

IVY GRAVES

A central image of a human skull with a moth resting on its forehead. The skull is positioned behind the main title text. The background is a dark, moody composition of red roses and wispy smoke or mist.

BONES
DEEP

BONES DEEP

SHADOWS AND OBSESSIONS DUET

BOOK ONE

IVY GRAVES



Bones Deep

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

I acknowledge and pay my respects to the traditional owners of the unceded land on which I live and write, the peoples of Kombumerri Country and all their descendants past, present and emerging. I further acknowledge and extend that respect to the First Nations and Pasifika region peoples who are reading this book.

WARNING

This dark romance novel is taboo and was written for open minded adults only. The themes could make you feel uncomfortable or trigger emotional distress. If you need support with your mental health, please contact Lifeline Australia on 13 11 14, or a help line in your local area.

POSSIBLE TRIGGERS

Extreme graphic sex, graphic torture, murder, sex trafficking, paedophile rings, crime, incest, drug and alcohol use, drink driving, graphic self-harm, rape, kidnapping, stalking, voyeurism, age gap, cult ritual, child abuse (historical), degradation, exhibitionism, BDSM (rope suspension, bondage, impact play, blood play, knife play, breath play, spitting, golden showers and more).

This duet is for those who've ever felt helpless at the hands of another, and then dreamed of a fantastical revenge.

And for those who like large, fancy cocks.

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PROLOGUE

*P*ast

Melbourne - Australia

Fight For Me - Barkaa, Electric Fields

The Same Deep Water As You - The Cure

Desert Rose - Lolo Zouai

HAZY

I brush raindrops from my lashes and shift my backpack to my other shoulder. Marching to keep warm, I groan as my feet squelch in my lace-up Docs.

Gross.

Watching the curl of frosty breath rising before me, I wish I was one of those organised people who kept an umbrella in their bag. Those people always seem to have everything they need at just the right time. Thunder ricochets around the clouds, making me jolt just as a red Ford approaches with its headlights on. My blood runs cold.

Fuck.

It's them. Of course it is. I bet they've been out driving around, searching for me all day. God forbid I thought I could

get away with a day off from their bullshit.

The sedan splashes a puddle over my legs as it comes to a stop in front of me, my skirt now dripping with mud.

“Cunts,” I grumble. Just my luck.

The passenger window rolls down a fraction, and Janette Withcott gives me a death stare.

“Get in the car, Hazel,” she says, even-tempered. The sour old face glaring at me is pinched as though she’d just smelled her own putrid ass.

Her frizzy blonde hair puffs down to her shoulders, and the extra weight she carries shows in her hooded eyelids and generous double chin. She still lives in the eighties, with her frosted makeup, including her hot pink lipstick that grossly offsets against pasty, powdered skin. I dread the sight of her.

I’m so sick of this; the relentless torment and abuse. The violation of every inch of my body and mind. I wonder how much more of it I can take before I snap. I’m close, I can feel it.

I peer down the rainy street, hoping to see the bus, but it’s nowhere in sight. The rain is falling harder now, leaves and twigs whipping from trees. School buses are notorious no-shows, and I don’t have any cash, which means I have to walk the five kilometres home. And I don’t want to do that. I want to get home as quickly as possible to curl up in bed with my dystopian novel and stay there till tomorrow. Or forever.

So, I risk it. Fingers crossed they take me home like any kind, elderly couple would. Swiping a hand across my cheek again, I open the back door of the car just as an uneasy shiver runs over my skin.

But this is no kind, elderly couple.

“Thanks,” I mumble as I chuck my sodden bag across the back seat and wring my raven hair onto the upholstery. I hope the seat grows mouldy. The car reeks with a foul stench, a mix of B.O. and the putrid scent of human monsters. My eyebrows knit together at memories of what they’ve done to me in the back of this car.

Fuck them and the horse they rode in on. I buckle myself in and pray to the gods of whatever that they are having a good day today.

“We missed you at ballet and hip-hop classes yesterday. Where were you, Hazel?”

“I was sick,” I lie.

“I was expecting you at the pre-primary class, and then to come take care of Phillip’s needs in the evening,” Janette says in her fake posh accent. “He was very disappointed to discover you’d abandoned him. Weren’t you, Phillip?”

He grunts as the windscreen wipers beat a solid rhythm, steering us out onto the road.

“Sorry. I didn’t have phone credit to call,” I say quietly, eyes down. I try my hardest not to poke the bear today.

“Well, I expect you to be there tomorrow, young lady. You’ve obviously made a speedy recovery,” Phillip huffs. “You owe us two *extra* hours for my missed session. I trust your father will be oblivious, as usual, if he’s even noticed you’re missing. Saw him down the pub the other day on the pokies. Such a loser. Anyway, you’ll be at my place tomorrow night. I’ll even shave for you,” he says, winking.

Nausea swirls in my chest, and I swallow it down.

“Okay,” I say, but I really do not want that.

Phillip pervs at me in the rearview mirror. I can feel the laser-like focus in his glacial eyes, as he squints from beneath his hairy brows. They crawl together like two caterpillars during mating season. Do caterpillars have mating seasons? My wet school shirt clings to my tits, and his creepy gaze smothers me there like a cloying entity. I cross my arms over my chest, even though there’s no doubt he’s already copped an eyeful of my bra.

Developing early made double-takes from males the norm, but the way Phillip has leered at me since I was a kid makes me sick. Add to that the way he smells and touches me...my skin crawls.

His touch makes me heave for real, and fuck does he love to touch me. Obsessed with my fucking nipples, his stupid fat fingers pinch me, and I just have to sit still while he takes advantage.

I purge every day whether he touches me or not; my body is just trying to expel every fibre of him out of my system. I am allergic to that torturous, sadistic motherfucker. My skin breaks out in welts frequently as proof, especially where his revolting cum lands when he squirts it all over me.

“Good. Make sure you wear my favourite bra and panties tomorrow. The pink ones I got you, with the sparkles,” Phillip says with a smile.

I nod as I swallow down more bile and search in my bag for a Tic Tac. He makes a snorting sound, then swallows his phlegm.

I hate these people; trapped in a never-ending nightmare with them, that I cannot escape. What did I do to deserve this? I was such a perfect child, happy even, before Mum died. Then they stole my innocence in one fell swoop.

Now I’m a broken, porcelain ballerina who dances for their sadistic pleasure. The power they wield is unfair. He’s a cop, so he always has the upper hand, his threats and blackmail are always delivered to me in great detail. Then add to the mix my father’s alcoholism and gambling habit, and well...let’s just say Dad knows what they do to me, but he’d rather sell his daughter’s soul than to ever give up his precious gambling habit. He doesn’t care about me. No one does, so while Dad sits at the pub, I have to go with these monster’s so they don’t kill him. They rape and torture children with no hint of remorse, an extremely sick partnership that I just can’t escape. I’m sure if I look up Satan in the dictionary, it will be their faces staring back at me.

I naively hope Phillip is driving me home, or at least to the dance studio, which I can walk home from, but he starts driving south down Waverly. The raindrops *tap-tap-tap* against the window. I shiver in my wet clothes and rest my forehead against the cold glass. I don’t know what’s going on as their

silence fills the car, and he navigates rainy traffic on one of the busiest streets. Janette throws some folded paper at me to get my attention. I look at her, then down at the paper.

“What’s this?” I ask, picking it up.

She raises her eyebrows at me as I unfold them. I scan the papers and quickly notice they are transcripts of my private text messages.

“Where did you get...” I start to ask. “That’s illegal.”

I’m fuming at the thought of them doing this, completely disregarding my privacy, along with everything else they’ve taken from me. A cold sweat creeps up my chest, then terror floods my veins as realisation sinks in.

They know about Aaron.

Fuck. They were very direct in telling me—as they performed heinous acts on my body—that boyfriends are off limits. Friends of any description are off limits. No one can get close to me, not even teachers. All the easier to molest me if I have no one to interact with outside their sick cult. They’ve owned me for the last six years and they’re paranoid I’m gonna go rat them out. Their brainwashing is disintegrating, and they know it. The older I get and the more I read on social media, allows me to see cracks in their threats, and I’ve had enough.

My heart thumps outside my ribcage, and it’s as though I can’t suck any new air into my lungs. I’m hot, then cold. Fight or flight. I want to fly, but where would I go? This is my bed here, and I’m about to lie in it.

“Who. Is. He?” Phillip demands, anger seething from him.

He slows the car down at an intersection. People shuffle across the road with their umbrellas flipped inside out from the wind, rushing to a late lunch or a spot of shopping. Meanwhile, my world is collapsing in on itself like a star in a black hole. My breath comes in short bursts; I can’t get enough oxygen. I’m going to pass out. I grab at my chest in an effort to breathe deeper.

“Aaron,” I exhale onto my lap. I focus on the pretty, hot pink scars on my skinny, white thighs. Symmetry is important.

“Aaron who? Who the *fuck*, Hazel?” he yells, palming the steering wheel. “You know you’re not to have a boyfriend. Is he from school?” He turns to stare at me now, his knuckles white on the steering wheel. I nod.

“FUUUUCK!” he screams, pounding the dash over and over.

Click.

He’s locked the doors. I’m trapped.

“Open the doors!” I yell frantically, my voice an octave higher than usual.

A whole new level of fear ramps up inside me. The lights change, and he floors it. The tyres spin for ages on the wet road, but he finds traction and makes his way up through the gears until we speed towards the freeway.

“Where are we going?” I ask desperately. “Please. I just need to go home now. Dad’s waiting. You’re scaring me.”

“We all know that’s bullshit. Your dad’s glued to a pokie machine somewhere.” It’s true, and it makes me sick. “You’ve got no one left to fight for you anymore. You’re unwanted.”

“Let me out, Phillip! Please. I’m begging... you love it when I beg. Open the doors, please. Let me out of the car. Jesus! HELP!” I scream, pulling on the door handles relentlessly, bashing on the glass.

“Where does this little Aaron turd live anyway? Near the school?”

His voice has returned to relative calm, but he’s driving like he’s in a race car, weaving at 90kph through a 50km zone. He’s gonna kill someone. We aquaplane down the centre of the road, causing on-coming cars to veer out of our way, and when the tyres grip again, we skid in a zig-zag. I realise he’s trying to take me to my boyfriend, even though he doesn’t even know where Aaron lives. God, he will probably kill him in this

amped-up state. I've seen him do it before. What he thinks he's going to do now, I have no idea. With his connections, I'm sure he's capable of anything.

“No, no, no! Fuck, slow down, Phillip! YOU'RE SCARING ME!”

He ignores my pleas, laughing at my fear as Janette eggs him on even more. I should have known better; this whole scene is getting his dick hard. I'm having a full-blown panic attack now, rational thought has gone out the window. He tears through the intersection and careens around past a police station. Janette is cackling like we're on a rollercoaster ride. I bang on the foggy windows, screaming and crying, but it's no use. He's going to kill me.

No one outside the car even spares me a glance. I'd rather jump out of a moving vehicle than stay in here with them one minute longer. He's lost his fucking mind, and I think he will slam us into a telegraph pole on purpose. I lean back and start kicking the glass with my Docs, but the window is too strong, and nothing happens except feeling increasingly defeated and even more frightened. What's he going to do? Kill me and throw me off a pier? Why? I just can't comprehend that he is jealous of a seventeen-year-old boy.

“A boyfriend? Hmm. Well, I know a few bikers who love breaking kneecaps.”

He chuckles as I look at him in the rear-view mirror. How can I have fucked it all up so royally in less than the two months since I first kissed Aaron at the beach? I'm about to be killed for doing something every teenager does. And maybe even get him killed too.

“What are you going to do? Run off with him? Get married? Have his kids?” he questions mockingly. I see foam and crust sticking to the corners of his lips as he looks over his shoulder at me.

“I'm sixteen,” I say quietly. “We went to the movies. Why do you care anyway, you sicko? You're married.”

“Watch your tone, young lady! Those tight little holes between your legs are mine and you know it. No grubby boy is going to taint my property,” Janette snaps.

She leans over the seat and smacks me across the cheek. I see the sick smile twist her face as I recoil. She loves watching me squirm; it gets her off, I know it. She’s on such a power trip, master manipulator that she is. She loves watching Phillip abuse me, but she’s the one who orchestrates it all for her own amusement. Sadistic fucker.

We’re speeding through St. Kilda now. He continues ranting, and I’m frozen with shock as I try to search my brain for a way out of this impossible situation.

We stop at another set of lights opposite a beauty school, where women are milling around outside in the alcove, clearly on their break. I watch them smoking and chatting, and I start to wave desperately. I’ve got a chance, a small window of time I can’t waste.

“HEEELP! LET ME OUT OF HERE! HELP! THEY WON’T LET ME OUT OF THE CAR!” I shout, bashing on the window as tears streak my face.

A few women glance up and mutter to each other, looking back at me and pointing. They can see I’m suffering.

“Shut up,” Phillip growls, but I most definitely will not.

I keep screaming because my life depends on it. I scream even though my throat is raw. I continue screaming for every moment of my innocence these two creeps have stolen away from me.

Phillip hefts his weight up and whacks me across the face, his knuckles connecting with my cheek as I reel with bone cracking agony. My head spins, but still, I don’t stop screaming. Phillip’s gut gets stuck under the steering wheel as he hoists himself up, and I try the door handle again. I hear a crack in my skull just as I do, and my cheek flares in pain again, but I keep screaming without pause. It’s definitely not the first time he’s hit me, but it’s damn-well gonna be the last.

All eyes are on our car with laser focus now and most of them are on their phones, hopefully talking to the cops.

“Ahh, fuck,” Phillip huffs, seeing more and more people pointing at his registration plates.

Yes!

He clicks the central locking switch, and the doors unlock. I push mine open before he can lock it again, and I make a split-second decision before I jump out. Everything starts to blur and my heart lurches from fear into fury; not just for being locked in this car or having my boyfriend's life threatened. But for all the years of trauma and blackmail I've endured in silence.

This is the end.

The end of it all; I've had enough. A red sheen lands across my vision. My throat is raw and I'm a bundle of rage, adrenaline, and anxiety all rolled into one. I need to do something to make this cycle stop. I pull a small knife from the outer zip of my backpack. I've been carrying it around for about a year now because it makes me feel a tiny bit safer. I've never had the guts to use it, but that's just because the timing wasn't right. And that's about to change.

Phillip's staring out his window at the women across the street whilst cursing at me. “...*being a stupid little bitch drawing attention like that. How I'm going to cop it tomorrow night...*”

Blah blah blah.

I lean forward, blade in hand, a newfound purpose and strength thrumming through my veins.

With a precision I didn't know I had, I hack at his ear with the blade. I work quickly, and the flesh slices from the top to almost the bottom. I'm surprised at how it feels like slicing through a tomato. Easy! I love this sensation under my fingers and the sound it makes along his cartilage. I love hearing his screams and watching him writhe around in agony. When I remove the blade, blood spurts, the shell of his ear dangling

limply by a thread down around his jawline. I get a warm sensation all over my body. I'm enjoying this.

"Janette! Fuckin' bitch!" he cries, trying to stick his ear back on.

I laugh out loud as Janette screams like a banshee and flaps her arms around, trying to do something.

Time grinds down.

"Shut up, please," I say politely.

This is so surreal. No one listens. His groans mix with her high-pitched wail like a Richard Ramirez symphony.

"Shut up," I repeat louder.

She's hysterical as the blood spurts over her arms as she attempts to stop the flow. Warm liquid dribbles over my eye. It's in slow motion. Little drops have splattered across my rain-soaked school shirt, turning it pink. I stare at my hands to see the same.

My favourite colour.

The knife feels alive in my fingers. It calls to me. I need the noise to stop for my own sanity. I need to get away.

"I can't deal with your screeching!" I yell as I plunge the blade deep into Janette's shoulder.

Then again into her neck. And three times a charm as I slice a nice tendon. She finally freezes.

The molecules inside the cabin of the car stop swirling; there is no air to breathe anymore, even though the door is open. She slowly registers the pain. Still, no noise as she turns white, trying to reach over her shoulder to plug the wounds. The fat cunt at the wheel is screaming at me now as blood spurts from her wound onto me and the passenger seat. I can feel it hot on my face.

From my hazy peripheral, I notice girls rushing across the road towards us.

The cops will be on their way any minute now. Run, you stupid idiot. You're gonna get sent to juvie, for sure.

I grab my bag and fling myself onto the footpath. All limbs and hair, I pause, leaning back into the car. I probably look like a character from a horror film as I get into Janette's face, our eyes locked.

“One day, I'll make you pay for what you've done to me. Stupid. Fuckin'. BITCH!”

I don't hang around to find out what happens next because I'm off across the path, leaving them behind in a pool of blood. The last shred of my sanity is tucked somewhere inside that car. I sprint across the park with burning quads, hair flying behind me.

What have I done? They will be hunting me after they get those wounds tended to.

Phillip is, without a doubt, going to kill me. He'll beat me until I'm just a meat sack rotting in his basement. I know for a fact there are other kids buried down in the crawlspace. I will never escape them. I won't live to see my seventeenth birthday.

I slip on the muddy grass, school bag bumping on my back, and land on my knees. I'm up again instantly and find an adequate hiding spot inside some empty playground equipment. I watch them from a distance, with raindrops on my lashes. The Ford takes off along the street a moment later, the beauty students back inside the building. That ear won't be stitching itself back on, and she'll be losing blood from the neck, for sure. I hope she dies. Good riddance.

Exhaling shakily, I clean the blood off my knife, letting the rain wash it some more before wiping it on my skirt. As I run the flat edge of the blade against my fingers, the cool metal feels comforting. Reliable. Natural in my hands.

I'm pleased I finally got up the courage to use it.

I creep out from hiding, shivering and terrified. My cheekbone is still throbbing, but I can't feel the pain. I trudge across the

park towards a set of lights so I can find my bearings. My tears blend into misty raindrops as I wait to cross the intersection. I'm startled out of my thoughts as a black Jeep pulls up at the red light. Four big men are inside; two stare at me, and one points. It's not a surprise, considering what I must look like right now. My long hair clings to my face, blood splashed all over, mud on my legs and skirt. I flick the knife absentmindedly between my fingers; I refuse to put it back in my bag until I get home.

The passenger window rolls down and a deep voice calls out, "Hey, sweetheart. Are you okay? Do you need some help?"

When I don't respond, the door opens and a pair of long legs stretch out onto the pavement, though he leans against the car to keep his distance. He's a big Islander guy, dressed in a leather jacket, black t-shirt, jeans, and boots. His head and face are clean shaven, and I can see a lot of tats. He looks intimidating as his gaze flits between my eyes and the knife jittering in my hand.

I shake my head no. I don't want help. Stepping back, my eyes stay locked with his intense brown ones. I take another step back and glance left to right, then back to him. Life continues on around me, traffic moving and birds twittering, and he remains steady by the car, watching me with his protective gaze. I've never felt anything like that gaze before. Usually, the men staring at me are predators.

The traffic lights change to green, but the Jeep doesn't move. In fact, the cars and trucks merge around it, horns blaring. It's a busy road, but the man doesn't seem to care, oblivious to everything but me. His mates have flicked the hazard lights on, and I get the feeling that these guys do whatever the hell they want.

"I won't hurt you," the man calls.

"I know," I whisper.

I believe him too. There's something about his energy that makes me believe him. He must be in his thirties. I'm not very good at picking adult ages, but he looks a bit younger than

dad. Maybe thirty-five? I can't tell. There is too big of an age gap between us to even hope he could keep my heart safe. But as fucked up as I am, I have a thing for older guys.

