, the insulated seal, the frozen look of everything on the shelves, this tells me I've found a cold room and not some devious lair.

Even so, I am here. I may as well check it out. I wedge open the door with my shoe then double check my shoe won't be squashed flat and allow the door to seal me inside when I release it. Then I turn proceed, gingerly. My one bare foot is freezing. I've seen all those stories about people sticking their tongues to frozen surfaces and tearing off skin.

I should go. I hold my foot off the floor while I give the room one final examination. Shelves, boxes, a few swinging

corpses on hooks, but they're obviously animals and not humans.

Then...

I see a landscape of round, frozen things. Eyeball-sized round things in a bowl. I hop closer, tempted to touch the metal shelf the box is on, but I don't. Those *are* eyeballs.

“Fuck.”

And behind the bowl is a tray of severed fingers. Have I found the souvenirs of a serial killer?

Shocked, I stagger backward, manage to bump the door and it opens. Trying to regain my balance, I half-fall backward and right myself with a palm slapped to the wall.

“My shoe,” I whisper, and I stoop and snatch it up. Who can I tell?

After popping on my shoe, I spin to begin my stealthy escape and find myself face to face with Marcus and Razor. A staff member brings up the rear, perhaps as reinforcement, or maybe they told my men I was here. He might even be the guy guarding the reception door when we arrived—Panties Guard who watched me remove my underwear.

I need to say what I found.

Is it safe to do that in front of him? A kitchen staffer pokes their head through the far doorway to the left then ducks away, clearly more interested in food preparation than a lost guest.

The door wheezes shut behind me. I open my mouth to speak, and Razor dangles the black collar—the one with FUCKTOY engraved on the jingling tag.

“Oh,” I begin.

“Yes, oh.” Marcus leans a hand on my shoulder, pressing me down. “Kneel.”

I lower myself to my knees, because it's easier than arguing two different things at the same time. I even raise my head so he can fasten the collar. As he buckles and adjusts it, his hands touch my neck, here, there, sending frissons of

excitement cartwheeling down my spine. I should be truthful to myself. I gave in because I wanted to and not just to avoid confrontation.

Slowly, deftly, he buckles it, admires me and the tag before he lets go and steps away. “What were you doing here? This is a strange place to hide.”

“You know what she’s doing,” Razor says dryly, with an undertone that hints at our ongoing detecting.

“Yes.” I swallow. “That. Also, there are eyeballs and cut-off fingers in this freezer.”

Now they look interested in more than collaring me.

Phoebe

“What and where?” Marcus gets in the first query and steps around me, except the guard beats him to it and opens the door, disappears inside.

“I have this!” he shouts back, his words French-accented. He has a small mustache too. This isn’t that first panties-eyeballing guard. “I have the answer.” He emerges, smiling, and rolling in his hands are three of the frozen eyeballs. He picks one up and opens his mouth, bares his teeth.

And I know how stupid I’ve been in that moment. These are not real.

“*Bon appetit?*” He bites down and slices the eyeball in half with those white teeth. “*Miam*. These are frosting sugar or glaçage.”

Dammit. I’m mortified by my mistake. This is a freezer attached to a kitchen. Why did I leap to that conclusion? The gloomy lighting in there that cast a yellow hue over everything? The horror movie theme running through my mind? Those are my excuses, and they’re lame.

Marcus goes inside, and I hear him moving things before he, too, emerges bearing an eyeball and a quizzical expression. He samples the confectionary and swallows, pulls a disgusted face. “Sorry. Too sweet for me. Why do you have these?”

A chef has joined us in the corridor. “For the celebrations when you have your horror parties, of course, you fools. Now, get out of my kitchen.”

“We’re going.” Razor attaches the silver-colored leash to my collar, gives it a tug. “Come, little fucktoy.”

And that there is the worst thing he could have said and done. I’m instantly blushing hot. I don’t know why, but most likely it’s that the audience is not made up of guests, and this isn’t in the privacy of our room. We have a guard who smirks and looks like he should be twirling his tiny mustache, and an annoyed chef.

I slink out past them, following Razor with Marcus by my side. The pair of them are wearing actual tuxedos with ties. I side-eye them after we enter the main hallway. “Fancy.”

“Indeed.” Razor glances back at us then halts beside where an overnight bag has been left against the wall.

That looks like Marcus’ bag, and the man retrieves it. “I have something for you in here, Miss.”

Miss Fucktoy. That label may horrify me. It also says I’m theirs, and I guess I do like that implication.

The dining room is around the corner, but are we going there?

“You, on the other hand, will be non-fancy, especially considering you missed the parade. What should we have her wear, Marcus? Naked girl attire with collar and leash, or is there some other way that we can punish her for dragging us all over this place?”

“I’m thinking.” Marcus is leaning against the wall looking deliberately nonchalant. “The slave auction may have begun, but we could sell her to someone else.”

I shoot him an alarmed glare, hoping that he’s joking.

Razor has wound in the leash, making me move toward him.

His hand is at my mouth, his large thumb is pushing aside my lips and levering my teeth apart for access. In grouch

mode, I resist. He smiles. With the chain wrapped over his fist, his dark-blue eye make-up, and his tattoos, it's as if he's some metal-encrusted Pict warrior zapped here from the past. All of this, paired with his formal attire and his dire concentration as he studies my face...inside, I'm melting.

I open my mouth. With my tongue, I lightly touch his thumb, leaving the tip wet. His gaze intensifies.

"Suck." His gravel voice is underpinned with lust. The man clearly has a fetish for this, and I'll bet he's thinking of his cock while I'm doing it.

I suck on him, once, and I'm so tempted to keep going, but then I pull away. I've remembered why I am here. "Wait, please. Before we do this."

"This?" He takes my throat in the *V* of his hand, squashing the collar to me, caressing above it as he speaks. The metal of the chain quietly chinks. "We know what you were trying to do. We had to enlist security with their comms so we could find you. And you found eyeballs made of frosting."

"At least I tried. We aren't doing *anything*. This shouldn't be all fucking and fun."

Marcus replies. "Fucking and fun is worthwhile." And yet his demeanor is so somber I'm wondering at his mindset. Is he truly that unhappy with me?

"I know." I lick my lips. "I do like this. I need this too. I do." I'm babbling. I draw a deep breath, release it. "I vowed to her that I would enjoy myself." *Her* meaning Milli, and I guess they know this. "But I also need some seriousness. I need to do this, or guilt is going to tear me apart. I can't desert her. We came here for a reason!" I hiss the last word.

Razor sighs and stands back.

And I look about me, suddenly aware I have been speaking louder than I should. No one else is here.

"We understand, don't we Marcus?"

Ambling up behind me, he agrees with a grumbled, "Sure."

“There might also be nothing here, Phoebe. You need to see that possibility.”

“I do.”

“Or there might be a murderer or three hiding here. Which means you are not to go off alone again. Marcus and I worried a crocodile might’ve grabbed you off the beach. Security was down there scanning the water until just now.”

“I’m sorry.” My vow to never ask permission for anything might be stupid in this place.

“Good.” Razor looks over my head to Marcus. “We should just go in as we are.”

“Or I can add a few decorations to her.” Marcus lays his hands on my shoulders and squeezes. I’m between the two of them being talked over. It seems a habit of theirs, but I am touched that they’ve been so desperately looking for me. My apologies seem too little.

“What decorations are these?” Razor asks. A world of threat prowls in those few words.

Shit, what are they cooking up now?

“*Ummm.*” I intend to say more but Razor muffles me with his hand, then holds the back of my head so I can’t dodge.

“Go on,” he says.

“Well.” I can tell Marcus is leaning down as close he can get, for his words are sifting through my hair to my skin, sending erotic tingles flitting and zigzagging through me. Spine, breasts, body, and clit are alight, highlighting me with his neon filth. “I was dreaming of such fucking devious things.”

I gasp as his fingernails sink into my skin. With his words and touch, I’m thrown into fantasizing.

His wet tongue luridly curling around my nipple, flicking the tip as his teeth bite my flesh and tease me.

And hurt...

And tease.

“Show me.” Razor turns me in his arms, traps me against his chest.

I breathe hotly into his hand, through cruel fingers draped across my nose, mouth, and chin. I’m so easily turned to fire and lust. So quickly have I been rerouted from detective to fucktoy. Marcus squats and begins to rummage in his bag. He removes scissors, lays them on the floor, then rope, then clamps. I tremble, hungering for whatever tortures they might subject me to.

M^{arcus}

I cannot tell them the severed fingers are real.

I pull a few more things from my bag, slowly, while I reconstruct what happened.

That the guard let me go past him says he didn't know this. Yet the fingers are being kept in the freezer of the fucking kitchen of this place.

The staff must know. Mustn't they?

Which means the guard might have. Are they flaunting it? How many are involved?

Or did I imagine what I saw? One was flesh inside, bone beneath frozen muscle and skin, not frosting. I snapped it in half, then placed it back where it came from.

I was fast. They might not realize.

Who can I trust here? Did they want us all to come? I'm not even sure of Razor now. He seemed to agree too easily.

Is it a trap for me or for Phoebe? For her, most likely.

That is, if I'm right about the finger. I should go back tonight and check. I need to try the phone as often as I can.

The only other person I'm sure of is Phoebe. This place, this entire idea, revolves around her finding her friend. Her nightmare with its connection to the photo is so crazy I can

almost believe it to be a premonition. She hasn't invented it. Why would she?

Plus I know her. I may have hated her for years, but I know her.

I trust her and myself. And Emma Bartholemew?

It's bizarre, but I may be compelled to trust her too. If she's playing us false, has lured her daughter-in-law here to have her murdered...

But that would be fucking nonsense even for her, bitch-faced, conniving monster that she is.

I still cannot tell anyone else about the finger. I need more time. I need to think.

In the meantime, we get to play with Phoebe.

My cock is happy with that. Even if, inside, I'm freaked out, just a bit.

How can I keep her safe if the whole island is a trap?

Maybe it isn't?

Maybe.

I check the pile of things I've placed on the floor then I pick up the scissors and advance on her. I open the blades, close them, over and over.

She wriggles in Razor's arms, trying to escape the inevitable.

"*Snicker-snack*, little girl. Punishment time." Then I shift Razor's hand and kiss her, finger her below, pushing her dress into her pussy, until she's whimpering and panting in cute little gasps around my mouth. Then Razor muzzles her again. Wide-eyed and looking out from behind his cage of fingers, she is so defenseless and edible.

Maybe I should eat her. Get her off, then show her off, with her arousal dripping from her cunt. Sometimes I wonder why I'm like this, and then I meet a woman like her, like Phoebe, who wants it. Then? I don't give a fuck.

“Do you want to keep your nipples? Then stay very, *very* still.”

Her dress is made of thin white material, and I easily pinch up a fold over her left nipple. She’s breathing hard and fast, staring at where I have the scissors ready to snap closed and slice off a circle of the fabric.

I wait for her to stop moving, to stop twitching when I look at the scissors. Her shoes have been kicked off ages ago and lie on the floor to the side. She’s only trembling now, stops pushing at the floor with her bare feet.

“Ready?” Slowly, I close the scissors, and they make the distinctive sound of metal shearing through cloth. They snick shut. The circle of cloth flutters to the floor then I go to the second nipple. This time, I make sure to grab some of her along with the dress and she shrieks.

“*Tsk.*” I let her flesh slip through my fingers and grab only cloth, though I’m sure that nipple is still smarting with hurt.

Quickly, I snip through the dress, ignoring her anxious *mmmpf* noises.

“You’re fine. I missed.” I move away and pick up the two clover clamps connected by a chain then return to her, slowly, admiring the girl with the dress with convenient holes.

“Nice,” Razor says, playing with one of her tits, squeezing it as I descend.

I suck on them both, dampening her and the fabric. Once I have her moaning, I squash each nipple between finger and thumb, then clamp them, and her noises of pleasure turn into chaotic, desperate breathing.

When I straighten, she’s staring at me; her eyes flick their focus from my face then downward to her breasts, and she whines and sucks on her lip, as if she cannot believe what I’ve done.

I tap the chain connecting them. The weight of the metal will make the clamps hurt, randomly, as she walks.

“Below too?” I cock my head, considering this, then inch her dress upward. “I do have one more.”

“Temporarily only,” Razor suggests. “We don’t want her clit falling off.”

“*Hmmm*. No. We don’t.” I play with the scissors again, regarding how Razor holds her captive with that face-smooching hand and an arm below her pretty, partially bared breasts. “Might make a mess of the dress.”

He laughs. “It’s not going to be wearable after what you did.”

“Truth.” So I kneel and start snipping, cutting a section away, making it easy to see, touch, and lick her pussy. Making it easier to place a clamp on her engorged clit. I’m still aiming, still thinking about it when—

When I get kicked.

“Fuck!” The clamp goes skidding.

A glint of merciless glee is in her eyes, or in what I can see of them.

Rubbing my chest where she kicked me with both feet won’t help, and Razor is laughing.

I go to my bag, retrieve another item, then return to her and bag her head with the leather mask.

“You can breathe. Stop making fake gasping noises.” Assuming she might try the same assault, I wrap her ankles in tape and put my knee on the connecting bit between them.

“Kick again,” I warn her, “and your clit might get ripped off. Nod if you understand.”

She growls at me from inside the bag, which makes me snort. Then, she nods.

“Fuck me.” I wipe my eyes of the tears then clamp her clit hood and listen to her squeal with great satisfaction.

It would be hot and claustrophobic in there, so I unzip the mouth hole on the bag, to allow in light and air, before I back

away. The gimp mask is a bit much. I prefer seeing her, all of her, but it can stay on for a while.

“Phoebe scores one for making us worry about the croc and where she is, and for kicking me. I get a score of...one, two, three, for each clamp.” I rip the tape from her ankles, then rise, take her wrists, and rope them together at her back. I steady her when she almost trips. “Razor, want this?” I offer him the end of the rope. “Should we make her come at the doorway to this event?”

“Where everyone can see? Why not. If she ever kicks me like that, I’d have to invent something bad.”

“Oh, I have plenty of bad in mind.”

Phoebe blows a raspberry from within the bag but winces and curses me when I drag on the clamp holding her clit.

The things I brought with me are going to get some use, tonight. The anal hook, for starters.

“Behave and I’ll remove this soon.”

Halfway to the event room, I remove the bag. The hot, flustered look of condemnation on her face barely registers when I have her like this—hands bound at her back and the rope lead in Razor’s hand. She’s collared, clamped, and under our control, and more than a little turned on by us toying with her along the way. That kick she gave me was on the boundary of too far, but I’m sure she held back. It’s an excuse to punish her, and I’m certain she knows the consequences won’t be trivial.

The raspberry from inside the bag sealed her fate.

Except, when we reach the event room, despite the debauchery happening inside, all eyes turn to us. The doors are latched against the wall and the opening is wide enough for the three of us to stand in line abreast, with Phoebe in the middle.

The music playing is stirring and belongs to *King Arthur, Legend of the Sword*. It’s a favorite movie of mine, and I’m feeling protective of it. I’m actually annoyed these people have appropriated this music. Do I have anything in common

with these guests? Possibly nothing beyond a love of highly sadistic BDSM.

A better question: should I be gifting them this exhibit of my Phoebe? And she is mine, my balls tell me, my heart tells me, the thump of blood in my temples tells me, more than she is Razor's.

If some of them want to kill her, this is horrendously stupid. But maybe it is sensible too. Blend in and make them think we...I, have no suspicions.

If I tell Phoebe about the fingers, my main concern is that being a woman, she will panic. We can't have that.

I'm going to carry on fucking with her then, and being normal, until I have a plan.

Except, the blindfold in the bag is calling to me. Not sure why, but letting them drink her in, being degraded and fucked by Razor and me, it twists my gut. If I can't or won't leave with her, why does a blindfold seem a reasonable choice?

Because it gives her solace? No. Or not exactly that.

I pull it from the bag, along with the anal hook and some cord, my dick thrumming with anticipation, the blood rushing in. I can imagine myself sinking into her asshole, her gasps, her cries. It gets me harder than stone. I'm going to make this last.

This blindfold, however.

Is it because her not seeing them somehow works on my warped brain? I think it might be that. It doesn't make sense, and it's a weakness to give in to the pressure of them watching her. I tuck the scrap of cloth into a pocket.

Phoebe

This is a new room, bigger than where we dined.

The music continues, but no one seems to move in this moment as I'm pulled to a halt in the doorway by Razor's hands on my shoulder and wrists. Has the air itself stilled? He steps sideways, still holding the rope that goes to my bound hands. All the parts of my body that I might wish to conceal are on display—the reverse of how it should be. The clamps at my clit and breasts ache, alternating a sharp, biting pain with a dull throb.

Am I blushing? I'm too aroused by their fingerfucking to be sure, by their pausing on the way to handle me, to tease the clamps, to lap around the metal jaws with their tongues, while the other man holds my arms or throat or hooks his fingers in my mouth. They painted my thighs with my arousal, and the bottom of my dress is in tatters.

Determined to not be overwhelmed, I try to calm myself.
Breathe.

A higher floor looks down on us on three sides. Beyond that mezzanine floor, gold-framed porthole windows pull in the late afternoon light. The lower walls feature metal installations of sea life, whales, octopuses, and fish. The timber floor is blond, and lumpy blue sofas cluster on it like reefs at sea. The luxurious fittings clash with the shiny chains

that hang from the two-story-high ceiling. They end at just the right height for doing sadistic things to people.

The stage at the rear is unoccupied. If they had an auction, perhaps it is done? I hope so. The idea of a 'slave' auction makes me wonder how they decide who gets to own the slaves.

Shredded and discarded clothes lie on the floor, along with rope, cuffs, looping chains, and various metal and timber devices. Some of those would be at home in a medieval dungeon.

Hands that have been tying knots are frozen in the act, hands cease to push heads into laps or fasten cuffs. The greedy eyes, the leering smiles, the way some have ceased to fuck with, flog, or toy with their partners. I feel like a butterfly caught in a jar. As if to underline this, I notice a man at the back, with his head locked inside a box. He's in mid-fuck with his 'owner'.

A few yards away, two women stand with their hands attached to chains above their heads. One is being whipped. The other must belong to my old friend Simon, who lowers a monstrous pink dildo and stares at me.

I sway, disorientated, my calmness blown. I'm horribly vulnerable. My bare feet rest on the cool floor, and everything here is wickedly strange, deviant, and not right. I need to shrink down to nothing to avoid those eyes.

Marcus comes to stand before me, partly blocking my view. He looks down. "That can come off first. Razor, hold her." An arm about my neck locks me to the man behind me.

With no further warning, the clamp on my clit is removed, and I'm swearing, cursing at Marcus in Latin, for all I know, and trying to double over. The application of the clamp was bad, and this is equally so.

Then Razor frees me and comes to my front, offers the rope to Marcus. "My turn. I've held her for you enough."

While Marcus grumbles about that, I'm considering my chances if I run. Zero, unless... I pretend to trip, and then I *do*

trip, courtesy of it being difficult to balance with my hands locked at my back. They both lunge to catch me.

“Free my hands?” At my back I raise my arms the small distance I can, to emphasize what I’m talking about.

Both of them look amused. It was worth a try.

“What do you want to do with her?” Marcus takes the rope then walks behind me. “Strip her?” He wraps his arms about me and takes hold of both my breasts, squeezing enough to make me gasp and to feel those clamps ten times more as the pressure builds.

They throb in his grasp; he increases the force. I close my eyes, suppressing a whine.

“I want to do so many things to you,” he rasps out the threat, above my ear, then bites my upper neck. In a way, the collar guards me from his teeth.

The longer he hangs on with his teeth, marking my neck, the more difficult it becomes to remain silent.

“No. Leave her like that.”

My poor abused clit feels the brush of skin as someone’s hand arrives at my pussy, lifting me onto my toes. I don’t open my eyes, preferring the black, but I jerk as that hand worms between my parted thighs. He enters me with at least two fingers. It must be Razor. They’re thrust in, making a wet noise that is obvious and due to my own zealous lubrication.

Fuck, but it’s hard to resent that.

Gravity anchors me onto that hand, and I press at the floor with my toes, teetering, trying to get away while Marcus chuckles.

As the fingers are withdrawn then speared in, I jerk again, whimpering as Marcus wraps a hand across my face and over my eyes, pulling my head back against him. My own moisture leaks past those violating digits as they plunge inside.

“A very wet cunt. I wonder why?” Razor says lazily. His body radiates heat, and I’m burning like a piece of well-buttered toast, trapped between the two of them.

When I'm allowed to, when Marcus moves his fingers, I open my eyes to see Razor and his dedication to his task. My eyelids flutter, and I'm gagging from need, still pushing at that faraway floor, as he repeats his thrusts while studying me.

“Oh, you do like this. Being fucked in public.”

Shocked, I shake my head, but he only bends to kiss me from my navel to my clit, then paints my belly with his wet fingers.

By then I'm panting uncontrollably.

My clit and pussy are happily pulsing, reminding me of what he has done.

Razor is searching in Marcus' bag for something, and I have a fair idea as to what this will be. What he just did was mortifying, but—

His hand emerges holding a curved hook as long as my forearm, with a bulb at one end, where the sharp and nasty bit would be if this were a fishhook.

While I watch him fasten a cord to the eyelet at the other end, Marcus smooths his palm down my belly then covers my pussy. With his fingers in a V, to either side of my clit, he slides them past it and along my slit, teasing me, slowly.

“Using her own lube or the tube?” he asks Razor.

“Both? Both is good.” The man stands, pads over to us on his black gym shoes. Like Marcus he's chosen all-black clothes today...tonight. The light has almost faded outside those windows. “Turn her.”

“Fuck you both.” My voice is husky. It's a small telltale of what they've done to my body, but I'm compelled to not make this an easy conquest. I shove at the floor with my feet, pressing Marcus backward until he compensates, then lifts me off my feet.

“Her derriere end, not the feet,” Razor reminds Marcus, dryly. He brandishes the big, steel hooklike thing.

I'm cringing just looking at it.

It starts with A and ends with hook. An anal hook.

I do not like this Sam I am. I do not like things that size that want to go in my ass.

“You’re sure?”

I squirm sideways but Marcus swings me then pushes me lower, using a fist hold on my hair at the back of my neck. The collar and the *Fucktoy* tag make a too-cute tinkle against each other as I drop with my knees bending. I’m overbalancing and ready to faceplant several feet to the ground. He halts my fall then forces me down, until I’m on my knees with the side of my face squashed to the floor. In his other hand he grips my wrists and the rope. I squirm again, twisting even as Razor places a hand on me and parts my cheeks, probing with fingers.

Funny how I’m noticing the lovely hue of the wood, inches away.

“Go. Go, go,” murmurs Marcus. “Target acquired. *Mmm-mmm*. The tube lube? She’s wriggling a bit much?”

“Yes.” There is the cold shock of lube being squirted over my rear hole. It makes me gasp and renew my struggling.

“Fuck, no. Fuck!” I manage to shift my bottom sideways, and Marcus leans over me and uses his full weight to keep me still.

A finger slides along the split of my ass, moving in and out by a fingertip’s depth, circling, gliding on the lube. I have no way to counter that, and I moan as Razor inserts his finger through the ring of muscle, easily penetrating me. My attraction to being degraded has arrived at the worst of moments. This is turning me on. It shouldn’t be. I’m whining and writhing on my knees when he almost extracts his finger, then widens me with a second alongside the first. When those are gone, I sigh in relief.

Until he begins to angle the hook into place.

“Do not move, Phoebe,” Razor admonishes while he introduces the first hint of the curve of the hook’s ball to my

asshole, rocking it as he pushes. “Don’t, or I will cane you first, until you fucking learn to not move. Understand me?”

Safeword? I know I should be considering this but, but, but. So many butts. *Haha.*

I huff then summon a halfhearted raspberry, just to register some sort of protest.

The lure of what they’re doing is complex and has many nuances. More than I can figure out on the spot since that *thing* is being inserted, slowly, inside me. I’m locked down, lodged on my knees, and there’s nothing I can do, when Marcus makes a rude suggestion.

“Let me use a vibe on you. It will make this much, much more pleasurable for you. Say yes.”

I hesitate for a second, mouth open as I pant through the pain. Then I nod. “kay.”

“Good girl. Give me that, Razor.”

Which is when I realize they had it ready for me, all the time.

Already the hook has gone past what I think I can bear, and I’m saying *fuck* into the floor, until that familiar soft-hardness is pressed into my clit...and switched on.

The buzz jolts into me, spreading like warm toffee, leaving in its wake a wave of exquisite pleasure, and I tense then relax, sighing then choking, because the hook is being pushed fully inside. It feels enormous as it drops past my final resistance. My ass squeezes in, onto this foreign object.