He smiles and his eyes crinkle in the corners, his bright teeth standing out against his warm brown skin. A thrill courses through my nervous system at the sight. I've never had a man like this pay any attention to me.

My gaze drops to a neck tattoo; some kind of winged creature. A bird, or an angel? I wish I had the courage to get closer to see it more clearly.

I glance at the other guys in the car who have been watching us, but they've lost interest and are chatting to each other and arguing over the radio, rap music rumbling in the background. When my gaze moves back to him, he steps toward me slowly, as though I'm an injured deer. And he's right. I'm still shaking uncontrollably from shock, about to bolt back into the grey, concrete forest of Melbourne.

"I won't hurt you, little one," he repeats gently. "I just wanna make sure you're okay." The corners of his mouth turn up into another smile that warms me. "This is gonna sound so weird, but I've dreamed about you before. I mean, you were older in my dream, and you had tattoos, but it was definitely you. So odd..."

I like him, despite the rambling about the dream. His gaze never leaves me for a second as he approaches. Now I can make out the tattoo properly; an angel and demon in an embrace. An unfamiliar jolt runs through my core as he steps even closer to me, towering above me. I can see his eyes now, such an unusual colour. At first, I thought they were dark brown, but I can see flecks of amber emerging in the overcast light. *Like autumn leaves.*

As I snap out of my hypnosis, I remember I really do need some help. But I can't go to the cops looking like this, and I'm definitely not getting into any more cars, especially with a stranger. Not when the doors can lock me inside again. My heart slams against my ribs in an act of self-preservation.

"It's not my blood," I whisper up to him. "I'm okay."

Those eyes light up with fascination. He's so close now he could reach out and touch my face, but he doesn't. He looks like he wants to kiss me, but he doesn't do that either. I'm not sure why part of me wishes he would. I inhale his scent, savouring its comfort. He smells like some kind of wood spice and the leather from his jacket. I could step forward and bury my face in the safety of his chest, he's so tall. Tilting my neck back to look up into his eyes, the glare and misty rain make me blink.

I feel the world swirling around me. I'm swaying with it suddenly, and I think I'm going to fall. I'm so very tired and confused. I gasp for fresh air. I cannot let anyone else take me anywhere. As much as I want to trust this man, I make a vow with myself. I'll never trust anyone ever again.

Without warning, I bolt.

"Hey!" he calls.

I don't stop. I run along the perimeter of the park, looking for a back street to hide in so I can plan my next move. My feet fly, one foot in front of the other. Again and again. Right foot, left. Right foot, left. Running blind, away from the wolf pack that has caught my scent and I don't ever want to be caged again. Never. I'm in full control of this body now.

"Hey! Baby!" I hear him calling faintly from a distance. "Wait for me, please! I can help you!"

As I reach a corner, I glance back. He followed me halfway and stopped. Two of his guys have caught up with him, standing on the footpath, both shaking their heads. My guy's hands are crossed behind his head, legs spread, eyebrows knotted. A brick wall of a stinky back alleyway greets me as I turn back around, with garbage cans and parked cars, graffiti and rusted fencing.

The rain beats down, and despair takes asylum in my heart as I run toward my future.

*T*hirteen years later - Present Day
Inner City Sydney, Australia.

Flowers & Sex - EMELINE, smle

The Song of Solomon - Kate Bush

Boss Since Birth - MissGenius

HAZY

I'm bent over a cold steel railing on a stranger's fifth floor balcony, trying to admire the view of lights shimmering across the harbour. My bobbed, black hair falls across my face in the breeze, tickling my nose. I blow it out of my face as the stranger's greedy thrusts shove my stomach forward into the metal over and over, digging into my soft flesh and leaving me gasping for air. My pale, inked arms are bent at odd angles to support our combined weight, but my bony chest feels as though it's about to cave in at any second by the force. He's balls deep, and I twist my neck to watch his dick pump. I usually love watching cocks slide in and out, so it's a shame this one isn't worth looking at.

I met this chaser at a gig a few hours ago. He's decent looking, I guess, if you're into tall, thirty-something goth guys, which I normally am. He's got a goatee and more jewellery

than I'm wearing. Now that I'm half sober, I don't know what I was thinking. I need to stop drinking rum and Coke at gigs; it's too messy. I should've grabbed his package through his jeans before we left the venue, and would have saved myself a cab fare because this definitely isn't worth it.

His hands grip my shoulders as he grunts like a koala. Those fuckers are scary loud. I'm not gonna come.

"At least hit me," I complain under my breath.

He told me earlier, as I was dancing wildly near the front of house speakers, that he likes it rough, and I stupidly believed him. I'm so sick of vanilla dudes thinking they're all kinky. This is what you'd call pathetic. He must have heard me, because he stills momentarily before smacking my right butt cheek.

"Harder!" I beg.

For fuck's sake. Hurry up. Get it over with already. I'm sobering up here, buddy.

He stings me with another one, and I lean into it, trying to extract more pleasure from the action than it warrants. Doesn't work. He goes back to pumping and groaning until he shouts victory around his neighbourhood. I sure know how to pick 'em. I should stop drinking altogether.

Haha ha ha ha. That'll be the day. Where the hell would we be without the booze?

Dead, that's where.

"Your pussy is so tight," he groans, thrusting the last of his fluids into the condom.

All these guys are so original. "*I love goth chicks... your pussy is so tight. What's with the scars? You give the best blow jobs.*" I cringe as the montage of my lousy one-night stands flashes in my mind.

"Thanks?" I say, rolling my eyes as I try to wriggle him out of me.

I should have gone out with the girls tonight. Xanthe makes fun wherever she goes. Hell, even the dickheads on that

party boat down there would be more fun than this. I shrug him off; this was another mistake. I'm really good at those.

I wish I knew this pretty boy's name so I could at least acknowledge him, but, let's face it, I don't care. I won't be seeing him again unless it's in a mosh pit where I'll probably punch him in the face anyway. He finally pulls his wet peen out, *snaps* the condom off, and mumbles something, stumbling into the apartment, then disappearing.

Wobbling through the balcony door, I fall face first onto the dusty couch, groaning at myself with frustration. The room spins and I feel vaguely horny, completely nauseous, and wholly unsatisfied. I hear the toilet flush and the shower turn on.

Get out of here! You don't want to have to have a conversation with this bozo.

I make myself semi-presentable in his entrance way mirror. Wiping at some smeared mascara and pulling my velvet Wednesday Addams-style mini dress down over my bare ass. I adjust the criss-cross ribbon up my chest and smooth the white collar. After I manage to hunt down my knickers from the balcony, I grab my boots and leather bag and get the fuck out of his apartment.

Fuck my life.

*D*umb Things - Paul Kelly & The Messengers
Gimme Shelter - The Rolling Stones
Sultans Of Swing - Dire Straits

HAZY

Out on the grubby Pyrmont Road, I hail a cab and shove a cola Chuppa Chup in my mouth. The smell inside the car brings tears to my eyes—a mix of synthetic fragrance and stale body odour. I text June while I leave my fingerprints on the window and a few strands of my hair on the seat. You know. In case the cops need to identify me.

Me - On my way to The Pit. xo

June - Already here. C u soon. xx

During the short trip to Newtown, the cabbie keeps trying to small talk me, and I bite into my lollipop, chewing the sugar as I zip up my boots. I stumble out of the car and across the pavement before righting myself into the ginormous bouncer.

“Hey, Haze,” he says, rolling his eyes at me. He’s used to me dragging random fuckboys here in various states of undress and at all times of the day and night.

“Hey, sexy,” I reply, smacking him on his solid ass. “How they hanging?”

“Not hanging, dragging!” He shakes his head and opens the door for me, grinning.

The Pirate Pit is a pretty crusty bar when you look at it in the light of day, but we love it because it’s a safe space for genderless sluts like us. The scent of stale carpet-beer and sweet vape smoke greets me as I cross the room. The regulars here form a dysfunctional family headed by the matriarch, Laney, who runs this drunken ship. She’s a classic; a cross between Mama Hen and Hit Man. She’ll give you good advice, but she’ll also kill you with John Wick’s pencil if you fuck up her bar. It’s almost empty now, with only a couple making out in the corner and ol’ mate at the other end of the bar sitting on his warm beer.

My soles stick to the floor as I head towards my besties. June and Xanthe are sitting at the bar, and instantly, I feel at home.

“Xanthe! Is that the new harness? It’s stunning!” I say, probably too loudly.

“Yes! Oh my god, it finally arrived. I thought it was lost in the mail.”

“So nice!” Wow, that was loud. I must be more inebriated than I first thought. I glance at the mirror behind the bar. The small sticker spells out ‘Human,’ and each letter is a different queer flag.

Xan’s ass-length, lavender-grey hair is tied in two thick Dorothy plaits tonight, which spill across her ample chest. Sitting to her right is her latest squeeze, a gamer girl she met online who idolises Xanthe. People are drawn to her for her commanding yet warm presence.

Perfect hair. Perfect tits. Charming personality. They’ve got perfect everything.

“Hey, Xan.” I give her a kiss on the cheek.

“Hey, babe, do you remember Emily?” she asks.

“Sure! Hey, Emily,” I say, faking a smile.

As much as I love my girls, their sexual partners come and go so frequently, it’s barely worth learning their names. Same here, though, so I can’t talk.

June is propped up at the counter, sipping a drink, her afro hair tied back in a low, messy bun. Her lips are a gorgeous shade of blood red—evident on the rim of her glass—and against her dark skin, it’s utter perfection. She always has the best makeup techniques and products, and she and our friend, Patrick, run a YouTube makeup channel that gets a few hits. I don’t care about makeup that much. I’ve perfected the thick black goth flick over the years because that’s all I ever want to do, and with a smear of red on my lips, that’s usually it. June’s glamour-look is framed by the bar light, and she looks so resplendent that jealousy seeps through me for a fleeting second. I love everything about her, so the envy pang subsides quickly.

“Hey, Ju Ju,” I say, coming up behind her for a hug. “I missed you.” I breathe in her perfume and squeeze her tightly.

“Same, hun,” she says, squeezing me back with one hand as she places her glass on the bar. “How have you been doing? Haven’t seen you for a few days.”

“I’m okay. Work is work. Dead bodies and chemicals. Sex is sex. Live bodies and alcohol and all that,” I say with a shrug. “Same old carousel.”

In addition to looking physically perfect, my two besties are actually the nicest people I’ve ever met, and we have the most interesting conversations at all times of day and night. I love hanging out with them whenever I can, and we live at each other’s houses as much as we live at our own. Without our little crew, we would be lost in the ocean of Sydney’s seedy underbelly. The waifs, the vagrants, those of us who’ve never fit into society’s sharp little boxes. Those of us who rebelled from the church in the early days when our questions about Jesus got no answers. We were onto them and their lies. For those of our friends who escaped the clutches of the church later in life, escaping cults and abuse or pushed out the

door by our own parents... evidently, we end up in a hole in the wall, and we keep each other afloat.

I love my friends, but I'm bored, and I hate myself right now. Where's my drink? I look over at the old bloke at the end of the bar telling his life's story to poor Laney. Again.

"Where were you tonight?" June asks me.

"Ugh. I went to that *VAMPISH* club night thing at 28. It was lame. I had a dance and hooked up with another pretty boy." I cringe. "Ended up at his. Of course, he had a pencil dick and didn't know how to spank me. Nothing worth telling you about, as usual."

"Oh no, babe!" Xanthe says as Emily cuddles up to her side, pressing a kiss on her neck. Xanthe and Emily are all over each other. I wish I felt that way about someone.

"Poor you, why do you do it to yourself every week? Come here." June pats the stool next to her. "Soothe your angst; a martini for my queen, please." She snaps her fingers with a flourish. Laney rolls her eyes from the other end of the bar, but gets on with mixing my drink. Probably glad for an excuse to cut the conversation with the bar fly. I climb onto the bar stool, throwing my bag on the scratched countertop and burying my head in my arms. June pats me like I'm a cat.

"There, there, honey, you're all good," she soothes. "You'll find the perfect dick one day. Correct length, correct girth, correct mechanics." She laughs.

"I could barely even feel it. Soooo thin," I grumble, unable to keep from laughing too.

"Gross, thanks for the visual," Emily pipes up. She's not into guys at all. I don't think she ever has been. I drain half my martini in one gulp, barely touching the sides of my anxiety, though it warms my soul. I nod at Laney for another drink and throw my credit card on the bar.

No wonder your one-night stands never turn into anything. Who would want you, you weird cunt? You don't even deserve friends, let alone someone to stay with you romantically.

My shadow taunts me relentlessly. All hours of the day and night.

“What did you guys do? Tell me something fun to cheer me up, please.” I flutter my eyelashes seductively. I probably look like a scarred racoon. Reaching for the edge of the bar, I spin myself around and face them. I touch something hard and crusty and realise gum is now stuck under my fingernails. Gross! I shake my hand, and the scent of mint fills my senses. Eww.

“Gallery opening for some art installations. It was okay, I guess. There was a room called *All Hail Rock Dogs* and there were video montages of rock stars overlaid with the juxtaposition of the blah blah blah. I dunno, but they had free wine and cheese, so I was happy,” Xanthe says, and I laugh. She runs her hand absentmindedly up Emily’s thigh in a possessive kind of way. Xanthe is a professional Dominatrix, and Emily has worn her leather collar for a short while now which makes her unusual. Xanthe has been keeping their relationship on the down low until she was sure it was something she wanted. Her client base is mostly rich older men, and even though she’s dated men in the past, she’s only been in relationships with women, which is where Emily fits in. Emily is a service submissive and is head over heels devoted to Xanthe. It works perfectly for both of them, I think. I pick the remainder of someone else’s stale chewing gum out of my nails with a grimace and reach for a serviette from behind the bar.

“The art was rubbish, but who cares? I partook in the free *booooze and cheeeese!*” Juney laughs, throwing her head back.

“I definitely should have come with you guys,” I say, pulling some sanitiser out of my bag.

“But then you would have missed the spectacular *Mr. Pencil Dick* experience!” Emily says, nose wrinkled and looking physically ill.

“Thanks for the reminder.” I make grabby hands for my fresh drink. Patrick bursts through the door now, eyeliner

smearred, and half his mini skirt torn and hanging. His shiny, studded, black backpack is slung over one shoulder. He's a slut of epic proportions and that's exactly why we bonded in the first place. We're cut from the same smut cloth, he and I. Sharing story after story of one-night stands, recent sexual abuse dates and near misses, but also sharing each other's wardrobes. And sense of humour. He looks better in half my clothes than I do, and I love borrowing his huge collection of goth jewellery.

"Whoa, babe, are you okay?" I ask, worried something terrible has happened to him tonight.

"Don't ask," he says with a grin. "But I will say, I came twice."

"Well, shit!" I reach out to high five him and shuffle over to make room so he can sit down next to me.

"Love your makeup, Juney," Patrick coos as he reaches out to squeeze her shoulder.

"Thanks, love. I can teach you if you like. Found a new chick on TikTok, you'll love her. You should see her collection of palettes, oh my god."

Patrick claps his hands together and pulls out his stool to sit down. Our squad is small, but the love here is fierce. We drink quietly, spending time in our own heads for a while as we listen to *Dire Straits* belting it out on the speakers. Laney shuffles around, tidying up for the night, re-stocking glasses and wiping things down with disinfectant.

"Hey, I've got some green in my bag. Anyone wanna smoke?" I ask, spinning the martini glass between my fingers and thumb. I'm ready for bed, but I've got lots to do before then. I'm not twenty anymore, but why do I feel so old and tired? I sip my liquid relaxation syrup and settle into my bones a bit.

"Do popes shit in the woods?" Xanthe snorts at my question. We're all stoners, so no one is ever gonna say no to my question. Draining my glass, I pay up for everyone. I often shout, I only need booze and money for fresh ink to survive

and I'm happy. I like treating my friends; it makes me feel good.

“Meet you in the gutter,” I say as I drag myself off the bar stool. *Gimme Shelter* starts playing as I stumble through the bathroom door, marvelling at the back up singer's vocals. The automatic lights flash on as I walk into the smelly room, noticing some posters promoting hand washing and safe sex. Haha. Well, at least I do both of those things. I can't be 100% fucked morally.

I squeeze my way into the narrow stall and hang my bag on the back of the door. Without touching any surfaces, I lean over the toilet. Holding my hair back, I expel \$28 worth of martini into the stained bowl. Once I flush, I wipe my mouth on some toilet paper.

You're so pathetic, look at you!

The strong scent of vomit blends with synthetic perfume that sporadically pumps out into the room, as I wash my hands and use a piece of paper towel to open the door. I catch sight of myself in the mirror and the vision morphs between an overweight middle-aged woman and what I know is really there, a malnourished woman, pushing thirty, with hollowed out cheeks, scars, and hours of expensive black tattoos.

The back alley stinks of rubbish, and I battle with bile as I sit down in the gutter between June and Xanthe, wrapping an arm around each of their shoulders and pulling them into me. We pass the blunt between us lazily and in silence, staring up at the few stars we can see peeking through the bright city sky. Patrick and Emily are off to the side, leaned against an industrial bin, seemingly in some intense discussions about Elden Ring. Whatever the fuck that is. Patrick continues the conversation with her as he wanders across the road to take a piss against a scrawny-looking tree.

“Am I ever going to be happy? Sometimes I think I'm gonna be numb for the rest of my life. Therapy does nothing for this brand of fucked up.” I sigh, taking my hit and passing it on. “Why do I bother getting out of bed anymore?”

These two are used to my suicidal tendencies and are well equipped to deal with my morose ramblings. They know I've courted death since I was a kid, though their knowledge of my life at that time is highly censored. I've kept my early abuse as a relative secret. But they don't care about our past—none of us does, really. They are here for me now to pull me back from the brink of disaster whenever I spiral down. Namely, the time June found me on the floor covered in vomit and pill bottles and I was rushed to RPA within ten minutes.

“You're not leaving us, you hear?” June says, passing me the weed again. “You promised us. It was a fucking pinkie promise too, and you know those are the top tier contracts. Stop working so hard to line the pockets of someone else. You shouldn't be stuck in that funeral home. You should write! You're smart enough to be lecturing; why don't you do something like that for a while? Stop staring death in the face all day. Maybe? Do you think?” Comforting me with a softness that fills me up, I lean into her embrace before taking another toke on the ganja.

“That would be nice,” I hum. “But I've got the mortgage and the old car to fill up with petrol, which are extortionate prices at the moment, mind you. Also thinking about my drinking habit I need to uphold.”

“I hear ya, I do. We will try to get out of the city a bit more, huh? Go for a spin up to the Blue Mountains, or even Canberra... we can go to the gallery? Anyway, we'll do something fun soon, promise. Till then, we will acquaint ourselves with old Mary Jane here, and we will binge *Sons of Anarchy* on Sundays. Promise, new tradition, okay?”

“Yeah,” I say, forcing a smile. “Thanks, guys.”

“Chibs is my favourite, with his swoony eyes and sexy scars,” Xanthe pipes up. “What I wouldn't give to be on my knees before that fine specimen of a man.” Even though she loves dating women, what she really wants is the perfect example of a masculine man. Cut like a chiselled god or something. Yes, we've discussed her perfect guy in detail many times. But the reality of finding a hot guy like that who doesn't get possessive of her is rare.

I sigh and take another puff, holding it deep in my lungs until I can't hold it anymore. Why is dating so fucking complicated? I think about how hot Chibs is as I exhale the blunt. A car door slams at the same time a junkie woman rants her head off somewhere in the distance.

"I'd beg him to fuck me with a gun to my head," I say with a dreamy sigh. "Really, fucking hard, push his cock so deep inside me I have to scream for mercy. That's how I wanna get railed."

"Or his gun in my ass. Tig can watch," Patrick chimes in from the shadows.

"Ewww," Emily whines, curling her lips in disgust.

"OMG, totally," Xanthe says with widening eyes. "He could fuck anything he wants. That man is fine as fuck!" Everyone dissolves into hysterics as we picture that scenario. Satisfied sighs and *mmms* can be heard echoing off the graffitied brick building.

"What's mixed with the green tonight, Haze? I've got an extra little buzz going on here too," June asks. "My lips are a bit numb!"

"Oh, yeah. Forgot I sprinkled some blue lotus in. Nice touch, huh?"

"Oh, wow. I like it!" she says, licking her lips and tracing a long black fingernail across her skin.

"Whose place for kick-ons tonight?" Patrick asks, reaching out for the small blunt.

"You guys can come to mine, but there's no food there. Got plenty of gin, though," I offer.

"Sold!" Xanthe says, slapping her thigh and throwing her leg up into the air. She extends her long legs and hauls herself out of the gutter, grunting. She turns to extend me a hand and pulls me up beside her.

"I'll go to the shop for nangs and chips and ice cream," Patrick says, smoke framing his face as he makes all his grand plans.

“And I need Maccas, so I’ll go with him,” June says, giving me a cuddle. “See ya at yours. I love you. Stay alive.”

“Love you too. See you soon,” I say, holding on to Xanthe’s arm as we stomp down the alley together in our matching Demonias, Emily following a few paces behind.

*F*orty Six & 2 - Tool

Coming Down - The Weeknd

Shirt - SZA

HAZY

Kick-ons are usually my favourite time with my friends.

All hanging out together, sitting on my couches, which are actually secondhand, high-end coffins from cremated deceased. I say why waste such beautiful craftsmanship and throw them on the tip? So I have had them converted into red velvet lined couches by a local craftsman.

We take turns queuing music on Spotify and just chill out, chatting about big and small things; aliens living among us and whether or not Patrick actually used a condom tonight. Listening to drifter music, Patrick keeps lining up the songs. I grind up weed in the coffee grinder and pack a cone. Xanthe mixes gin martinis, dancing as she moves around my small kitchen, opening and closing the freezer a few times before handing out beautifully crafted drinks to each of us.

Everyone leaves by 3.30am, and I set my half empty glass on the bathroom counter. I love my friends, but they're not my lovers; they can't be here for me in the black of night when my demons come out to play with me. I switch on the portable

speaker and flick through my phone till I find *Coming Down* and set it on repeat. This song makes me happy as I slice my body into tiny fragments. Abel's voice wraps around my depression and gets me through another long night.

I've been bad, Mr. The Weeknd. I did try to quit again, but well, we all know how this story goes. So here we go again.

Turning the shower on, I settle cross-legged on the cold tiles. The hot water cascades over my head and down my back like a waterfall. It takes a good five minutes of psyching myself up with the blade hovering before I make the initial cut. I still get nervous and all my heightened emotions buzz through my system. It's worth it, though, watching the blood ooze from my arm, rivulets running over tiles. Art down the drain in a vortex. I stare at that beautiful slice when the skin first separates; peering in wonder at the layers of inked skin and the vivid ruby liquid that trickles out of me like a stream. It's like that floating moment in time when you've inhaled a joint and held it in your lungs, lingering between angst and release, then the whoosh consumes you and you can breathe out again. *Oh, do I breathe!* Now there are four neat red lines all in a row and that internal chaos has subsided with my blood streaking down the drain. I watch the fresh water wash away the blood, then move my arm out of the spray to observe with fascination the beautiful streaks again. A weight has lifted from my shoulders, and I can finally think straight. My brain is less foggy once I've slashed myself open.

I take a deep breath and feel my shoulders relax. The razor blade is still between my fingers, and I make another slice. This cut is deeper than the previous ones; the others aren't deep enough. Pretty, but not enough to contend with today's bullshit. I'm going over old tracks, over little pink, raised lines. The evidence of my trauma written in the flesh.

Cut down to the bone. Deep.

My treacherous shadow demands I do serious damage; it's always taunting to push me further, deeper into my dark obsessions. The voices cannot be trusted, so I nudge them away. But nerve damage is a real risk, and I don't feel like going down that road again tonight. I just need release, not a

trip to the emergency. I'm too tired. The alluring pain consumes me now, floating on a high, and I lean my head out of the stream of water to smile, laugh, and cry. I've been waiting all day for this release. Tears run hard and the emotions I've been bottling up come pouring out, following the blood down the drain. Cleansing my sins. And the sins of my father.

I lie down on my side in the foetal position, choked with sobbing, until my tears run dry. I hate having one-night stands, but I hate the thought of committing to one person even more. And this is why. I'm so fucked up, no one needs to deal with my bullshit.

No one would want you anyway, so it's not like you have to make a decision here. Has anyone ever proposed to you? No! You're a fuck-up.

I scrub my pussy and thighs till they're raw, then turn off the shower. Wiping my eyes, I crawl to a towel and wrap myself in the fluffy cocoon. Gravity hurts tonight. Sitting on the floor, I listen to my music and stick a band-aid over the deepest lacerations. I sip the last of my drink like a royal with my pinkie stuck out and pat myself on the back for how dignified I am.

I think these new cuts will turn into decorative scars to add to my collection. Sometimes I see my marks as a form of body modification, and that scares me. Just how casually I can slice myself apart. If it's neat and tidy, it's not a hoard, is it? It's a collection. This blood addiction will never let go of me. No matter how many times I try to quit, it consumes me on a cellular level. I need it. The catharsis whooshes through me, as it does every time. Wiping the steam from the mirror, I smile sadly. My eyes are empty. They are lonely, if I'm being completely honest. I brush my teeth, staring at my minty self in the mirror.

You're a fucking crime scene, Hazy Vale. You're never going to get your shit together. Don't kid yourself that you're the fucking aristocracy. You're a cheap drunk.

“Shut up,” I sigh at my reflection, to the shadows that are always lurking in the back of my mind, threatening to murder me. Fight-or-flight, that’s my permanent state, but I guess that’s everyone’s permanent state these days. During this apocalypse, I think whatever vices I need to indulge in to get me through can’t be all bad. Right? I can hear the voices and, very occasionally, once every few years, I can see them too, but not tonight. They are buried deep inside my head tonight.

Why are you still here, still breathing? You’re a disposable razor blade. No one thinks twice about throwing you in the rubbish. You could slit your wrists. No one would find you for days!

I put one dab of oud perfume behind each ear, then turn off the bathroom light in an attempt to silence the contempt. I head into the bedroom naked—let’s be honest, my favourite state of dress. But I’m cold. I’m always cold, so I grunt out two hundred sit-ups and two hundred squats to warm me up. I’m queasy from the booze sloshing in my stomach, but that’s never stopped me before. Once I’m sufficiently heated, I change the blood-soaked band-aid and dress in my favourite old flannel pyjamas. Smoothing down the fabric and admiring the cute little cartoon bats, I think about the night Xanthe gifted me these a few years back.

I finally fall into bed and listen to a family of kookaburras call to each other, just as the first light of day makes its appearance. Fuck, I’ve gotta be at work in a few hours. I’m dragged into sleep and my familiar nightmares quickly welcome me. Their dark, torturous claws wrapping their way around my awareness, and I drift into oblivion alongside them.

*S*outh Coast, Sydney.

Conditions Of My Parole - Puscifer

Captive Honour - Megadeth

Meditjin - Baker Boy, JessB

BANKS

Rosetta greets me in the foyer with a green protein shake and a handful of vitamins. She's a petite Italian doll, with golden brown skin and a playful glint in her eyes.

She found her way into my life a few years back at the fetish club. She was tied to a St. Andrews Cross in the Wicked Tails room, being flogged to within an inch of her life. The asshole who dared to call himself a Dom wasn't letting up on her, even though she'd been shouting "Red" for a few minutes by the time I got there.

I shot that son-of-a-bitch in the nuts and threw him out the back door, directly into an awaiting van. I don't care if that fucker was high on drugs; there is no excuse for that behaviour anywhere around me or my premises.

Rosetta has been one of my domestic slaves since that very first night. I brought her back to my home and had my medical

staff tend to her wounds. I got her counselling, and she has been grateful for the job.

And she's always done her job well. She knows how to keep her mouth shut, fills out a slutty maid's outfit nicely, and is easy on the eye. Not *exactly* my type, but I've been known to fuck any woman who takes my fancy when my dick gets hard enough. I never have to look far anymore.

Rosetta looks after my day-to-day needs; I've been fending off a virus for the last few days, so she keeps me up to date with all the revolting herbs and potions I'm directed to take. I'm juggling a few business deals at the moment, so my attention is scattered, and I haven't got the time to lie around, moping in bed with the man flu.

"Thanks, Rosie. Can you let Swallow know I'll want dinner at eight tonight? The boys will join me, so set a few extra places."

"Yes, Sir. She said tonight's menu is fresh oysters, followed by a Brooklyn Valley scotch fillet. With smoked butter sauce, asparagus, roast potatoes on the side," she says. "Will that please, Sir?" Her hazel eyes are lowered, tousled honey head bowed, and arms held out with my black jacket slung over them.

"Ohh, nice! I'll have a '98 Yarra Valley red with that. Grab one from the cellar for me, will you? Gotta get to work."

"Yes, Sir." She dips her head.

I finish the vile drink and swap my smoothie glass for my jacket, heading toward the main doors. I know her eyes remain downcast as I walk away; I don't have to see her to know that. I've put a lot of time and effort into training her for my particular desires, and she's a good girl.

The sun is blazing today, so I put on my big black sunnies and inhale a lungful of briny sea air. Fuck, I love living here. I watch the seagulls hover above the clifftop and the yachts bobbing on the horizon, the white sands in the distance. I whistle to the dogs who are play fighting on the lawn as I

make my way down the circular drive to where Zane has the Mercedes G-Wagen parked and ready to go.

“Morning, boss,” he says.

I nod and let out another loud whistle. The dog pack bounds over to me, nuzzling each other out of the way to give me a nudge. The alpha - a Belgian Shepherd, Shade - pushes his way through to lick my hand and positions himself at my side. The rest of them don't fuck around with Shade, as they all know he's the boss and wear his scars around their throats like jewellery. Shade saw two tours of Afghanistan before retiring with a Canine Service Medal. He's now living his best life, though I occasionally take him to work with me if I need some canine back-up. His favourite sport is leaping through car windows with his titanium fangs out, ready to detain.

“Hey, guys. Promise we'll go for a run later, okay?” I say, as they all scatter back to the garden, where a flock of crested pigeons just landed.

As I get in the car, I look up at The Castle, the place I call home these days. We call it “The Castle” as a pisstake, but I fucking love it regardless. It's a Victorian manor house, big enough for epic parties, and my inner circle live here for free if they choose. Most of them choose. Plenty of wings and space to chill out. Computer rooms, games room, a resort style lap pool, bars, and even a library. Whatever the fuck my friends want, they get, because I owe them each my life for some reason or another.

Once we're settled, Zane hooks up his Bluetooth. Dave Mustaine starts his diatribe about the collapse of society and evil lurking around every corner. I love that guy, his lyrics always resonate. The engine rumbles as we head down the long, paved drive.

“Warehouse first, then some meetings in the city. Thanks, mate,” I say to Zane.

“No worries, boss,” he says. His man-bun wobbles on top of his head as he turns to speak. Ladies froth over this guy, like nothing I've ever seen before. Zane and I have been buddies since our training days in the military. He specialises in

evasive driving and is always my first choice for a chauffeur if he's available. Sitting in the back of a car when he gets us out of a hot situation is better than any ride at a theme park. Adrenaline pumps hot every time he dances with the clutch and gearbox and pulls the hand break. Wheels spinning and burning rubber... ahh, those are the days! Of course, he's useful in many more ways than driving, but if he's not tied up in his IT tech shit, I feel good knowing he's got my back. Hits the bullseye every time too, so there's that. Never know when shit can go sideways in this line of work, that's for sure.

Gum trees and tree ferns line each side of the winding driveway, and a wallaby springs off into the bush. Pretty standard to see wallabies or kangaroos eating and scratching their nuts on my land. Fuckers always leave their shit all over my lawn, but I forgive them because they're majestic. I wouldn't wanna meet one of those big cunts in a dark alley. Christ, they're savage.

We're on the south coast of Sydney here, hidden by dense bushland adjoining the national park. Most people don't know I'm in here, as they think this is crown land and they stay the fuck away. I prefer it that way. I need my privacy.

We snake past the stone guardhouse, *No Trespassing* signs and other deterrents signposted near the road. The dogs run as a pack beside the car, yipping and snarling, until we get to the wrought-iron gates. They are flanked on either side by solid eight-foot sandstone fencing and low-lying bushland scrub beyond. The fourth perimeter of my property is a sheer hundred metre drop to the rocks and ocean below.

A few bodies have gone sailing over that beautiful Sydney sandstone before, but I keep that kind of behaviour to a minimum because who knows which beach they will wash back up on. I keep my business nice and tidy. Usually.

I crack my neck as the car rolls through the barbed wire prison fencing, which signals the edge of my land, and we head onto the country road and towards the city. I dial Susan; she heads up my 'legal' businesses, so that the rest of my work can fly under the radar and keep the tax man off my back. I'm an upstanding citizen, one who gives back to his community.

At least that's what I tell myself and the media, and it's worked so far. Lots of questionable people on my payroll, and many street-soldiers between myself and any major incidents.

"Thanks, Susan. I mean it. I'll get the boys onto it," I say as we wrap up our debrief. I throw my phone onto the seat next to me and lean my head back, exhaling. God, I need a woman. The right one.

"Here, boss," Zane says, as the car bumps over a metal fence track. He turns the music down to talk. I look up as we pull up at the wharf.

"Wait here, this shouldn't take long," I tell Zane, adjusting my holster. "Keep the air con running, please." I step out of the car and head towards the giant warehouse doors, past a white Cayenne parked near the chain-link. Max is waiting outside the abandoned tram shed. This place has been out of commission for decades, and I snapped it up for a bargain. I keep it in this decrepit condition for a reason.

"All clear?"

"Yeah, they just arrived," Max informs me. "He's got two big cunts with him. Both packing." As we slip through the gap in the warehouse doors, Lino smiles and calls out as though we're old mates.

"Banks! Thanks for joining us, buddy," he says, his voice falling away in the vast space. "Strange place to meet, but okay." The compulsion to rip his throat out with my bare hands overwhelms me, the desire to dig my fingers in and peel his skeleton out with it; but I play it cool. I'll give him one more chance for a valid excuse.

I do a quick sweep of the location and detect no threats. The window panels along the roof, while in their day would have let in spectacular light, are now caked in salty grime or smashed out by rocks. Bits of rusty machinery and tools lay scattered about, and two old trams sit in the far corner, long ago retired and collecting graffiti as they deteriorate. I love this place; it's central, but far enough away so no one can hear a scream. Always a prerequisite my real estate contacts are used to now.

“Fuck off, Lino! That your wife’s car?”

“Funny,” he mutters, chin wobbling. I stand in front of him and Max stops next to me. Max’s hands are clasped on top of each other, around his weapon. I scratch the heel of my boot through the dirt floor.

“Look, I’m not here to fuck around, champ. Where are my flesh bags? You know I hate it when my shit goes missing. It wastes my time because then I have to clean up your mess.” His lackeys shift their weight, ready for action, but I just laugh.

“Mate. I know I fucked up a bit. I honestly don’t know what happened! Gimme a few more days, my guys are sorting it out.”

I glance at Max, raising my right eyebrow minutely. Shots ring out and pigeons shit themselves as they take off from the rafters in a panic. Lino’s fuckers fall like sacks of shit, dust swirling as the sound of heavy men hit the dirt. Lino stands between them with his hands over his ears, mouth wide and piss slowly staining his pant leg.

“You’re not much of a tough guy now, are you?” I say, quickly moving to remove his gun from the back of his pants and tapping his ankles. “That’s what happens to people who waste my time and resources, Lino. Now. Where. Are. My bodies?”

“I. I... I don’t know, honest. I was double-crossed. Please...” His voice trails off as he focuses on Max’s gun trained on his chest.

“Turn around, cunt,” I growl as I stroll across the floor. In the corner of the warehouse, I open a rusty cabinet. Mmmm... I love having a good selection of tools. I return to Max and Lino with a machete.

“Don’t, Banks. P-please,” he sputters when he sees the blade. He can’t take his eyes off me. “My family!”

“I told you to turn the fuck around. I’ve been wanting to try this move out again.”

“I’ve got two little girls at home. They need their daddy,” he whimpers, his piss stain growing. His gut shakes with his sobs as he realises he’ll be leaving this place in pieces. “Please. If it’s about money, I can get it...”

“It’s not about the money. Not really,” I say. My dick twinges at the sound of a grown man begging. Sweet music to my ears. When people tell me to get a hobby, well, this is mine. No better catharsis for the void that swirls inside. Nothing beats the feeling I get from carving someone up. A few drops of blood on my hands. Arms. Some arterial spray on my face. I lick that shit off.

I head over to Lino, and with one decent quick slash, cut a gash straight through his spinal cord. Nice and neat. Perfect pressure. I do strive for excellence, after all. The cut isn’t deep enough for him to pass out, but it’s deep enough that he tumbles forward onto the ground face first.

He screams out, body still, and I throw the machete down. I grin as my dick swells even more and I have to rub it through my pants. As I reach inside his chest cavity through his back, the sticky warmth reminds me of fist fucking, and my arousal increases. I could pop out his eyes and fuck his skull as I slice him up a bit more, but I won’t do that today. I’m already messier than I’d planned.

Grabbing the lower part of Lino’s ribcage with both hands, my knee pushing against his back for leverage, I realise the screaming has stopped. Dissecting a living human being is such a delicious energy exchange, and when they die, it kind of kills the fun. But not entirely. I yank the ribcage up to the back of his head—that glorious *snap crunch squelch* sound really doing it for me—and I pull it outside of his body. A glorious, gruesome set of barbaric wings.

“Too late, mate,” I say, smiling. I reach into the cavity again and grip onto his lungs, pulling them like an elastic band until they snap off into my hands. I’m glad I work out in the gym regularly because this can be an exhausting task. Throwing them on the corpse, I flick the excess blood off. His blood tastes like fear, as I lick it from my lips.

“Nice one!” Max congratulates me on a job well done as he moves to collect the other guys’ weapons. I notice he’s managed to evade getting one drop of blood on his clothes.

“Thanks, mate,” I say, wiping my hands on my pants.

Whenever I’m covered in blood, I think about my girl from Melbourne all those long years ago. Feels like a lifetime since we pulled up at the lights and she was standing there, all covered in blood and mud, and staring at me with those eyes I’ll never forget. I wanted to save her, but I fucked it. I froze. I let her get away.

Wiping my cheek, I then pull a smoke out. Blood soaks the paper as I light up. I breathe in the blood of my last victim. I don’t smoke that much anymore, not like I used to anyway.

“Idiot,” Max huffs, kicking Lino’s twisted carcass. The rush I get from ending people’s lives is the only time I feel like myself anymore. I’ve almost forgotten that happiness exists. I don’t need a shrink; this is my therapy.