I squeak as it forges further and then is locked in place by Razor tying the anal hook’s cord to my wrist rope.

The vibe is switched on and humming, and I’m not ready, not for orgasming in public with these vultures watching me.

I squeal as it touches me again, wincing at the pull of the cord on the hook whenever I tense my arms. But the drag, the buzz of the vibe is reaching deep and shivering into my pleasure zones like an enormous python slithering into my personal heaven.

Another few thundering pulses of that rattling vibration, and I am coming. I'm spluttering into the floor, arching, and my eyes are rolling up. I'm sightless as this tsunami eats me alive, shakes me, over and over, then finally releases me. Am I still human? A boneless puddle is more likely.

I may need a new clit after this, and I've probably left a pool of my own come on the floor.

I twist my hands, feel the rope clasp my wrists. Panting, gulping in air, I'm loving the possessive hands on me. And Marcus muttering threats.

"I can't resist this," Razor says. "Pray for me."

As Marcus gropes beneath my chest. One sharp pain hits then a second. They sear deep then throb at me—the clamps on my nipples have been swiftly removed. I yelp, then groan, my body confused. I'm still somewhat mind blown.

Pants are unzipped, and then Razor's cock is pushing into my pussy entrance, parting my lips, slowly forging deeper. He takes me in small increments then in giant slams while Marcus cradles my front on his thighs to stop me skidding forever. It's an amazing sensation, and as he keeps going the metal hook prods me, pulls at my ass, reminding me of where it is.

I'm still feeling aftershocks from my last climax. Before, my pussy walls clutched at nothing. Now I have cock in me, and every drive makes me choke or gasp or moan. I surrender to my need to be taken, to be fucked with no remorse and no way to refuse.

Safeword, my mind whispers.

"Fuck. No." I groan that softly to myself, no one else.

Ecstasy tiptoes in again, coaxing me back to its realm. I shudder and angle my ass upward.

I rock on my knees, my upper body shunting back and forth on Marcus' lap as Razor fucks me.

"God. With that in here, just seeing it going in...that fucking huge hook..." he's blurting this out, with each thrust a

vulgar punctuation mark, "...and her bound for us. It's fucking incredible."

Marcus laughs and strokes his fingers across my mouth before he leans down and kisses the back of my neck. When he bites me there, hard, I splutter.

"Let go!" I croak. Not that I want him to.

"Hell, no. You're my well-chewed fucktoy."

But I'm straining, clamping in on Razor's cock, filled in both pussy and ass, when I feel him tense.

Razor swears, moans, and the swell of him inside me is glorious. I made him come. I...made him, and he sounds fucking deranged. It's the thing that kicks me over. The pleasure pulses then expands, storming through me, and I spasm into another orgasm, weakly straining in every muscle, with his hands at my hips, clawing me closer to him.

Those fingers bruise my flesh while Marcus murmurs sweet compliments and says he's next.

"No. No more." My voice is worn out. Possibly only the floor hears me.

I blink through salty tears that have somehow reached my mouth so I can taste them, my focus running along the floor until I see the blur of people watching us do this.

Oh fuck. What have I done? Am doing, for Razor has put his mouth to my entrance and is sucking on me there.

I shouldn't have. I could have stopped this. What have I done? None of them are friends, except for Marcus and Razor, my sadistic mentors.

Then Razor arrives, hand cupped. A moment ago, I heard him spit. He leans down and kisses me, and I feel some residue of whatever was in there spill into my mouth. I'm not sure what to do.

"Drink it up," he says, an evil smile curling his mouth, and he grabs my nape and pushes me toward the small puddle in his palm that contains a mixture of his come, mine, and spit.

I hesitate for a second, my mouth hovering where he holds me, and then I swallow and dart out my tongue, and I begin to lap. “Good girl,” he croons. It tastes fairly vile, as come tends to, like slime and oysters made into a soup, nevertheless a tingle is summoned from between my legs.

A startling realization comes over me, a satisfying one even. This is a turn-on. If a puppy, I’d be wagging my tail at his words.

When I’m done and have licked his palm clean, Marcus rises and loosens the cord that connects my hands to the ass hook. He picks me up in his arms and starts to walk, deeper into the hall, and he’s heading for one of the nearer dangling chains. I burrow my head into his chest.

“Hiding won’t work forever, Phoebe.”

M^{arcus}

Razor is right. Seeing her like that made my balls tighten, made me want to fuck her into tomorrow, right there, right then.

Head down, her dress half stripped or cut away, with that hook in her ass and having just seen her getting hammered by Razor, while the whole time she's been lying with her head on my lap, shaking, making noises, and climaxing? I am so done with being the passive holder.

My turn. Again.

She looks completely messed up, as if we've dragged her through the gutter.

I love doing this to her, as well as watching her take it and get pleasure from it, and that last part is maybe the best of all.

The way she's ducked her head into my chest, along with the weight of her in my arms and her ample curves, my heart is ready to burst too. The role of protector versus that of her sadist conflicts so utterly. And yet, and yet, there is warmth in this, a satisfaction that can never be rivalled.

This and that. Sometimes you can have your cake and eat it too.

My dick is straining to get out of my pants and may end up permanently bent.

“Where are you going?” she finally has the courage to ask.

“To where I can chain you and do what I want with you, before I fuck you, princess. I’m not fucking you in the doorway. I’m going to savor this.”

“Princess?” She seems to find that title hilarious.

“So am I.” Razor has caught up and has my bag. “You wanted this?” He raises it.

“Yes. It has the barbed wire in it.”

“What? No!” She starts to squirm in my arms.

“Stop that. You’re not getting away. Besides, it’s not normal barbed wire. You’ll see. Do not fucking kick me.” I heft her higher, set her on her feet, and get busy untying her hands then retying them at the front. I remove the anal hook, drop it aside it into a plastic bag. By threading the rope through a chain link, I easily haul her hands higher, then knot the rope in place. “There.”

Her head is slightly bowed, and she regards me through the long hair that’s fallen over her brow. Her pink tongue curls out, strokes along the seam of her lips. Above her head, her hands move as she finds a place to tuck her fingers into rope and chain.

Her areolas stand out, reddened where the clamps have pressed, and there is the faint triangle leading to her pussy, with the slightest hint of the split of her cunt... I draw a shaky breath. “Mag-fuckin-nificent.”

“That’s not a word.” But Razor is also appreciating our displayed and chained girl.

I take a few steps back, admiring our prize, then look around the room. Even though we’ve been here for ten, fifteen minutes, the creepy eyes are still on us more than any other throuple or couple, or whatever combo people are arranged in. And some of them are indulging in some unusual kinks. The female dressed as a red latex doll, with the bare backside, tits, and mouth-hole, being swapped between two men and another woman? That’s not rare, but it’s striking.

Yet we are the commonest focus—us three. That has to mean something.

Razor shakes the coil of flexible wire at me. It has fewer nasty barbs than the real stuff used for fences. I had made especially for this—for decorating a woman and making her squeak and fear me. Making them orgasm while wrapped up in barbs is quite a sight. “Thanks.” Absentmindedly I take it from him.

“What’s wrong?”

“This place. Them.”

A man is approaching, and he’s tall, suited, and official-looking. I don’t recall him.

“Razor and Marcus Thompson?”

“Yes,” we answer as one.

He holds out his hand, and we shake. It’s such a normal gesture for a situation like this, and it makes me edgy.

“You missed the auction,” he says. Which is when I notice Bastion, the dude who MCed the dinner, going up to Phoebe. He’s leaning in and saying something to her.

“We did. Things came up.”

“Well. Things aren’t allowed to come up. You signed up to participate, and there will be consequences if it happens again.” This man could roleplay a butler...and if Bastion touches a hair on Phoebe, I will fucking deck him.

“We did not sign anything that compels us,” Razor butts in.

Bastion has walked away. Good. My eyes have been swiveling as if on stalks. “Our dicks came up. That was the delay reason. Are you disallowing that here?” I doubt that bit of rudeness will shock him.

“You signed in at reception. You signed for and agreed to those penalties. One million pounds if you fail to attend the next one.”

“*Whoa*, man. Are you trying to blackmail us?”

“Blackmail? It’s extortion,” Razor adds.

“Same, same. Can I punch him?”

“No. Not yet.”

Razor’s reply makes me laugh. “A pity.”

The man smiles patronizingly at us and our banter. Me, I just want to choke him out, along with everyone else in this hall.

“I will be rechecking what we signed. That is not a reasonable penalty. It won’t fly in court.”

The man inclines his head at Razor’s assessment. “I will ask the office to give you the copies.”

“So you won’t do anything this time anyway?” I ask, semi-cautiously. “No penalty, as you call it?” My blood is threatening to pop from every vein in my body and blow off the top of my head. Which would be tricky to clean up.

“No. Not this time.”

“Good.” My mind clicks a decision into being, one I was leaning into anyway. “In which case, we’re fucking leaving. If you agree to that Razor?” I sent him a frown. “Sorry. I should have asked you.”

“Leaving sounds exactly what we should be doing. Shall we carry Phoebe or let her walk?”

At that the pair of us turn away from the asshole trying to push us around and we stroll the few yards back to Phoebe. She’s watching us with eyes wide enough to swim in—all shiny and cute—puppy dog eyes.

We start to untie her, and I’m suddenly and perplexingly unsure I should be this wrapped up in keeping her, even if she feels like everything I ever needed to make life complete whenever I touch her or hug her. Or fuck her.

We walk out hand in hand, with her in the middle but silent for the moment. She’s still half-naked and reddened in so many spots, where she was clamped or bitten.

We've left her barefoot, tucked her shoes into the bag. Being barefoot makes her seem this beautifully naïve virgin. Below stirs to life again, but my cock will have to wait until we get her somewhere more private.

Our switch from public display to this must seem odd to Phoebe, yet she asks us nothing. Why? The doors remain open, and so I wait until we're out of hearing range before I ask, "What did Bastion say to you?"

"Let's talk when we stop somewhere?" And she barely seems to think we will disagree and just keeps walking. It's novel how assertive this girl can be, considering her kinks and her state of dress. Refreshing even. I've had partners who expect me to okay every part of their life.

"Sure."

Razor nods too. "The bedroom would be okay, but why not the pool again? It's outdoors, pretty, and we can turn on the lights."

"Okay." Phoebe looks to both of us, a tiny line forming between her eyes.

"Problem?" I ask.

"Maybe?" She screws up her face. Worried or embarrassed? "I was wondering if we could try that barbed wire stuff? But I also do want to talk." The last is tacked on hurriedly.

"*Hmmm.*" I pretend to have to think about this. "Razor. Can we do that?"

The writhing of his face broadcasts outright glee, but he shakes his head, then declares with morbid solemnness, "I don't know, Marcus, can we do this? It sounds immoral."

"Definitely fucking immoral."

"Oh! You two!" She squeezes down on my hand and likely Razor's, too, thinking she could crush my fingers? As if that would hurt. I give her a fast demonstration of how hard I can squeeze, and she gasps and ducks, tries to pull away.

“Never forget who has the power, girl. We can sit on you and tickle you or worse, any time we feel like it.”

When she doesn't answer and only moves her hand in mine, snuggling it deeper into my grasp, my heart does that flip-flop, glowy thing it's been doing the past few days.

A thought surfaces, a shark cruising in dark waters. A crocodile, if you will.

Fuck. What if... What if she doesn't intend to stay mine? Just because we are investigating a possible murder and screwing each other, that doesn't automatically make us life partners. I should talk about it, with both of them. Should. This island is hardly an idle spot for romantic tête-à-têtes.

Phoebe

Without the weight of those strangers' stares, the night sloughs off its brittleness and acquires a welcome, quiet laziness. It's not just me, I can feel the men relax, through their hands, from their gait, and even from how they speak.

It isn't long before I simply must stop. I slip my hand from theirs and pull my now-useless dress over my head, leaving it on the floor.

When they look curious, I shrug. "It wasn't covering anything." My nakedness is liberating. It's my decision to throw away my clothes.

Now, what to do about the desires agitating inside me, a petulant storm that needs a shore or two to crash upon. If I don't get to fuck them both soon, I may scream. I am at sea in a way I've never been before.

I've been super horny before, yes, but not with this freedom I now have to do *anything* I want, providing they play along.

I lean into the wall, offering a smile before I take hold of Razor by the arm. I draw him closer, reaching up to the back of his neck until he leans down.

"What's this, sweet sexy thing? Are you seducing me?"

"Perhaps?" On tiptoe I kiss him, gently, on the lips. When he responds and presses me backward, my head bumps on the

wall. It's a soft, languid kiss where we are, almost, equals. Then I do the same to Marcus who's looking distinctly annoyed at being second.

Marcus leans a forearm into the wall above where I've slumped. I'm caged in by two predators and still naked, and this is perfect.

"Forward, isn't she?" Razor offers.

"Very."

"A spanking or a caning, Marcus? To discourage such forwardness."

He grins.

"What? What did you expect? My butt is still remembering that hook inside me. It was not a trifle." I raise an eyebrow, push out my breasts, teasing them.

"You can wait."

I get my butt smacked, once, by both of them, and we keep going. It was worth it. My mouth remembers the kissing and my ass those smacks.

We walk about the pool looking in the nooks and crannies. This place has more of those than I expected. Motion detectors flick on lights here and there, most of them dim. We seek somewhere that holds enough light to feel safe and enough to see each other, yet we also want concealment. Around us the night breathes soft as we find a little white, roofed gazebo nestling by a curve of the pool. Stirred by a breeze, the shallows lap ripples of light across the water's edge.

No crocodile would ever deign to swim in this pool. Thank god. I'd have extra nasty nightmares. One would be crawling at me from the depths if I were left here alone.

Around us, small pink-and-white lights dot the walls of the enclosure and the trunks of the palms, the lattice walls of the gazebo. Fairy lights some would call these. I imagine them being scattered by a bunch of drunken elves that lost their Christmas tree.

"This looks good?" I venture.

“Yes.” Razor grabs me off my feet then swings me in a gentle circle. There is a frisson of awareness whenever they touch me, multiplied by the contrast between my nakedness while they are clothed. That would be an aberration anywhere but here. In some ways, this place is a godsend, allowing my most subterranean needs to climb to the surface of my consciousness, spitting out the dirt of what is right and wrong in society.

Spinning, spinning... Razor smiles down at me, lips twisting, a mix of fiend and friend captured in his expression.

If only my reason for being here wasn't so malevolent...so potentially malevolent.

This is a place of whispers, secrets, and eyes, and every corner I turn I half-expect some monster to make itself known—probably by eating my face off.

When he gathers me up then drops me onto my back, I whoop and shriek though it's a quiet shriek. I bounce a little on the large round bed taking up much of the space then flop backward, sighing.

“Nice.” The fabric is cool, swishing against my arm when I sweep it across the surface. The bed and the painted timberwork are pale and diluted, with only moonlight and those tiny lights to illuminate them. The sky is crosshatched by the overhanging lattice.

“Bugs?” Marcus says.

“Well, there are those.” Razor lifts his palm toward the sea. The chirruping of crickets and other insects is almost as distant as the roar of the sea. “The other sort? The gazebo isn't the best place.”

“I thought so but I guess we'll risk it?” He sits on the bed and places his bag beside him then pulls out that fancy coiled wire.

The main wire is blue. It's pink where little barbs pop up at regular intervals. Without bare steel, the colors lend it the look of a child's toy. Staring, I remind myself I asked for this. Again with the frisson of excitement, the liquid feeling in my

stomach. I'm becoming a Pavlov's dog to whatever gestures he makes, if they warn me of incoming kink.

"So, Phoebe, back to the question." He straightens the tines on a barb. "What did Bastion say?"

Leaving my head turned sideways so I can watch him work, I pretend to weigh up his question but really, I know what I'm going to do. If I can't tell these men, who can I?

I roll onto my stomach, then bend my knees to tuck my feet in the air, ankles crossed. Testing the bed, I rock my hips. It's super comfy. "He told me not to trust you. And he told me I could go to him for help if I needed it."

That peacock-haired man, leaning over me while I was tied up and waiting for Razor and Marcus—I'd felt nauseous, exposed in a way that was very different to what I wanted.

"*Ahhh*. And what did you say? We didn't gag you, unfortunately."

"Oh, very funny." I give him a mocking but flirtatious look. He raises one eyebrow then goes back to sorting out wire and stuff. "I chose not to believe that idiot. I said nothing to him."

"Good."

I wriggle around to face him and lever myself up on my elbows and forearms. My breasts are fully on display, and my nipples brush the bed fabric if I move and make them sway. Both men notice. Neither reacts much. Disappointing.

I'm sure I can make them react, but the game has barely begun. My swollen clit is pressed into the bed. Who'd think merely staring at the guys and fantasizing, wriggling a little to massage the poor neglected thing, would be enough for now? I may regret this—egging them on and asking for the wire—but I really doubt it.

"Who wants to go next? We should lay all our cards on the table. Has anything else happened? I told you about the USB."

Razor circles the bed until he's nearer my left ankle. He sits then seizes that ankle, pulls my leg wider using it. "At the

dinner, the waiter who left that list also told me not to trust Marcus. I didn't say anything about it because I don't give a shit what BS they feed us." The asshole runs a fingernail along my sole.

Jerking, I try to yank my leg from his grip, but he pins my leg to the bed. "Ticklish, are we?" Then he bends over and bites the side of my foot.

"No! Fuck. Let go!"

His muffled laugh makes me pout, and I consider kicking him but...bad idea.

"So." He releases my foot though I'm sure I have dents from his teeth. "They're trying to sow discord, as someone once said. I don't believe any of it."

"They don't seem to like me, especially. Lie flat and extend your arm." Marcus says this in a salesman voice as if he's unpacking a TV. He uncoils wire, making his intentions clear.

"Is this going to hurt?" But I give him my hand and rest on my front, feeling terribly comfortable and content as he begins to wind the wire up my wrist and forearm.

"Of course it will. That's the whole reason for doing it." He winks. "So, they are sowing, and we are not believing. But who is they? How many?"

"I'm beginning to think most of them?" Razor squeezes my ankle, kisses it, then begins a journey of kisses up my leg, *higher, higher*, to my knee. By then he, too, is on his stomach, and I have one man playing with my leg while the other...

"Ouch," I mouth the word at Marcus. The barbs dig in as he tightens the coils, and he's reached my shoulder. "Not the face?"

"No. Not there. Your tits though, yes. An absolute yes."

Crap. Also yum. I swallow. They are sore but I'm willing.

"Oh. Should I stand up for this?" My pulse is thumping. Having slithered up the bed between my legs, Razor nibbles

on my spread inner thighs, licks along the crease of leg and ass but slowly. A sloth could beat him if it were a race.

“No.”

Distracted, my internal fires being stirred but sluggishly, I lie unmoving, relishing the sensations as the wire is led over my back, the barbs walking sharply.

Have I disclosed all I know? “I told you about the eyeballs that aren’t eyeballs, but I also walked around the hill to the right.” Mesmerized by what they’re doing, I think over everything I’ve said so far. “It looks like not much is there, just a small beach. There is, however, a possible ledge with a metal railing below the hill and the ruins.”

Razor pauses. “Someone should go up there again and look over the edge. It might be easier to access the room under the trapdoor that way.”

“Let’s see how this goes, Phoebe. When I say, roll over so I can bring the wire across your front.” He twists the wire, carefully adds a new thread from a new coil that I didn’t see him remove from the bag. That intensity of concentration makes him so attractive.

“Speaking of access...” Razor bites higher then pushes one finger inside me. Breathing halts and, eyes closing, I give a small shudder.

“Are you fucking her, Razor?” Marcus chuckles.

“Of course. Where were we? Confessing our research?”

“Roll over now.”

A command that will leave me face-up with my delicate bits bared to this sadist.

I wanted this, didn’t I?

A thrill trickles through me, ever downward, to where Razor has been messing with my pussy.

Thoughts of research fade.

I roll onto my back, and he shuffles his knees backward a few inches, the bed sinks, then he swabs my skin, laying a cold

trail directly over the peaks of my breasts...which is scary. He lays the wire over my chest. The alcohol in the wipe has an acrid, cleansing smell. The wire hits one nipple and areola, perfectly on target. I hiss and go almost cross-eyed trying to see his hands and the barb as he makes it dent my skin even more, increasing the pain, increasing the tension on the wire.

Blood wells from two of the barb points that I can see.

Raising my hand to stop him is instinctive, except I'm sure he won't let me, or he'll cane me or worse. Unless I safeword. As usual, defiance is tempting, but with tendons popping up in my clawed hand, I desist. I lower it not because I must but because I want to see this out.

"Good girl," he murmurs, and continues.

"*Mmm.*" I wince. A month ago...no, two months ago, I'd think myself insane for doing this.

These barbs don't spike my skin, mostly, only if made to. Like fucking now. My mouth opens in disbelief and confusion as Razor begins licking at my pussy, his silky-smooth tongue brushes over, revolves around my nub.

Be calm. Except *fuck*, how can I be? I need to breathe through this, through everything they're doing. Soft, measured breathing. Moving might yield more hurt.

My body chooses to disagree, arching toward Razor's mouth, my heels press into the bed, hands grappling with the bed cover seeking an anchor. The barbs spike skin, and I hiss again at the stings, sighing, moaning at all the wondrous sensations—my back, my nipples and breasts, the bites on my inner thighs. The finger inside me, thrusting. Marcus eyes me and deviously pinches my nipple from below, making it bulge upward into the sharp barb. He's watching me, watching... then he smiles. A mini-orgasm ripples through me, and I lose the world for blissed-out seconds.

Too quickly, it's gone, leaving me unsatisfied and needing more. My body and clit somewhat subdued, I settle again, though Marcus gets me to lift my butt so he can feed wire

beneath me. I feel myself beat and hum within to the tune of rushing blood and overwhelmed mind.

“I...” Another biting barb. I gasp then open and close my eyes. “You know about the USB. I’ve nothing to put it into...” Two, three fingers are pushed inside me, and I’m listening to my heart, seeing the insides of my eyelids. I feel myself squeezing onto those fingers. *Inhale. Exhale.* The wire bites. “We need a phone. We really need one.”

“Yeah, we do need one, and a switched-on network.” Marcus keeps working on me, crisscrossing my belly. “How can we turn on the cell tower? Ideas, Razor? Roll over so I can wrap you again.”

“It’s off?” Razor says.

“I asked the staff about it. Yes, it is.”

And slowly, methodically he builds a cage of wire around me as I roll and shift, lifting my legs, my arms, studying him as he knits it together. The small pains blend. They scratch and prod, hurting deviantly as wire is taken between my legs then drawn to the small of my back to be linked in some labyrinthian way with other strands. If he forgets how to undo this, I’m going to be in trouble.

Somehow, we keep discussing our situation in this house of ill-repute and even less reputable people. Though it’s mostly them not me. I’m okay with simply listening.

The barbs catch in the bed cover and have to be untangled with care and patience.

Who is saying what blurs because I’m not looking so much as feeling and being touched with my eyelids narrowed to slits, barely open enough to see a wayward ant wander by wriggling its antenna. It navigates the dips and hills of the cover and disappears stage left.

“I don’t know how to activate a cell tower network. And first we need to get a phone. You’d need fiberoptic cable to the island, and that linked to the tower. I think.”

“If we could google it, we would know. Oh the fucking irony. You said you nearly got married.”

“Yes.”

“Anyone I know?”

I’m sure Razor isn’t going to say.

The scent of fresh blooms filters down, a rich, tropical perfume. Marcus tucks a blossom into my hair then moves away. Beside him is a small pile of plucked flowers.

“Is it anyone you know?” I can tell he’s thinking of what to say and from the very corner of my eye, I see Razor dragging off his shirt, then reaching for his belt. The metal bars in his pierced nipples gleam, his tattoos writhe as his muscles shift—beautiful embellishments to this beautiful man.

“You don’t have to say.” Marcus leans over my back, his fingers tracing, manipulating. The softness feathering my skin is from blossoms being threaded under the wire. When he sees me looking, we exchange smiles then a soft kiss.

He’s decorating me with wire and blood, and I wonder idly if I’m still a girl or have I become a mildly gory work of art.

“What did they mean by that penalty?” Marcus has switched topics when I’ve been hoping to know more about Razor’s almost bride.

“I don’t remember anything like that, and I read the fine print.”

“Then why say it? To intimidate and make us do what they want us to?”

“Or...there is something that we’re missing.”

“Maybe. They’re playing a game, and we can’t see the board.”

“Or all the pieces.”

Then Marcus is kissing across my ass and tracing the path of the wire, with teasing fingertips and mouth. I turn my head and smile, wriggling a little but not much. I don’t want to stick a barb in his tongue.

During the long pause that follows, I burrow my way through the meaning in those last words. They were talking

about the penalty that I overheard.

“Maybe...” I say, and I’m slurring a little. “It’s just to scare us.”

The pad of wet feet near us draws me to look.

I heard a splash, ages ago, and only now do I realize Razor went AWOL. He’s returned from the pool, is wiping water from his face, shaking his head, and toweling it off.

“Maybe that’s why.” Marcus slides off the bed and stands, begins to take off his clothes—shirt, pants, underwear. “But a million pounds is so ridiculous. And lot of people are sue-happy. Insult their grandmother, and they sue for mental distress. Why risk us doing it?”

“Because...” Razor drops his knee to the bed, then crawls to me, leaning in to kiss my ear then down the line of my jaw. Cool water drips onto my skin. His words are quiet and as intimate as they can be, despite this strange discussion. “Maybe they know we aren’t ever going to tell tales or leave the island?”

That is chilling. I freeze, until the sagging of the bed tells me Marcus has shuffled up between my legs. I did wonder whether to ask for the vibe to be used on me. It would be the perfect ending for being made into this wire-wrapped creature. For him to fuck me instead...better. Best?

I peek across my back. Though Razor takes the collar and uses it to anchor me before he wriggles lower on the bed to kiss my mouth, I glimpse Marcus. Cautiously, he lifts me to tuck a heavy pillow under my stomach, then another, and unsticks the barbs from the bed as I try to bunch my knees under me. He obviously wants to fuck me. At the thought, my arousal peaks and I feel my lower lips swell and unstick from each other.

For him, I bow my spine, presenting my ass higher.

I swear I can feel my wetness leak while I wait for him to move. A subtle breeze sneaks up and cools me there. My throat closes down. The anticipation of being fucked is rising, tightening, sending lust shivering up and down my spine.

He cradles his erection and approaches, thumbs my cunt apart even more, opening me up so as to fuck me. The barbs down there must make this hazardous, and he pushes on some of them. I wonder if it's to bend the points away from where he plans to be.

Leaning closer, he makes his cock nudge at my lips, penetrating me by the smallest of fractions, but it's enough. My gasp is soft, my mouth opens, closes, so unexpected this crash of sensations, no matter that I watched him do it.

"How?" I whisper, worried, questioning Razor about his previous answer and this danger-fucking...both.

"Never fear, he won't be spiking his dick. Or if he does"—he chuckles—"it's all on him."

"The danger of your cunt biting me back only makes you more pretty, more fuckable...more *more*," Marcus harshly breathes the words as he thrusts slowly inward.

I groan and twist my upper body so Razor and I can kiss more easily. The *Fucktoy* tag jingles against the collar. His hands explore my upper body, roaming over my exposed breast, steering around the wire, and sometimes not. He presses it, and I wince then shudder out a whimper as Marcus speeds up his thrusts.

My nipple is suffering, and blebs of the red stuff have smeared across my skin. Razor moves in to kiss me from there and up my neck. A heated trail of softness. The miniature lance of the wires. The surge of cock inside me. *Again, again.* Desire blossoms, running riot through me.

I'm overwrought, grunting into Razor's mouth. Our tongues tangle, and when I dare to enter his mouth, he sucks on mine. One man is inside me, while at the other end, I am inside his partner. Messy, wet, animal sex.

Razor releases my tongue, and then our kissing gets more frantic. He swallows my swearing, my shudders. There is a flurry of heavy shunting drives, with Marcus grasping my ass and a thumb slid into my ass...with my thighs straining. My groans are swept away by Razor's mouth. Desire peaks.

Almost there, *almost*, I clutch at cloth, at skin, and my fingers slide on sweat. Marcus grunts, stiffens, and pours himself into me.

Razor holds my hair, thumb wedged in my mouth, watching me whimper as Marcus fucks into me, again, hard, thudding my flesh.

Collapsed half on my face, I rasp in torn breaths. The last spurt of come fills me, and he pulls out and leans in to bite me—capturing a chunk of my ass in his teeth.

I wait, my lower back still bowed upward, with Razor's palm pressing on my back. I'm released, throbbing with new pains to add to where the barbs taunt me with their tiny fangs.

Cautiously, I slide into a fully prone position, then turn onto my back.

Could I have come? Perhaps. I do not care. I am enveloped by two men, two careful men who bend the barbs aside before they sneak in closer.

Should I ask about the removal of the wire? Not yet. Instead, I run my hand through Marcus' thick hair. In the night it looks blacker than ink but feels glorious. I could do this forever. Be theirs.

His darkened eyes watch me. He cups my wired breast, kisses my arm, my fingers.

"She is Japanese," Razor says quietly. It takes a second or two, but I see that he's answering a long-ago question about his not-wife. "Her family was not happy with her marrying me. At the last, they convinced her not to."

"A clash of cultures?" I venture, tired but happy, but still horny.

"More a clash of kinks. They found out about my deviant proclivities." His gesture somehow says, this, this island of craziness.

I kiss his shoulder where it presses into the bed. "If she couldn't handle it, it was best she said no, surely?"

He nods, hair rasping on the cloth. “I’m seeing that. There was something else too. I might say it another time.” That’s cryptic, but pushing for it would be rude.

He places his hand on my thigh and inhales sharply, curses. He’s found a barb. Fingers advance, even so, until he has them resting curled, over my pussy, draping across my clit. It...swells. How could it not.

Distracted, I inhale, exhale slowly.

“Marcus, can we defuse her soon? I want to cuddle this little bitch of ours, and I find her too prickly.”

Marcus snorts and rolls off the bed, goes around to his bag to retrieve something resembling pliers. The removal of it all takes a while. He wraps it around and squashes it into a small sphere and takes it to a bin, then returns to join us, lying in front of me. Razor and I have already merged as one into a pile, with his hand arriving back where it was. Idly, he begins to toy with my clit. I’m not about to interfere.

My heart seems to stop then to thump at me harder, echoing the slow intentional massage of that nub of mine that’s pulsing back to life.

“Shall we make her come?” Razor murmurs.

I turn over and spoon against him, my rear molding against Razor’s hardening cock.

In answer Marcus slides lower and places his mouth over my breast, starts to quietly suck, his tongue swirling, and his hand seems to be below also, searching. Then someone’s fingers enter me. One is stirring my clit, the other fingers me, fingers curling high inside, stroking.

I’m arching already, squirming, making noises partway between gasps and sighs. I pull Marcus closer, my hand wrapped in his hair. It doesn’t take long for the pressure to build, swirling low, tightening, and I’m clawing at bed and men, lost in the moment—the shoving, pulling and moans, the wet sounds as fingers violate me, knuckle deep.

I’m fucked and coaxed heavenward, until I stiffen and choke, mouth wide. I’m spasming onto whoever has me stuck

with his fingers, in the middle of a blinding orgasm.

I clench and shudder, thighs squeezing in, hit by a wave of smaller climaxes. My muscles tensing in their last throes, I milk their fingers as if to crush them, clutch at someone's wrist to keep those fingers where they are.

Done. I'm so done. I subside, unseeing, gasping, and flat on my back. Somehow, I've rolled over. My thighs are sodden from male come and mine, and someone pushes fingers in my mouth for me to lick. They're both dragging themselves nearer, smothering me a little.

"Am a filling in your man-flesh sandwich?" I ask weakly. Someone laughs. "I think we have enough mayonnaise now." I paw at someone's chest to my right—Razor's, I see.

"I was going to go to sleep, before," he murmurs, mouth in my hair. *As if*. "But you come so prettily."

I doubt this, though I am suddenly exhausted.

His arm is within reach, and I pull it across me, beneath my breasts, then I wriggle and snuggle a little lower with Marcus' arm beneath my neck.

"Mayonnaise..." He snorts. "I'm remembering that."

"We can use wasabi on her pussy, next time?"

"Fuck no," I mumble, complaining despite my smile.

Amusement also twists Marcus' mouth. "Wait there. I think we deserve something like a bottle of wine. I'll be back." He slides away and off the bed, grabs his pants. "I'll shower then go raid the kitchen for snacks and wine. Go have a swim, you two!"

"Good to know I have a butler to call on," Razor says. "A cheese platter, please!"

"Up. Yours." Without turning, Marcus erects a finger and keeps walking.

This is how we end up sitting on the bed, wet from a way-past-midnight swim, with cheeses and snacks, a bottle of champagne, and a bottle of Merlot to share among ourselves.

The water stung when I dived in but was a beautiful reminder of the passion and sadism we'd shared.

I'm on Marcus' lap, between his legs on the bed as I raise my first glass of bubbly. Then I remember where I am, and that by now, I've normally woken from a nightmare.

"I might...I might just have water tonight."

I need to be tough and sober here. Just this once, or twice, I will refrain from getting tipsy. I stare at the glass, revolve it, tasting the wine that hasn't yet touched my tongue...then lean forward to set it firmly on the small table.

"There is another event tomorrow afternoon," Marcus tells us while lightly walking his fingers over my upper back where the wire crossed me. "Let's go look at the ruins in the morning. We can check out your theory about a ledge?"

We agree to do that, but the words Razor said have returned to haunt me.

Maybe they know we aren't ever going to tell tales or leave the island.

"One last thing, tonight, Razor and I decided to add to the tag." Marcus turns the collar on my neck and tugs, then unbuckles it, slips it off me.

I noticed them talking about something earlier, but I'd slipped into the pool again and couldn't hear. What can they possibly add to it?

Razor puts down his glass and takes up the small knife that came with the cheese and snacks. He kneels and with the tag held in place on the table, scratches some new word on there. "We thought this advisable, considering." He shows it to me, the tag sways and it takes me a few seconds to read it.

"*Our Fucktoy*. Oh my. It's adorable and horrifying, all at once. I do love it but...please don't ask me to wear it in public. Except here," I add hastily. And even I'm wondering why the *our* makes it worse.

"Horrifying?" Razor clears his throat while Marcus sounds like he choked on his champagne. "We need to do some

attitude adjustment on you. Tomorrow?”

“Sure.” Marcus grasps my jaw and turns me to face him, while Razor buckles on the collar. “Maybe on top of that nice hill we aim to climb?”

Is he asking *me* to okay it? I’m wondering what this adjustment will entail. As long as they don’t dangle me off the hill over a drop, I’m sure I can take it.

“What big eyes you have, miss.” From inches away, Marcus smiles that wicked smile. My toes scrunch into the ground.

I love how these two bounce off each other when we’re fooling around. How ironic that it’s here, on the Island of Doom, that this is happening. When we leave, I scoop up the cheese knife and then leave it in the pot that sits near the entry to the pool. It’s beneath the green leaves of a fat tropical plant, which I’d google if I had a phone. I feel safer having these men with me. I feel even better having hidden a few weapons, no matter how puny, around the resort.

Phoebe

How did I get to be here? It's a question that pops up daily, hourly sometimes. My reasons seem thoroughly impossible. Until they aren't.

A friend missing.

A maybe murder.

A place full of kinksters and film critics of the worst variety.

The wind whips my hair into my face. Marcus is prowling the ruins.

I turn in place, slowly.

Blue sky is visible through the trees to the east, past some scaffolding. To the south is blue, to the west, and to the north. There is no hint of clouds, or thunder, or the apocalypse, yet here I am, swearing off drink because Milli went missing. The weather needs to get with the program and at the very least crack a bit of lightning across the sky. Was she ever here? Stay tuned for further updates.

I want to settle this, but I fear finding out the truth.

Razor stands near the cell tower, gazing outward. Unmoving, feet planted a solid distance apart, hands hooked on his pants, he appears to be contemplating something deep. The wind shoves hard enough to make him lean to one side,

and I catch at my hair as I walk over. He recovers, resumes his stance. I thread my way past fallen blocks from the old tower, scattered boulders, and tree roots.

“Hey there. Anything interesting?”

He looks around and sees me. “Just wondering how they get internet and cell reception. I figure they have a fiberoptic cable for the tower to be of use. A sat phone would work without this.”

“I’m not really up to date on how to get phones to work on an island.”

“Me neither. But these.” He thumbs toward the tower. “Only work if they can detect another tower or are plugged in somehow. We’re too far away from other land for it to be a tower-to-tower thing.”

“Huh.” I join him, standing beside him and checking out the mast of the tower.

The next event is today, and I can’t help but wonder what it will be. We had breakfast in our room before traipsing up here to this spot. Tourists would love it if it weren’t for the mysterious trapdoor. Marcus squats next to it. The padlock is old-fashioned yet recently oiled, even though the trapdoor has suffered from being out here and rained on.

Although Razor spewed out info on the tower, I doubt that was what he was thinking when I approached. He still appears away in another world, thinking deep thoughts about god knows what. Forlorn even.

“Are you okay?” I incline my head as if to see his face better.

“Yes.” He smiles fleetingly. “Thank you for asking.”

It seems weird to say this to him, considering all the deviancy he’s practiced on me, all the sex...but, “If there’s anything you ever want to talk about?” He hesitates, and I add, “If it’s just your love of cell towers making you look pale and wan, forgive me. I’ll zip my lips.”

“The cell tower? Pale and wan?” I get a smile from him. “No, it isn’t that. It’s not something I should...” He shakes his head. “Look, Phoebe, if it ever looks like this is more dangerous than anyone thought it might be—”

“As in worse than snuff films?”

He coughs out a laugh. “Yes. Anyway, if you get a chance to run, even if you have to leave us behind, do it.”

That’s a rather revealing statement. Like me, he’s realized we may have grabbed onto something we should not have. A lion’s tail. A live wire. A bunch of homicidal freaks. Not that what he says is possible. “We are in the middle of the ocean.”

“I know. Just do it though, if, you know, you can. I’m unhappy I let you come, or that Marcus did.”

“I appreciate you caring, but none of us are clairvoyant. And we still don’t know what’s going on here, plus...I want to see what Marcus is looking at.”

He’s moved to a few yards down from us, to about where my ledge might exist, and is leaning forward with his knee to the ground at the very edge.

“Come.” I grab Razor’s hand and pull him with me.

“Found anything?” Razor asks.

“If I had a phone to hold out like this...” He pretends to do a selfie out past the cliff edge, with the pretend phone aiming downward but tilted. “I might be sure, but I think there is a ledge?”

Soon, we’re all lined up beside the drop, kneeling and peering over. “A mirror on a stick?” I suggest.

“If only we brought one.” Marcus shuffles backward and sits on the ground.

“Maybe later we can do that.” I can definitely see the flatness of a ledge, and there are handholds, places for feet on the way down. I glimpse the sheen of metal. It’s solid rock here, not crumbly, and there is a place to land. Already I’ve kicked off my shoes. Whether there is a door that goes inwards? I have to lay my eyes on the ledge to answer that.

My long shorts and T-shirt will do. I turn onto all fours and carefully lower myself, finding those footholds, calculating where to put my hands.

“What the fuck are you—” Marcus has noticed first. Razor is looking elsewhere, out to sea.

“I need to climb down to find out.” I say this, but I’m already descending. Do first, ask later.

“Phoebe!” That’s Razor.

Go slow.

I don’t take my eyes off the face, pick my way downward, hanging off handholds and toeholds. I check what’s below me and find that railing with my toes, crouch and drop straight down onto the ledge.

My feet hit bumpy rock. It’s flat but debris has accumulated over the years. “Ouch!” I grab at the metal railing to stop myself when I stagger backward. Good of them to install one. Even better that it didn’t rip loose from the cliff when I stood on it. I will need it to get back up there, unless I climb out sideways. I lean out to eye that part of the cliff. *Nope. Not doing that.*

“Are you okay!” Marcus and Razor are yelling.

“Yes!”

“Jesus Christ!” That’s Marcus, but I’m grinning and too busy examining my find to reply.

“How are you getting back? Do I go get a rope?”

“A ladder would be nice!” I’m joking but maybe they missed that from the next swear words I hear. “Joking! I can get back up.” I’m unfit as a toad that’s been flattened by a lorry, but I can make that small distance. Something to thank stepmum for. A school climbing certificate, level four, used to sit on my dresser. Mother wanted me to be an all-rounder, to make her proud. *Barf.*

“I’ll yell when I’m returning! There is a ledge.” Duh. “There is a door.” Another old, metal door. The rust streaks are plentiful. No one has been oiling it much, though painting it

would be what I'd do to keep the metal happy. The key lock also seems rusty. If only I had... What are they called? Lockpicks. Yes. And the skills to use them. And a bucket of grease.

Have any of our evil hosts seen what's happening here? Are binoculars are trained on us? Or a drone? I scan the skies and see nothing. If the room that *must* exist beyond the door is used for snuff films by that Killer Crew, this exploration would be a problem for them.

The men have shut up.

“There is a locked door down here!”

I check for windows and see nothing to show there is one. Unless there is a window further around? Which is possible. This ledge is only about three yards long. I lean out and reassess my impending climb, test the railing, again, to check it will hold if I place a foot on it. Then I drag myself upward using it to take some weight. I stand and balance on it, finding handholds above, using the rock to my left to steady myself.

Without proper shoes, the metal is slippery.

If I fall, I die. But if there is one thing Milli taught me, it is that who dares to try, has more fun. Or they do until that final curtain falls.

Also, if you never ever try, you never ever win. The SAS would love me.

When my foot slips off while I'm halfway up, I remind myself of that slogan and my stupidity, while I hang in mid-air over a several-hundred-foot drop, give or take a few yards—I don't have a ruler on me. If I fall and hit the bottom, it will pulverize my skull, break most of my bones, and turn my brain to mush, that I do know.

Two seagulls swoop below, gliding on air.

I swing there for a few seconds then clench my teeth, curse the skies, and dredge up my bitch attitude cultivated by years and years of being under the thumb of the stepmother from Hell.

I heave my body upward on my puny muscle power, and barely manage to reach and jam one hand into a new crevice, grinding off skin. Then I scramble and haul myself up the last section until the men can grab me and begin to pull me to safety. Hands lock in my T-shirt, under my arm. One of them is lying flat and has me, the other man is holding onto his ankles, so he doesn't slide off the cliff.

On all fours now, on solid ground, I look around, sweat dripping down my face. It's Razor who has my shirt still fisted in his grasp.

I roll and lie on my back, lungs dragging in air, my hand stinging, and listen to the guys swearing at me, asking if I'm okay, then swearing again.

I smile up at them. "I'm okay."

Marcus looks scared *and* angry.

Sometimes, you have to say thank you to your stepmum for what she—

No, scratch that. Fuck no.

"Thank you." I lick my lips then laugh. "Had to save your fucktoy, hey?"

They both glower at me.

Back to normal.

*R*azor

“Let’s get away from here.” I grab one of her arms while Marcus takes the other, and we help Phoebe to her feet. She is still red-faced and breathing hard. Not surprising since she almost fell to her death. “There?” I point.

Marcus agrees. Phoebe shrugs and starts dusting off her hands before wincing and staring at the bleeding one. I turn it over to see her knuckles.

“I’d call you a fool, but maybe it’s too late for that, and I plan to take it out on your ass anyway.”

“Ruler, crop?” Marcus suggests. “I like teeth.”

“Hand, cane, blow-torch?” I continue. “Choose a couple.”

Phoebe eyerolls. “I think investigating this shit place means we take risks. Yes?”

“Calculated risks,” I point out. “Next time ask so we can organize, think, help you do it.”

“You would have said no.”

I glare at her. “Maybe, because it was bloody risky.”

She avoids my eyes, and holds her hand up again, tsking at her abrasions. There is blood, but mostly she has rubbed off skin. “Climbing gloves. I needed those.”

“Come on. Let’s sit over there.” Marcus has her right hand while I have the wrist of her injured one.

We bypass the ruins and the trapdoor, heading for the other side, where the shade and a low stone block make a good place to sit.

Once we are seated, I wait for her to calm her breathing, to look less likely to faint from doing too much in this sticky tropical climate. “Your hand, please.”

“I looked.” She shrugs a shoulder. “It’s minor.” But she places it on my thigh.

“I guess it is.” I poke her fingers, pulling gently at the skin. “Nothing else that Marcus can check on the other hand? You need a couple of Band-Aids on your knuckles. So.” I give her back her hand. “No more doing that again. Please.”

“Because?” She looks from me to Marcus. “I am an adult. It is my friend who is missing. This is not sex, not CNC.”

“Because we care,” Marcus says, though he seems embarrassed to say that. “Because watching you almost die gave me a heart attack. Because I’m going to really take it out on your ass ten times over if you ever do anything like that again.”

“Oh.” Phoebe pulls a face as if shocked, but her shoulders slump. She adds, softly. “Sorry. I didn’t think that would happen.”

I pull her to me, kiss the top of her head then say to Marcus. “Dibs, I get first go at her butt?”

“Flip you for it.” He pulls out a coin.

By then she’s figured out we are serious and tries to rise. “Take care with that hand!” I say that more for her than Marcus.

With more kindness than usual, we wrestle her onto her knees then tie her hands behind her using her own shirt after it’s stripped from her. Took a bit of finagling to do that but we manage to get it off both arms then turn it into bondage material.

“I hope you didn’t hurt my shirt. I’m running out of good clothes.” Such a cute pout.

“Aw, shucks. Then we’d have our fucktoy permanently naked.” I ruffle up her hair.

“Oh the horror,” Marcus drawls.

She blows a raspberry. I win the coin toss.

When I have her over my lap, my hand over her wrists, Marcus cradles her head so she doesn’t bump it on the rock we’re sitting on. We’ve pulled down her shorts and panties, undone her red bra. She’s ninety percent naked, I figure.

I toy with her fingers, stroke along them, watch her respond and covet mine. I exhale softly. “Do you want me to untie your hands?” It’s not something I normally ask, and she hasn’t safeworded, but this, now, is different. She almost fell.

“No. I’m okay.” She squirms on me. “It makes me calm.”

A bruise that shows teeth marks is visible on one cheek.

“*Hmm.* Such a pretty ass, and only one bite bruise? How is that possible?”

“Because we forgot to bring a cane.” Marcus levers her head higher, looks her in the eye. “I do want to bruise it sometime soon, after doing that dumb-ass thing.”

“Actions have consequences. Like a hard spanking.” Quietly, while smoothing my hand over her backside, I accuse her of slacking off, “You didn’t really try to get away.”

Her backside is so gorgeously soft and round. Unlike Marcus, I’d probably keep it unbruised. A spanking though, definitely.

Phoebe sighs. “Sometimes I want to fight and others I’m okay not to.”

I’m still tempted to untie her hands, but either way she seems happy, and a woman in bondage is not something I’d ever say no to.

My erection is growing—why wouldn’t it with her over me. I watch her breathe, admire the curl of her ear and the fall

of her hair over her face, as if we were normal nonkinky lovers about to embrace and kiss, then I deliver ten smacks to her ass, not hard enough to do more than redden her skin and make her yelp a few times.

Then I bend over and kiss her where it's reddest. She wriggles on me, which makes me harder, and now I'm thinking filthier thoughts than I intended. Marcus is making her suck on his fingers while he anchors her to him with a fistful of hair.

He stops to ask her, "What made you think climbing down there was a good idea?"

"I climbed at school, remember? Level four."

"Fuck. I do now, yeah, except that was wall climbing. Not this. What if the rock was decayed and fell apart? You think you can tell that?"

"Um. No. I guess not." She sounds sheepish.

"Idiot. Brave, but still."

She has this fuck-it attitude at times, I realize suddenly. It's not always predictable. It's why she came to us. Why she sold her apartment to get into the CNC frat. Why she's here even. "You need a minder," I murmur, delivering another smack.

"I do not." An indignant tone there, and she scowls.

Marcus grins. "Well, we think you do. And now you have two of us."

If we can catch her before she acts. "Training. You need some training. Fetch. Sit. Stay." I'm teasing but serious too. "Tell us though, what did you find down there?"

"A door with a lock. Metal door. Rusted. The ledge is small. Nothing much else apart from a railing."

Since I'll have to give this end of her up soon, I nudge my hand between her legs and slip two fingers along her slit. She's wet, of course. Likes being mildly spanked, is my guess, as well as our wrestling here.

"Why are you here, Razor?"

Her question is so unexpected. I stare at her; she looks back at me. Her head is tucked under now, with Marcus combing her hair with his fingers. We're all being subdued.

Why am I here? She's making me think.

I welcomed something to do after the wedding crashed and burned. Miyaki occupied my mind more than I needed her to, considering we were finished.

"I was sad." I've never told anyone this. "Needed something to do. Also I like the frat. Most of it is good with people having kinky fun. Only some members go too far. This...seemed as if it needed fixing. I guess that sounds frivolous, but the murder part is still unproven. No matter how odd this place seems."

"Huh." Marcus scrubs his chin where stubble is sprouting. "I never knew you were sad."