Lino has—well, had—been an associate for near on six years. He supplied me with a multitude of produce for one of my businesses, but I don’t care who you are if you fuck me over. I’ll put you in the ground. He got too greedy.

“Are you right to clean up this mess?” I ask Max.

“Course, mate. I’ll make the call.” Lino and his mates here will either be shipped in refrigerated trucks north to our crocodile farm, east with the fishermen, or out west to our pet food processing plant. Regardless of the direction, the bodies will never be seen again. I grin at the thought of this fat fuck being fed to the crows.

“Oh, before you go,” he shouts as I head across the car park. He jogs over to close the gap between us. “I heard there’s some shit brewing down south with the guns. Our Melbourne contacts have told me to stand by for more intel, so I’ll let you know ASAP.”

“Thanks, mate. We might need to make a trip down there soon. Melbourne has been causing problems for a while now.”

I nod and head to the Merc, and Zane hands me a towel as I get in. He shuts my door and walks round to the driver's side.

“Quick stop at the Redfern flat for a shower, then the eating disorder clinic for a meeting.”

*M*y Strange Addiction - Billie Eilish

*My Body's a Zombie for you - Dead Man's
Bones*

Breakfast - Dove Cameron

HAZY

The mirror is cool against my forehead, and I roll my head side-to-side, chilling my cheeks. Public restroom soap and bodily smells make me feel queasy. Sweat drips under my arms, and I struggle to keep the nausea down. It's threatening to paint itself across the tiles. My nightmares last night were extreme, and I woke myself up shouting *Rape Rape!* I've been on edge all day.

I grip the sink as I look at myself. The dark circles under my eyes stand out against the pasty white complexion of my skin. My hollowed-out cheeks look even more prominent under the harsh overhead light. I'm aware of my appearance; I have to be because of my obsession. But it's a strange kind of awareness; one where I see two images overlapping each other.

Two women stare back at me.

I eyeball myself hard to get a grip on reality, focusing on the scars I know for certain are on my cheeks. I know they are

real, as I meticulously cut them there myself. I take a few deep breaths and concentrate on my ink, following the lines of the black and grey artwork, which starts right under my jawbone and doesn't let up until it reaches the soles of my feet.

I'm a tiny wall of ink, and that scares the shit out of the majority of society. I don't give a fuck, though. The inked symbols and obsessively symmetrical scars are intriguing to a few weirdos out there too.

The image I have now in this reflection, fading in and out across my reality, is the projection that my shadow forces me to see. A short, chubby woman, with puffy eyes and bloated cheeks, with triple neck rolls, and wobbly arms. But that lady doesn't have tattoos, so that's how I can differentiate them. The two selves wrestle constantly within me.

I groan and pull a toothbrush from my coffin-shaped bag, and clean my teeth for the third time today. Minty fresh replaces the bile taste. Two flavours that make up my pathetic life. *Get your bile flavoured chips here!* White liquor would be the third flavour.

This is the dingy bathroom at my eating disorder clinic. I have a regular appointment here every fortnight at lunchtime, check-ups and psych appointments with a rotating staff that leave very little personal connection. It's all redundant anyway. I haven't made progress in years, but I guess I'm stable. My ECG always comes back good. I'm still alive, so there's that too. Without this place, I'd have been dead years ago.

I splash water on my face and feel the wave of nausea subside. It's probably the twentieth time I've scrutinised my reflection today, measuring and assessing my progress. I'm excited because my wrists are definitely smaller today. I'm absolutely sure of it.

You're so fucking disgusting. Heffa. You should just kill yourself now and get it over with. The staff here can help someone who actually wants help.

I wipe tears from my cheeks with a paper towel and tidy my eye makeup. My short black hair is long overdue for a

trim, and I try to finger comb some of the knots out of the longer parts.

My god, you're a bore.

Deep breath.

And a whore. Haha! We're poets and don't even know it!

"I'm a one-hundred percent normal human being," I whisper to myself. My heavy boots drag down the corridor and I glance into the inpatients' rooms as I pass by.

I hate this place, it's so depressing. Thank god, I'm not locked up here at the moment. I'd fucking die. I'm forced to attend the outpatient service, otherwise they would admit me and jam a tube down my throat. Again. For the thirteenth time. And then I wouldn't be able to see my friends or drink my booze, and cut myself up into teensy-widdle pieces. So here I am! Punching in for duty.

I chuck my bag on a seat and plonk onto the one next to it. This waiting room is as dreary as the rest of the place; all grey, tired furniture and sad-looking plants. I rummage for my phone, images of thin girls whizzing past on my feed, then taxidermy animals, and fancy cocktails with salt around the rim. The thinspo hashtags are a dangerous rabbit hole that I often find myself falling down. I know it's the worst thing I could possibly do for my mental health, but I find myself transfixed on one particular reel of a hot goth chick. She's wearing only a slashed knitted jumper and fishnets and boots. I zoom in on her perfect tits and thighs.

Look at that thigh gap. Oh my god, you are such a hefty hippo in comparison, it's laughable. Why are you sitting down? Shouldn't you be marching to burn cals?

I put the phone away and stand up for a moment, breathing deeply. I march on the spot, but when a nurse catches me, I sit down again. I could do with a swig of gin, but they'll be onto me.

Just another hour or so, and I'll be out of here.

There are a few patients milling about, mostly teenage girls and a few androgynous people. Zombies, all of us. There

is nothing behind any of our eyes, not really. We are all so malnourished, it seems our souls have left the building, along with our cognizance.

As I look around, I notice an imposing man, and his eyes are fixed on me. Unwavering. He looks so out of place here that I startle. He's surrounded by medical staff as though they've just finished a meeting. The director of the clinic is there, with an administrator or two. I have *definitely* never seen him around here before. He's got an air of authority that demands my attention. His skin tone is mid-brown, and his thick afro hair is greying at the temples. His facial tattoos look vaguely prison-ish. I can't figure out his nationality. He looks Māori, but his skin is quite dark. Perhaps African Māori? Whatever, he's smoking hot and way out of my league.

Realising I've been ogling at him for far too long, I look away quickly. *Shit. He caught you perving, you idiot.* But even so, I can't help glancing back briefly. He towers over the rest of the group. He's self-assured, unafraid, and hyper-vigilant, those qualities palpable even from a distance. Probably a cop, or military of some kind? What's he doing here? He's wearing very expensive-looking clothes; black linen shirt, black pants, boots.

When my eyes travel up his body again, I find him captivated with me, his gaze raking up and down my length. I startle and glance away again. My cadaverous heart sputters to life like a rusty lawnmower forgotten in the shed. My skin prickles as though something inside my soul has awakened. It's like someone flicked a switch somewhere and all my senses heightened in response. I can't look away, so I risk another glance to find his eyes still hyper focused on me, and now he is pointing directly at me.

Shit, shit, shit. Would you just stop staring at him already?! I think that guy could kill us. For real. We don't want him to kill us, that's your job!

His coat lifts at the same time his arm is raised, and I notice the lining is a rich red silk. This guy likes quality. The way the fabric falls is divine, and I wish I earned that much money. He oozes a mafia style; luxury, with an aura of

brutality. Everyone in his group swings around to see who he is pointing at, then turns back to him and starts jabbering all at once. What the fuck?

My adrenaline kicks in again. What the fuck does he want with me?

I busy myself on my phone, but I can't concentrate. When I look back up under my lashes, he says something, and one of the admin ladies scurries off. He speaks again, eyes boring holes into mine, but his voice is silenced behind glass. The woman returns quickly and hands him a manilla folder. His eyes are still on me until he looks down at the file and flicks through. What in the ever-loving fuck is going on? Panic rises in my chest.

“Hazel Williams?” a voice calls.

I just about jump out of my skin, but it's only the nurse calling me for my appointment from down the hall. I'm still freaking the fuck out over what just happened with the super hot, monster tall man, but I drag my bony ass off the chair and follow her into the weighing room. I get the weekly routine weigh-in—I've lost another five-hundred grams this week, and she's definitely not happy—pee in a cup, blood test, then answer a barrage of stupid questions, which I lie about in a variety of creative ways each time. The lies just fall out of my mouth, and other than a stern talking to, there isn't much the nurse can do.

Such bullshit. She knows it's bullshit, too. She's got my blood charts from the past six months, and she can see my freshest scars.

*B*ANKS

“It can’t possibly be her, can it?” I ask no one in particular.

“Sorry, sir?” the manager says, but I ignore her. I wouldn’t believe it could be her if those haunted green eyes weren’t seared into my optic nerve fibres.

Staff handed me her medical records that state her name as *Hazel Vale Williams*. Hazel. I’ve wondered for so many years what her name was.

This says she’s been a patient here for years, suffering anorexia and bulimia. Twenty-nine years old, with a whole raft of associated medical issues. I do some quick math. Say it was thirteen years ago when I first saw her, that would make her sixteen back then. Yes, her age definitely fits, but this fully inked woman staring at me from across the waiting room is nothing but skin and bones.

What happened to that rosy-cheeked, blood-soaked schoolgirl?

I can’t rip my eyes away. I’m about to march over there and grab her, but she disappears through a door. If it’s her—and it has to be—she’s mine now. I’d given up hope of ever finding her after sniffing around all the schools and then bus stops in Melbourne for over a decade. But I was looking in the wrong city entirely. I never imagined she’d be in Sydney.

I need to talk to her; I have so many questions. *Patience, man.* Even though every part of me wants to rip that door off its hinges and drag her into my car, I restrain myself. I want to get her home and wrap her in a blanket and feed her. I need to get her healthy fast, so I can claim every part of her.

But now is not the time to act. And as I look up to the security cameras in the waiting room, this is definitely not the place.

*H*AZY

Emerging from the psych office, I peer into the reception area, looking for Mr. Tall, but it's empty. I breathe a shaky sigh and make a beeline for the exit, thinking about the work I have coming up this afternoon, which is mostly paperwork. Ugh. I much prefer preparing corpses for their resting places.

I notice a shiny Mercedes parked in prime position by the main doors. Off to the side, a man waits, staring at his phone. This guy's tall as well, but he's white and has his long hair tied in a topknot. With a full biker beard, he's Xanthe's type, for sure. As I'm staring at this Viking dude, a forceful grip lands around my upper arm and a gravelly voice resonates in my ear.

"I've been looking for you, little one. For thirteen years. You belong with me." Instinct kicks in and I wrestle to get out of his grasp, but it's impossible.

"Oh, hell no!" I say on a breath, spinning around to face my offender. Of course it's the Islander guy I saw in the office earlier. I try to yank my arm free again, without success. Staring down at me, I shudder in his presence.

"God, I was so dumb to only search Melbourne," he says to himself. "You certainly managed to evade me, didn't you?"

My mind is boggled as to why I haven't started screaming yet? It's like the scream is stuck somewhere between my brain

and my throat. This man is clearly a predator. Clearly! I've had my fair share of those, and I've had situations in hotel rooms and under bushes where men took full advantage of me and left me broken and bleeding. My arm stings as his grip tightens, and he pulls me up onto my tippy toes.

Inches from my face, his eyes are a Manhattan cocktail; irises a liquid whiskey, with a black cherry centre. He's intense, measured. The kind of guy who gets whatever he wants. Whenever he wants it. I feel his breath on my face, his eyes drilling holes into me. There is a darkness there, a force that has the power to subdue me, and my intuition tells me to run.

But his arrogance repulses me more, and I feel a nausea swirling again in my empty stomach. He's hot as hell, but who the fuck does he think he is?

"How dare you touch me, you giant prick-shit? Let me go!" I bite out, shoving at him as my heart races. Struggling to breathe, my skin feels cold and clammy. With my eyes squeezed shut, I wiggle my arm back and forth in an attempt to escape again, but the vice-like grip holds me tighter, and I let out a sharp howl. "Let go, you stupid cunt!" I shout, and kick out at his shin, but he doesn't even react. My boot bounces off as though he were the Terminator, and he smiles at me gently. A couple who are walking by look up at us, but keep walking. He laughs and nods at them.

"Stop struggling, and I will," he whispers through white teeth, but he loosens his grip. I notice his tattoos extend over his knuckles to his fingers. *Okay, Hazy. Assholes can be hot too. It's okay. He's a psychopath.* "You belong to me," he says again, and I just about retch. "I'm going to look after you because you're my baby, and it's obvious they're not helping you here." He gestures into the foyer. "Fuck knows what they actually do with my money. I trusted them, been donating cash for years. Clearly, that was a mistake. My future wife, of all people! If I'd known you had been here for so long, I would have stepped in sooner. I promise."

I'm so fucking confused right now. Confused by his garbled rantings, and confused at myself as to why I'm not

screaming bloody murder and sprinting in the other direction now that he's let me go. His gaze tracks down my body to my chunky boots before returning to meet my eyes, and he smiles like a predator. I look away to see the other guy, Mr. Viking, laughing at us and stepping toward the driver's door of the Merc.

"I've got a fetish for fixing broken dollies," he continues, leaning in to sniff my hair.

"Oi!" I shake my head. I think about head butting him, but he's too tall. I lean my torso away from him as far as I can stretch without dislocating my shoulder. *Who does he think he is? I mean, who is he anyway?*

Looking around, more eyes are on us now, but no one is coming to help. I should be scared, but he repulses me more than frightens. I don't feel like he's actually going to hurt me. Why aren't the staff helping me, though?

"What the fuck do you know about my needs?" Shifting to face him, I shove at him uselessly. His bicep is larger than my thigh. "And I don't need a man to do anything for me!"

"Fiery!" he says with a twinkle in his eyes. "I love it when they fight back. Gets my dick hard."

"Gross," I say with disdain. Though my mind immediately wonders about the size of his dick. He's enjoying this, the sick bastard. He thumbs the corner of his mouth, lazily smirking through his stupidly long lashes. Fucking guys and their thick lashes.

He leans against me, the bulk of his weight pushing me backwards until I stumble over my feet and plonk onto a bench against the building. Eye level with his cock. I'm in a bit of a trance as he positions me where he wants me and, apparently, I'm powerless. He cages me against the wall, and I can see a distinct outline through his pants. I blink. He's hard.

The. Outline. Is. Not. Small.

This is ludicrous. Get away.

"Listen," he says, as my hearing fades back in. "I've wanted you since the first time I saw you, and it's important

you learn that I take what I want. And what I want is to keep you safe.”

“What? The fuck. Are you going on about, buddy?” I ask, enjoying the view despite myself. He’s delusional. His quads pull his pants taught as he squats down and grabs both my shoulders. I flinch as he leans forward to nuzzle in my hair again, whispering in my ear.

“Don’t bother trying to fight me on this. I know you need it as much as I do. I saw you watching me across that room.”

You’re fucking hopeless, you stupid fat cunt. This guy is a predator. Get away from him.

He may as well be a brick wall for all the distance I’ve been able to budge him. I struggle my way to standing, and he steps back a little. I glare directly at his chest in defiance, but something about being in his presence makes me feel safer than I have for a long time.

“Ugh. Excuse me, douchebag. Shitstain. Whatever. It isn’t the 50s anymore, you don’t get to drag women around like The Flintstones. Just fuck off, okay?” I shove him hard; moving him exactly zero millimetres. “Arrogant cunt,” I mutter under my breath.

My physical body is a strange combination of being charged with fear and feeling intensely guarded. That’s a new feeling. “Get out of my way!” I say, the final word shouted as I kick out. He smiles, laughing a real chuckle of amusement. At me. “Let go of me, you bastard!”

“Oh, baby, you’re so fucking adorable. I had no idea how much fun you were gonna be.” He laughs again, running a finger along my hairline in a tender sort of way. “I can’t wait. Christ, are we gonna play?”

“Fuck off!” I shout, and he finally steps aside with a grand flourish, as though he’s a magician on a stage in front of his adoring fans. I leap away, jogging out of grabbing distance. Breathing heavily, I struggle with shaking hands to tap one Tic Tac out of its little box. My heart racing, palms sweating, I keep an eye on Mr. Asshole as I get the damn thing in my

mouth and salivate around its minty goodness to calm me down. He's still smiling to himself as I retreat.

What the hell just happened to me? I feel like I've slipped into an alternate reality.

"See you soon, my girl. Hazel. We'll get married soon, I promise!" he calls after me in a sing-song tone, clasping his heart as though we just had a romantic interlude. And he's not some creepy borderline stalker hunting me down outside my weigh-in clinic. "Hope you like red roses!"

He smiles the kind of beaming, attractive smile that leaves you rooted to the spot. Mesmerising is what that man is. And I feel like I'm levitating in that space between running toward him and running away. Like two magnets.

"No one calls me Hazel, you cunt. It's Hazy," I say, flipping the bird over my shoulder as I stomp off. As though I won that whole scenario. I feel a little smirk on my lips. I enjoyed that. He got my weak heart pumping.

Why did I just tell him my real name? Why do I want him to know it?

Freaking the fuck out and forcing my eyes ahead, I continue briskly across the car park. I won't give him the satisfaction of my interest, even though I very badly want to turn around for one last look.

"Hazy!" I turn around, my body not obeying my last thought, and stare at him. "I'm crazy about you, Hazy!" He's raising his eyebrows repeatedly at me.

Oh, for fuck's sake. Who is this fuck stick anyway? Fucking entitled prick! And he hurt you...so deliciously. And you deserve everything you get because you're a dumpster fire. You're a dumpster fire!!! Hahaha!

I sprint past a woman assisting a pajamaed teen out of a car. My coffin bag and all the junk inside slaps against my hip with each stride; makeup, keys, Tic Tacs, a water bottle, all clanging together.

Diving headfirst into the hearse, I lock the doors one by one. Hands shaking, I light up a smoke and wind the window

down a fraction. I can risk a glance now, over my shoulder, and he's standing exactly where I left him, staring at my car. His hands are crossed on the crown of his head and has the largest grin on his face I've ever seen.

I'm still shaking as I rev the old girl's engine and leg it out of the car park. She roars into the oncoming traffic with black smoke billowing in our wake. I realise I didn't even buckle myself into the seatbelt, too busy thinking about that man as my heart swells in my chest.

*B*ANKS

The receptionist told me that she drives a beat-up old hearse, so Zane planted a tracker under it and a camera inside it when she was in her shrink appointment. Of course my baby's car is a wicked old hearse, complete with bar fridge and gothic bed in the very back. It even has velvet curtains and LED lighting in there to make it a party. I want to fuck her in that thing. We'll smoke joints and watch boats sail through the heads.

What a fucking life I'm going to have with her, I can almost smell it. And I can still smell her... oh fuck, did I smell her. Her hair was pure pheromones, edible, and I'm ravenous.

The tracker led us straight to her workplace, where she spent a few hours before driving to her apartment and has remained there since. Sat at my desk, I logged the coordinates into the app and stared at the little blue dot for most of the afternoon. I'm so distracted. She's my new addiction.

Haunted. That's how I'd explain her looks and my emotions. All those planned, symmetrical, almost tribal-like scars on her tiny face. Fuck me, who did that? She's a warrior, but a broken one. The fact she is covered in ink is evidence of how much pain she tolerates, how strong she is under all that dysfunction.

And her name is Hazel. No, Hazy. All these years, I've given her so many names as I've wondered about who she was. She was Betty in my head for a while. And Samantha and

Angelina. But I never thought of Hazy. Never knew if she was still alive at all, and here she is, a blue dot on a screen. That dream I had all those years ago is getting closer to the truth now.

She's mine.