"I'll get over it." Am over it, I realize. I feel free of this vague cloud I've had blanketing me for months. Finally. Phoebe and Marcus have cured me, I guess? I like being around them both. Even on this crazy fucking island. "Want some girl ass to smack? It's cute and rounded, and she makes these sweet noises."

Maybe I should say something deep and meaningful to them but I'm wary. I said enough. Things went sideways last time. Wait. Just wait.

We swap her around, and she doesn't kick once. Not me. Not Marcus. I guess we're all in a contemplative mood.

"Look at this. Now I have your mouth end."

She smirks, pokes out her tongue.

"And your tongue. If only I had a peg for that."

It zips back in, and she bares her teeth. Brats are so much better than the obedient ones. More interesting, more fun, more challenging. So fucking much better. Miyaki was an obedient girl and barely into CNC. Maybe fate organized this excursion to this island of kinky fuckery?

But...

Padlocks and trapdoors.

Missing girls and intimidation.

People creepily watching us.

And maybe murder. This isn't that simple. If only it was. I'd be discussing doing more of this with Phoebe and Marcus if it were.

"We need to get out of here, before something bad happens."

"Easier said than done," Marcus says, as he begins to soundly spank her ass. Her yelps are louder, but then the force he's using is greater.

"No bruises," I suggest. "If possible."

"Hmmm." His next smack is lighter, then he too gives in to the need to simply feel his palm running over her skin. His hand disappears, and she inhales sharply.

"Is the nasty man fingering you?" I tilt her neck back so I can see her face, tap her nose.

Her mouth opens, and she blinks at me, preoccupied. The sounds of wetness being forced aside by digits delving into her cunt is distinctive. I could get her to suck on me.

Should.

Should not?

I unzip and pull out my erection.

The only thing to interrupt us is another couple arriving. Marcus notices, too, but I barely look over my shoulder. Maybe they've come to check if we forced the padlock. Maybe they're seeing the sights or wanted some time up here to do naughty things, like us.

"Open wide," I tell her.

M^{arcus}

In our room, a shiny green ball gown with a diamante bodice and ribbons on the sleeves is laid out on the bed for Phoebe.

“I’m reminded of the dancing scenes in those old movies.” I circle the bed. “Has a ball gown ever had to be quarantined for being too overdecorated? I’m guessing the suits are ours.”

Phoebe has this biggest-ever smile spreading across her face.

“What? What did I say?”

“Quarantine? Really? Though I too am overcome with a case of the delicate-lady faints looking at it.”

The suits have a frock coat appearance that’s harking back to a Wild West movie, and if only they gave us six guns to go with them.

“The gown will make it hard for you to run from us.” Razor strokes his chin. “I like it.”

“You would.” I snag the suit with wider shoulders that looks my size.

It’s late afternoon by the time we rock up at the event, where everyone seems swathed in mountains of glossy fabric or old-fashioned suits. The right-hand side is walled off behind white partitions that run the whole length of the hall. Buffet tables line the walls, offering finger foods and pastries,

cheeses, fruits, and chocolates. I'm guessing the main meals will be served much later. The music is as ancient as the costumes, from World War One to Two, the Charleston is one I recognize. A few couples dare to try waltzing across the central floor. Only one foursome has given up and is piled on the sofas at the far end, kissing and fondling each other.

"I'd say this is going to be a boring night." Razor eyes this with a skepticism that I'm also feeling. "Except this place rarely does boring."

"Yeah. So true." Then and there I decide to spill everything to Razor. Later though. I need him to back me up in all that I might do, and I'm not using Phoebe. She's too flighty, too delicate, too something I'm not yet sure of. I guess I just don't want to feel guilty when something I instigate goes wrong, and she gets hurt.

Ironic, since we are at Satan's Tea Party here. *Killer Crew Club*. Those fingers... At the memory, my stomach feels infested with sickly worms.

"Would you boys care to partake of the dance floor?" Phoebe links arms with Razor and me.

"Boys? Them there are fighting words, miss damsel."

"Damsel?" Her hiccupping laugh and then Razor's make me realize this is one of the few times we've laughed together.

Some distant whoops echo. "Let's go explore. If it's boring—"

"If it's boring," Razor adds quietly, "I think we should still stay. That penalty might be fake, or not. They haven't even bothered to send a copy of what we signed to the room."

Phoebe tugs us forward. "And it's so noisy we could talk about how to get into *that* room, and nobody will know."

That room. I'm not telling her my idea. At this point, she is best kept out of the loop.

Concealed behind the dancers and the groups talking, are a roulette table and two other tables where people are playing cards for golden casino-style chips.

I point at the first one with three men seated around it. “I would hate to think what they’re playing for?” The chips could represent anything.

“Flesh and favors?” Phoebe’s eyes narrow as if she is sure it will be something deviant.

“And how consensual would those be?”

“Or just money.” Razor casts me a glance. “Everyone here is rich. Redistribution of wealth is a favorite of humans.”

Except if we took too much from these people, I reckon we’d get knifed, either figuratively or in reality if they were extremely pissed at the loss.

For an hour or so we mingle, pretend to dance, and trip over each other’s feet, except for Razor, who is quite good at this. We gamble and find out the chips mean whatever the table occupants choose them to mean, but only for long enough to participate and then we get out of Dodge before the piranhas eat us. We nibble food, we mingle some more.

“What is the purpose of this?” I ask Razor, swallowing a tiny caviar snack and a gulp of champagne. The alcohol is flowing.

“They haven’t been handing out drinks until this one.” Razor echoes my thought.

Phoebe is off visiting the bathroom when the central divider begins to be rolled away to either side, revealing a head-high mesh barrier behind it. On the other side women, and a couple of men, are lined up in rows, semi-naked, with their ball gowns or pants removed or cut away to the waist. They’re strapped into metal devices that hold them in place, kneeling, with their rears facing us.

Only now do I notice that half the people in the room have been vanishing.

“Getting a bad feeling.” Hesitantly, I step forward to see more of the room.

“Getting?” Razor curses.

The left-hand side of the dividing wall rolls further back... fifth along is Phoebe, gagged and dressed only in the lacy white underwear that came with the dress. She is strapped down, ass presented outward.

“They must have taken her in the bathroom.” Razor arrives beside me, iron-eyed, jaw twitching with tension. “The fuckers.”

“The nonconsent part of CNC is strong tonight. I am concerned she may not be intended for us alone.”

“Yes. Same here. Other thoughts?”

“Wait and see.” What else. It is possible our thoughts are worse than what they mean to do.

The stage has been revealed, and our dear friend Bastion stands there beaming, his perfect blond coiffure stiff and combed upright, his suit a shiny black. The mic on the stand before him is larger than his hand.

“Welcome! Welcome to our annual bidding war for the asses, mouths, and whatever else you choose to use, of our lovely contestants!”

The cheering is loud, and people turn and raise a glass to me and Razor. Eyes beady and expectant. Smiles glued on. They know they have us fucked. I smile back—a smile hopefully less ghoulish than theirs.

“This is bad,” Razor says.

“Yes. If we run in and take her back?”

“I’m sure that’s in their expected results. It might precipitate a violent response, earlier than we need to see one?”

I decipher his words and fume. I want to get violent. I want to poke out their eyes, the vultures.

“Ladies and gentlemen! As you know, each of these contestants will be offered to you, and the highest bid will win them for the night. Any of you can win! You can then *do* anything to them! Choose wisely. Spend wisely.” He gestures broadly at the hall. “May the best whatever you are win!”

“Fuck,” I whisper. “Anyone can bid for her.”

“But how much will they bid?” he muses.

“She’s gagged. If she safewords, we won’t hear it unless we get over that barrier.”

“Violence is our last resort. We are outnumbered.”

I grunt my unmentionable answer.

The bids on the first woman, a blonde, reaches ten thousand and more before it peters out and someone wins her.

“I can afford this. You can,” Razor says, calmly.

“I am not letting anyone else have her. We should just leave.”

“*We should,*” he repeats. “But we probably can’t. I don’t think any of this, tonight, is meant to be fair. She did not consent to be in that restraint. Theoretically, a safeword should set her free.”

“Then let’s try?”

“And we’d fail. They want something else from us.”

“Money?” I venture.

“Our fear. I’ll bet they want to scare us shitless.” His hushed tone makes snakes spawn in my gut, joining the worms.

“I don’t fucking like this.”

The second, third, and fourth women are bid on and won. Phoebe is next.

I step forward, elbowing through to the front next to the mesh barrier. “Can we check if she wants to safeword, please.” I raise my goblet and am wishing I could shove it, broken, down Bastion’s neck, when he grins.

“No. We asked her already, sir. Phoebe Bartholemew, daughter of our esteemed board member, Queen O, agrees to being bid on and then fucked etcetera, by whoever wins her.”

Even from this distance, I can hear her groaning out some unintelligible sound. Her head and neck are locked down, as

are her arms, hands, and legs.

“I need to get over there and hear this myself!”

“Sorry. No. You may however bid on her?” Bastion bows, almost fucking curtseys at me, the fuckturd.

“Thirty thousand!” A man yells.

“Fifty!” And that is the woman we saw at the pool. The one stitching red ribbon and metal into her girl.

“Ninety!” Another man.

“And we are off to a great start!” Bastion stares. “Your bid, Mister Marcus Thompson?” Every syllable is enunciated.

“Fuck you,” I mutter as Razor grasps my upper arm as if to wake me or stop me. “Two hundred thousand!” I can afford this, just.

There is a palpable, pregnant silence that gives birth to only harsh breathing, from myself, and some more swearing from Razor.

“Four hundred K, US dollars!” At the American accent I whip my head around, seeking the owner. I can’t find him, and my head is aching from the blood pumping in.

I swallow.

“No.” Razor’s grip tightens. “Let’s just go get her.”

“No violence, you said. They can’t make me pay this. It’s fraudulent anyway. Half a million in USD!”

That’s enough. That has to be enough.

More heartbeats thud through the silence. *One, two, three, four, five.* I count to distract myself. *Six, seven, eight, nine—*

“No more bids? Anyone? Someone? Come *onnn.*” Bastion is encouraging the crowd.

“Shit.” I curl my fists tight, knowing Razor is shaking his head, in disgust? In resignation?

“Sold to Marcus! You can claim her when the auction is done, sir! As long as payment is finalized.”

A thought rampages in. I shove aside my anxiety and anger. “How can they make me pay when the internet is off?”

“Ummm.” He eyes me. “What do you mean... Wait. Only through using a banking app or similar. I see what you’re saying. They need to connect to the bank to transfer it.”

“Which means a phone should also have coverage.”

“Yes. We don’t have a phone, Marcus.”

I look around to check no one is close enough to hear what I’m about to say.

“I do. Don’t ask. I’ll hand it to you and turn it on. Check for a signal, and if there is any hint of one, send the message I have lined up ready to go. As for the money. I can cover it, just.”

“Fucker.” He scans the room as two men head our way—staff, I assume, wanting my money. “I can do that. I’m going to flush you down the toilet for not saying you had one, before this. I’ll split the cost.”

“Thanks. Later, once we are gone from this island, you have my permission to flush me.”

“Deal, sir.”

We bump knuckles. I’m hurting but also thinking, we have them. If we get a signal, we have this. *Location, location, location*. Even if the message fails, surely the phone can be located. She said her IT guy was brilliant-er than Stephen Hawking.

The rest is a blur. I’m bankrupting myself, again, spending every spare cent I have. Money that I need to keep my business solvent. All for this woman I rejected for years. Guess I’m a fool, or in love, or a fool in love. Or maybe I’m just a white knight rescuing random maidens.

We use the excuse that I have to get my account details from the room. I give the ass phone to Razor. I will tell him how that got to the island, one day. I get escorted to a room that has more locks than anywhere else here, get sat down and made to transfer the money. It works, with permission and

codes, and I probably opened up my account to hacking doing this on their machine. If they don't drain it all out, I will be shocked.

I will never forgive.

I rise, stiffly, say nothing to the guards, and am escorted back to the event where Razor waits at the entry. He nods to me, mouths, *done*. I nod back and hope my blood pressure normalizes, one day.

Blood will be spilled.

Then we wait for Phoebe to be released to us.

When they insist that we must participate or else be fined, I go to her, still locked in that device, and I spank her, robotlike.

“Done!” I raise my arms and face the room, challenge in my glare as I sweep them all. “We have participated! Now fuck off.”

Then I let her go.

We are done. They watch us, our every move, but do nothing.

I imagine myself smashing their faces to a pulp. It is clear every single person here, on the bidding side of the room, is in on the secrets, whatever they might be.

Her sobs and shaking as Razor and I surround her will never be forgotten.

Their eyes follow us as we leave with Razor carrying her.

I will kill them all. Every last one. And I've no idea how but it's definitely on my Christmas wish list.

M^{arcus}

“Sorry,” I hear her whisper to Razor, and he shushes her, but she ends up wriggling enough that he sets her on her feet. “I am okay now.”

Wiping tears from her cheeks, she stands wobbling and frowning, shaking her head, even though both of us have once more surrounded her.

I take her hand, just holding it while I brush more stray tears from her face. I hug her to my chest, my arms wrapped about her. “You don’t look okay. We don’t need you to make yourself be strong or anything.” I’m awkward, but this isn’t what I’m used to doing.

When Phoebe sighs and hugs me back, then gathers in Razor, it feels good, too good—considering what we just rescued her from.

“We’ll go back to our room, and you can talk or not, and shower. We all need a shower and a change.”

She needs clothes full stop.

“I wish we had a plan. I’ve trapped us here, haven’t I?” She screws up her mouth at one side, rueful. “My idea to do this. My fault.”

“Uh, no.” Razor smacks her ass lightly, jarring her into me. “We all chose to do this, for our own reasons. Marcus because

he's a dick. You because you lost a friend. Don't insult yourself, Phoebe."

"I'll try not to but if we all die here. *Fuck*. Just..." She exhales, loudly. "Fuck."

He looks ready to smack her butt even harder, but somehow, we end up returning to our room.

After getting cleaned up, having a few slugs of scotch, and eating while the three of us supposedly discuss plans, she falls asleep. Now I have to contend with Razor once he emerges from the bathroom. The man has been holding in what he's found out. That I am the bearer of a phone.

"Come," he intones, beckoning me to the patio so we can speak without waking her.

With the sliding door closed, I lean my arms on the glass-and-metal railing that stops us falling onto the roof, below.

"Marcus, are you still voting for not telling her we have possibly been in contact with Emma? She needs some hope."

"We don't know we did it. Don't know they received the message or our location. It's not a vote. When we are sure, when it won't propel her into maybe doing something impulsive, we can tell her."

"Uh-huh. When." He stands with his hip against the railing, assessing me—as if I have the answers. "I don't think she is that bad. If we say to act normal, she will."

"Jumped down that cliff without a rope. Drinks like a fish when no one stops her. Signed up with you for random kink... spent a few mill on joining a board she isn't qualified to join."

"You just did similar."

"That was done while under enemy fire." I stick the corner of my thumb in my mouth and chew off a ragged piece of the nail. "Shit though. I hope I can recover it."

"If we get out alive and with evidence, I'm sure you will be reimbursed. If not—"

"We may be dead?"

“Yes.”

“Okay, with that sort of outlook, you’ll be interested in what I want to do tonight, while they’re all at the event.”

“Keep going.” He glances at where Phoebe lies asleep on top of the rumpled covers.

“And she is not coming with us. I cuffed her ankle to the bed while you showered. That thing has sturdy anchor points. But here, listen up, this is what we’re doing.”

He acts like a fish out of water for a few seconds, mouth opening but no words emerging, then he gives up and nods.

“We are going to climb back up to the ruins and get into that room through the door on the ledge, get some evidence, maybe see if the cell tower can be connected to from there. A cable runs into the ground nearby.”

“How?”

I tick off the items on my fingers. “Rope. I found one. It was decorative but is sturdy enough. I’ve placed knots in it and a loop for the feet at the end. A metal bar to bash in what I hope will be an old lock.”

“They’ll know if we manage it. We can’t put a lock back together. However, I’m getting this feeling that whatever they’re intending is almost ready for us. They aren’t even pretending to be nice. Who is going down the rope?”

“You. I’m stronger, heavier too. I can pull you up, take some of the weight as I lower you. I agree about the impending doom feeling. The way Bastion called out Phoebe’s name back there, and Emma’s, it felt...ominous?”

“Ominous, yes. And everyone is saying don’t trust you. There’s no boat, no plane, only Queen O to rely on for rescue.” He stares upward at the night sky. “I’m in, of course. You’re lucky I’m easily convinced. We should go now. The event won’t last forever. Bring the phone so we can try it up there.”

“I was going to. That office I went to tonight must have the controls to the internet and phone connections. I doubt it’s up at the ruins. They’d want it to be down here, close by. I was

wondering, what if they regularly turn it on at night while we're asleep?"

"Could be. We could sit up tonight and take turns to see if we can connect again. But if you want to go and climb that hill, we need to do it now. We can talk on the way up the track."

"Good." As I move to the door, he stops me with his hand on my arm.

"I have to ask this."

"Yes?" I brace myself, expecting some heated questions about why I've hidden things, why he should trust me.

"Are *you* okay?"

I flounder for a second, but I'm touched. I really am. Razor and I have been friends but never that close. Never *this* close. I nod. Are these tears trying to come out? "I am okay now. As much as I can be." I think back to the second when I made that outrageous bid to keep their hands off of Phoebe. "I'm a... I am rather attached to her."

"So am I, I guess." He breaks eye contact, looks in at Phoebe, and the moments string together. "I hope there is a way out of this."

"Yeah." I have yet to tell him the fingers were real, severed fingers. That will not make for optimism, but realism is better. "Come on. Try not to wake her."

But when we pass by the bed, ready to exit out the door, Razor speaks, quietly. "We need to tell her."

He's probably right. I chew the inside of my cheek.

And she rolls over, breathtaking as usual, her hair sprawling across the cover, her areola showing through her white tank top. That and the sweetness of her navel and the indentations in her panties where her sex is molded to it—the fabric has pushed into her cleft...this draws my eyes down her body. The clearing of her throat snaps my focus upward.

Blinking slowly, Phoebe rubs at her face. "What?" Awareness dawns as she takes in our bag and our dark outdoor

clothes. The handcuff clinks as she flexes her ankle. “Where are you going? And without me?”

“The ruin.” Razor pats her foot, squeezes it. “We decided it was unsafe for you. Stay here. Sleep.”

“You were leaving without saying. You wanted me to freak out?”

“I left a note for you.”

“Marcus!” The accusation pairs with anger. Anger is better than fear, though the faint quiver of her mouth is new. I have to wonder if she is scared and hiding it.

“I don’t want you hurt. When we come back, I’ll tell you everything.”

“Everything?” she rasps out. “That says you have more you’re hiding.”

“Trust us. You need to sleep.”

Razor follows me after kissing her foot. I smile. He isn’t game to try for her forehead or lips.

“And if I safeword that?” She’s jabbing a finger at the cuff.

“Doesn’t work on this.”

We close the door on her muffled grumbling and move quietly through the resort then out the rear door. We pick up the heavy rope and the metal bar I found earlier that I hope is enough to break that lock.

Onward, upward, silent as possible.

We’re halfway up the hill to the ruins when Razor makes an observation I’ve already turned over, since a day ago.

“They have all that staff and yet we see nothing of them while doing this.” He waves a hand about. “We are the ones they are trying to mess with and confuse—”

“Mostly Phoebe though. I figure they have a grudge against her stepmother.”

“So do a lot of people. So why are we left to do as we wish to?”

“Let’s see. Stupidity? Neglect? Or they are watching and maybe videoing this, even? Or they don’t care since we cannot escape. Choose one or two of those.”

“Yeah. That is what I was afraid of.”

“Let’s pick up the pace.” I start to jog. The theorizing as to why changes nothing.

Ten minutes later, we reach the ruins. It takes little time to arrange the pre-knotted rope and for Razor to decide he can do this. I’ve anchored the rope end around a small tree and myself.

It should be enough, I tell myself as he crawls backward to lower himself.

“Wait!” I chew through my thought. Is now a good time for this? What if he finds dismembered bodies in that room. I need to tell him. “In the freezer, the eyeballs were sweets but next to them, I found a tray of severed fingers. Real fingers.” Souvenirs of the dead, I assume. He can figure that out.

Razor gifts me with a seriously disbelieving stare but that gradually morphs. His face shifts into acceptance, and he nods curtly. “Got it. I’m assuming that’s a warning.”

“Yes. I didn’t want there to be surprises or, you know?” Even I don’t know. Anything could be in this room.

“Thanks, I think.” Then, hand over hand, he descends. As his weight drags at me, I feed out the rope. My muscles are straining to lessen the slide and a yard, two, slip past my gloved hands before I hear a muted yell.

“Made it!”

With the rope safely fastened to the tree, I crawl to the edge and listen. Already I hear metal *thunks* and a few high-pitched chiming sounds, as if the bar is used to bash the lock.

“Any luck?”

“Wait. Wait.” Three more metal-on-metal sounds come to my ears, and he lets out a whoop. “It’s done. The lock has disengaged from the door. I can swing it inward.”

“And?”

Silence. I can hear him moving about then the thickness of soil and rock between us removes all telltale noises of him doing whatever he is doing. I lie down on my back and count the stars overhead, waiting, waiting, for a sign all is well.

Or a sign he has discovered a gateway to Hell.

I switch on the phone, hoping to see bars. Nothing.

How long is this taking? The moon is barely showing a sliver, and going back down the path will take some care, but with the rope climbing back up from the ledge should be doable. Insects are buzzing about. Thankfully, they aren't biting.

Ten minutes must have passed. What is Razor doing? I squint at the phone screen and it shows a signal. I had a text waiting and punch send. Before I can punch in and send another message or do anything else, it's gone again.

But a message notification sounds.

We are coming in force. Delay them. Delay. Delay.

There must be a drone up, relaying the signal, just like they said they'd do. What the fuck does *in force* mean though? Delay? For how long? Am I supposed to believe in some imaginary rescue? I've got nothing here, am half a million in debt, and everything is going to shit faster than someone going over Niagara Falls in a fruit basket.

*R*azor

This idea of Marcus' is enough to give me PTSD for some time to come. I am not a climber, but I don't normally fear heights. I also don't normally dangle myself over drops when the light is fading and there's a chance I'm going to end up a bloody pulp on the slopes below. I should've thought about this more. The metal bar Marcus found is tied to my waist and clunks against the rock. The rope makes a rough abrasive noise and I imagine the strands being worn through and snapping. The big knots catch as I slip, slide, and lower myself.

Also, my shoes don't have enough grip for rock. Bare feet would be worse.

The last drop onto the ledge isn't as bad for me as it must have been for Phoebe, since the rope carries much of my weight.

"Made it!" I yell up at Marcus. "Don't lose the damn rope." If the rope gets loose and falls, I'm stuck here. The ledge is a rectangular box chiseled out of the rock to a bit above head height. Leaning carefully into the guardrail, I peer up at the lip. The paling sky lets me see enough to imagine Phoebe clawing her way back up from here. It looks impossible.

There is no point in overthinking this.

I turn to the door.

Metal, as she said, rusted, and the lock is in the usual place for a lock but with an enormous keyhole, which means this door has been here a long time. Hitting it might force the deadbolt from the frame? The hinges and door jamb show it should open inward.

I heft the bar and get to work, praying the repeated clangs are muffled by the rocks and directed out to sea. On the tenth hit, the lock and door separate a little, with the surrounding metal bending.

“Any luck?” Marcus asks.

“Wait. Wait.”

Another three blows springs the door inward, and I shove it further open.

“It’s done! The lock has disengaged from the door! I can swing it inward.”

There is a room beyond the door, of course, and I see nothing past the first yard. The sun is expiring on the other side of the hill, and all I have is a lighter.

The lighter fires up on the second flick. As I slowly advance, I hold it high. A stone table materializes, and I pass it, shuffling, aiming to not crash into anything. I leave my hand touching the stone, slipping along the edge, for balance and to orient myself, but I have to release it if I want to go further into the room.

It’s gone now, behind me.

Without that, the room seems to swell and tilt, the darkness piles in, squeezes down, as if it has a presence, a consciousness. As if it means to conquer me. I hold the lighter at arm’s length, directly ahead and turn slowly.

A metal stairway sways in the gloom, dancing to life as my light paints it. I don’t know how big this room is, or if there are holes in the floor. Or traps.

Why would there be traps? I don’t know but there could be? Paranoia seems essential for survival on this island.

I inch my way further in. If there is an electric light, the switch would be beneath the trapdoor and the stairway must lead to it?

On the basis of that flimsy theory, I climb the staircase, feeling my way, and my hand catches on the edges of rust flakes, finds the corrugations of the treads. There is a handrail to each side. The steps echo beneath my shoes, dust or rust motes drift downward in the faint yellow light from the flame.

If this thing goes out, I'll have to find my way back to the doorway in near pitch blackness.

How many steps are required to reach a ceiling? Impossible to answer. This room could be any size.

I search each tread before I step on it, afraid it might be missing or weakened by rust and time. How long since this stairway was last used and took a man's weight? That doesn't make sense if they've been filming here. I know this. I'm still checking them.

Above, the light pools on metal, and my head almost bangs into the trapdoor. While gripping the handrail, I slowly move the lighter around the edges of this square.

My Holy Grail appears—a light switch. I want to kiss it.

Flicking it on is almost as good as sex.

Hallelujah, I can *see*.

Fuck, yes. The stairs descend to a floor that seems ten feet below.

I sit on this top section to catch my breath and wipe away sweat. I'm sweating despite the lack of real exertion. Chalk up a fear of utter darkness next to a fear of heights. It is the unknown that almost beat me.

But what is here? My first sweep reveals everything one might stock a torture dungeon with. Or a sex dungeon.

The stone table proudly sits in the middle while this stairway is off toward the rear wall. I recall the trapdoor's position above, at the crown of the hill. Most of the room is toward the east then.

Stone table. Walls covered by glass-fronted display cabinets and cupboards. Devices and weaponry line the far wall. Battle axes, scimitars, coils of rope, and wire. A scythe the devil would love to wield, various floggers and whips, and an entire bottom shelf of leather harnesses and masks.

None of this proves they were making snuff films though a tripod that could take a camera sits off to my right. I descend the stairway and realize the table has manacles just as Phoebe described.

From her dream. From the image shown to us at the board meeting.

Positioned to hold someone splayed out, on back or belly.

A chill snakes in as I stroll past the camera tripod and circle the table. A hose is coiled on the wall and small metal grills in the floor must cover drains. So they have water being pumped here. The floor slopes toward the drains. I imagine them clogged with pooling blood, flowing from someone tied to the table. Hosing must make it spill to the outside, through an outlet drilled in the cliff, down the cliff onto the wave-washed beach. If I'm right, there would be ample DNA in the drains and on the cliff face. And who will ever know, on this small island in the middle of a nowhere ocean?

Are they killing people for fun? I cannot do forensics and look for gobbets of flesh or spots of blood. No portraits of victims sit on the walls. I look around again. A laptop lies on a narrow desk, and if there are severed fingers in a freezer at the resort, those cupboards could hold clues.

I try the laptop first. Though connected to power it's passworded. Phoebe's USB might circumvent the password. I move on to the cupboards, pull out drawers full of BDSM gear and things that could qualify as torture implements—pliers, thumbscrews, clamps, and scalpels—as well as stuff I might find in any drawer. Notepads, pens, staplers, reams of printer paper. There are no specimens of human origin, no souvenirs of body parts preserved in formalin.

Then I reach a set of drawers with large posters rolled up inside. When I unroll them, one after the other shows a woman

strapped down on the table or kneeling, being hurt, being tortured, being fucked while a man strangles her. A small plastic lunchbox contains something that rattles. I touch it gingerly, ready to be revulsed, horrified. This might be teeth.

Evil coils and weighs heavy in my churning stomach. I resist the urge to vomit, holding down the corners of the last poster where she's on the floor, bleeding out from somewhere beneath her.

How am I going to tell Phoebe what I've found? The posters are of Milli. Her friend was here and is likely dead.

I unclip the lid of the box.

There are no teeth. Inside is a blue-and-silver mermaid pendant with a decorative chain. The back of the pendant is inscribed. If I had any doubts, now I do not.

To Milli, Happy Birthday from Phoebe.

“Fuck!”

I can't do this to her. I won't be able to say the words.

This concrete knowledge that we are on the island with a bunch of happy killers should be the worst of this. We have no way off, have seen no boats, no conveniently parked helicopter, we've no way to reliably communicate with the rest of the world. We're outnumbered and have no weapons.

But telling Phoebe her friend has been murdered, like this...

It tears at me, cuts me mortally deep, aching way down where my heart beats.

An ugly thought spawns as I trot through the facts and round them up.

What were they going to do? Why are these the only posters? Were they going to set up this room with posters of Milli dying to shock Phoebe?

We left her in the room, alone, tied to the bed. That might not have been wise. I guess we didn't quite believe that murders could be happening here. We didn't *believe*, not in our

guts. Not really. There were always those niggles of, maybe not? Maybe it's just films, not killing? Maybe not here?

I slam shut the drawer and sprint for the door that opens onto the ledge.

Phoebe

Three taps at the door jolt me from my futile poking at the lock on my ankle cuff with my fingernails. I couldn't budge it anyway. Holding my breath, my hands shaking for some stupid reason, I stare at the door.

"Yes?" I ask cautiously. Fear is creeping about in my bones. I hate how what happened has robbed me of my courage. I'm in a tank top and underwear, and this cannot be Razor or Marcus.

"It's Aimee," comes the quiet reply, as if she's talking with her mouth right next to the door. Relief floods me. "Can I come in?"

She doesn't sound like a threat.

"Sure, if you can unlock the door. Sorry, but I'm all tied up right now." I'm making jokes again. Has to be a good sign.

A second later, the door clicks and starts to swing open. How did they open it so quickly? And...they asked permission but is this this really a woman? What if they brought someone to speak for them? What if...

Aimee enters.

She is the submissive who was getting pierced and laced up at the pool. Her red hair is even more startling up close. She waves in a half-circle. "Hi."

“Uh. Hi.” I jiggle my ankle, wondering if she can do her trick on this, because the door must have an even more complex lock? “Can you?”

“Sure.” She springs over like a happy spaniel and gets to work using a set of lock picks. “And why have they tied you to the bed?”

“A longish story, though mainly they just wanted to go off and do something without me.”

The cuff pops open, and I rub my ankle—mostly to let myself think. I was careful not to yank on the cuff. She seems harmless. I bounce off the bed and grab a pair of shorts, bra, a top, and a light jacket to fend off the mosquitoes that fly around here some nights.

“What are you doing here?”

Aimee adopts a serious expression, which still looks way cute on her with those rosebud lips. She’s shorter than me by several inches. I would never have imagined her a lock-pick expert.

“I’m here as an intermediary.”

“Long word. Your thievery skills intrigue me too.” As I drag on shorts, I eye the cuff where it hangs off the bed.

“Long word, and it’s a long story too, I guess. Like yours. A man wants to talk to you about the unsavory things going on here. He’s waiting down at the jetty.”

She tucks her lock-picks into the pocket of her black Lycra shorts. Her shirt is black also...which makes me wonder if she plans to blend into the night. Everyone is camouflaging themselves, tonight, and here I am in black shorts and a pale blue top. I’m half night-camouflaged.

Who is this girl? She knows this resort is doing criminal things, but does she know they may be making snuff films? I’m not sure I should mention that. Unsavory could mean many things.

Why is she really here?

I'm wary of trusting after being grabbed and gagged in the bathroom, hustled out and locked into that apparatus, ready to be violated. If Marcus hadn't been prepared to pay...

That was on me. *I got us in too deep.*

The risk-taking is all on me. I cannot make things worse, can I?

I swallow and switch back into the now.

"I'm not sure I feel going down there at night is safe. Especially if I'm to meet one of these..." *Assholes*. "People."

"Yeah. He thought as much, but if he wanted to do bad things, he could be in here doing them."

She is probably correct, except Marcus and Razor might return and spoil anything nefarious, if it were happening. And she has freed me. She looks too nice to be evil. Not a smart way to judge, and how did this man choose her to speak for him? There is more beneath the surface of this. Sharks might be lurking.

I sigh and choose the riskier option.

"Let's go then." I push my feet into a pair of gym shoes and tie the laces. "Not sure why I'm trusting you," I mutter as we pad down the corridor toward reception.

She only sends me a half-smile and keeps going, silent as the plague, or is that deadly as the plague? I'm still rattled from earlier and probably not making wise decisions or good similes. We take a turn away from the main door, and Aimee unlocks a side exit. I'm definitely thinking Aimee is a ninja.

My logic may suck, but my instincts are saying, go there, talk to this guy. Right now, we are stuck here. An ally could be highly worthwhile.

And Aimee is what? "Are we friends now?"

"This question is a little too early to decide, yes?"

"I guess so." The jetty looks deserted though we angle off again, sneaking across the warm, soft, beach sand toward a darkened hut that sits at the end of a smaller pier. It's on the far

side of the little bay. I don't recall this from the day we landed, perhaps due to a rocky outcrop jutting into the bay, screening the pier with palms and shrubs.

We pause where concrete steps merge into the sand and lead onto the pier. At the opposite end of the pier, the door of the hut seems to wait for me, the frame edges glowing with faint light. To the left, a wash of paler sea marks where window light is cast onto the water.

"You can go in. I will stay here to guard you. If anyone comes, I will—"

"Hoot like an owl? Have I been watching too many movies?"

She nods and smiles then points toward the door. I wonder whether it's meant for fishing or for isolated bacchanalian rendezvous. Surely the latter.

"No hooting. I will make a clicking noise." Then she clicks her tongue. I would need ninja hearing to detect that above the rushing of the waves rolling in.

"Okay. Less fun but okay." I'm flippant because I'm nervous.

Walking closer lets me gauge the depth of the water sloshing against the supports. It looks deep and perhaps that's a trickery of the darkness. I'm not about to jump in and test it.

My footfalls on the jetty make creaks and dull but obvious noises. The door opens, spilling light across the timber while I'm still yards away. A man stands there, silhouetted. I know him. I stop dead, rocking, momentum trying to make me go forward, while all my instincts are screaming *fuck no!*

If I were to kill anyone after what they did to me, he would surely be one of the first on the list.

"Simon." His name feels vile as it slides off my tongue, and my distaste must show.

A glance behind shows Aimee still there and she's shooing me forward, as if she truly thinks this guy has something useful to say or she has some stake in this. Money, love, sex,

all of those are big motivators that drive people to do horrendous things. My heart thumps away, fierce enough that it seems to reverberate, reminding me I'm still alive, and that is always desirable. I need to stop being so afraid.

I take a step.

“I won't bite.” He fake-gnashes his teeth, and I pause to catalogue the cut of his short, blonde hair and his perfect linen shirt with the onyx buttons. He wears long pants, here, tonight, in the place of sweat, crocodiles, and air so thick you could carve it up for dinner—probably along with a vast array of bugs.

A cooling breeze arrives, as if to dispute what I'm thinking. It rattles the distant palm trees and delivers one last bug. I swat it from my face, and it whines away, into the darkness. “What do you want with me?”

“To talk.” He steps back and indicates I should enter.

I have back-up, don't I? Yes, a woman I only just met, who looks sweet and as if she'd fold if someone breathes on her. But then again, if she can do break and enter so smoothly, I have to wonder at her job skills. Who is she?

Who is Simon?

I'm torn. I'm more than a little afraid.

And I go in past him. Spider meet poisonous fly. If he tries to touch me, I will thrash him, severely, somehow.

I don't even have my cheese knife.

Large windows dominate three sides. The light comes from standing lamps with gilded nymphs climbing the central posts. Those are in the far corners presiding over two lush red sofas that run the length of the walls to my left and right. Beneath the front window, that's pushed fully open, lies a narrow bar carrying a silver ice bucket and a row of bottles.

White curtains flail in the gust sweeping through and a painting of a nude woman having sex with two very flexible men bangs against the wall. It's a classical painting I recognize

though the name has slipped my memory. Bookending the bottles of whiskey, vodka, and so on, are erotic sculptures.

The hut *could* be used for fishing on a luxurious scale, but it's unlikely as hell.

"I'm not here to—"

"Oh I know that." He flashes a knowing smile that sinks almost before he launches it. Still creepy. "I had you brought here so I could broker a deal. Drink?" He saunters to the bar, puts out one square glass, then two.

"No, thanks." I follow but stop in the middle of the room. "How in the world can I do a deal?"

"Oh, I appreciate you're in a sticky situation, Phoebe." Even his use of my name seems a defilement. He pours himself a drink, fishes ice cubes from the bucket. "You're the daughter of Emma Bartholemew and have come here after being lured..." He drops two cubes into the amber liquid. "So we can kill you, luridly." He glances back and smiles as he says that.

Fuck. My blood has run away to hide, and someone has doused me in a glacial waterfall.

"That's blatant." Is my voice shaking? My legs are quivering. *Fuck this.* Grow a spine. I clear my throat. "The deal?"

He takes a sip, leans back into the bar. "You're probably thinking you have no power and you're right, but your mother does. I am feeling guilty, to tell the truth. I regret my involvement, and you are my best way out."

"Oh?" I angle one eyebrow and wait. Everything, *everything* we were postulating seems to be correct. "You were making films? Killer Crew?"

"You got that far? *Hmmm.* Well done." He places aside the drink and pulls out a phone, which makes me wonder if his has any bars. He taps and scrolls then turns the screen to face me. "I don't like being a murderer. I prefer being a sadistic and grievously nasty sexual partner to the women I bed. This." He pulls a disgusted face, waves vaguely. "Not me."

“Or not anymore?” It’s facetious to think one can be absolved of murder just because you’ve changed your mind. I crane my neck to see the screen and this concrete evidence without getting too close to Simon. “May I?” I reach out a finger as if to touch.

He advances so I can touch it. “Scroll all you want. I’m not in those.”

“But you were there?” I murmur, as if his answer would mean nothing to me. Horrified, I spot three different women. This is that room. The stone table room. Manacles and blood and writhing women being sexually tortured meet my nauseated gaze.

The moment is nailed into place, a wriggling maggot pinned on a stick. I’m sickened to my core by the fusion of my nightmares and *this*. I cannot move, cannot think past what is before me. It cannot be real. Again, I let my eyes track the movements, see the blood, the silent screams, the faces in throes of agony. I’ve seen war on TV. I’ve seen the insanity of humans. The damage we inflict on others.

And yet, this cannot be real. My hope, my need for Milli to be alive, demands that I reject this.

It might be roleplayed? Imagined?

It’s not.

It’s real. This is real.

I swallow, twist my mouth, and accept this revolting fact.

When I glance at Simon, he seems placid but fascinated with my face. He may have sworn off murder but he’s getting off on showing me these awful crimes. I almost tell him the police would love these. I don’t. I hold my tongue, difficult as it is not to yell at him and call him names like *cockturd* and *asshole* and *you putrid fucking murderer*.

Nausea surges up my throat, and I swallow it back down. Puking here, no. He’d probably love that too.

“You can get us three off the island? If we get you immunity, somehow?”

“Yes. In a nutshell. Emma and the board have influence. I can call them. There is a set time when the network is on. I give them all the info on this. The board have a security force they can send. Your mother and the board leave me alone, help scrub me from records.”

I’m wondering how the fuck he thinks I can influence my stepmother enough to do this when I couldn’t get her to wipe my parking fines, or my nose, let alone this...when an image makes my finger freeze up. Then it shakes.

A video, but I don’t tap play. *Don’t*. It is Milli, bound to the table.

Don’t tap.

Tears spring into my eyes, welling up along with revulsion, rage, and illness—they roil about, fighting for supremacy, and I’m not sure where to look. He will see I’m upset, and I’ll lose this deal, and then bad things. I’ll get us all killed.

I clamp down on the tears and my emotions, then ask ever so nicely, “Who is this one?”

He turns it, scans the screen. “Umm, not sure. I was there, but the name escapes me.”

He. Was. There.

Then, he smiles, he smiles at me, then turns the screen and it’s playing, and Milli is screaming, soundlessly, because *duh* the sound is off. The hut tilts, expands, the phone is all I can really see.

This is how she died. My fault. Again. Mine. I see that. Just as us three being here is my fault. Marcus and Razor would be saying words to me now. Like *stop* and *think* and *don’t* but this man, he is plain fucking evil.

I clench my fists, feeling helpless, hopeless, and if I cannot do anything what use am I?

I stare at his face, meeting him without wavering for the first time. Get a grip. Do something for once. My thighs are still shivering, but it’s with energy I want to release, not terror.

Every muscle on my body...

...strains and twitches...

...with incandescent rage.

“You—” I begin quietly, but I’m speaking through my teeth.

“She was a pretty one.” His mouth purses as if he’s regretting killing her. “Now, this deal.”

He knows. He knows I know her and is teasing me. I push out an exhalation, and something in my glare finally connects and he backs off and throws out a hand, and shouts, “Wait! Wait!” But he’s laughing, too, unable to contain his amusement. “Wait. I can expla—”

My anger peaks, burns through, and fire is probably sparking off me as I charge forward and leap at him. My head is bursting. My jaw is tight, teeth clenched so hard they might splinter, and I’m roaring as my flying kick smacks into his chest.

To my shock he goes backward into the window, smashing bottles. He teeters, tilts, windmills his arms, and falls out. The splash is almost immediate.

I run forward and thrust my head out the window, scanning the water. The asshole is below, centered in the wash of light. He’s laughing and treading water.

“You idiot! I’m going to enjoy watching your death, you little cunt!”

“Get us out or I’ll tell all your lovely compatriots you were betraying them!” I’m caving, but with that kick all my anger has spilled and fled. I’m empty of courage. I can always track him down and do something, later. I’m making a deal with a guy swimming in the sea, and it’s ludicrous.

“Fuck no! You are a liar, Miss Phoebe. You’re also dead and fucked and—”

A dark mass swims past from right to left and sweeps him away with it. Gone.

Gone in a fraction of a second, only his look of disbelief remains, etched into my retinas, and a churn of the water that

vanishes under a wave. Did I imagine the opening and snap of large toothy jaws?

Gone. No blood. No debris. No screams. I think it was a crocodile. What else could it be?

I stagger backward, away from the window.

“Well. That was new.”

Shaking, I collapse into a squat on the floor, and find that his phone has landed there, screen up, and it’s playing the video of Milli being tortured.

I pick it up, intending to hurl it out the window, then stop myself.

Hand trembling, I clutch the phone until my hand hurts. I’m swearing softly, looking out at the night, hearing the crash of the waves, and trying to make sense of what has happened.

Milli is really dead.

I can use this phone if I keep it open.

Milli died here, hurt by these evil people, because they thought it a fun thing to do on their weekend.

I climb to my feet, head hanging down, my hair before my eyes like a shield. I have to face this world, even if my stomach is churning with nails and ice. I bite my lip, tears dribbling. *I’m sorry, Milli.* I keep imagining her dying, her lonely death, and I gave her the way in. Me.

I came here for the truth. I found it. Now what? Do I just give up and die? If I do, so will Razor and Marcus? Milli would not want that. She would’ve fought to the end.

“Fuck! Fuckitty fuck fuck!” I scream the words but hoarsely, as one does when enemies are everywhere.

The phone is fully charged. I turn off all the open apps, tuck it into my jacket pocket, and I keep tapping as I depart, closing the door behind me and walking quickly down the pier.

Aimee has waited, and she rises from a crouch, materializing from the night.

I stop there, panting, summoning the right things to say, if I can.

“He’s dead. I think a croc took him.”

“Oh. Oh fuck.” She glances back down the pier. “How?”

“I kicked him through a window. It’s a thing I seem to do.” Truth. “He showed me a video of my friend dying, and he laughed. That’s punishable by death.” I smile, perfunctorily. “Now tell me who you are. Or I might get murderous again. Are you on my side?” Whatever words she says, I need a spoonful of salt with them.

“He was my best hope at getting you and me off the island.” She shrugs. “I was sent by your mother—”

“Stepmother.” Of course she was. That makes sense. “Why? To make sure I failed?”

“The opposite. I’m supposed to covertly help and observe, but things have become too dangerous. There is a final event tomorrow...a chase where they set you loose and make you run. You’re meant to die then.”

“Fuck, again.” How nice. It’s almost anticlimactic due to expecting this news for days. I’m less moved than I am by knowing Milli is gone. I sniff, blink away the moisture threatening to spill. Fuck tears. I do not need them. Later, maybe, if I’m still around to do any crying.

So Mother managed to send Aimee and didn’t tell us three. I am so confused.

I doubt Aimee is lying. But can I trust my own judgement?

“Now I don’t know what to do, Phoebe.”

“If you thought Simon the cocktwunt was about to save us, and that he really was remorseful, I think he conned you thoroughly.”

“Why?” Her little frown is adorable. My image of her as a ninja is wearing thin.

“Aimee, he was getting off on watching me watch my friend die in a vid. He laughed. And really, how was he going

to get us rescued before this big event? The timing is off.”

I’m dying today. *Shit. Bummer. All the swear words.* Milli would want me to have fun, have sex, kill her enemies, and dance on their graves, even if it takes a cheese knife.

“You’re not a ninja, are you?”

Her frown appears and stays a while. “What? No!”

“Special Forces? SAS? MI5?”

“Sorry, no. I’m good at locks, IT work, and gathering intelligence, but none of those.”

“Damnation. Look, I kinda trust you. I shouldn’t though.”

She shakes her head but waits.

I’ve been tapping Simon’s phone to keep it awake but should I give it to her? I’m probably going to lose concentration and let it shut down eventually.

“Do you have an alternative plan to Simon dearest?”

“You have definitely killed him?”

I hold my hand out, toward the hut and the ocean. “Do you see him? A big shadow swooped across underwater and sucked him under.”

“After you kicked him out the window,” she says, absentmindedly. “Look. He was my only real plan. If I’d known how shitty this assignment was, I’d not be here. No boat. No plane. No comms. I can’t even get the phone off of Fiona. She keeps it on her or somewhere else secure.”

Fiona must be her Domme. “Simon said the frat has a security force they can send out. And that the network here gets turned on at a specific time.”

“Yes, to both. Pretty sure it’s around two-thirty AM.”

“So all five of us might die if we don’t get in contact with the board or my stepmother.” I pull the phone from my jacket pocket. *Tap.*

“Simon’s?”

I nod. I can give this to the men and hope they can use it tonight or give it to Aimee and trust she does the right thing. I don't know when I will find them. "Will you be killed too?"

What a nonchalant tone I have, saying that. I guess I'm worn out. I feel like I'll shatter to bits any second. I'm thin as paper, as empty as the breeze.

Tap. Maybe I could make the phone take longer between taps before it switches off?

She locks eyes with me. "I'm probably okay if I get back soon. They think I'm with them, but they'd make me watch whatever they do."

"And you can get in touch with this security force? Are they nearby? Close enough to get here in time?"

"I'm a part of it, and yes as for the rest of it, the ones with guns and the skills to intercede, those are close enough."

Intercede, another long word. I search her eyes, her face, looking for clues as to her true persona.

"Meaning you know their number?"

She smiles, says, "Yes," and holds out her small hand. It's about my size really, her fingers are as slender. I just don't know if this is the right choice.

My stomach has been playing chase the icy, serpent butterflies for ages. My mouth tastes foul due to that almost puke I swallowed. I pull back my hand.

"I have to think. How can I contact you?" *Tap.*

"Room four zero one, but that may not always work. I have to go where Fiona does, and she will be suspicious if I wander off with you."

"I'll chance it. Good luck."

She only nods as I walk away. If anything, her lack of action says she is who she says she is. Nevertheless, if I keep the phone going, I should be able to get the guys to use it. And both of them will know who to contact. I check our room, and no one is there.

It's nine-fifteen, so I have a lot of tapping to do as I walk a meandering route around and through the resort, poking my head into places I shouldn't. There are rooms I've never tried entering before, but most are locked. No one comes to stop me.

I'm tempted to go to the ruins but negotiating the trail while constantly tapping the phone? Something will go wrong. I prowl the outside of the pool enclosure. It's dark out here. You can climb down through the terraces of the resort on the outside, and not be seen.

They must have returned by now, but I've not seen them.

I tap the phone screen. Even with the longer shutdown time, I've almost had it close a few times.

I decide to head back to our room and climb over the pool enclosure, using a rock to get enough height. Trying not to let any motion detectors spot me, I drop and sneak forward using the landscaping, furniture, and sculptures for cover. If they trigger, the lights will turn on.

A sound at my back makes me freeze.

Phoebe

When I twist to check what made the noise, I see two figures. One drops to the ground to crouch beside the other.

“*Psst!* It’s us, Phoebe!” That’s Marcus, and Razor is with him. They must have followed me over the wall.

“*Shhh!* Go around the outside, next to the wall. Motion detectors!”

They halt their advance and must have heard me for they come to me via a winding route.

We squat beside a fallen beach umbrella.

“Why are *you* hiding, Phoebe? Why are you out here?” Razor reaches out and runs a hand up my arm. “You’re trembling.”