"Hazy," I say aloud. I like the way it feels in my mouth. I imagine how I'll feel saying it aloud to her directly... *Hazy, get on your knees. Hazy, open your mouth. Good girl, Hazy.*

I stared at the GPS while I sent off some emails earlier, keeping tabs on her location. Second guessing my decision not to take her right then and there, because what if I lose her again? How could I let her go again once I found her? What if she runs? But why would she?

Once she was home, I made my way over there on the Night Train; my favourite bike. The smell of fumes and the rumble between my ears and thighs calming my need to race right in there and fuck her into oblivion. I've been sitting on a low wall in her street, watching the windows and smoking for two hours. Every now and then, I catch a glimpse of a shape moving behind her curtains.

Occasionally, over the years, I've wondered whether she was even real. My stomach is in knots, and there she is, less than a hundred metres away. In a hokey little flat not even fifty kilometres from where I've been living. But I need to wait. I can't afford to spook her.

Not now that I've finally found her.

W olfpack - TALA, Banks
Sex money feelings die - Lykke Li
High Enough – K. Flay

HAZY

Since the incident with the hot weirdo at the ED clinic earlier in the week, I've felt more unhinged than usual. As a thin, Caucasian goth girl, I get my fair share of pervs hassling me. But the way my body reacted to this one's grip... the way my nervous system reacted to his voice... no one has ignited me like that for a very long time. Not since the day that changed my life forever.

He seems so familiar.

My squad thinks I'm the weirdo, which isn't unusual, but they don't understand the effect he had on me. They've never seen me like this about a man before. I usually hit and run, and forget. I don't need to catch any feelings; I've got enough on my plate.

"What's going on with you lately, Hazy? Are you okay, babe?" Xanthe asks. We're sitting on the grass, sipping coffee at the Saturday markets. Brightly coloured flags flap overhead whilst various stalls sell handmade wares. An Aboriginal woman with a guitar is strumming and crooning, incense

wafting from next to her busking hat. I adjust my sunnies and enjoy her soft voice, singing about going home, but she doesn't know where home is. Girl, same. I know I can't compare myself to her struggles, but I feel homeless too sometimes. Disconnected from any history my family may have had. I don't even know where my ancestors are from.

I wriggle further into the shade; I forgot my sunscreen and am meticulous about keeping my ink out of the sun. It's why it's still in such great condition, even though some of it is thirteen years old.

"Yeah, I'm okay. That weirdo at the clinic the other day shook me up a bit, that's all. I'm fine." Xanthe side-eyes June, who is smoking a clove cigarette while she waits for her current lover to return with some Dutch pancakes.

"What exactly did he say to you?"

"I can't remember half of it. He was ranting about how I'm his future wife and he donated money to the clinic. It's all a bit of a blur." June studies me critically, then ties up her loose shoelace. She's hot, as usual, in her classic converse, frayed denim cut-offs, and an oversized white Eminem shirt. Xanthe goes back to looking over a bunch of crystals and bones she just bought from a vendor, but I know she's trying to suss me out. I scald the roof of my mouth on my long black.

"Did he hurt you?" June asks.

"Yeah, nah, I dunno. I mean, I was coming out of my shrink appointment, and he grabbed me by my arm." I pull up my sleeve to show her a faint bruise from where his grip detained me. "Doesn't matter anyway. I'll never see him again."

"Fucking hell. That's full on! Didn't anyone at the clinic come to help?"

"No! That was the weirdest thing! Though, I didn't call out for help. I dunno what came over me and why I didn't. He was fucking hot, and I was on the defensive from the start. I got bamboozled. Anyway, it doesn't matter."

“Okay...” Xanthe says, giving June another look, getting the hint that I don’t want to talk about it anymore.

“Did you watch that doco on the Saqqara necropolis? I saw it last night.” Xanthe asks as she smells a candle, then puts the lid back on it. She’s always forwarding the latest peer-reviewed article or woo-woo spiritual rantings about Egypt or any current obsession she has. She’s a witch, working in the psychic realms in ways I don’t understand, but I love her even more for that. I feel like she has spoken to my guides enough to keep me alive this far. I honestly believe that without her on my side I’d have killed myself long ago. Oh, and she has a pet crow, and that is just the coolest fucking thing in the world. I love the way her brain works, the way she ties magick to everything.

“Yes!” I sit up straight. “Oh, man, and the engineering! Where did their technology go? Did you know we can’t even compete with some of its precision?” I reach out to take a candle Xanthe is handing me to sniff.

“I know. It’s bonkers. My brain explodes thinking about it for too long,” she says. I remove the glass lid and inhale cinnamon, amber, and pepper.

“Same. Human prehistory breaks my skull too,” I say, handing the candle back and taking a small crystal out of her hand in exchange.

“Did you see that thing I shared on Facebook?” she asks. The crystal feels smooth in my hand, vibrating almost. I peer into its inner chambers, see all its inner secrets of the creation of the earth’s crust, and the crystalline fractures glow.

“I did! We are definitely going to see those monoliths on our world tour. If we ever fucking get there.” I laugh, rolling the crystal in my hand.

“If the apocalypse hasn’t finished us all by then!” It’s true. The end of human civilisation is here. It’s collapsing all around us, and we stand here sipping our margaritas and slicing ourselves to pieces. Everyone is traumatised. There is no normal. The ancients had it right.

I snap out of my thought process just as Caro arrives with June's fluffy, fried orbs. I slip the little crystal into my bra for safekeeping.

"Sorry it took so long, babe," Caro says. They have a very masculine appearance, and I admire their sneakers.

"Nice shoes!" I comment, to which they smile.

"Thanks! Got 'em on marketplace, of all places!"

"Yum yum yum," June says, making grabby hands at the food. Caro's non-binary, and their pronouns are they/them. My friends and acquaintances have various conglomerations of pronouns. It took me a short while to wrap my head around it all, but now it's second nature. Refusing to use a person's preferred pronouns makes you a '*Fucktard of the Highest Order.*' If I accidentally fuck up with someone, I'll apologise and get it right next time.

These two look sickeningly happy right now, smiling in each other's company, and you know what? Right now is all we have, so we'd better enjoy as much of it as we can. A new song starts, and I smile over at June as they stab pancakes on their forks and I take a sip of my Diet Coke. It makes me feel nauseous, watching lovers be all lovey-dovey together. Well, the nausea could stem from that or the fact that there's enough buttery syrup oozed over those pancakes to strike fear into any calorie counter's heart. I hold back a dry retch as the scent of butter fills my nostrils.

I still don't think I want a life partner. Allowing anyone into my life to that extent would road-block my self-destructive trajectory. I don't need anyone all up in my grill at 4am. Fuck that. I don't want someone watching me that closely, *spank-you-very-much.*

As happy as June looks right now, I'll be surprised if Caro lasts a month. Two max. Unfortunately, June just can't manage to keep lovers around for very long, despite her flawless appearance. That woman looks like the love child of Rihanna and Beyonce.

Dating sucks for everyone, really. Especially online dating. Fuck me, scary days, I'm telling you. Especially when the only man that's interested in me is a hot, unhinged stalker.

*H*ellfire - 1349

Ain't No Grave - Anna Calvi

IFTK - Tion Wayne, La Roux

BANKS

I probably shouldn't have smoked that fourth joint, but I need to chill. Now I don't feel like doing anything on my to-do list; I don't even want to text Jade. I'd rather sit on this couch in the den and stalk Hazy instead.

Zane's meticulous forethought and tech geekery are why he's one of my best mates—one of the only people I trust with my life—and why I pay him big bucks to be my right-hand man. Well, one of them. I've got three.

It had been easy for Zane to attach the tiny spy cam in Hazy's car. He was in and out quickly, his covert and tech training invaluable to me. Now I can track her in real time. Zane always has a small kit stashed in the back of the Wagen for these kinds of scenarios, though usually the trackers are going onto targets who'll be bludgeoned into dog biscuits. You can find them on a shelf in your friendly local grocer. Just five ninety-nine.

I scoop a mound of salsa and guac onto my corn chip and stuff it in my gob before firing up my computer. The tang of lime and coriander goes perfectly with the swig of beer. Swallow has been doing some great stuff in the kitchen lately. I should remember to mention it to her when I see her.

This is the first time I've tracked a lover. I've never been compelled to track any girls down before her.

I've read every government and public paper on her right back from the year I found her in Melbourne. Her tax returns are boring. She could be earning so much more. I wonder whether she has a criminal side hustle. From that financial year onwards, she's been in the funeral industry almost without a break. She's won awards and had peer-reviewed articles published as her work as a mortician with progressive ideas. She's got a vision of how she would like the industry to run. She's smart. She owns her apartment, bought it four years ago. Owes \$300k on it. I'll take care of that tomorrow. Owns the old hearse outright too. It costs a fortune to maintain, so she obviously loves it.

I wonder whether her diminished cognition from anorexia is the reason she wants to sit in a small funeral home instead of taking over the world. If that's not the reason, I can't figure out why such an intelligent woman with global ideas would be hiding in a pokey little funeral home in inner city Sydney.

With Zane's help, I've gained access to her computer and phone records as well as a tap on her phone. Whenever she makes or accepts a call, I get a notification and can listen in without her knowing, as well as keep the recording. The sound of her voice smashes my heart into my lungs.

I log into her computer. She's online reading about Egypt. I wait for her to scroll a bit further and see she's looking at something about The Apis Cult. I'm going to have to read that later. I resist the urge to send her an email. Or better yet, open a Word doc on her screen and write a creepy message to her in real time. Would be funny, but I don't want to freak her out. Yet.

I'm planning everything to the last detail. I must be patient.

Patience is my downfall with this one. I think I'm going to blow it.

*G*ravedigger - MXMS
Numb & Getting Colder - Flume, KUCKA

HAZY

Back at the fucking clinic again. It's the first time I've been back since the altercation with the psycho. I skipped last fortnight, so I have to be here today, or they'll roast me. After my stats are recorded and my psych appointment—fucking same old blah, blah, blah—I stop at the front desk. The young receptionist is wearing a button-up blouse, knee-length pencil skirt, and sensible flats. Her blonde, wavy hair is pulled into a ponytail, with wispy bits framing her face.

She's prettier than you. Admit it.

“Hey, just wondering if someone can tell me about that huge Islander guy who was here a few weeks ago? He harassed me in the car park, and I want to make a complaint.” The receptionist glances at me, then over her shoulder. When she looks back, there is an odd look in her eyes.

“You'd be right to avoid that guy. Are you sure you want to lodge a complaint? Did he hurt you?” As I think back to his total control of my body, dying butterflies flop around in my belly. I think of the bruise he left me underneath my tattoos.

“Well, kind of. I mean, he definitely harassed me. But I guess it didn't really hurt...” I dwindle off. She looks over her shoulder again, ponytail swinging, at the office manager who is tapping away at her computer. She leans forward.

“I can lodge a complaint for you if you’d like, but it would be a waste of time. If he didn’t physically assault you, there is nothing anyone will do for you here. Even the cops probably wouldn’t do anything. Why don’t you think it over, just to be sure?” I roll my eyes and huff at her as I dig my nails into my palms.

“Who is he?” She shrugs and makes a facial expression like *don’t even bother*. “Whatever,” I say as I grab my keys out of my bag. “Thanks for nothing.” I storm towards the car park, boots clomping, and my shadow kicks into high octane.

Why would you expect anyone to believe a word you say? You’re invisible. No one cares about someone as fucked as you. No one in normal society takes you seriously when you’re a chick covered in tattoos. They think you’re a scammer from the outset. Slit your wrists, bitch. Or you could slam into a tree. This hunk of junk goes fast enough for you to end it all? Drive off a bridge. Swallow some pills. So many options!

I shuffle into the driver’s seat, the old springs creaking and the scent of a pine air freshener filling my nostrils, and I rummage around with old rego papers and packets of mints before pulling my hip flask out of the glove box.

Whoever this fucker is, he’s got all of the staff in the clinic shaking in their boots. *Why don’t you think it over, my ass!* Useless bitch. I rest my head on the steering wheel for a moment as I try to bring my breathing under control.

Ah fuck it, a little swig won’t hurt. After all this bullshit, I need a soother. The vodka burns as it seeps its way into my bloodstream, steadying my heartbeat. I feel the tension deflate as I hold the pewter flask against my cheek. I bring it to my lips again, less greedily this time, and I savour the burn as one more sip slides down. I do feel guilty that I drive with alcohol in my system, but honestly, I need it. I know the alcohol dependency makes my tolerance sky high, because any normal person would be flat on their ass.

A swig here and there helps settle me from totally losing my shit. Booze is my very own, personal, double-edged sword.

Just keep telling yourself that, loser. Admit it, you're a fuck-up, beyond repair.

The hearse sputters to life as I turn the key, and I suddenly notice how hungry I am. I take another swig and open the window to get some fresh air, but instead I'm assaulted by the plume of exhaust fumes. I sit in a traffic jam for a while, before crawling through a million red lights, finally turning into my street.

Once I get home, I chuck my bag on the couch and strip out of all my clothes. I blast the song *Numb & Getting Colder* on the speaker and wriggle my ass. I'm sure my neighbours hate me, but there's nothing they can do about it at this hour of the afternoon. The cops won't care. At least the neighbours keep it to themselves for the most part. I do like living here, as filthy as the air pollution is and the lack of green space. I reach for my favourite stemmed glass from the freezer and mix a large gin martini.

"Stirred, not shaken," I say to myself in my dodgy Scottish accent. I think about my Scottish friend, Annie, and send her a quick text message. I can be a shit friend sometimes.

As I rub the rim with the lemon quart—to dress the cocktail properly—I think about how it makes me feel better, mixing classy drinks. Drinking cocktails when I go out. I can almost bullshit myself into believing that as long as I'm not chugging down a VB, like an uncouth bogan, that my respectable cocktail hour is less problematic.

Licking my hand, I wiggle my bare ass and spin circles through my kitchen into the living room, letting the bass and drums consume me. The dry bite of the martini goes straight to my head, exactly how I like it. Of course, I haven't eaten all day, so the delicious buzz of booze on an empty stomach sends my serotonin soaring. Today, and all its crap, is already beginning to fade as I welcome the warm fuzz spreading through my brain. I love being in my own space, with all my feathery and fluffy friends dead beneath their glass domes.

Death-God. You fight fire with fire. I'm losing it again. Did you know? The ibis are still here, here for the end of this age,

writing it all down. Sifting through the rubbish. We should be writing in stone. Nothing else will last what is coming. Fires and floods. Will AI take hold in enough time before humanity is wiped out?

I spin and turn and smile at my taxidermy temple. I love my weirdness and these strange, dark holes my brain takes me down. I grin at the thought of Dahmer, with his flesh temple in that rotting, stinking apartment. I'm not far off his level of insanity, surely? The difference is that I know for a fact I will never chow down on someone I fuck on a one-night stand. Not saying I would kick a hot dude out of bed if he died midway through a BJ. I mean, I'd finish the job whether he was breathing or not. But no, I will not eat his heart with a side of fries. My obsession with blood extends to my own body only. Thankfully.

Putting my glass down, I sway and writhe and bend my body in a furious dance. The sheer curtains blow in a breeze, and I part them to look out the window in all my naked glory. I see a hot muscle car parked across the road that I've never seen before. Ignoring it, I close the curtains and dance again. I still love dancing despite the childhood memories associated with it. I love burning calories by dancing the best.

The song ends and *Gravedigger* crawls out of the speaker next like an oozing demon, and I dive head-first to move with it. Sipping elegantly from my thin-rimmed glass and spinning slowly. I'm a pro at not spilling booze; it's all physics, and I catch a drop flying in my mouth. The song's raw sexuality and dark aesthetic winds its way through me, and I let my body move freely.

My ribcage flutters, and I dance on tiptoes through the apartment into the bathroom. I stop to pee whilst sipping. Fuck, I love being naked. Under my chronic malfunctions as a human, I'm an exhibitionist at heart. I love imagining that people want to watch me, as strange as that sounds coming from an anorexic. But the alcohol loosens and frees me. I chase that feeling, the shedding of inhibition. I dance and I don't care. I sway and move primally and the only thing I feel

is the music and that creeping cloudy rush oozing into my brain.

The expectations and restrictions of living in this fucked-up world hold no power over me when I'm romancing the bottom of a bottle. Like a child, I feel a petulant entitlement to this self-medication.

"Well, this broken dolly doesn't belong to anyone," I say loudly to the empty room. Gin-fuelled bravado. Fuck the world while I drink, dance sleazy, and forget. I raise the glass to my reflection in a mock *Leonardo* salute, and take another sip. Twisting the shower faucet and waiting for the water to heat up, I catch my reflection. The two women start to merge in the mirror again. Then voices start up, as usual, and I finish the rest of the martini in two gulps.

Now I wait for the shadows to shut up as the alcohol takes over my reality. I need to get dressed and ready for a night out with the girls. I might even do some nice makeup.

*K*illing in the Name - Rage Against the Machine
Дефект - Pharaoh
Chills – Dark Version – Mickey Valen, Joey Myron

BANKS

I flick through the songs till I find *Killing in the Name*; it always hits that sweet spot when I'm antsy. I've parked the Monaro across the street from Hazy's apartment, away from the streetlight and behind a low-hanging tree.

This car is my pride and joy. I searched high and low to find a '68 model in this condition. It was easy to throw a 383 motor in it, and now it's the perfect car to open up on the country roads. I drive it whenever I can, which unfortunately, is never enough.

Hazy's window and the front door of her building are easy to see from here. So easy, I caught a brief glimpse of her naked before she shut the curtains again. I was too slow to grab a photo, but I could watch her figure dancing in the background after she closed the curtain.

It's a tacky brick apartment, identical to the ones on either side. A row of square letter boxes perch above an equal number of garbage bins. Three *eshays* walk by, shouting and egging each other on. They notice my car first, their swagger

amping up as they make their way toward me. They can't see through the tint, but the music is playing, so I'm going to guess they are about to hijack me. I roll down the window and aim my Glock at the centre one.

“Shit, man!” he says through his teeth, surprise and panic evident. “Illchay. No worries. We were just going.”

“Weren't expecting to meet me now, were ya, little street rats? I should put you out of your misery, fucking with other people's cars.”

They back away quickly and make their way down the street, kicking over a garbage bin for good measure as they laugh and squeal. “*Gronk!*”

“Keep running, scumbags,” I shout as I wind the window back up and put my firearm back in its holster, smiling and letting the music wash over me.

Hazy left home half an hour ago.

I watched her walk from the door to the cab like it was slow motion. I videoed her too. I noticed everything about her and stored it in my memory for later dissection. Her short, black hair framed her sweet little face. Her skinny shoulders held up a black minidress, which looked more like lingerie. Doc Marten 10-hole—I counted—at the end of her black inked legs. She looked like a baby bird that left the nest too soon.

So fragile. I need to feed her...

My cock. I need to feed her my cock.

My phone buzzes with a message from Zane.

Target arrived at pub.

Pics incoming.

P.S. Miss Purple Hair is straight FIRE!!!

Of course Zane would have the hots for Xanthe. He's obsessed with goth chicks, and she is the epitome of every straight guy's wet dream. He'd better stay the fuck away from my girl, that's all I can say.

I open the photos and see the cab arriving at the pub, scrolling through a dozen pics showing them walking from the cab to the doors of the entrance. There's a stunning black queen, with red lips, heels, and tats. That's June. She's shown up multiple times in my Hazy research. Then there's the white goth chick, with greyish-purple hair almost down to her tight, leather-clad ass. That's Xanthe. Also, an androgynous goth in black jeans and an old Joy Division t-shirt. No idea who that is, could be Patrick Connolly; I saw his name mentioned a few times in her emails and Facebook messages. No threat to me, so I don't care. And then, of course, my girl, looking exactly as she did half an hour ago. Like the fucking priestess of death herself.