Am I? It’s the sudden release, the lessening of my worries, and then the ramping up again. They’re here with me, and I don’t know where to start to explain. We are in deep shit.

“What happened to the cuff? Where were you? We’ve been looking everywhere.” Even in the darkness, Marcus looks peeved. “Are you okay?”

“I have a long story.” I search their faces, trying to discern what they’re thinking. “But did you find anything up there?”

Neither answers, and the seconds stretch. “We did,” Marcus finally says. “You first. Shouldn’t we do this in our

roo—”

“No,” Razor and I say in unison. “Bugs, remember?” he adds.

Yes, bugs. *They* might hear us.

Overwhelmed, I cover my lower face with my hands and shut my eyes, drag my fingers down my cheeks. I’m no longer sure what is to be kept secret, what people will know we know. Should I say it all to Marcus and Razor? I’m just teeming with too much of all the wrong information.

“Hey.” One of them says, and I’m pulled into a huddle.

I sag against them, patting their arms. Someone squeezes me.

“Take a breath,” Razor adds. “Then tell us. I also have something important to say, but it will wait. Fuck though, this night is going all kinds of awful places.”

That does not inspire me. I sneak a look at them then plunge into what I should say, need to say. It spills out of me in no particular order.

“I had a woman come to our room. Aimee, the one getting pierced at the pool, remember her? She undid the cuffs, has mad lockpicking skills, took me to a meeting down at a second jetty I didn’t know was here. It has a hut.” I check them again then keep going. They’re only listening, not judging. “So, it was Simon and he wanted a fucking deal. He had vids. They have been killing women. One of them was...” Now my voice is wobbly, but I have to say this. “I killed Simon.”

“Fuck me,” Marcus grates out. He’s to my right, with an arm around my shoulders. I realize I’m leaning into Razor, squashed between them. My hand is at my mouth, and I bite the edge. The pain is good. It steadies me.

I suck in a long breath then go on.

“He needed killing. I kicked him out the window of the hut, and a massive croc ate him.”

“A croc? Are you sure?” Razor sounds highly skeptical and angles my face toward him. “This Aimee didn’t give you

drugs?”

“No. God, no. I wish she had. I am so sorry. I’m sorry. I’ve doomed us, haven’t I? I mean Aimee said they were going to kill me anyway...today. Now. It is past midnight? And Mother sent her but she, Aimee, arranged this deal with Simon. He was going to help us! I screwed up, and he’s dead. And Milli’s dead too!” I choke out a sob and look at both men, waiting for their condemnation. “Milli is dead,” I repeat, whispering.

Being strong isn’t easy. Anger resurfaces, flares.

“Fuck him. He deserved it.” I wipe away tears as the men pat me and try to soothe me but I’m beyond soothing. “What can we do?”

The phone! I pull it from my jacket and its screen is fading. Hurriedly I tap it.

“Damn. Almost another screw-up by me. This is Simon’s phone.” The thing dares to shake in my hand. Sadness, anger, adrenalin spiking, whatever, I know I’m a mess. “We can use this.”

Gently, Razor takes the phone from me then hands it to Marcus. “It’s okay, Phoebe. I was dreading having to tell you about Milli. I found proof up there too. I got into the room through the door on the ledge. Any ideas, Marcus?”

Why aren’t they all amazed about the phone? “Keep it awake. We get one chance tonight. Simon said he could contact the board and they have a security force which is nearby. Aimee said the network comes on around two-thirty AM.” I’m about to say sorry again, for killing that douchebag, but what is the use of endless apologies?

Marcus holds up the phone. “You know you can set most so they never sleep?”

“Oh, really? Oh god.” I give a half-hearted laugh. “I’m so stupid. I missed it.” On any other night I’d be facepalming, but this night has been full of horrors.

“Never.” He continues, while tapping the settings, “I’m part of security but I’m not surprised they didn’t brief me about Aimee.” He draws me closer and kisses me once, on the

lips. Then he holds me to him. “You have helped us, but, I already have a phone I brought in.” I stiffen at that. “I kept it secret for all sorts of...mistaken reasons, maybe. Or not. You just kicked a man through a window so—” Lightly, I punch his chest. “Anyway. I can try soon. It’s two-ten. We can wait, and there is also a possibility a drone—”

“*Shhh*. Is something going on at the beach?” Razor half stands, peers in that direction, where there is no fence and the infinity edge spills. My hand is still in his. I need the human connection, and maybe he does too? “There are lights and people shouting. They might have found Simon? What are we going to do?”

M^{arcus}

“Wait. Let me do this.” I punch in the new message about the urgency of rescue. They want to kill Phoebe, today. *Today! Shit, shit, shit.* I’m tempted to yell at this fucking phone. I open apps on Simon’s phone, find out the exact location, punch that into my message too. Getting his to cycle through a message is riskier since it might be logged. Am hoping my phone will escape that. “Before we make decisions. I’m setting this up to signal after two thirty, in a loop. I’ll go look at the beach. Wait there with her.”

Razor opens his mouth as if to disagree then shuts it. I give him a nod and creep forward.

The beach has at least five people on it, walking, running. They’ve lit up the sea with a floodlight, and even from here I can see the croc cruising along. Maybe it wants more dinner? If it gulps them down, that would be karma. Perhaps some remains have washed up, because a pool of light is focused on one section of sand and shallows.

Phoebe has a signature killing move—kicking assholes to their deaths. Which is amusing, until it’s not.

I have Simon’s phone in hand, and it vibrates slightly but nothing shows on screen. By scrolling I find an app tucked away with a ton of unread messages, all from tonight. They tried to reach him, failed, and then obviously started searching.

To the left, the terraced sections of the resort show as pale building with a few squares of windows. Much of the resort looks darker than normal, as if they've shut down the power, here and there. In some side windows, lights flash against the glass. Whoever owns those lights, they are climbing toward us.

A last message, maybe sent accidentally to Simon, comes through.

Located his phone at the pool.

I turn to Phoebe and Razor and make a decision I may regret. I'm compromised more than Razor. I know I can be an ass, a shithead, someone who chooses to do stuff too quickly, like spending more than I can afford—a bit like Phoebe, I guess. I signal them, waving abruptly.

“Go! Get going! They're coming here, and I'm off to delay them!” I say it just loud enough to carry.

Razor rises, perplexed.

“Get the fuck going! Somebody needs to!”

I jog toward the entry to the enclosure and lights come on, spreading faint illumination wherever I run. So far, the area where Razor and Phoebe traverse is staying black. If they can get over the fence, maybe they can hide. Hide for long enough for this reaction force to arrive?

I need to do something to delay whoever is coming for us.

I turn and throw two last words over my shoulder. “Trust me!” Then I'm out the gate and running downward.

I meet them coming up, twenty or so seconds later. Six men in black gear, carrying guns. Most of them are guests. I can imagine keeping staff unaware of, or happy with, the murdering would be a problem.

For what I am about to try to do, may the lord protect me. I don't care which lord—the Cat Lord from Planet Zap will do, but I figure I'm going to need forgiveness and help. I raise my hands. In my right hand, I hold Simon's phone. I dropped my own in the enclosure, under a shrub.

Bastion is still in a suit. The little prick likes to look fancy.

“I want to make a deal with whoever is in charge. You?” I address Bastion. “I’ll give you Phoebe and Razor and my cooperation. I know you make snuff films. I know what you want to do to her. My cooperation is yours if you let me help to kill her. You can even keep that money I gave you, plus a bit more. The little bitch planned to get rid of me after we leave this island.”

“Oh? Really?” Bastion has this smug smile. He’s panting and I guess they were hurrying upward. “Where is she? In there?”

“Yes.” I hope they are running fast and clever, can dodge this pursuit. Lying won’t work for me.

“Go!” He sweeps his arm. “Get them. Her, alive! The man, too, preferably. Send some men around the outside in case they jump the wall.” They wrench open the gate and four of them enter the pool. One of them is calling for others on a comm. “Handcuff this one.”

I let them do it, cuff my hands at my back. I’ve no choice, really. Not if I want this to seem genuine. It’s a last-minute deal I’m seeking, and maybe it won’t help, but every few minutes I can postpone the end is worth it.

Delay. Delay. Delay.

“I will let you be involved in her death, but be aware that if you do anything stupid, you will suffer. I’ve yet to make one with a man being skinned alive then pulled apart into four pieces, like they used to do in medieval times. Now that would be fun.”

It’s hard not to spit on him, but I manage.

“Tough guy, hey? How do you want to ‘help’ us? Anything specific?”

“I want to do it like in that movie, *Hostel*, hang her upside down and let me cut her with your sword. The *soshu* katana you’ve got on display here. I want to taste her blood.”

“Ooooo, my. You are an evil bastard. Agreed. I cannot wait. You won’t be allowed to kill her but cut her, slice her, yes.”

“Tell me,” I ask, making light conversation. “Why is that big croc hanging around this island. Is it normal?”

“Him? We feed him regularly, of course.”

That is sick, and not in the good way. I can guess what, or rather who, they are feeding to him.

Phoebe

There is shouting from within, before we even make it over the fence. Once he's atop the enclosure wall, Razor reaches down with his hand. I take it gratefully. My climbing skills are respectable but with nothing to grab or stand on, being shorter has drawbacks. We drop down on the other side and start jogging.

"Keep low." Razor ducks, and I follow him, watching for obstacles.

Tripping now would make noise, and people are coming from somewhere in the resort, are spreading out and combing the undergrowth. Flashlights carve into the darkness. The palms and nurtured shrubs make for barely adequate cover.

We pause behind a pile of boulders, catching our breath.

"It must be two-thirty by now. If a message gets through, how long do you think?"

"Before they get here? I'm sorry, Phoebe. I don't know. If we even had a boat to use temporarily...but anything to keep away from them. Anything."

"The far side of the island. Past the hill and the ruins?" I take in his angular face, how the moonlight glances across the white streaks in his hair. I try to discern his eyes. It's too dark out here, but I smile and bump my head into his solid shoulder. He grabs my hand and I close my eyes, inhaling the scent of

this man. It's a comfort I need. "If we go there, it will mean we're boxed in."

"Or we could hide inside that room."

"The secret one?" I shiver. With the table and memories of what happened in there. The deaths. "I suppose. It would be the last place they'd look."

"Also hard to escape from if they find us there."

"The other side of the island then. Let's go. They're getting closer," I whisper, and pull at his hand as I rise.

We sneak along, watching the ground, freezing when anyone seems close, then a flashlight arcs over the shrubs beside us then over our faces. I fling up an arm to shield my eyes, but my night vision is gone. Razor jerks me sideways and I stumble and run after him.

"There they are!"

"Stop or we shoot!"

"They won't," Razor rasps out. "They want us intact."

Me. It's me they want intact. Suddenly, I'm afraid for Razor more than for myself.

We pound along, risking falls and sprained ankles because stealth has lost its appeal.

The route to the right-hand side of the hill angles toward a ridge where the trail runs but Razor has taken us leftward. We're on a rougher part of the island where whatever flourishes is hardy and grows wild. Rocks and fallen branches are underfoot, and someone is using the path we recently left to sprint ahead of us.

"Where?" I gasp.

"Keep running. The sea?"

There is a crocodile there, but he knows this. His running slows, becomes ragged, stops. "Fuck."

A wall of rock looms before us. Although before this I could see the blackness of it ahead, this is an impassable

obstacle. A cliff rises toward the heavens.

We could go right again and hug the hill until we can ascend, but the men chasing us are also there. Their voices and the crackling of their shoes in leaves and gravel draw ever nearer. The way the land rises like a sword from the earth makes me suspect this hill is an ancient volcanic plug. To the left it's a cliff that drops into the ocean. Far above there is where I once sat on Razor's lap to be spanked.

Razor seems unsure of what to do, and I cannot blame him.

"Come." I tug on his shirt. "Back to the resort. It's the only choice."

A thunder of feet and a much closer crack, as a branch snaps, makes us both spin to face whoever comes. Flashlights pin us to the darkness, blinding us. Two people stand there and two more walk in from the direction of the resort.

"Got them!" one of them yells.

The lights silhouette and halo at least two raised guns.

"Turn back around," a man chugs out between his panting. "Hands at your back. We will shoot. Especially you, Razor. Her, we'll just beat on until she cries."

Panic tries to surge, a churning mish-mash of fear of being hurt and fear of dying, of strangers ruling me. I start to count to one hundred in my head. I drag in deep breaths, attempting some semblance of control of myself.

Panic is pointless. My heart still bashes away at my insides. My mouth is dry. My muscles stiff as I move.

Neither of us says anything. Words would only communicate despair. Though maybe Razor is trying to see an out, a way to escape.

I never find out. We turn and they cuff us both, their guns aimed and unwavering. Neck twisted, I look over my shoulder at them, trying to ID them, though all are just men I want to hate on, and when I get the chance, to kick and dismember. They throw me to the ground and hold me there, waiting for someone new to arrive. When they do, something is jabbed

into my ass. I curse them, over and over, fuming as they laugh and pin me with their boots on my back and neck.

“Your mother will be getting such a surprise in her inbox,” someone says, sneering.

“Step...mother. And fuuuuck you.”

“Language!” Razor says softly. I blink past the glare of the flashlight, and I realize he’s lying beside me, his face turned. He winks.

I smile at him. “We got this.”

We don’t, but it sounds good.

Cold infuses my muscles, swimming in, spreading like frigid wildfire, smothering each of my rebellious thoughts one...by...one. My fantasy of turning this party into a bloodbath of my enemies sinks, somewhat thankfully, into oblivion.

I wake to the zap of electric pain on my hip that jolts my flesh and makes me cry out. To Aimee climbing to her feet above me, to a world of shouting men. One of them is an idiot with lanky black hair and a big mouth. He wields a cattle prod or similar. He is the one who poked me.

Another zap and the shaft scrapes the bars as the prod is withdrawn, and I scream and roll over onto all fours. Then, still blinking, wobbly-legged, I scramble to my feet.

“You got two minutes, ladies, and we release you for the chase to begin!”

The sky is made of bars of shadow.

“The Chase!” men shout in the distance. “The Chase!”

The hill ascends before us, and Aimee and I are in a cage lodged on sand on a long narrow beach that scrapes around that hill and sprawls wider to the right, shaped like a comma. On the fat part of the comma, a batch of men waits. I can see their running shoes, the batons and sticks in their hands, a net held high as if to boast or scare us. The sea grumbles and roars

there. I clutch the bars of our cage, steadying myself. The tip of the cell tower shows far above on the hill.

The man with the prod jogs away.

“Can you run? Are you ready?” Aimee looks worried, her gaze skittering from them to the hill to the beach to me.

Is she my fault too?

I know where we are, what is happening, and... “I am never going to be ready,” I croak. I squeeze shut then open my eyes, rub them, making myself wake. I shake my head. A drug was given, and a reversal agent, I guess.

We’re on the far side of the hill. I went to all that trouble hiding four knives and a corkscrew in pot plants at the resort, and I’m nowhere near them. Sucks. But Aimee?

“Why are you here?”

“Because they decided I’m a spy. This.” She shakes a piece of paper at me. “It says there is a boat at the jetty. Reach it, and they won’t kill us. If they catch us...” She gnaws her lip, inhales, exhales noisily. “You know.”

“Yeah.” I bow my head and stare at the cage bottom for a second. “How long is it now?”

“Time? Maybe sixty to seventy seconds. You can run?”

We’re both wearing underwear and gym shoes.

I stamp my feet, noting the men have retreated a little. This cage has an electronic lock. Razor is also caged and further back, but closer to those men. We have a head start. He’s still prey. I’m betting they’d kill him just to make me cry and break down.

I’m already hurting inside. Is this how it ends? Is it? Not with a bang or a whimper but with screams and blood?

I don’t believe in that boat. I don’t. But what else is there to aim for?

“Stick with me and wait for Razor? The three of us can take a man down even if he’s armed.”

“Maybe.” Aimee seems doubtful. “But there are too many.”

Ten or fifteen of them? They’re waving sticks and clubs. They won’t want to lose. Some will have better weapons, just in case we resist more efficiently than they want us to.

The waves roll in, and the sun glares down, telling me it’s late morning. Seagulls cry and circle the blueness above, and a bell tingles. It sounds like an old shop bell from the movies, signaling a customer has entered.

The cage lock goes *clack*. Aimee shoves at the door, and it flies open. “Run.” She takes off, heading for where the beach continues around the hill, beneath the tower. The ledge with the door will be further on. I look to Razor, hoping he will catch up. His cage is also open, but he is simply standing there, watching me. He waves as if to shoo me off.

“Go! Move! I’ll delay them.”

“What?” I whisper. *No. No. No.* “Fuck! No! Please, don’t do this.” My voice is a quiet squeak. He cannot do this. I do not want him to sacrifice himself. But the horde of men is roaring louder than the sea and running at him. Soon, he’ll be swamped.

I jog backward, my eyes trying to cry, but I refuse to let them. A headache builds as the fastest of the men catches up to where he stands. One tries to go past, and he sidesteps and punches the man off his feet. Two more attack Razor. The blows are fast and when another three arrive and surround him, I lose sight of my man. He isn’t coming, and I just wasted his effort.

The crowd peels away from where he must be lying and three, then four, then more of them are running toward me.

I suck so bad.

I sprint off after Aimee, sand kicking off my heels.

If we get away, maybe there can be justice. He might not be dead. Hope is there, at the rear of my mind, nibbling at me.

He might be alive, but a glimpse through the oncoming pack shows a figure sprawled on the beach, unmoving. No one could hate me more than I hate myself right now.

Why did I come here?

To save a friend. It hasn't worked. Not in the slightest.

Another question pops up. Where is Marcus?

I pump more power into driving the downthrusts of my legs and hope I can get to where there are those fallen rocks above. I saw those when I descended to the ledge. If nothing else, maybe I can help Aimee. She's ahead, but I'm catching up. I can't maintain this pace indefinitely. She seems more methodical, as if conserving energy for when she needs it most. That might be of benefit if none of our pursuers is good at this.

If.

It would help if there really is a boat.

A wayward rock turns under my foot, and I swear and stumble sideways, hopping on one leg before I decide fuck-it, *I have to go*. I dash off again. My ankle gives one twinge then it fades.

Do not sprain your ankle.

My strides are just a little longer, and I eat up the distance, edge up to her shoulder. On the way to here, I've thought and made my choice. It's got to be her not me.

My last conversation with Milli has been circling my brain.

I like you. You like me. Some friendships just are.

To the future! She was such a nice person, and nice is everything.

Those chasing us are far enough back that I figure I have time to do what I intend. Only one has pulled ahead of the pack.

Talking while running is never easy.

“Hey.”

She nods at me, keeps going. The sand here is wide enough but twenty yards ahead, no. The fallen rocks make passage across that section a maze.

“I think...we got a message out at two-thirty...to the force.” That covers a lot of possibilities. Mostly though it means, I hope we did.

“Oh?”

The fear in Aimee’s eyes echoes mine, but I’m done with being at fault and wrong. This girl looks enough like Milli—okay, not at all—but she came here for me, and they aren’t letting me go. I’m their target. I can at least try to save her.

“I’m going ahead. I’m climbing up where...there are...rocks. Will delay them. You keep going.”

“Wait. No. Don’t do that.”

“Yes! They want me...not you.” I sprint ahead, my last sprint. My legs need to be able to climb. I keep going, checking overhead, and by the time I reach the right spot, I have time to climb. I pray I can get high enough to make this possible. Broken rocks and branches litter the cliff wall, having lodged on the smallest projections, as well as the strip of beach before me. I weave and pick my path through the debris.

Phoebe

Aimee hasn't passed beneath me and the fastest has almost caught up to her. The rocks I've gathered are all sorts of sizes, and I'm sitting on a few. The rest are to either side on this small ledge. I adjust my butt and skew myself sideways to get a safer position to throw from, when he takes a huge stride and catches her shoulder.

He wrenches. She goes down on the rock-and-branch-strewn sand, screaming as her back hits.

I draw back my arm, adjust the angle, guessing at how much to heave on it to make it travel far enough. The rock must be a couple of kilos. When have I ever had someone's life in my hands, depending on what I do? *Milli, of course.* The surge of sudden grief threatens to unravel me.

Not now! Shut up. Shut up!

The fucker smacks her across the face as she tries to rise. I hear the slap ever so clearly, hear her sob.

If I don't sprain my wrist, I *might* hit where I aim. Or I might kill Aimee.

He's spotted where I'm hiding and grins up at me. "You're fucking next!" Then he turns to Aimee, stamps on her back, pulls at her bra and rips it partially off her while removing his foot. The force spins her from where she was crawling.

They're not below me, but I *can* throw that far. I *must*. I lunge my arm forward and upward in a shotput motion. The rock spins through the air, plummeting rapidly in an arc. It thuds onto and glances off his shoulder, hard enough to stagger him and drop him to his knee beside Aimee.

He growls as he grabs her hair then hauls her higher, level with his face. Her expression is...not scared...no, she looks fearsomely angry. He snarls up at me, and already blood is seeping from where the rock tore off skin. Aimee gathers her knees under her, no doubt to relieve the tension on her neck. She scrabbles at the sand with her hands then raises one.

“Bitch!” He shakes her head but is talking to me. “Watch me kill her, then. All because you made me fucking piss—”

Aimee swings her hand and she's stabbed him in the eye with a stick, sinking it deep. Blood squirts in a small spout, dribbles then ceases. The sand puddles with blood.

He gargles and slumps, facedown on the beach, arms splaying uselessly.

It's gone into his brain? “Ninja skills for the fucking win!” I whisper that, in awe.

I rock backward and almost unbalance. “Ohmigod, Aimee!” *Don't waste this, not this time*. “Run!” I yell. “They're still coming.”

She nods, grimacing as she levers herself upright, and takes off again, methodical, measured, plodding. *Admiration, girl*. I hope she makes it, gets away, hides.

She has a chance if that security force gets here, and if I can get the others to forget her.

Which is why I spend the next fifteen minutes throwing stones down at a gathered mob of the assholes, taunting them, smashing rocks near them. I've not hit anyone else, except for one dude who tried coming up to get me. He's sadly okay apart from a bruised arm.

They are wary due to the flaked-out corpse, now on its back with blood leaking from the eye socket. The stick protruding from said socket is gruesomely splendid.

When I run out of rocks, they begin to climb toward me, threatening to push me off with sticks. I've readied myself, am trying to stay unemotional, dead inside...well, not as dead as Mister Corpse, yet.

Okay, it's impossible to not feel anything, to be fearless, to ignore how my hand can feel my heart thundering against my ribs when I place it there. Even so, I've amazed myself. I've done something here to be proud of. No one has departed to chase after Aimee.

This is when I get to choose. Jump now and die or injure myself, falling, or I can surrender.

I choose surrender. I knew I would. That's preordained, by me.

Every second of life gives me more hope and more time to live. Few people ever choose to die early. I might regret this if I end up on that stone table, but I will face that moment if and when it comes to me.

"I'm coming down." The stick from the man to the right, on a lower section, thrusts upward, catching my foot. "Stop poking me, you fuckwits! I'm coming."

The second I hit the sand after a small jump, they knock me down with a punch to my gut and smash me into the sand. I get a faceful of it as they zip-tie me at hand and ankle then pull me to my feet.

"Smart." I look at my feet, coughing, wincing at the pain. "Now you have to carry me, fools."

That's when someone punches me in the stomach again.

I drop to the sand, retching.

M^{arcus}

Two men carry her up here, to the plateau at the top of the hill. They attach the block-and-tackle rope to her ankles and haul her into the air. This scene is too raw, too violently offensive, and I look away. More men emerge at the top of the hill path. They cross then pool into a crowd, a ragged semicircle of watchers to my right, partly within the foundations of the ruins.

The trapdoor we tried to enter is now open, a gaping hole to hell.

I swallow slowly, swallow my rage, and look back to her. *Phoebe...my Phoebe*. Her hair has fallen, and she's spun until facing away from me. I cannot tell if she is even conscious.

This is tearing me apart.

"Go," Bastion urges, shoves at my back. "This is what you wanted, yes? The katana is there. Cut her. Make her *bleed*."

Artfully arranged, the *soshu* katana looks innocuous. Someone has put it below where she hangs and sways, her hands tied at her back. She's gagged with cloth. They left her in the pretty white bra and panties, and she looks so innocent. She is deathly quiet.

Is she even alive?

I can't take this. I arranged it to play for time, but now... what can I do?

With my hands cuffed at my front, with my heart hurting, I negotiate the uneven ground between the ruins and the block and tackle from which she swings, upside-down, unmoving. Apart from the play of gravity, she is still scarily silent.

To the west beyond her and the cliff's edge, the sky is clouded and dark, as if a thunderstorm is on the way, as if it is waiting for a killing or something similarly formidable to happen.

Death casts a shadow.

I would welcome the death of all these vile men.

A woman arrives, late, and she hurries to join the watchers. It's the Domme who played with Aimee, the girl at the pool. Figures. Next, Razor is dragged into view, also gagged, with his hands cuffed at his back. He's pushed into a kneeling position before the watchers, front and center. He seems stiff and angry, but in a self-contained way. The man has shown more emotion when eating a bad meal.

I want to grow up to be more like him, I decide, on a macabre whim.

I pace onward, deliberately unhurried.

"Do not kill her, yet!" Bastion shouts after me, the mockery clear in his voice. I note that comment, for reference afterward, if there is an afterward.

When I arrive at the block and tackle, they've lowered her enough to be reachable with the blade. "Lie there," says a man wearing sunglasses and a holstered gun. He points at the ground. "Do not try to attack anyone, or you will be shot."

I want to do it like in *Hostel*, I told them, though she was in a bath and had a scythe. I suppose they think this near enough. The blood is what they want. I had not thought it would truly come to this.

I had not thought.

Delay, delay, delay. This was for that.

I wish I had thought some more. I should have quoted a movie with a big gun.

The five men in sunglasses, dressed in dark pants and white shirts, scream security in their demeanor. They stand in an angled line between me and the crowd. They all wear holstered guns.

These snuff film addicts don't trust me, that's obvious from the cuffs I wear.

"Wait a moment!" Bastion holds up his hand. "We are gathered here, Killer Crew, to witness the demise of Emma Bartholemew's daughter, Phoebe Bartholemew. And though it has delighted us to watch the dawning of knowledge in the three of you." He sweeps an arm to indicate myself, Phoebe and Razor. "The realization of the knowledge that Phoebe was brought here to be killed, tortured, maybe skinned alive? Who knows? But painfully is a guaranteed outcome. Even though it was amusing us, today is the day. Today you die, below. We will be filming it. We will send some tasty snippets to Emma, our much-detested Bitch Queen. We will also be planning her death in the near future, yes?"

The crowd cheers and laughs. A few fists are raised. They hate Emma. Not surprising, though this goes further than seems sensible. I imagine they also have making a profit in mind. Whatever their financial wizardry, I do not give one solitary fuck.

"As an entrée, I now hand her over to her companion, Marcus, who promised he would make her bleed, so he could taste it. Begin, sir!" Bastion takes a bow as if introducing someone onto a stage.

For as long as I can without it seeming a true delay, I glower in his direction.

I sit then lie down, wriggle until I'm beneath her. The wind has risen and propels a few leaves our way. Dust leaps into the air. Her hair stirs and flails. The block and tackle has grease on it. The small details are highlighted and slowed in this moment. I wish I could hit rewind.

The hilt of the katana is within reach if I half-roll in that direction. I pick it up and let it lie with the blade resting over my shoulder while I look up at her.

I look and try not to weep.

I thought my family losing their money was terrible. I thought at that time I'd experienced the worst life could throw. I felt betrayed and useless and angry.

Now?

I am bereft more than any man could be. Empty. The wind whines through me, scatters more leaves. This is so stupid, to offer to hurt her.

"I cannot do this, Phoebe," I say softly. Will they outright kill me? It would be unjust for us to die and for them to survive. Life does suck though.

Then her eyes open. "Hi." I can decipher that despite the gag mangling syllables.

Is that fear in her eyes or is it disbelief, seeing me below her with a sword? She will have listened to what Bastion said. If anyone hears me, so be it. I cannot hurt her without confessing.

"I said I'd cut you to buy you time to run, or time for them to come to us." She will know who I mean.

"I g'know. Don't c'y for me. I's not your fault."

"Fuck. I'm not crying." It is though, my fault. I blink and smile up at her, there, swinging, tied up, ready to die for these fuckers. She's being a stupid martyr and smiling back. "You need speech therapy."

She frowns. "G'cut me, slow. I c'n take it. Time. 'E need time."

Time. I don't think we have any. This is past the time for anything to be done. They're too late—if they're coming at all. I don't say that I just look into her eyes, amazed at how brave she is being. If I cut her, if I make her bleed, she will live longer than if I do nothing and let them take her through the trapdoor.

There is one other choice. One that only she can choose. I shut my eyes, take a breath and I look upward again, eyes locked to hers. "I can kill you if you wish. It would be swift."

I feel numb then unclear, to have said that.

If she says yes, I will kill myself after her.

I cannot bear to hear her answer, and a ringing arrives in my ears that I have to shake my head to clear.

“No,” she says. “*No*. Do the cut.”

“I will do your hands,” I whisper. “If I can.”

Again with the frown, and I wonder if she realizes I mean to try to cut her hands loose. I raise the katana and slide it up her body, up her back. I need to really cut her to distract them. I wait for her to spin enough, until her back is fully to the cliff, so her hands won't be seen by the crowd.

“Forgive me,” I say softly as the keen blade begins to bite. “Make fists.”

“I do.” Then she hisses and arches. She screams, full-throated and raucous, sending the sound ripping toward the men who watch her, and I hear a rumbled hum of approval.

Ignore her agony. It is done.

Swiftly, I rotate the katana to slice the rope between her hands, and I pray she still has her fingers when the blade breaks free into the air. I stop it moving for that would betray what I did.

Blood drips off her and onto my face, and the rope and Phoebe swing in a small arc, raining more gore, driven by her pain and writhing. Minute shreds of cut rope float in the air.

No fingers fell. Now...should I leap to my feet and free her legs?

Where to from there? The cliff? It would leave Razor to their mercy and us to the jaws of that crocodile though we would probably die from the fall.

I should take her with me if I jump. Up here is only a slow, terrible death.

Phoebe

Where the sword sliced, pain sears a line along my bottom. Warm blood dribbles and trails the length of my body then drips off my hair. Teeth gritted, I dangle here, pretend my hands are still tied, that I am helpless and only a target for that sword, nothing more.

Nothing more. It is close to the truth.

Marcus stares, horrified, eyes wide, my blood spattering his face. A muscle tic twitches beside his brow.

I rock back and forth, spin, and wonder how to make the most of this limited freedom. At my ankles, my feet feel like balloons—the rope hauls at skin and muscle where my weight jams it onto me.

I'm turning slowly, bound to block and tackle, and soon I will face the sea and they will know what Marcus has done. Pain throbs and arcs into me, jangling pain receptors.

I could try the pole dancing trick, curl up to my feet, and maybe release my ankles?

The blade in his hand points skyward. Stray sunlight beats upon the ancient metal. Inhaling harshly through the gag, I squint at Marcus, and he mouths a word I cannot catch.

Though I'm upside-down, I see a new yet familiar figure dragged upon our stage, up from the path to this hill of ruins.

They've caught Aimee.

She has her hands fastened at her back, and she is sobbing. She wears a jacket, has new boots, and I wonder at this as her escort, another sunglasses-wearing guard, clouts her, makes her drop to her knees on the graveled ground. He draws his gun, and it seems as if he intends to blow out her brains from the back to the front, but the arc of his draw continues higher.

Then he starts to shoot, and Aimee whips her hands from behind her back. With some small Uzi-type weapon, she too fires at the five other sunglasses and gun-toting dudes. Before those can even think to drag a weapon from a holster, they're rolling about with holes in them and blood splashing their clothes.

I'm upside down and stunned, but I remember my plan.

Ankles. I'm a huge target up here. I curl up and reach for the rope at my ankles, holding on above them with one hand while I try to, somehow, undo the knots.

It's impossible. The tension on the knot is too great.

"I'll get it." Marcus stands and slices the main rope above my feet. Only then do I realize he's still cuffed and cannot catch me. I'm plummeting headfirst, falling with my hands stretching toward the ground, but he grabs one ankle and takes most of my weight. Abruptly halted, my body twisting and swinging, I see the drama unfold on the hilltop.

A helicopter rises almost silently, apart from a soft rumbling roar as it clears above the cliff line. It floats forward, and from within, men spill, abseiling down on ropes. One man sits in the doorway and fires a weapon in single precise shots. More of these mercenaries run onto the hill from below. Rifles high, they fire sporadically.

After Marcus carefully lowers me, someone throws him a key to the handcuffs.

A minute after it begins, the only sound is the chopper and the screaming from one wounded man. Several others are down, lying still, quiet, and bloody. The five guards with their obvious guns are dead—sprawled across the dirt and the thin

grass. Bastion is alive, having thrown himself to the ground. He raises his head and looks about. Strangely, he seems calm, yet these are our rescuers, and they have killed so many.

Marcus pulls me to my feet and removes the gag.

He cuts the rope below, freeing my legs, drops the sword to the side, then holds my hand to steady me. Blood has rushed from my head, and I'm dizzy after being the wrong way up for so long. I bend my knees into a half crouch, lower my head. At the stretch on the back of my legs, pain spears in, reminding me of the split skin. Perhaps the bleeding is taking its toll.

I lean on Marcus as he wraps his arm about my shoulder.

The hovering chopper is blasting dust, leaves, and anything not nailed down across the landscape.

"We are alive!" I'm smiling despite the screaming and the insane violence.

I am alive, and so is Marcus, and...thank god, so is Razor. Someone has freed him. He lopes our way, his face bruised and bloody, but a grim smile occupies him as he surveys the carnage. Many are dead, but not us.

I cannot stop marveling at that.

"Razor." As I straighten, he takes my hand, kisses it, kisses my face, holds me to his chest.

"Ouch. My ass. Hurts." My panties feel as if they're barely hanging together.

"Ha. That was something." He turns me a little to see it then grabs Marcus and kisses him on the lips then laughs. "You bastard. Well done. It got through! That message got through!"

"Yes! We're safe. We did it. Fuck though, at least ten are dead. No more kissing, you. Your friend is handy with a gun, Phoebe."

"Yes. She is."

We are the epitome of chaos, hugging and kissing, saying stupidly obvious things, while these soldier merc types are

trailing about with guns, checking wounds, disarming, slapping on dressings, and holding weapons on those who need subduing. There are...I count them...six guests still alive plus Bastion.

And there is Aimee.

“She has ninja skills. I knew it.”

Aimee notices us and gives me a thumbs up with a rueful smirk. She touches her cheek where red-blue bruises already show. I am totally suspicious of her training—not ex-military? Uh-huh—but who cares. Not me.

Blood still winds a path down my leg though it has slowed. I stare at the red trail in disbelief. I’d nearly forgotten.

A woman in uniform has seen the wound and comes to me. She crouches and studies my rear.

“Of all the places to get hurt,” I joke, fumble a laugh. I need to relieve this wound-up nasty tension. My hands have begun to tremble.

“Let me fix that. You’ll need sutures. Lie over here on the—”

“Wait.” I splay my hand, palm down.

A soldier is helping up Bastion, dusting the man off.

I bend over and snatch up the katana, a move that makes me regret the abruptness. Pain makes me hiss. I’m not sure what I’m needing the sword for except to wave it and threaten. The merc or security guard inspecting my ass, whatever it is they call themselves, she stands and steps aside.

I guess I did swing the sword a mite randomly.

“Come.” I limp toward Bastion, and I hope murder is written on my face because I want him to know it is coming, to dread it as I did. To piss his fancy pants, if possible. Razor and Marcus flank me, saying nothing. The three of us advancing on him must look ominous.

He only backs away unhurriedly.

Off to the left, a rope drops to the ground from above, coiling, signaling the lowering of someone new.

I halt and crane back my neck. Dust swirls, grit gets in my eye, and I peer upwards, shielding my face. My grip on the sword tightens. I hand it to Razor. If I didn't, I might stab my stepmother before she even touches dirt.

Mother places her petite boot on the ground, and a soldier starts to release the catches.

Mother is here, in the middle of these murders. I am truly shocked.

She's wearing a cute black-and-white sundress with a flared hem and leggings underneath, luckily, because the wind from the rotor blades blows the dress up like an upside-down umbrella. Already, I'm hoping she expires of sunstroke. Knowing her, she will be back in air-conditioning before the hour is over. This visit will be for show.

"God has arrived!" Sarcasm from Marcus? I must be infectious.

"Now we know who these guys belong to," Razor adds.

Marcus half turns. "Killing the bad guys wasn't a clue?"

"They do need a CNC Fraternity badge." I'm being flippant. Anonymity is probably their catchphrase. I wonder which country would be in charge of the investigation if word of this operation leaks.

The harness is slipped from her. The helicopter skims sideways, out to sea, leaving us in relative peace, and she puts her hands on her hips and looks to Bastion. "Thank you. Well done!"

We are in a triangle here—us, Bastion, and Mother, and she seems reluctant to get nearer to anyone.

"Why, Mother? Why thank him? What has he done? If anyone deserves to die—"

Bastion butts in. "I am the reason your signal went through. Once I saw what happened to Simon and knew there must be a mole, I saw the light, Phoebe. I have expedited the

dismantling of Killer Crew. Your mother recognized my contribution.”

“Yes. We have smoothed over our differences, daughter. If you were more cognizant of finances and the fraternity, you’d know some people are too big to be removed. These others...” She waves lazily at the corpses that are currently being tagged and pulled into a pile, “These are easier to clean up after. We can cover the tracks. The main thing is that you and I have succeeded. The snuff films are no longer going to be made. And the fraternity is safe.”

“Really. The latter is all you care about, not justice.” My anger is refusing to abate.

“We have success, dear, and I am actually quite proud of you.” Her eyebrow arches.

I survey the slaughter again then look to Bastion. “I, Marcus, and Razor are pissed at being used so blatantly. You knew what we were walking into. And this scum!” I jab at Bastion. “Is evil as fuck.”

“Evil as fuck?” She laughs and looks to the sky for a moment. “Phoebe—”

Before she can look down, I limp toward Bastion. I’m slow, alas, though fuming. “Come here, you.”

He actually smiles as he backs. “I know you like kicking people out of windows, girl, but look around you. You cannot do it here.” He stops and waits as I approach, touches his chest. “Get it out of your system then. Right here.”

Do I care if he is mocking me? No. I attempt a leap and a kick, have to pull the blow because of the pain. I barely knock him back a foot.

Bastion stands there grinning. “Try again! Use more muscle.”

“Murderer!” I hop backward, hissing and cursing.

He tilts his head, nonchalantly. “There’s a lot of that going around.”

“Give me the sword, Razor,” I say out the side of my mouth.

“No!”

“Damn you.”

Then Razor gestures, and I turn to see Marcus take a flying kick at Bastion. He connects but poorly, as the man dodges, laughing.

“Amateur hour! Now, we are done! Stop this or I will have you all shot.”

“Oh.” Mother raises her eyebrows. “A bit excessive, Bastion.”

Marcus landed on one knee and is levering himself upright when...

Razor runs in, and I’m expecting another lame-ass kick as he clearly falls short and skids. When Bastion jerks and his expression stiffens, I step sideways to see what’s happened. The blade has gone through Bastion, at the end of Razor’s extended arm. Through and bloody, straight and a perfect lunge. I purse my lips. *Approximately at ooh liver level?* Man meet pointy thing.

Swiftly, decisively, Razor cuts downward through the stomach then extracts the katana. He flicks gore off the metal.

Bastion staggers, mouth opening and closing.

“Better?” Razor winks at me.

Fuck. Am I getting immune to this shit? I *like* this—seeing him suffer. “Yes. Ten points.”

“Oh dear. Sorry, Bastion.” Mother winces. “But that looks fatal.”

“No. Please. Get me to a doctor.” He wobbles, legs almost folding, clutches his stomach.

The trapdoor lies open behind him.

“Boys, shall we?” I saunter forward.

“A better place for him is.” Razor points at the cliff beyond the block and tackle, and we all know what awaits him there—the crocodile.

“It would be just.” I eye our audience. No one seems interested in interceding. “Okay. Let’s take out the trash.”

Marcus and Razor grab him by an arm each. Bastion is close to unconscious, head falling backward, eyes shut, and I pace beside them as he’s dragged toward the drop. Is this right? Is this moral? This day, the lines between justice, revenge, and what is moral has become blurred, heated, and mired in the stench of butchery.

His feet leave a red trail.

We halt a step back from the edge. The wind ruffles past, and the men look to me as if it’s my job to condemn him. They release him, and he totters there, hands clutching his middle, facing the sea but seemingly unaware of the danger.

“Consider your sins on the way down, Bastion. To Hell with you.” I deliver a kick to his backside, ignoring the tearing sensation in my wound. He topples forward then falls into space, dropping out of sight without a single scream. I lean over, hand on knee, needing to see this to the end.

Razor and Marcus join me, watching as he plummets. The splash when he hits the water is tiny and there is nothing but the sea and him, legs and arms akimbo, floating. Until a huge, black shape swims in. It breaches the surface and takes him then rolls him, thrashing the sea into froth, then it drags him deep until they are a vague rippling blur. Monster croc has lunch.

The men comment casually. “Goner.” “Yep.”

“Thank you,” I tell them.

I bow my head. I will never forget this. It felt so good to find the evil that took away Milli and dispose of him. Razor caresses my upper back, murmurs something soothing.

As if he’s about to tell us a secret, Marcus gathers us to him, into a huddle, and says, “The family that slays together, stays together.”

Razor groans.

Family. A grin slowly overtakes me. Weird how that word gives me the warm and fuzzies deep inside.

I look around at the soldiers impassively watching, then at Mother. “Do not bother looking for his remains.”

“Oh, absolutely, daughter. You three have created a mess by killing him, but this has also impressed me.” Her admiration positively drips off that sentence. “I do believe you are a chip off the old block. Even if the blood isn’t there, between us. I was going to have to have him eliminated eventually, I suppose.”

“I am not a chip off your block.” Mother and Putin are more closely related than I am to her.

She ignores me. “If only the Australians used nukes, we could solve this island disaster in one neat go and blame them. Pity.”

We’ve chosen to sit on a bench near the jetty while the security force gathers up all our gear before they transport us off this island. The place is being swept clean of evidence and then, who knows? I don’t care, myself. I wish we could indeed nuke the island.

Razor sits to my right, Marcus to my left. We’ve showered and tidied up but washing away violence is not so simple. The sutures in my butt remind me of the wound whenever I shift onto that cheek. Apart from that, we three have come through this in great shape, physically. I am a little shocked.

How did we manage that?

I turn the mermaid pendant over and over in my hands. It’s the one thing I was allowed to keep from the room below the trapdoor. Everything else was shudder-worthy, anyway. The afternoon sun plays on the metal, gleaming thickly here and there, on her blue-and-silver tail, on the chain, and on her silver face. The inscription makes me sad, but I think I’m

getting there. Wiping out most of this evil clique has been a big step in the right direction.

I release a sigh and gaze out to sea, listening to the gulls and the rhythmic crash of the waves.

Serenity and the sea go together, still, even though I know what swims beneath those waves.

“They say you never quite get over the death of someone you love, Phoebes.” Razor squeezes my forearm, and I slip my hand into his. The warmth always just filters in and makes me feel good. Though this time my eyes water.

I sniff. “Oh?”

“But you do learn to live with it. Everybody dies, and Milli, being a kind soul, she just went earlier.”

“If only it was the reason. She was though—kind. My best and only real friend.”

Marcus clears his throat rather obviously. “Us. You have us.”

“Hmmm. You two are just fuck buddies.” I snigger when they both make surprised noises. “You’re too gauche to be friends with. I mean the family who slays together stays together? What is that?”

“It was good,” Marcus asserts. “A good slogan. I liked it! However, you don’t get away easy. We are not just fuck buddies. Though we do like to fuck you, we are friends, lovers, and I think I qualify as a boyfriend and your Dom. Now Razor...” He scoffs.

I turn to Razor, and he is shaking his head, amused, but he remains silent. I bump him with my shoulder.

“What?”

“Say something?”

“That Marcus is full of hot air? We are both all that he says, unless...you don’t want us from now on?” He lifts my chin with his knuckles beneath, looks into my eyes. “You can

say no. After everything that happened here, I would understand if you want a break.”

My heartbeat has decided to gallop crazily. A break. If I do that, I have a feeling I would run logic in circles and convince myself this was never meant to be.

I answer quietly, just loud enough to be heard above the ocean, “I don’t want a break. I need you both, so if you will have me, then I guess I will have you?” Why am I tearing up, again?

“Good answer.” Marcus lifts me onto his lap.

My sutures fire up. “*Owie*. Careful!”

“Sorry.”

When Razor moves close, I’m carefully transferred to sit on both of them.

“I cannot believe you thought we wouldn’t want to continue this.”

“Yes,” Razor agrees, solemnly. “A spanking offence, I think. Later, when we get home, and your pretty ass has healed.”

“*Ummm*.” Spanking sounds interesting but wrong to speak of right now. Even so, a thrill runs through me at the realization that this is now my life, shared with these two men. “Home? Whose house, guys? My apartment was sold. I suppose I’ll have to go looking again.”

“Stay at mine or Marcus’ until we decide where to keep you. Assuming he isn’t bankrupt?”

Decide where to keep you? My mouth falls open. This will require more discussion.

“The money is coming back to me, including what my family was defrauded of. I’m fine.”

I listen to them talk over my head while I study the pendant again. “I would like to have a remembrance ceremony for Milli. The crocodile here may have taken her remains, but I

want some closure.” They murmur agreement. “I’m glad we threw Bastion off the cliff.”

“That’s my bloodthirsty girl.” Marcus pats my shoulder.

“Marcus, I am curious if you or Phoebes here got an offer from her stepmother to join some investigative unit the frat is forming.”

I sigh. “I did. I said no.” I couldn’t believe she offered that.

“Me too. She asked, I said I’d check with you two.”

“Hey. Look.” The engines of the helicopter on the landing pad have started and the rotor turns. Someone is jogging up the beach toward us. Though she’s changed into a dress, I recognize Aimee.

“Hi. Your bags are on board. Time to go.” She swallows, catches her breath. “I never said thank you to you, Phoebe, for saving my life back there.”

Gingerly, I maneuver off the men’s legs then hug her. “And thank you for being here, and for saving our lives. I’d save *you* again, anytime.”

“Me too. Me too.”

We break the hug, and she steps away, nods toward the chopper.

“We might see you again sometime, Aimee. In London?”

“Maybe.” Her smile is wide, generous, and Razor and Marcus thank her then we head toward the jetty.

“Beautiful island. Terrible place,” Razor murmurs, and he stops to look back for a moment.

“Yes. A pity the other guests who came to the ruin are still alive.” It’s something I couldn’t get out of my thoughts. “They killed people, filmed them, and just because they didn’t fight back, they weren’t shot. Karma? I don’t think so.”

“And they can’t be tried either. The frat will make them pay somehow but not anything public, not with courts and trials or prison.”

It's a problem I can do nothing about though I ponder on it in the helicopter, all the way to the airport.

When we step onto the airport tarmac, a question returns, something I meant to ask Razor about and forgot.

"Hey." I tug at his sleeve. "How did you know how to use that katana?"

"That? It's just a big knife. Why wouldn't I know?" When I purse my lips, he laughs and elaborates. "Truthfully, I studied Kenjutsu for a while. And now." He claps his hands and walks backward, startling the man in charge of ushering us across the tarmac and further away from the blades of the helicopter. "Where to? Are you okay with us taking you to a place in Australia, Phoebes? Marcus and I found somewhere good. It's a retreat in the mountains and quiet, with forests and wildlife, and no beaches in sight."

I stop dead, turning over in my mind the thought of not yet going home. "Australia? Wow. I guess?"

Maybe this would be for the best. Going back to London feels as if it would be retraumatizing. I want to organize a last goodbye for Milli, but not yet. It's too soon after finding out what really happened to her, then having a battle play out before us...and then, to find out I can happily kill someone if they cross the wrong boundary. Hurt my friend, I will hurt you.

I do need to breathe. I need tranquility, and I'm guessing my men do too. Then maybe we can find our feet again in the normal world.

I look from Marcus to Razor.

"A forest retreat sounds wonderful. Sure. I love that idea."

"Yes!" Marcus grabs our hands, raises them high, then does an impromptu Riverdance, or something, with some wild leg tapping and crisscrossing.

I cannot help grinning at his idiocy. Yes, this is what we need. Something good. Something to make us smile and enjoy life once again.

Phoebe

Three days later

The winding road up Mt. Tambourine takes us through lush rainforest where sunlight filters through the tree canopy and flickers over and dapples the window glass. Only a few cars pass us going the other way, down the mountain, and none are following close enough to be seen. When I roll down my window, the bird calls punctuate the muted drone of the engine. Their voices are a natural music that soothes my soul as much as the presence of Razor and Marcus.

Our first view of Rapscaillon Rainforest Retreat is through the trees as the road curls toward the entrance.

Delivered before the front steps, we wait for the valet trotting down those steps to collect our meagre luggage.