I've kept an eye on her movements since we bugged her car. Generally, she travels between this apartment and work. The more I discover about her, the more obsessed I am. It's as though she was made for me.

Now that she's arrived at the pub, and I know she won't be turning up back here any time soon, I grab my mini locksmith kit. I jog across to her building, easily picking my way through the lobby door and then into her two-bedroom apartment. I close the door behind me gently and take a look around, slipping the tools into my pocket. It's quiet here. And it smells like her.

I sniff at the air with a primal obsession.

Finding a switch for the lamp, my fingers sink into the fur of a white taxidermy rabbit. It's perched next to the lamp on the hall table, a fuzzy face illuminated in the glow. The top-hat and gold monocle balanced on its head seem to be typical of Hazy's vibe. Darkly humorous, macabre. An outright weirdo. My favourite kind of people.

At every turn through the minuscule apartment—seriously, my den is bigger than her entire flat—something bizarre catches my eye. An array of natural history decorates every space. If you've ever wondered what maximalism looks like, this would be it.

Bird skeletons stare out at me with their eye sockets from under glass domes, their pale bones offset against the rich wallpaper. A taxidermy duckling wears a party hat next to a priest crow. A baby red belly black snake floats in a jar of formaldehyde; a collection of small Victorian death photographs displayed on the wall. I see an assortment of Victorian mourning jewellery, hair and all. Antique lamps. She seems to have an incredible style on a tight budget. On a tall, wooden pedestal sits a frozen peacock, tail draped to the floor. What an ostentatious choice for the living room. She's adorable.

My footsteps fall on the burgundy carpet as I cross the room to get a look at a display of shiny Victorian-era medical tools. Each set cradled within a velvet and wooden case. Each one looks as though it could be used to pull a person's brain through their nostrils, or simply carve their head clean off. Impressive. Most chicks collect cats or lipsticks or shoes, but this is a woman after my own heart. On the coffee table is a heavy fetish photography book opened to a page of Helmut Newton. Crystals and coral of different colours are displayed in a bowl next to a baby crocodile skull. I don't get the whole crystal obsession; they're rocks. They can take some from my driveway, if they like. I don't care.

In the bedroom, shelves are crammed with anatomy books and ancient Egyptian statues scattered about. Many more animal foetuses in formaldehyde. I take a photo. Muted silver rings and necklaces in shapes like bird claws, planchettes, and crescent moons hang on hooks. Decks of tarot cards and creepy gothic art stare out from every corner. It's a death museum.

I. Fucking. Love. It.

I wipe my brow and continue on. Opening each dresser drawer, my dick springs up at the sight of lace panties. I run a finger along the makeup brushes on the dressing table, sniff the perfume vials, wind open the lipsticks, then sniff the pillows on her perfectly made bed.

I like to sniff, and god dammit, I like the way this woman smells.

In the tiny yet tidy kitchen, I take a swig from an already opened bottle of red. Opening the fridge, I see green apples, vegan burger patties, small tubs of yoghurt, and some soda water. I take photos of everything. In the freezer, I find frozen peas, ice cubes, vodka, and a bottle of gin. In the pantry, dehydrated soup, a jar of applesauce, and rice cakes. I snap photos of all these too.

Christ. How does she survive on these rations? It's worse than I got during service. No wonder she's 40kg. I need to do something about this immediately. That so-called eating disorder clinic has a lot to answer for. Turning my baby into a skeleton. What the hell have they been doing to help her? Nothing.

And she barely knows I exist.

I'm coming for you.

I make my way into her bathroom, snapping photos of everything, especially the bottles in her shower, bathroom cabinets, and makeup box. She has hoards of razor blades, enough to fill an entire drawer. Seeing the scars on her face and body the other day doesn't leave me guessing as to how she uses them.

I sniff a pair of her dirty panties from the bathroom clothes basket, then shove them in my pocket. Her musk drives me wild. I wish I could figure out how to bottle the scent of her pussy. I have a raging boner after smelling her and need release. Heading into the bedroom again, I lean back on the bed, taking a deep inhale of her pillow. I unzip my jeans and fist my cock with one hand as I bring her panties to my nose with the other. I think back to earlier when I watched her emerge from her building. Her smile, her skin, her tiny frame. I jerk my cock and groan as I come in my hand within a minute. Being in her private space is like taking four little blue pills.

After I finish, I grab a tissue from her night stand and clean myself up, making sure to smear some of my cum on her pillow and pocket the knickers. These will be staying with me. I hope her scent doesn't disappear too quickly. I flush the

tissue and make my way to the entrance, switching off the lamp.

She's a fierce little mystery I want to unravel.

We need new locks on her doors; this area is so dodgy. And the security is non-existent. Or better yet, I'll get her out of this place ASAP.

I head back to the car, texting Zane to let him know I'm done here. As I start up the Monaro, the roar of the V8 vibrates through me. I wind the machine out onto the road for fun and open her up as I head toward the pub. I'm going to watch her from a distance.

I need to be near her.

I swear an oath to myself that I will not approach her... for tonight.

Come on, stay strong, mofo.

She'll be in your custody soon.

*D*arkness - *Rage Against The Machine*

HAZY

It's been a few days since I went out with the gang. I sniff and rub my nose with my forearm and adjust the headphones with my shoulder. The vodka shot in my stomach burns. I could really go for a cheeseburger right about now.

No, you couldn't, lard-ass.

The podcast in my ears talks on as I remove my blood-stained gloves and spray down the bench with hydrogen peroxide. This true crime podcast I've been listening to makes the hours fly by, but my feet are still killing me after all the hours of standing. I probably need another iron infusion.

The familiar astringent scent of chemicals, which covers the putrid scent of decomposing remains, is stuck in my nostrils.

I finish up embalming the sweet old lady with the fluffy white hair. My tools—the aneurysm hook, surgical scissors, angled forceps and scalpels—clatter to the stainless-steel trolley as I return them, and I give the bench another quick wipe down. This lady died in her sleep at her nursing home, and looks so peaceful now. I wonder when I go, will it be just as peaceful?

Nope!

I've dreamed of every possible way to commit suicide, and I just can't decide on the one I want best. Most of them include graphic violence, and the reality of overdosing on pills is not pretty either. I wash and dry her hair quickly and with the respect afforded a Queen.

I glance at the clock. It's 4.30pm. Home time soon.

"There you go, Betsy, all ready for your family," I whisper to her corpse, giving her frail hand a gentle squeeze. Her face is sweet, with cold skin as thin as gold leaf paper. I wonder what being so old would feel like? I will never know. Betsy's open casket isn't until next week—her family can't make it from interstate until then—so there is no need for me to get her dressed or apply makeup for her today.

Betsy was my fourth deceased today, easy in comparison to the first up this morning. That was a more difficult, restorative job, a rebuild. He was a nineteen-year-old, who smashed himself up spectacularly in his too-fast car, going one-twenty in a seventy zone. I had to try to put the puzzle of his face back together again in case his family wanted to view him. I think I did a great job, considering what I had to work with. His face had looked like something you'd see in the glass cabinet at the butcher's shop.

"Jeff, I'm done here," I call out to my boss.

I shuffle about the prep room cleaning, yawning, and laughing at these hilarious and highly inappropriate podcast hosts. After Jeff comes to help me shift the body to the cool room, I disinfect and set up for tomorrow. When I'm done, I strip off my gloves, protective gown, apron, and shoe covers before washing my hands and grabbing my phone and heading down the hall to my dingy little office.

I've worked in the funeral industry since the week I moved to Sydney at aged sixteen, and became a qualified Mortician and Embalmer shortly after. Raising awareness around death acceptance—the idea that death is nothing to fear—is probably my first and truest love. I'm trained in cremations and all other

aspects of the trade, including the growing interest in eco and natural burials.

In my spare time, I love researching funerary traditions throughout the ages and different cultures. Planning a way forward for the burial process in our collapsing society. Get back to natural processes. We should turn to dust in the earth, not be petrified with chemicals that leach into the soil around it. Contaminating everything. Each to their own, though, and I accommodate every family as they require.

I've always been fascinated with death, my entire life. From age eight, when I witnessed the death of a friend at the hands of our abusers and saw her body disappear into the night.

Walking the two paces from the door to my desk, I place some fresh water on my little altar dedicated to the underworld and the afterlife. I blow some dust off the Anubis & Osiris statues, and rearrange the crystals and feathers. Then I take a quick swig of vodka from a bottle in my top drawer.

I like having my mini altar at work to help guide any souls who haven't yet transitioned. I feel sad, especially for the deceased who find their way to me, who no longer have any family members around. I say a few little words for Betsy before slumping into my ratty old desk chair and finishing some paperwork that has been stacking up in my inbox.

Form after form after email, I get through quickly, then I snap my laptop shut and pack it in my bag. Then I'm calling Xanthe to finalise plans for tomorrow night.

We're heading to *Drag Queen Bingo*, and Patty and June are going to do my makeup for me beforehand and pop a bottle of bubbles to get us in the mood. Our friend, *Ophelia Tits*, is the host and it's going to be a hysterical night. I'm actually looking forward to it. Sometimes I like socialising because my adopted family is fucking awesome people.

"See ya tomorrow morning, Jeff!" I say, poking my head around his office door. "I've finished all the paperwork for today. I'll be in early tomorrow to get a head start because I'm leaving early. Girls' night out."

“No worries, Hazy. Thanks for everything, as always,” he says, rubbing his temples and staring back at his computer.

His private office is even smaller than mine, with no windows, and dust everywhere. Luckily, there is a bright, fresh meeting room where we welcome clients. I love working here. I would have moved on to a bigger, brighter funeral home years ago, but this environment suits me perfectly. They don't mind my less than traditional presentation and odd bottle of vodka stashed in my desk. And they respect the work I do.

I'm looking forward to mixing up a naked martini tonight and releasing my demons. Gonna jump around the living room, blasting *Doja Cat* at top volume.

Gonna get some blood spiralling down the drain tonight.

*F*ade - *White Katana, niteboi*
Skengman - Ghetts, Stormzy
Send My Bitch - CEO Trail, Enchanting

HAZY

After a quick stop at Coles, I pull the Cadi into my underground car park in a cloud of black smoke. I clunk it into park, ready to jump out and mix that goddamn drink. *You're too fat to drink, Williams. 120 calories you definitely don't need. Porky.*

Leaning over the centre console, I slip my phone and keys into my leather bag. I want a bowl of olives for dinner tonight, I think. I make my way around to the back of the car and lift out two shopping bags from the storage compartment I've set up in the back. The bed is always made in case I want to take a drive out to North Head and sleep there to watch the sun come up. There is one shopping bag containing alcohol and detergent, and the other holds green olives, apples, and some toilet paper.

A low rumble approaches and tyres screech as an expensive 4WD careens around the corner and into the garage. Pigeons and sparrows hightail it out of the underground, concrete space, flapping madly and creating a draft with their wings.

All my *spidey* senses switch into panic mode. Sweat prickles under my arms instantly, and I watch, wide-eyed, as the car pulls up behind the hearse. Blocking it off. A door opens before it's even stopped and a burly thug jogs out. *Fuck*. I'm not hanging around here to find out what these guys are up to. Nothing to do with me, but I drop my bags and make a break for it regardless. I run behind their car, then continue as fast as I can toward the exit to the street. But the thug chases me, and it's now that the real panic sets in. I run faster.

"Get away from me! Fuck off! Help! Help me! Please!" I shout as I beeline toward the entrance, and I think I'm having a heart attack. Next thing I know, I am being pulled by the man onto the ground, but the way we land, his back is on the concrete and he protects my fall. Unfortunately, my leg ends up underneath him in the roll. As pain tears through my leg, I roar like a wounded animal.

"Help! Fire! Fire!" I scream because no one would care if I told them I was being raped. They might be curious if they thought their apartment was going up in flames. But, no one comes to help as the nugget-neck pulls me up to standing, and nudges me back toward the two cars.

"I'd think real hard before trying a little stunt like that again, girly," he says, making a gun visible in a holster under his armpit.

"What do you want? Let me go, please," I plead. I'm shocked at the sight of a gun. Even though I know they exist in Sydney, I've never actually seen one other than strapped to cops or security. I'm not sure if these guys are either of those things, and I wish I didn't have to find out.

I make a futile attempt at escape from his clutches again. My breathing comes quick and fast. I kick out, but it's like kicking a brick wall, in the hopes it will fall over. My ankle and leg hurt. My cheeks are hot and wet with tears, and through blurry vision, I make out two more guys. They are out of the car now and approach us slowly.

"Didn't see that one coming!" one of them says, chuckling. "Nice tackle."

“Me either, mate. Fuck!” says the guy dragging me along. I freeze to the spot as we stop, my mind ticking over as to who they could be and how I can get away for real this time. This can’t be random, can it? The weirdo from the clinic is behind this? They don’t tackle you in dark car parks for overdue parking fines and swigging vodka in your car.

I scan all possible exits, but they have me cornered. *It’s a three-man militia against a pathetic piece of shit.* Guess who’s going to win this round? I check them out as they stand around talking. The one that tackled me is a towering hulk, with dark brown hair tucked behind his ears, two-day stubble, and a red scar along his cheek from who knows where? He’s in a suit, black on black on black. He looks like he knows how to point that gun.

The man hanging back slightly reminds me of a commando. The kind of tough guy who reveals halfway through the film that he’s been shot in the lower abs, but *don’t worry, he’s fine.* Just put some pressure on it. His dark brown skin gleams in the fluorescent lighting and his hair and stubble are cropped short. He’s in a well-worn leather jacket, jeans, and a t-shirt, with army boots. He lights a smoke like he’s relaxing on his afternoon tea break, not about to do something awful to an innocent woman.

“What do you want?” I ask, voice trembling more than I would like.

“Just do what we say, okay?” says Mr. Suit as he tries to manoeuvre me into his car.

“HELP!!!” I scream. Surely someone can hear? But no one wants to get involved in anyone else’s dirty business.

“Shut up, love. What did he just tell you?” Commando says, moving his jacket aside to show a gun under each arm. *Fuck. Okay. Of course, they ALL have guns.*

“Wh-what do you want with me?” I stammer. “Please don’t hurt me.”

“Like I said, do what we say, and you’ll be fine,” he growls. “Are you going to cooperate, or should I put you in the

car myself?”

“HEEEELP!” I scream and make another run for it. Okay. I’m a giant fucking idiot. I’ll admit it.

“Oh, for fuck’s sake. Grab her bags for me, will ya? And lock her car?” Mr. Suit tells Commando as he grabs me again and effortlessly throws me over his shoulder.

“Fuck you!” I yell, banging my fists on his back as he strides over to the shiny car and gently places me in the back seat.

“Be quiet, will ya, love? Seriously. This is all gonna happen, so just do as we say,” he says much too casually, as he hops in next to me and slams the door.

“I don’t have any money, if that’s what you’re after?” I say, trying the door handle with no luck. I realise how stupid that comment is after I feel the quality of the seat against my hand. This has nothing to do with money.

“Shh,” says another guy in the driver’s seat. The driver looks eerily similar to the guy I saw with the Merc at the clinic that day. His long hair is tied back again, he’s still got a full beard, and is covered in ink. His head almost touches the roof.

Commando hefts himself into the passenger seat, door slamming, then we’re reversing and speeding back out of my car park and into the peak-hour traffic. One sentence keeps repeating in my mind as my local neighbourhood flashes past the window, telegraph poles and workers’ cottages.

Don’t let them take you to the second location. Every murderino knows that one. What the hell have I just fallen into? Why didn’t I run faster? Yell louder? Kick harder? I’m so fucking weak and pathetic, one of Snow White’s dwarves could have kidnapped me.

My breath catches in my throat. My blood feels as though it’s suspended outside my body as I flashback to when Phillip trapped me in his car all those years ago. As we weave across town, I begin really freaking out.

I hate not knowing what is coming next. I remember some meditation techniques and try to imagine being in my happy

place; wandering along the shore, collecting shells. Breathe in. Breathe out. Three guns. Probably more. Wax on. Wax off. I don't want to get shot. I want to slash my wrists. The shitty breathing doesn't help.

Rap music blares and stars dot my vision from the lack of oxygen. I close my eyes and rest my head back on the seat and listen as the men joke with each other, oblivious to my state of distress. My leg throbs and is swollen in pain. I rub it, but that doesn't help.

No one will realise you're missing. No one loves you.

"Let me out, please, let me out. Please, just let me out of the car!" I bluster, tears in my eyes. I hurt my fingers in the door handle, which I'm trying to rip open, but instead, I bend a finger back. Banging my head against the window, I relish the pain; something better to focus on than the thought of what these guys want to do with me.

It's too late. It's way too late now. Amidst a full-blown panic attack, I'm raging and struggling to breathe as the city blurs past my window quickly. I'm definitely having a heart attack now. I try to self soothe, but I'm beyond help. I'm losing my grip. Everything closes in on me.

"Help me!" I'm screaming, over and over. "Help me. Let me out."

"Shut her up, would ya? For fuck's sake!" the driver grumbles as he navigates city traffic. "Trying to drive here."

"Jesus, what a fucking banshee. What does the boss see in this one?"

"No idea, but he said to keep her in one piece," says Commando.

"Yeah, yeah. I'm on it," says Mr. Suit, digging around in his jacket pocket. He grabs my head, and I feel a sting on my neck, like a bee or ant. My hand raises to cover the pain.

"Wha... th... fuck wassat?" I ask, eyelids heavy.

"Just a little vaccination against that fucking racket," he says, smirking. He releases me and sits back in his seat next to

me.

“Fckkk yyooo.”

I hear laughter in surround sound as I decide on a little nap. Immediately.

*C*ome to Daddy - Pappy Mix - Aphex Twin

BANKS

I pace the den as I wait for the call; they should have her by now. Zane said she'd left work ages ago and had stopped at Coles on the way home. I feel like a fucking schoolboy, desperate to cop a handful of tits or maybe even finger a wet pussy. I guess I am. I was too nervous to go with them to get her. I didn't want to be involved in the abduction, so I chose to stay and let my boys do what they do best.

Stubbing out my smoke, I undo a few buttons on my shirt; I'm hot all of a sudden. I've been so consumed with actually getting her here that I haven't given too much thought to what I'll do as soon as she arrives. I wish today would hurry up and slow down all at the same time. The phone rings in my pocket, and I rush to answer. It's Max.

"Yep," I say.

"Got 'er in possession, boss. Due in about forty minutes, I'd say, depending on traffic." As adrenaline surges through me, I feel my dick twinge.

"Good. I'm tracking your route on the GPS now. How'd it go?" I ask in a rush. "Is she okay? She's not hurt, is she?"

“Had to sedate her; she’s a sassy one, alright. Kicked up a stink, but she’s out cold now, having a nice little nap. She’s like a tiny little bird. Reckon she’ll break if you were going to bend her...” At those words, I get a wave of heat surge through my chest, and all my muscles tighten.

“Keep your hands off now. Bare minimum to get her upstairs, and if she acts up, I’ll come downstairs. I’m waiting in the office,” I tell him in a deathly calm tone.

“Roger that.”

“And, Max. No one disrespects Hazy.”