“It’s cool here.” I turn in a circle, and it’s as if I’m breathing in the green lushness. Another breath and I might float away.

Razor nods. “Quiet too. There’s no rush. No schedule. We can do whatever we want to, however we want to. There’s a farm nearby you can go to just to feed the horses.”

“Awww. That would be so cool.”

“I say we do that then.” Marcus has grabbed one of his bags and refuses to let the valet have it. Once he picks up the others, we slowly follow the man up the steps. “I can feel

myself healing already. A scotch on the rocks and Phoebe under me will do the rest.”

He said the latter quietly. Though I shoot an alarmed look at the back of the valet, he seems unaware. Or polite.

“*Shhh!*”

“I agree, Marcus.” Razor sneaks his hand to my rear to pinch me. He’s chosen the unwounded side so I only glare and keep going.

“I predict a long week of me abusing both of you.” I smirk to take the sting out of that.

Razor snorts. “The reverse, girl. The reverse.”

Our room is huge and open plan, with wide doors, mirrors, stone-blue couches that have elegantly sculpted timber backs, Asian décor sideboards and cupboards, and striking art on the walls. The bed is on a platform overlooking the couches and the enormous TV. A king plus his small harem could live on our bed.

For a while, stunned, I simply stand in the middle of this all, taking in everything, absorbing the peacefulness and the understated beauty, how the forest is so close it seems part of the background.

“It’s a treehouse with all the modern conveniences.” I open my arms and sigh. “You chose wonderfully.”

“We did.” Marcus eyes me. “And today, House Rules say you get to walk around naked with only our collar on you.”

“Oh?” And now I’m melting and anticipating a week of kinky sex with these two, and no worries...no future that involves death, dismemberment, or the losing of friends. I blink and pull myself back to the room, away from the bad memories. I go to the two of them and huddle into the middle, surrounding myself with their male warmth—my arms around them and theirs around me, squashing me close. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” Razor kisses the top of my head. “I booked us into their restaurant for dinner but left it so we can just eat it here, if we want to. Whichever everyone wants. The

food looks to die for, though we probably should ban you from eating the desserts, Phoebe.”

I hesitate then I take the bait. “Why?” I mumble into Marcus’ shirt.

“You would never stop eating them and then, sadly, I’d have to cane you for being naughty.”

“Desserts are a caning offence, now?” My bottom is still healing, but I’m betting he’d happily cane my other side.

“Maybe.” He musses up my hair. “We’ll see.”

I wriggle my ass, and my clit happens to grind on Marcus as I do so. Suddenly, I’m particularly breathless, and my nipples are rising. “Tease.”

“Guilty.”

“We have a week to explore you, Miss Phoebe.” Marcus pulls me even closer to him. “Prepare to be our pretty fucktoy.” Then he takes that collar from his pocket, stands me back from him, and buckles it on. “You are beautiful and ours, and I...well.” Why are his eyes shining? Is Marcus crying? That makes me want to cry. Then he kisses me on the mouth.

“She is.” Razor is playing his fingers along my neck, quiet, slow. “You are beautiful and ours, and also everything that Marcus is saying, feeling, I am too. I’ve honestly never felt this attached to two people before, even if one of them is a bit loud, a bit of a wanker, at times.”

“That had better not be me,” I say, deflecting this off of Marcus and softly kissing him again. He’s not a man who often wears his softer emotions where you can see them.

When the kiss ends, he tsks at me, cups my face and thumbs beneath my eyes. “She’s asking to be put in her place.”

“Aye. Which is between us, being toyed with until she comes and screams.”

“And there, you’ve made Razor go Scottish, or pirate? That alone is so naughty that your ass will have to be made very red.”

I eyeroll, but inside I'm grinning. "Only one side of it." I have a suspicion they are going to wear me out, and I do not mind this at all.

We are barely getting started on the meal we've chosen to eat in the room when my phone chimes. I glance at the screen, preparing to toss it onto the couch when I realize it is from Mother.

"Are we reading texts, now?" Razor asks, scowling in that sexy way he has.

"It's from Emma. I shouldn't but—"

"Read it." Marcus dishes out the cuttlefish bolognese onto three gold-edged plates. He sucks some off his thumb. "*Mmm. Take too long and all this will be gone.*" The table is laden with five different steaming meals.

"Okay." I scan it then look up. "She's asking me, *again*, if I'd consider getting on board with this investigation unit. It's to..." I read it verbatim, "*Be a watchdog and track down bad actors.*" I'm both flattered and horrified that she thinks I'm worthy.

"Dear Phoebe, I was surprised yet also pleased at your actions on the island. I had hoped it would provide the motivation for you to do something with your life, for once.

"That is how she starts it. *Ugh.* Let's eat."

Typical of her to think pushing me into what was essentially a pit of homicidal snakes might provide me with a life goal. It is true that I still cannot shed my disgust and grief at what happened there. More than one woman died. Milli was not the only victim. I cannot help but wonder about the others and how they died, and how their families must be feeling, not knowing—

"Enough?" Marcus nudges me.

For a second, I stare at the pile of noodles and duck. "Oh, yes. That's lovely. It smells delicious."

Two more days remain of our week of rest at RapsCALLIONS. We've fed the horses, had mad kinky sex, eaten some of the best food ever, gone for walks through the forest, and we've decided to return and see more of Australia, sometime soon. It has to tee up with Razor's company work and with Marcus', though his father can run his antiques shop, and several million pounds extra have been deposited in his bank account, courtesy of the fraternity. If not for the wear and tear on our psyches, the island affair would have been...nice? I cannot think of a particularly accurate adjective to describe making a profit from that slaughterous mayhem.

Tonight, we are making use of the indoor-outdoor spa. Sliding back the glass doors on two sides makes it outdoors, but we've kept them closed and also drawn the shutters across. Luckily, we chose that. I imagine what they're doing to me might shock some guests.

Not that we ever see many other people. These little guest houses are perfectly situated for privacy.

The jets of heated water stir weak bubbles before me but not enough to conceal everything. I'm nude and sitting on Marcus while the two of them play a game called, clamp whatever bits of me they feel like playing with. It is enervating. It's also strangely relaxing when they do it over and over and don't bother to try to arouse me, much. Even so, the painful throb from the clamps currently crushing my areolas, just below my nipples, brought me fully into the moment, though I was also reading a book.

I put it aside. Not only am I surely going to drop it, but it is becoming difficult to read any words at all on the water-spotted pages. My ass muscles squeeze in on Marcus' cock. I'm seated fully on him and am *almost* used to accommodating it. Desire swirls, lazily reminding me of him whenever we shift.

"*Dune* is supposed to demand the reader's concentration, boys," I admonish them, as Razor swims in and lifts one breast from the water so he can lick my nipple with his tongue tip.

I'm spellbound. The touch of his tongue trickles excitement, down, down, to between my legs. The artistry of his tattoos also fascinates me, and I follow the lines of the blue dragon that curls over his chest before it submerges and blurs underwater.

But none of us is in any hurry. And, after all, I already have that cock in my ass. His hands are on my hips and his thrusts are measured and small, maybe once every thirty seconds. Out of curiosity, I think I should've brought in a timer. I've had enough orgasms this week to keep me merrily masturbating to the memories for years, centuries...if I needed to do that.

Razor transfers his attention to my other nipple while, beneath the water, he meanders a finger from my navel to my clit.

"Hey, hey. None of that. We vowed to *not* come for half an hour. Remember?"

"I do." He ceases licking but his thumb is making moves below. My attention wanders and my lips part as he presses there and circles, achingly slow. "Though I also recall there is no really good reason to not make you come. I get to add another spanking to the big list for London, is all, if you do. Plus you don't give *us* orders, Miss Phoebes." He edges his teeth around my nipple and squeezes, adding to the sensations summoned by the clamp.

"*Mmm,*" is all I manage to say, or want to say, my eyes wide, my hand grasping his wrist.

Marcus withdraws an inch then pushes his cock back in. I gasp at the renewed sexual harassment.

"You spoiled my book."

Marcus snorts. "I know you've read it before."

Then Razor swims to the edge and returns with two more clamps. These are new. The silver kangaroos swinging from the little chains make me smile. This must be what was in the express parcel delivered this morning.

“Tongue? Clit? Where can I put this? She’s so damn slippery in the bath.”

“Tongue?” Marcus suggests. “Or just pop these off for a while. I want to see those swing from her while we fuck her.” Without warning, he undoes both and pulls them off. The abrupt sting and thud of blood through my nipples has me squirming.

“Hmmm. Okay. And definitely one on her clit. Needles tonight. I haven’t used any for ages.” He moves in, between my legs, sending water sloshing, and kisses me on the mouth while Marcus holds me at waist and breast. Razor’s cock pokes at me, finds my entrance and slides in far enough that I gasp into his mouth.

“You promised,” I squeak as he goes even deeper—the immense pressure of two men inside me, stretching me, it never ever gets old.

“Not to come?” He laughs and kisses harder, thrusts a few times, turning me to mush, into a panting, groaning girl. Though Marcus also groans into my ear and said *Jesus* and *fuck* once or twice.

I’ve closed my eyes and am fully into this. Who cares who comes first...

When Razor withdraws, I flutter open my eyes and lick my lips. I glare at him. “More?”

He laughs. “Soon. Maybe on the bed. I want to pound into you while you’re on hands and knees and make the kangaroos on the clamps get shaken and stirred as your tits wobble.”

“They don’t wobble...well, not much.” I poke out my tongue.

“Read your book,” he tells me, moving in again, and touching my clit. He massages it, cruelly slow, while Marcus bites my neck, spacing them, deep and intense, *one, two... three.*

I moan, tense my thighs. My focus wanders from him to Razor, to everywhere they touch me. What...book? His thrusts

cease. My heartrate levels out at fucking excited but nowhere near coming level.

“Or what about we talk through that offer of your stepmother’s. To work for the frat, sometimes.” Razor’s eyes narrow. “I know you’ve seemed more receptive the last few days.”

What? Now?

I fumble through my thoughts, reassemble my brain, swallow.

“Oh. True.” Was I that obvious? “I wonder if I should accept but I don’t want to do it, if you two aren’t interested.” And still his fingers toy with my clit. Is this an exercise in control? Is it them seeing what they can do without me exploding?

He retrieves one kangaroo clamp.

“One?” I frown, and I keep frowning as he submerges while looking at me and smiling.

A moment later, he’s probed for and found my clit, pinched the hood in finger and thumb and I know what comes next.

Lip in my teeth, I watch him underwater.

A second later, he applies the clamp.

“*Fuuuuck*,” I whisper. It hurts but it stimulates, and it makes me so fucking aware of it being *there*. That alone adds greatly to the thrill. I wriggle, just a bit, still impaled on Marcus’s cock.

Razor surfaces, water streaming off him. “Keep going. You were saying?” He laughs as I frown while scrambling for an answer.

“Are...either of you interested in working this investigative thing?” I direct my gaze toward my clit, imagining I can see the kangaroo, but I can’t, for it’s lying between my legs on that chain. This is nowhere near as painful as when they clamp a nipple.

“And?” Marcus says quietly. “Why?” His hands have cupped my breasts, and he brushes his thumbs in circles around those now very sensitive parts of me. The water laps at them. They’re red and standing up like buttons. I jerk my hips and sigh then cannot help moaning because it’s building up to be more than I can resist. Razor is tugging on the clamp and massaging my clit. He’s squeezing, touching, toying, watching me, lips caught in a tight smile.

They are to blame for me panting and being terribly distracted.

“Why am I...oh. Yes. One, she has to pay us. Two, I think we’d get some control, some insight into what they do. Three, special reason I will say later. To do with...the island.” I gasp, my mouth staying open, as the clit massaging becomes more rhythmic. “The frat that is? No? Oh god, I’m...” I stare down at my breasts, past them, and flop my head back, onto Marcus’ shoulder as he thrusts in, then pulls out then jams in.

“You sure you don’t want to fuck her now, here?” Marcus asks, laughing. “She’s going to come anyway. Fuck her now and later?”

“Choices, choices. But back to your question, Phoebe.” He squeezes my clit, timing it just right as Marcus has me arching my breasts into his hands to get more of his thumbs. The water sloshes more as he speeds up, doing short sharp thrusts into my ass. Luckily, the sutures are healing well.

“Question?” I splutter. *Focus. Focus.*

“I’m willing to join that unit, experimentally. Marcus?”

“Yeah. If she comes, we try it out. If not, we keep fucking her until she comes, then we join. Come for us, Phoebe,” he rasps into my ear. “I’m going to fill your ass with come, stretch it wide, claim it, then Razor might, then we’ll do it again tonight until you’re a fucking mess.”

“Our fucking mess.” Razor ducks under the water, and a second later, he goes deep enough to tuck my thighs over his shoulders. Then I feel his mouth on me, sucking, his tongue stroking, and Marcus isn’t stopping this time, either. I bow my

spine to keep myself jammed onto Razor's mouth as Marcus takes my hips again to hold me higher as he plows in. He's fucking my ass while Razor sucks me off and drags on that clamp.

Then, Razor shoves three fingers inside me. Still licking, still sucking. My mouth stretches in a silent scream as I jerk and spasm into an orgasm. My thighs crush inward. I can feel the heat and the pressure of come pouring into me, and then I'm shuddering and coming some more.

I emerge from my scattered oblivion to an awareness of Razor prying apart my thighs. Bubbles erupt then...

He launches from the spa, spraying water everywhere, thrashing and dragging in huge noisy gulps of air. "I almost drowned!"

I'm hiccupping in laughter. Luckily, he pulled my legs apart in time to get to the surface and breathe.

He curses me and swipes water from his face, shakes his head, spraying more water about the room. "I'm using a snorkel if I ever do that again."

Marcus is also laughing, and I end up with him crushing me to him and Razor forgetting to remove the clit clamp, so I have to grit my teeth and do it myself.

Later that night, as punishment, he fucks me on my hands and knees, with the silver kangaroos swinging merrily to and fro from my nipples from the violence of his thrusts. I have another clamp on my clit, as well as five needles marching down my belly. I admit I like these punishments. I'm not telling either of them that.

Though they may already know.

Being taken by the two of them has become my best ever, wildest, erotic dream.

LONDON

We accepted Mother's invitation and are now an investigation unit for the CNC Fraternity. We were allowed to name it, since

we don't actually have a badge or a building with a sign over it, and so the three of us are the excellently trained *Agents with Solutions Service*. Our motto: *be bloodthirsty*.

And we will get invoices with that printed on them—*ASS*. Mother is suitably appalled.

What she doesn't know are our ulterior motives for joining. We're going to discover all the victims of Killer Crew and the identities of the guests who have not been punished, yet.

Yet being the important word.

Seth and Aimee are coming with us, too. Seth was the source of Mother's IT expertise. She recruited him from under me, as she does. He seems happy and was the reason for Marcus' ass phone. I should have guessed that. Although Aimee hates what happened on the island, we are not sure how much information to trust her with. I have a feeling it will be everything. I like her badass attitude and skills, and her ability to keep secrets.

If only we could do something for those who died.

We've found a bar that has views of the Thames. It's nothing like looking out over a rainforest but for plotting mayhem our table with the line of craft beers will do. I haven't felt the need to drink to drown my sorrows since the island. When I'm sad, I share with Razor and Marcus. I hope they will do the same whenever they need comfort.

I prop my feet on Razor's lap and hook my forearm over the low back of this navy blue, curved armchair.

Marcus has parked his elbows on the armrests of his chair. He's nursing a bottle of Landlord in both hands. "We're in then. It's looking good."

"It is." Razor pokes my toes through the sandals, pretends to pour beer on them until I frown. "We now have access to almost all the files the frat carries. They're behind a zillion layers of IT security, but we can read them, if we ask the right people using the right channels. And I know the right people."

I swallow some beer, feel the cool fizz go down my throat. “The plot thickens. If we stick with this, over the next few years, we will be able to track down every single motherfucker who knew about the snuff films, and then we will quietly excise them from existence.”

Marcus raises his beer. “A toast to joining ASS and excising those fuckers from existence. You know, I’m pretty sure this makes us the good guys.”

“To being the good guys,” I say.

We lift our beers and drink.

“Marcus, did my mother ever apologize? You asked her for an apology if we came through on this.”

He sucks on his beer before answering. “I did, and she did but—” He raises a finger when I look at him, astonished. “It was only verbal, and is supposed to be private, but this is going no further than us. So... To my surprise, she admitted to being wrong even.” He hitches forward in the chair, inhales. “She also said she found out, years later through some private CCTV sent to her, that her son’s death was an accident, and it happened after he was sexually inappropriate to you. She forgives you, clearly. And me. Or we wouldn’t all be sitting here, discussing all of this.”

“Oh. I am stunned. That does explain things. A lot. I am also actually relieved.” Does my stepmother have a conscience?

“Come here, Phoebe.” Razor beckons and I move over to his chair to sit on his lap. The hardness of the bar in one of his nipples nudges my arm, and I subtly tug on it, earning an amused scowl. “Behave. There is something else I’m sure you will want to do. If we’re on the inside, we can arrange for some money to be given to their families of the victims.”

“Suck some money out of the assholes prior to their departure from this Earth,” Marcus adds. “Transfer it through proxy companies to the people still hurting. I am willing to pledge...” He leans in and taps his fist on the table. “Some of

the money Emma finally gave back to my family. To not do that? It would feel wrong?" He shrugs.

"I am tearing up here." I wipe my eyes with my fingers. "Dammit, you two. That's perfect."

"We will have to be careful, slow, leave no tracks," Razor points out. The low rumble of his assertive voice is smoking hot.

Both Marcus and I nod in agreement.

"Then another toast," Razor says. "To helping the families. To giving retribution. To being the good guys."

"Yes!" We drink again, and I hug Razor's neck then go to Marcus and kiss him. He wraps his arm around my ass and pulls me onto his lap. *I love them so much.* "Guys. This is what I call a happy ending."

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A SNEAK PEEK AT TAKE ME BREAK ME



A DARK CAPTIVE FANTASY ROMANCE

I'm scraping the barrel trying to stay afloat when an idea arrives that could rescue me from debt and bring me back together in a kinky way with a man I never gave up on. I'm terrified and fascinated and tempted beyond sanity.

Capture fantasies rule my eBook. Re-enacting one in a documentary will surely be irresistible viewing to millions of women?

Klaus and I discover that inside an ordinary man dark desires may lurk. What will win in the end? The man and lover, or the monster?

EXCERPT 1

Klaus

As I kissed and tasted the tears that had leaked from under the blindfold, I said in a harsh whisper, "I enjoyed seeing you scream and try to escape, loved seeing you dancing away from the cane. Your ass – I'd declare it a work of art. Yeah..." I touched our foreheads together and looked down over her face, stared into her blindfolded eyes, and at her trembling full lips and those amazing tears. I traced my finger down the wet track on one cheek.

My murmur was soft but as deadly, I hoped, as a knife thrust. "I never thought I'd say this, but I enjoy this. You might be in trouble."

Truth and mind fuck rolled into one scorching bundle. Yes, she was in trouble, but then so was I.

I wanted to do it again. I'd saved her and cared for her so many times. She was a beautiful woman, with a mostly beautiful heart, and I wanted to hurt her and swallow those screams. God, I was so fucked up.

EXCERPT 2 FROM TAKE ME BREAK ME

Klaus

“I agree. This isn't working.”

Pure agreeable statement, but she rocked back slightly before she nodded.

“Nice is bad, Jodie? You want mind fuck. You want mean. You want things you dream about. You have no idea.”

Her eyes widened.

“Starting now. The rules are gone. I make my own rules.”

“Uh. What? They were your rules.”

I took down the list from the door and held it, slowly tapping the laminated paper against my leg. “No. They were not.”

After unfolding the flaps of the cardboard box, I tucked the list down inside and pulled out the two gags. “Rule one. You don't talk unless I say you can.” As her mouth opened, with the buckles trapped in my fingers, I dropped both gags into view, and dangled them. “Talk and I use these.”

Like magic, her mouth clicked shut. Now I had her attention. That had worked. I was perhaps as stunned as she looked. She touched her tongue tip to her upper lip as I stood before her and she kept her gaze swinging from the gags to my face. I had a feeling I'd never had a woman so rapt in what I said. Addictive. The pulse of excitement had centered at my groin. Nothing I could do about it. I already knew that looking at women in bondage revved my engine. But I'd never done more than look at pictures.

Now I had an inkling that anything where I got to hold the reins, really hold the reins, was like oxygen to a man in the throes of suffocation. Incredible.

I ran through my epiphany, convincing myself as much as her. Bluntness was called for.

“My conclusions. You asked me to do this because you still want me in your bed. You want me to fuck you.” Her gasp, I answered by swinging the ball gag. She uttered no words. “Somewhere in your plans, you hoped. The rules, I made up those in line with what I knew you’d be thinking. You knew I’d not step beyond, or not much.

“This,” I swept my arm across, “This room was your idea. Your rules. Lock me up. Make me yours for a while, but not too rough or dangerous because that isn’t in my rules.” I cocked an eyebrow. “Yes?”

Though she frowned and shook her head I went on. It didn’t matter if she deluded herself.

“You imagined some safe little love affair, with some kink on the side? Doesn’t work that way. Either you hand over control, or I walk. No documentary. Nod if you agree.”

I waited. I could almost hear the clocks ticking.

When she nodded slowly, my heart kicked back in. If it had beaten at all for those last few seconds, I was unaware.

“Good. This room is no longer your prison. The house is secure and private enough. You’re coming upstairs as long as you behave.”

No protests. Good. For a woman who liked having an opinion on everything this was exceptional. I could have walked on a cloud, I was so hyper-aware of everything she did. Were her lips fuller, her cheeks flushed, her breathing faster? I thought so. But she didn’t know what I intended.

“Let me point out what could have happened if this stupid plan had gone wrong. If you picked a less restrained, a less sensible man. You’ve given me a hundred filthy dirty ideas about what I could do to you. I never knew what depths my mind could plunge to. Now I do. If anyone was mindfucked so

far, it was me. Another man would follow through. You think these gags are bad? This one with the red ball is simple, it just stops you talking.” I laid the other, metal and leather gag across my palm. “This one is a spider gag. With this in, you can’t close your mouth and your mouth can be fucked. Do you have any idea of the things on the internet? Wait.” I held up my hand. “I guess you do, from what’s in those books you read.”

I bent and rested my hands on my knees. Mind fuck. This I could accomplish.

“You want a list? How about the list of things a man could do to you in this situation... I could make you wash my dishes naked with a gag in. I could tie you up, cut your clothes off and just stare at you all day – just because I could. I could make you be a piece of furniture and ignore you. Humiliating? Yes. I could train you to be an anal slut. I could fuck your ass all day long. I could collar you and make you crawl around on the floor like a dog at a convenient height for blow jobs. I could share you with the man down the street, stick needles in your nipples and use them and some string to fasten you to eyebolts in the ceiling. Want to try that one? And at the end of it all, if I was the worst sort of man, I could kill you and bury you out there on the beach.” I swung my arm up to point. “Maybe no one would ever find you.”

Now she was truly speechless, maybe even scared. Served her right. I watched the little swallows she did for a count of five.

“But I’m not going to. I’m your friend. Remember that, no matter what I do.” I smiled one-sided but I’m sure it didn’t reach my eyes. The eyes are the mirror to the soul and right then my soul was very dark.

Then I squatted down in front of her, a couple of feet away, reached out and ran the very tip of my forefinger along her plump bottom lip. “My rules. Open.”

A second’s hesitation at most. She shivered and her mouth parted. Mind fuck, here we come.

“Good. Jodie.” Then I very deliberately held up the spider gag, slipped it between her teeth, pulled her head forward, and held her there while I buckled it. Hair made a great anchor point. I slid my splayed fingers into the roots and tilted her head back then I added a rule. “Second rule. You do my dishes whenever I say. You wear the spider gag. You don’t speak unless I say. But first...” Eyes locked on hers, I advanced one finger into her mouth and stroked her tongue. And she let me.

Had I hypnotized her? She did nothing but stare back. What I wouldn’t have given to fuck her mouth right then and there.

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ABOUT CARI SILVERWOOD

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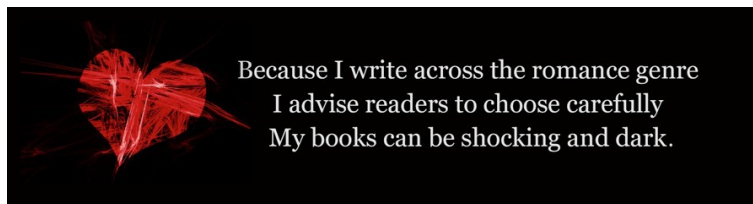
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