I click off the phone and stuff it into my pocket before he can answer me. No one touches my girl again unless it’s a direct order. I take a deep breath as I replay the conversation in my head. Welcome home, baby girl.

*T*ed - Clark

Heartless - The Weeknd

Drunk in Love - Beyonce & Jay-Z

HAZY

I'm breathing underwater in the flooded basement of a filthy mediaeval castle, debris swirling around my face and men in kilts telling me I'm a sexy lassie. Gold crowns float past with bubbles as dead, bloated farm animals bob past. I swim desperately upwards, watching my hair float with serpents like Medusa. I'm weighed down by a long, heavy, velvet dress, and I can't seem to reach the surface. Is this a fairy tale?

Every time I get to the top, I'm pulled back. I live down here now. I'm married to Blue Beard. He's going to kill me with a key. Blood swirls around my body and sharks take notice.

I deserve it. I've done something terrible, but I can't remember what. Did I kill someone?

A bloated sheep morphs into a tri-headed monster with five rows of glass teeth and it circles hungrily. I scream and thrash to get away, but no sound comes out, only bubbles filled with mercury which float up, up, up, to the light of the surface

and explode into fiery lava. I'm going to die down here. I can feel it coming.

It's a dream, Hazy. You may be fucked in the head, but this is all just ridiculous. Wake up you cocksucker.

I need to wake up, but I can't. I'm trapped in a terror loop, cycling through delusions. One after another. My wrists are tied together behind my back. I can't swim anymore. I kick but I can't move. A whimper escapes my throat.

"Water."

I think I'm back in the real world but I can't be sure. Am I stuck in the Matrix? My right arm stings, and my head pounds. I can hear voices and feel people touching my arm. It comes racing back; the thugs, the syringe in the car. I try to rub my eyes, but I can't move my hands. They're tied down.

I wish I'd paid more attention to those self-defence videos I've watched.

I sit at the edge of a chair, planning my escape with a seat stuck to my ass. I can sense someone to my right. Two people, maybe. I can hear them fiddling with plastic. A bag? And I hear a dog to my left, their gentle high-pitched whine oddly comforting to me. My head thumps with a chronic ache. When I open my eyes as little as possible to avoid the bright light, I can see Mr Suit. Next to him is a tiny woman with pale skin, freckles, and long auburn hair to her waist. She's in a latex maid's outfit.

Am I hallucinating? Where am I?

I bite my cheek to see if I'm asleep, but I feel it. She's holding three small vials of blood and is sticking labels onto them.

"Is that my blood?" I croak. I've closed my eyes again because opening them is just too painful. "Water, please," I rasp, tugging on the ropes, which shuffles the chair forward. Heavy footsteps retreat, and I let out a sob. Metal clangs and lighter footsteps follow out the door. A weight plonks on my lap, warm and fluffy. I squint one eye open to see a beautiful, shaggy black face. I'm not scared of this guy, but I'm

extremely aware that he could rip my throat out, so I stay still. My head spins, and I realise I've been holding my breath.

“Good doggo,” I whisper. He removes his head from my lap and curls up on my foot.

Muffled voices disappear outside, leaving me alone with my thoughts. That's always dangerous. I squint around, trying to get my bearings.

“Ughhh! Tissue, please! And aspirin,” I call to the void.

What is this place? And what the hell do they want with me anyway?

I hear laughter from a distance and music starts up, the windows rattling in time with the bass.

“Turn it down!” a man's voice calls from somewhere behind walls.

What is this, a college party house? Oh my god, is this one of those sex trafficking rings? Jesus Christ, of course it would be me who ends up entwined in something so sinister. Fuck. I'd rather kill myself than endure that kind of *fuckeduppery*.

The music turns down a fraction, and more laughter follows. Minutes pass by; a clock ticking somewhere close alerts me. I strain to hear any other noises, which might give me a clue to where I am, but nothing but the dull whoosh of the ocean meets my ears. I'm near the coast, that much I know, the faint scent of salt air finding my nostrils.

You're at the second location now. This is where you die. The world will be better off. They'll bury you so deep no one will find you.

My head... ouch, was I hit over the head? I wriggle around in the chair to relieve the pressure from my arms that are tingling with pins and needles, my lower back killing me. I startle as the plink of ice cubes sounds from not too far away. In this room. I thought I was alone in here, with the dog. A shiver runs through me as a cold sweat flashes along my hairline.

“Who’s there?” I ask, although I know it’s redundant. No one answers my questions around here.

“I’ve waited so long for this moment. Sorry I didn’t carry you across the threshold myself,” he says, and I recognise the voice. “There’s still the wedding night.” *Repulsive sicko*. “And hopefully, you’ll be conscious for that.” He laughs.

There’s no surprise who is behind this organised abduction. A low chuckle emerges from behind me, and the hair prickles on the back of my neck. I hear the squeak of a desk chair, then solid footsteps on wood make their way towards me, too slowly.

I struggle against the delicious pain and open my eyes to see the monster from the clinic standing directly in front of me. Within touching distance. And I lean into the pain. I’ll take it any way I can get. I snap my eyes shut; I don’t want to see him. Anyone but him.

“What the hell do you want with me? You’re detaining me against my will. This is all kinds of illegal.” The panic starts to rise inside me again, hot and cold flashes alternate, and my breath rasps in and out. This guy’s a fucking psycho.

“Get out, Shade,” he says, nudging the dog off my foot. The dog, Shade, gets up, and I hear the *tick tick tick* of claws moving behind me and his breathing. Watching. Protecting. Instinct tells me that Shade won’t hurt me. I feel an odd connection to him. I’m definitely more worried about the man’s intentions than the canine’s.

The man is towering over me now. I feel his presence. The wall of his body casting a shadow across my face. I reluctantly open my eyes to see him assessing me up close. Taking in my face, my eyes, my body, my hair. He leans toward me, and I jolt as his fingers graze the inside of my knee, travelling upwards, his short nails rippling over my collection of beautiful scars. Fingers grazing my inner thigh.

He doesn’t want to fuck you. He thinks you’re a joke.

I freeze, indecision about whether to kick out and aim high for the balls, or just do what any sane person would do and

stay quiet. A sane person would try not to piss this weirdo off too much. They've already brought me to the second location. I just need to bide some time and figure out how to get out of here alive. It's possible! I just hope I'm not here for the next ten years...

I feel the fabric caress my skin as he pushes the hem of my skirt up to my hips, tsking.

"We'll talk about these scars later," he says, trailing his finger along my skin.

"What? Why?" I scoot my ass in the chair till I hit the back and abruptly halt. This dude is creepy as fuck, and damn, I can smell him. Wood, bourbon, and something darker; murkier. Something like funeral flowers that I like too much. He leans closer to look at me now, his warm breath on my skin. I recognise the other scent now...

"Burnt sage," I mumble.

"Clever girl," he says, kissing my neck. I shudder at the intimacy. "I was preparing your room for you. Getting all the bad spirits out." My fight-or-flight kicks into hyper-drive. I tug on the ropes.

"Please don't hurt me," I whisper. He laughs and releases a breath as he stands, knuckles grazing my throat. I swallow a lump. "What do you want from me?" I croak, confusion jumbling my thoughts.

"Oh, I will be hurting you. You can be sure about that. But first, I want to welcome you home," he says, smiling. "Hope you had a nice drive out here. Sorry the guys had to force a little nap. Here's that tissue you asked for. Oh, I forgot, do you need hands for this?" He laughs again, dabbing my nose. Prick thinks he's so funny.

"Why have you tied me up? I won't do anything stupid, I promise." What could I possibly do anyway?

He swaggers away, well defined arms gesturing widely to the last of the sunset outside.

"Isn't it glorious?" he asks. I'm sitting in a beautiful room with high ceilings, Persian rugs, full windows opening onto a

wide stone balcony. It's then I notice it's getting dark. I turn my head and there's a huge, antique office desk covered in various papers, books, and computers. Lamp light sets the ambiance. More antique furniture is scattered around. Huge gothic artworks fill the walls.

I look at him as he thumbs his lips like he's sizing me up and preparing for his last meal. I wonder what he tastes like. How his cock tastes after a shower... *You wanna know how his cock tastes rammed down the back of your throat, whore. You know that's true.*

"Water please," I beg again, shaking myself from my sordid thoughts. I can't open my mouth properly, it's so dry.

My eyes travel from his hands up his shirt, unbuttoned at the chest, showing a solid wall of ink, and my gaze lingers at his neck. I recognise the winged tattoo from years ago. I can see it clearly now. It's old work. Two mythical creatures entwined in lust. The left an angel, and the right a demon.

Oh, shit. It is definitely him. The Jeep guy.

I pull at the ropes, and my flesh burns from the friction. He smiles, watching me struggle like a dog on a chain. The guy who stood in the rain to watch me run all those years ago. He found me. When even the cops couldn't.

"You're fucking delusional," I mutter, almost to myself. "You're an extra special kind of creep, aren't you? My friends will be looking for me, you know?" I raise my voice.

"All in good time. And I'm only joking, babe," he says, running a hand through his hair. "I said what I meant last time I saw you. I'm gonna marry you."

It's my turn to laugh now, a demented kind of cackle echoing from my ribcage. "You definitely have a screw loose, you know that? In this country, women choose who they marry." I'm panting now, angry that I've let him get me this worked up. The feminist in me raises her fist.

I need water, gin, and a smoke. I need to cut, purge, run, scream. All at the same time. I just need to get the fuck away from this psychopath.

You deserve what's coming. He's going to sacrifice you to his deranged god now.

“Have you been stalking me? I don't even know your goddamn name! You seem to know every last detail about me.”

He moves to a drinks table and pours himself a glass of brown liquid from a decanter, sniffs, then takes a sip as he stares out to sea. I steal another glance around the room; it's some kind of study or library, maybe? An office? Bookshelves line two walls with a large mahogany desk. Behind the desk is a giant black-and-white photograph of four horses pulling a carriage through Victorian dirt streets.

“What's your poison?” he asks, taking another long gulp of his drink and making his way over to me in a few steps. “Just kidding, I know.” He's behind me, so I turn my head to keep my eye on him. I hear the dog get up onto its feet and walk around to my front side again, planting himself back on my foot. I can feel the man's energy radiating across my shoulders as he leans close to sweep my hair away from my ear. I pull at the ropes around my wrists a few more times, to no avail.

“Please take this rope off. It's hurting me.”

“Gin Martini with a lemon twist?” he whispers, grazing his lips along my ear. A shiver runs through me. I shake my head no. I'm not letting this fucker know he's right.

“I can read you like a book. I'm going to tear out all your pages and rewrite them, one by one. First topic is your body; we must rewrite what you've been doing to that for the last decade, okay?” he says, lazily dragging a finger down my throat and slipping it inside the neck of my t-shirt. My flesh tingles, and I inhale as he gently caresses the outline of my nipple. Round and round, his finger twirls. I can feel every spark of electricity. He releases my breast and smiles at the pink heart-shaped tattoos covering my areola.

“Mmmm, so tempting.” He moves his hand, covering me up again, and walks around to stand in front of me. He finishes his drink in one swig and leans over to place his glass down.

I'm so thirsty. As he pulls something from his pocket, I hear a metallic swish, then *click*, and he flicks a blade out.

"I need to be very clear. There is no arguing with this, or it won't end well for you. You're mine now, do you understand me?" He speaks as he drags the blade up my thigh. A thrill runs through me as the cool tip caresses my bumpy scars. He grinds his teeth.

"I own you," he says, matter-of-factly. I groan. I can't help it.

"Really? Should I call you Mr. Misogynist? Seems so. *You own me?* What bullshit is that? I'm not a car," I say, rolling my eyes. "Anyway, you're an old man. What the fuck do you want with me?" He laughs at that. Apparently, I'm a comedian to him.

"I like that, Mr. Misogynist! Has a nice ring to it. No, you can call me Banks. Or Sir. And I own you because no one else does, yourself included. You treat yourself like garbage, but you're worth more than that. You chew through a new guy every night and throw yourself to the wild dogs. They can't do anything to help you; they just want to lay the little goth chick. I'm as good a hyena as any to take on the job. I'm forty-six. I ain't old, baby. And I'm just getting started with you." A tone rings inside my head; I am dealing with a certifiable madman.

"I'm a busy man with things to do and you won't be going anywhere for the imminent future. I can be patient if I want something bad enough. And I want you."

"I wouldn't fuck you if you were the last man on earth," I say confidently, though it's a damn lie. A knowing smile plays on his lips. "Asshole."

The door opens, and Commando comes in with a small box.

"You ready for this, boss?" he asks.

"Yeah, thanks."

The man walks over. He's without a doubt the type of guy who could rip my spine out and shove it up my ass in one well-rehearsed movement. He hands Banks the box, then

stands behind me. His leather jacket groans in protest as he bends to my shoulder.

“Shhh,” he whispers into my ear. “I don’t want to hurt you.” Those comforting words still me momentarily, and I seem to forget how to draw a breath. As he straightens, one forearm deftly snakes around the crown of my head while his other swallows my jaw and chin in a gentle yet vice-like grip. I’m frozen in the hold, immobile against his tree stump of a thigh, my head tilted back slightly, and my throat is exposed. The complete loss of physical control thrills me.

I make a feeble attempt to struggle against his grip, but there is really no point. I don’t budge an inch. And I don’t think I want to. Banks doesn’t lift an eye to his lackey pinning a defenceless woman, and wanders closer with a circle of metal in his hands, heart dangling and the box discarded.

“What the fuck?” I scream. “What the fuck? Jesus H. Christ, you freak! What is that?” I shout, as he hovers above me. Snap. I squirm against the cold metal collar he’s fixed around my throat with a small tool. A heart-shaped padlock securing it in place. Commando retreats back through the door, and I’m left with the heavy rolled steel rising and falling against my throat.

“Please let me go. I’m begging you,” I whimper. “You’re scaring me.” Tears are falling freely now, and I heave out sob after sob.

“It’s just a simple slave collar with an in-built tracker. It can’t hurt you, but I need to know where you are at every moment. Don’t even think about trying to get out of it. I’ll hunt you down regardless. But I’d hate to lose you again, especially since it took me so long to find you.”

I shake my head in disbelief, gasping in jagged breaths, my shoulders sagging. How is all this happening to me?

“I’m not your slave,” I whisper, though I’m not so sure anymore. Technically, nothing about my current situation screams freedom.

“Now, as I was about to say,” he continues. “You are going to eat here. You must get healthy. As kinky as I am, I’m not into dead girls myself. No kink-shaming, of course!” I ignore his jokes.

“You think you can throw me some scraps and I’ll miraculously get better?” Turning my head, I wipe the snot on my shoulder. He grabs another tissue, wiping my face with a tenderness that takes me by surprise. “If you wanted someone fatter, why did you pick me? You think you can swoop in and solve all my problems? Is that what this is all about? You’re some kind of demented Mother Theresa or something?” I laugh bitterly. “You’re dumber than you look, big guy.”

My gaze sweeps his full height, all six-foot-whatever of his solid, muscular build. All those ripples and defined angles and ink poking out at every opportunity and... *damn it, Hazy, get a grip now.*

“I’m completely fucked in the head,” I continue honestly. “Have been for decades. Can I please have some water now?” I ask again. He ignores me and walks to the drinks table, pouring from an Anty Gin bottle. I’ve never tried it before, but I’ve heard about it.

“Do you know what happens to sassy little girls around here?”

“No, but I can guess. You slit their throats? Wait, I’ve got it! You slit their throats, then you fuck their necks!” I snort at my own joke. “How would I know? You’re a lunatic. You’ve probably got a basement full of girls.”

“Not today,” he says simply as he raises an expensive-looking glass to my lips and tips it, the ice tinkling. It’s probably poison, but the scent is intriguing. My jangled nerves are desperate for a drink—like next level desperation—but I’m not about to let him win whatever this game is. So I clamp my lips shut and stare dead-eyed, straight through him, his eyes much too tender as they look back at me. I allow the booze to dribble over my chin and onto my lap as he raises it. I smile through the expensive mess, channelling my best asylum patient.

“I would never love a man like you.” As he removes the glass and rights himself again, I get a taste of the delicious gin. “You are way too into yourself,” I spit, and liquid lands on his trousers.

I feel the searing heat before I register what’s happened. He’s backhanded me and not spilled a drop of the gin while he did it. Wow, it’s been a few years since I was last hit properly and my cheek throbs. Now we know what kind of man he really is.

“Oh, I don’t fuck around, sweetheart.” His voice hits a sinister tone. “I’ve played *Mr. Nice Guy* for long enough. Open. Your. Fucking. Mouth,” he says. Squeezing my cheeks so tightly that his fingers jut into my teeth, tears rain down my face, and he tips the glass again. This time, I allow the alcohol to wash through my mouth, stinging the cuts inside, and I swallow every last drop with greed.

You deserved to be hit, you worthless pile of toxic waste. Stop back chatting him and shut the fuck up.

“Shut up,” I yell at my shadow. He slides his hand to grasp my chin with an inquisitive look in his eye. Leaning in to kiss me, his groan wraps around my mouth. I unravel in his grasp, not able to pull away, a magnetism reaching between us and then slamming us together. How is it possible to be both repulsed and aroused? How does this stranger manage to generate completely new synapses in my brain every time we collide?

“I love your brand of deranged, Hazy. We’re a perfect match. I can’t figure out who you’re even talking to.” I glare into his eyes. I’m not giving in to this fucker. Chomping into his lip, he doesn’t flinch, just grins as the blood seeps between us as my mouth lingers against his edible lips.

We’re eye to eye now, and I spit on his face. He laughs, wiping his mouth, then backs up to strike my other cheek. I feel alive. Adrenaline rushes through me as I glare at him, and his eyes tell me that this man knows how to do very, very bad things. I probably just made the most monumental mistake of my relatively short life.

I thought I was going to make thirty, but I was wrong. My life will probably end tonight after he's had his wicked way with me. I may be suicidal, but perhaps I didn't think that last action through very well. I'm not sure I want to be murdered.

"You're playing with fire. I'm a dead girl walking and I'm not scared of you. Go ahead, you can kill me if you want. I don't care," I say, licking my lips.

What the fuck is wrong with you? You just decided not to get murdered!

He swivels his head around with a cool stare that reminds me of creepy sideshow alley clowns. Seeming to think about my words carefully, he brings the cool glass up against my burning cheek for a moment. It soothes instantly. He releases me, moving to place my empty glass next to his.

"Good girl."

*B*ANKS

She is so fucking wet for me. I know without even touching her. Jesus Christ. I'm having serious trouble controlling myself here. I can smell her pussy like she's in heat.

My mind spins out into a million different outcomes, and I'm acting crazy around her. I want to slam her so hard from behind. Hearing her cry is like music. Her smudged mascara turns me on. I want to stick my dick down her throat. Now. I want to fuck her until she screams uncontrollably. She's driving me utterly mad. I have no idea how I held off sticking my dick in her tight little pussy when she was tied to that chair. My god! I wanted to rip a hole in her clothes and hammer into her. I had to physically hold myself back from dragging her ass up to my dick height and fucking her straight. I was so restrained; I need a sticker saying, '*Congratulations! You Adulterated Today!*'

I need to fuck her senseless, but I can't hurt her. Not yet.

*H*igh For This - The Weeknd
Rehab - Rihanna

HAZY

I have no idea what he's talking about, but he seems happy with himself, and cuts the ropes off my wrists with two flicks of his knife. When he yanks me up by my hair and marches me across the room, I have no choice but to stumble along with him. My scalp stings as he heaves me flat against the wall, leaning into me with his knife tip at my throat and hard cock against my stomach. He's definitely tall.

"Listen here, Bones. Playing with fire is my favourite pastime." *Bones?* He's calling me Bones now? I do resemble a bag of bones, I guess.

The knife disappears and his fingers slide along my throat, controlling me again while he shows off. My hands claw at his wrist, trying to push him away, but he just smiles at me.

Idiot, you're as dumb as a lobotomised pigeon. You deserve everything that's coming next.

"What makes you think you could be stronger than me? You think you're so in control of your life—bite by bite—because you weigh less than a ten-year-old, but you can't even get yourself out of a sticky situation." He's right. I'm a weak,

pathetic child-woman who is completely unable to protect herself from an attacker.

His cold blade draws its way along my arm now, and I shiver with a strange kind of lust, before he hides it back in his boot.

“So many pretty scars to be seen here. I want to study them all. Know about them all. I’m obsessed. Where is this one from?” he asks, running his fingers across raised flesh. Goddamn it, he has such a provocative smile. It makes me forget where I am for a minute.

Dragging his palm up my thigh again, he pushes my panties aside and glides his fingers along my pussy. I don’t even have a chance to react. I don’t even know if I want to. He laughs, actually laughs out loud, when he feels my secret arousal, then licks my deceit off his fingers and grips my throat tighter with his other hand. Faster than it had happened, he releases me and swaggers back across the room to pour another drink.

“You taste like candy, babydoll, and I do have a very sweet tooth.” Banks leaves me there dripping. I’m embarrassed that I didn’t know what kind of a man I was dealing with.

“Um,” I mutter, mortified. I wobble on shaky legs back to the chair, grateful to sit down again. “What do you want from me?”

“I want you to stop being such a selfish, ungrateful little bitch and have the drink I offered you. And answer this, is that scrap of lace wet for me and me alone? Have you been dreaming about my cock jammed to the hilt inside you? Or about my weapon lodged in your throat?”

My last brain cell kicks into gear, and I struggle to stay upright. I’m dizzy, gasping for breath as I fight the need to pass out. I’m humiliated by his accurate assumptions about the state of my underwear.

God, you’re such a trollop. You’re begging for it.

“I want you to stop your suicide mission. I need you alive.” His eyes pierce me like an iron hook extracting a brain.

“You’re mine now, and I look after my dolls.” At the sight of him walking towards me again, holding an even larger knife this time, my pussy pulses with increased desire. What’s wrong with me?

He should fuck you with the handle of his big knife. He should watch the blood drip from between your legs.

He pushes the tip against my flesh, and I stare at my skin where the metallic point creates an indent. Something sexual jolts right through me, and I jump in my seat. I stare at a little drop of blood that is left where the knife had been, swirling over my black ink and white skin, before meeting his eyes.

“No more cutting. If anyone is going to slice you open, it’s going to be me. Got it? And no more purging. The only thing you’ll be choking on now is my cock.” My thighs clench unwillingly at his words. Swallowing roughly, his gaze moves down to my mouth with an odd kind of look.

“God, you’re such a dick,” I mutter. How can one guy be so pretentious? I glance around the room, trying to map my escape.

“Oh, don’t do that! I thought we were just getting cosy in here!” he says, his voice lowering an octave, sounding scary. “You’ll never get away.”

A shiver runs through me, and I slump back in the chair. He’s right. Severe weariness and nausea washes through me, and I suddenly collapse from the chair to the floor.

Stupid woman, what gives you the right to expect him to treat you fairly.

Everything goes dark before I come to, curled in the foetal position on the hard, cold floor. I can’t control the sobs tearing from my throat. Around me, I hear movement, muffled chatter and footsteps, but I’m in my own head and nothing external registers in my brain. Every part of me hurts, and I can’t make out any words.

Wracking great waves of despair flood out of me as I consider my current situation, and I hear doors open and close. Someone pokes me with another needle, then everything

softens around me. A pair of strong arms picks me up and places me into a chair. A handkerchief is pushed into my hands, and I glance up through tear-stained lashes to see a small, golden blonde woman hovering above me. Next to her is the brute who placed me in the chair.

“Wipe your face,” she whispers.

I wipe my eyes, choking on sobs. My throat is so itchy, I’m desperate for water, and I notice it’s a wheelchair they have placed me in. I glance around and the boss man seems to be gone. Thank fuck for that. I can’t deal with him for one more minute.

“Stay in the chair,” the blonde woman tells me. I can’t be bothered fighting anymore. I just nod through another rising tide of emotion and rest my head in the crook of my elbow. She wheels me off into the unknown.

*B*ury a friend - Billie Eilish
Mad House - Rihanna

HAZY

I'm swirling underwater again, my feet bound together. I'm tied to a car, and it's pulling me down to the dark depths. A body shoots toward me from above, feet first, concrete attached to their ankles.

CRACK!

"Oowww, fuck!" I cry, cradling my head in my hands.

I come to, jolted from my dream as my head hits the bedside table and I sprawl ass over tit on the floor. Why did I fall out of bed? I haven't done that since I was a kid. Where the hell am I? Whose bed is this? Oh fuck, not another black-out one-night stand.

The sky outside the window is lavender, so dawn must be on its way. My head throbs like I've had a massive night partying with too many cigarettes. I want to vomit and drink a litre of water at the same time.

A wet snout nudges my hand, and I jump about four feet into the air. When I stop shitting myself, I sink my fingers into the comforting doggy fur. Memories bombard me.

After the arrogant prick was done using me as his amusement last night, a woman had briskly wheeled me into this room and locked me in. I heard the key in the lock and checked it myself; it wouldn't budge. I passed out quickly after crying into the pillow; too tired to even search the ensuite for a razor when I relieved myself. I need to suss out escape routes.

This room is a decent size, with parquet flooring and Persian rugs. The antique wrought-iron bed is covered with indigo-coloured linens. A silk screen stands against one wall, a black-and-white abstract nude hangs on another. Sheer curtains are framed by velvet drapes and an upholstered armchair is tucked next to a simple writing desk.

Thud. Thud. Thud.

Reality creeps in, and I remember I'm being kept hostage at a madman's house. Why aren't I panicking? I raise my hand to the back of my neck and feel the collar, now warm against my skin. I'm nothing more than a dog to him. What, is he going to microchip me next? I wouldn't be surprised. I rub my cheek and leg, recalling how I gathered all these injuries yesterday.

Thump. Thump. Thump.

What is that racket? I can't work out whether the sound is coming from inside my skull or outside the room. I drag myself to the window on my hands and knees, and exhale at the vast ocean panorama lying before me. Dawn cracking the horizon, purples and oranges and the white sands of a distant headland.

I'm going to be sick—*wait*—no, I'm not. I swallow and notice that the black dog was fairly quick to jump on the bed and take my spot. Curling up with his snoot on the pillow and grunting in satisfaction.

I follow the thumping noises with my eyes to find Banks and the ginormous black guy—Commando, or whatever his real name is—working out down below. An external covered patio area to the left of my view juts out from the main

building, and it looks like a complete gym's worth of equipment in there.

Commando holds the punching bag for Banks, who is kicking the absolute shit out of it, hopping around and taking another few kicks. He's wearing black shorts and an old band t-shirt.

There's a Middle Eastern looking guy whose body is half covered in ink; he has short dark hair and a moustache goatee combo. He's wearing only short black shorts, and is leaning against a gym bench, lifting a huge dumbbell up and down as his hips hypnotise me. A black woman is doing sprints and lunges and practising with some kind of stick weapon thingy on the grassy area directly in front of my room. Past her is the lawn running all the way to the clifftop. I watch the woman as she moves like a fucking cat. She is small, but I would bet a lethal weapon. She blends into the dawn's eeriness as she flies around like a ninja, kicking and stabbing the air.

Where the hell am I? What is this place?

I cringe as I remember Banks' fingers between my damp thighs. How ashamed I felt, how everything smelled of my pussy, and he knew it. I was so obviously wet while being nauseated by his words. It was a strange combination of emotions. I touch the collar again and remember the moment it was attached to my neck. He thinks I'm his slave.

Well, we know he doesn't want you for your body, fat, bogan slag. He could get any woman he wants.

He's lifting weights now, the big guy spotting him, and they look up to catch me staring at them from my window. I dive onto the bed as I groan into the dog's fur.

This is ridiculous. I need to call June or Xanthe. Someone needs to tell me I'm not clinically insane. I feel as though this is a prank, one of those scenarios where a complicated set of events happens to gaslight the person and make them lose their mind. Or, I'm actually in a mental asylum, finally gone off the rails completely and strapped to a bed, high on prescription meds.

I poke around the bathroom and find zero blades. Of course. He thinks I'll kill myself. After showering and drinking about a litre of water from the tap, I brush my teeth with a new toothbrush and ponder what to do next. I apply some lotion to my face—which is oddly the same brand as I use at home—and find my medication here in a clear plastic container. Ones for nausea mostly at this stage, but I've got a feeling that's about to change.

After my new morning routine, I realise I'm in desperate need of coffee. But I think twice because I don't know how to get it and I can't escape this room anyway.

Wrapping a towel around me, I then head back to the bedroom. I rifle through the bookshelf just to see what his tastes are like, but I realise he's loaded it especially for me. It's stacked with eating disorder memoirs. Nice touch, mate. As if that's going to cure me. I run my fingertip along a few classic novels and other crime books. Some dark romance and even some current Mortuary Science journals. Who the fuck is this guy?

I try the door again to still find it locked. Flopping back onto the bed, I wallow in my misery for a while. I don't know how long I lie there naked, thinking about having an orgasm. I need a release of some kind, and all my usual outlets are unavailable. Booze, blades, even caffeine. I try to go back to sleep, but my mind is racing, so I get up again and start doing some squats and lunges to pass the time.

I'm puffing from exertion when I hear footsteps outside my door. I dive for the towel I'd left on the bed. A key jangles the lock, then Banks sticks his head into the room. He stares at me as I hold the towel around myself. His hair is damp, face flushed, water bottle and phone in hand.

“Drop the towel,” he orders, his eyes devouring all of me simultaneously.

“Huh?” I ask, confused. He gets to me in four strides and rips the towel straight off me and flings it across the room. I freeze after my hand gets ripped away from the towel violently. I can only stare at him, completely naked. He is

standing over me now as I breathe heavily, and electricity bristles between us once again. It freezes me in place.

“I was very clear. When I tell you to do something, you do it.” He sounds stern, like a father who actually cares about his child, but his fiery eyes are wild, untamed. He drags me into an embrace, my skin touching his sweaty clothes and I try to get away from him. I notice a small red mark on his lip where I bit it last night. Good.

“No exercise, Hazy. I mean it. I didn’t say it last night, so I’ll say it now. Stop the squats. I know every damn trick in the anorexic book. Meet me in the dining room in twenty minutes. Breakfast.”

“The fuck?” I mutter, then breathe in the next sentence silently. How did he know I was exercising anyway?

“I want to go home,” I say matter-of-factly as I wriggle out of his grasp and move across the room naked to pick up the towel.

I want to turn inside out. I want him to turn me inside out. I fling it up in front of my tits, and I have a train of thought that falls very suddenly into hallucinations. My body is literally turning itself inside out. All the soft tissue and blood pulsing as I touch my own innards. And flames fall around, scorched flowers and red ash falling from the sky. This is hell. Except I don’t believe in hell. Hell is a Christian concept, and I don’t subscribe to that nonsense. I snap out of it to realise Banks is staring at me appreciatively again.

“Of course you do. That’s a completely normal response, but that doesn’t mean it’s gonna happen. Ever. So get dressed and meet me downstairs. I’m jumping in the shower. Come on, Shade,” he calls to the dog, who huffs and jumps off the bed. He closes the door, but I don’t hear it lock.

I find the wardrobe is stocked with an array of new clothes in my size and a few sizes larger. Mostly soft leggings, t-shirts, and hoodies, but a few pairs of jeans, dresses, and other nicer garments. Boots, shoes, slippers all lined up. I guess he’s expecting me to leave this room at some point. I run my

fingers across the loungewear, all cosy options and all brands I've bought in the past. I shouldn't be surprised.

I choose some Black Milk galaxy leggings, a comfy black linen t-shirt, and some Docs. I'm not even going to think about how he knows my shoe size. Or why every product in the bathroom was identical to the ones I have back at home.

Gulping water from the tap again, I purge it, then brush my teeth. I step up to the window, and startle a crow who has been sitting on the wrought-iron railing. It caws loudly at me and flaps back to the forest beyond.

It's such a pretty spot here. Let's see where this morning takes me.

*R*eady for the Sky (Live at Bakehouse Studios) -
Budjerah

Like You Do - Ramsey

Mad Woman - Sevdaliza

HAZY

I open the door and peek into a hallway. I can't remember much of that wheelchair ride last night. I was probably dissociating the entire time. I was somewhere else entirely. I'm not sure what I expected this place to look like, but I wasn't expecting huge antlers and horns aloft on the walls.

Tiptoeing down the hall, I follow muffled voices. I see a grand staircase winding down to a large entrance foyer. The wall of the staircase is decorated with framed and mounted scorpions and spiders. Nice collection. I see the front door—or should I say, double doors—flung wide open and I inhale the salt air. I could make a break for it.

Then Mr. Suit would appear out of nowhere and jump me again. No thanks.

This place must have had a couple of renovations over the years, but it's now a sleek and airy piece of architecture. Fresh and clean and completely unlike the man who apparently owns

it. I swallow the bile that rises and touch the warm metal collar around my throat, fingering the heart-shaped lock.

You deserve to be raped, you know? To be used like the promiscuous racoon you are.

Who the fuck says that to anyone? Who the fuck wishes anyone would get raped? Jesus Christ, how does my brain come up with this shit? Is that actually me talking? Or some sinister brainwashing I've undergone at some point in my life. I'm still not entirely sure that I'm not in a coma. This drives me insane!

I manage to push the intrusive thoughts aside and descend the stairs. As I reach the bottom, I'm only metres from the doors, but I step toward the voices instead and into an empty, formal dining room. I pass through this room into a large conservatory kitchen. It juts out to the side of the manor house and lets the green from the outside in, with its giant glass walls. The entire space overlooks the gym and wattle trees beyond. And, of course, that stunning turquoise ocean.

The early morning sun blasts in sideways, and I squint my eyes as I finally see Banks and some others gathered around a huge island bench. They are sipping coffee and scoffing down breakfast food. As I smell the bacon and eggs, I physically dry heave. His eyes lock with mine as I hover with my little pre-vomit display in the doorway.

“Leave us, will ya?” Banks says to his company, irritation crossing his features, but his eyes don't leave my body. To the side, I see another area with more glass, huge sofas, and doors opening into a courtyard. There are tons of dogs out on the lawn, growling and playing with each other and running around the huge open space.

The other people grab their plates as directed—piled with a variety of eggs, bacon, spinach, avocado, and toast—and the fit-looking black chick I spotted on the lawn before winks at me and smiles. They move as a pack out into the sunshine and settle themselves around a wooden BBQ table.

Cockatoos squawk overhead, and I can hear some swallows in the eaves of the house. The bushland across the

grass reminds me that at least I'm still in Australia. These fuckers didn't stick me on a private jet. A few laughs and chatter start up again, and I've been forgotten. Must be completely normal to see a new girl here every morning. With that thought, I start to sweat. Banks stays seated and pulls the chair out next to him.

"Sit."

"Not a fucking dog," I mutter. He smiles around a forkful of scrambled eggs. I move to the chair, bending my knee and sitting on my foot, jamming my hands up under my armpits.

"What do you want with me?" I sound like a bitch, but fuck him.

"Don't stress. I'm not gonna bite you..." he says with a grin. "Today." My heart is racing, and my palms are clammy. I'm petrified he's going to force me to eat, and not only that, but forcing me to eat food that isn't on my safe list will really tip me over the edge. That is the most terrifying thing I can possibly imagine. Being force fed something I am scared of. I honestly don't care if he backhands me again—I could actually even get into that if I was turned on enough—but forcing me to eat? Just kill me right now. I start looking around the table for a steak knife or something that I can use to slit my own throat.

"Please... just let me go," I plead. He spreads some avocado on toast, and I jump at the quick movement. Could I deal with eating avocado on toast? A magpie warbles outside the kitchen door, and I relax a little.

"I've got your safe list from the clinic, don't worry. So, do you understand why I've brought you here yet?" he asks, before taking a huge bite of toast.

"You mean, other than the fact you're an actual psychopath?" I side-eye him. "Take me home."

"Really?" He laughs. I shake my head, frowning. *Fuck this guy and his god complex.* How the fuck should I know what's going through that degraded skull of his? I need to pee again.

“D’ya want me to tell you?” he asks, swallowing and smiling at me. I nod, trying my hardest not to roll my eyes dramatically, and I turn away from his plate just in case I can’t help myself. “Do you recognise me?” He licks his knife, eyes smiling at me. *Oh god. That tongue.* I clear my throat.

“Yeah, from the clinic,” I say. I don’t want to admit I remember him from thirteen years ago. The obscured memory of how I felt in that man’s presence. He takes another bite of toast and chews.

“And before that?”

“What the fuck are you on about?” I should rein in the cockiness, but he infuriates me so much. I shift uncomfortably in my chair.

“You might not want to admit it, but I know you remember me. We shared something that day, and you just ran off! Fuck me, I searched for you...” He huffs a tormented sort of laugh, but I catch a fleeting pained expression cross his face. “I fucking looked everywhere.” His eyebrows gather together as he searches my eyes for a hint of recognition.

I can’t pretend any longer. We did share something that day and something inside me softens when I remember how I felt in the rain with him towering above me. Like I wanted to step in for a cuddle and have someone protect me for once in my short life. His smile grows, and he pushes his plate away. Leaning back with a satisfied smirk, he clasps his hands over his stomach.

“*Ding ding ding!* Cogs’re turning now!” he says, beaming. I nod.

The truth is, I have wondered about him for years too; the sight of any big brown guy devolved into days of hopeful abandon. Days of wanting to feel held and safe. He motions to a woman lurking in the shadows—the one from last night in a skimpy latex maid’s outfit—and she clears his plates away quietly with a downcast gaze.

We sit in silence for a few minutes, and I tap my fingernails on the tabletop. He sips coffee and the maid slut

returns with a small bowl of oatmeal and a spoon. She efficiently sets it in front of him and places a black coffee in front of me. She curtsies, then disappears, and I take a sip. It burns my mouth, but the caffeine hit is worth it. He's going to force me to eat those oats, I know it. My mouth goes dry and my stomach drops. I think I might shit myself without control.

"No, thanks," I say, staring at the food and leaning back in my chair, pretending to be fine. "And where is the bathroom?" He ignores my question and takes the spoon. Oatmeal is on my safe list, but I'm terrified that this is all out of my control. What's hidden in the oats? How many calories per mouthful? Was it made with milk or water? After dipping the spoon into the food, he pauses as it dangles above the bowl. Another chill rushes through me, and I clench my sphincter. I'm going to poo in my pants, and I'll be fucking mortified. Especially in front of him.

"You're here because I know about all the skeletons in your closet, and this is the safest place for you right now," he says, as though he believes it. "Well, I know almost everything; still unclear as to why you were covered in blood that day, but we'll get there eventually. Baby steps, baby."

"You have no idea about me. You got some files from the clinic, and you think you understand me?" My heart hammers away as I roll my eyes freely. I feel like a petulant teen.

"I've been obsessing over you since that day in Melbourne. I dream about you every time I jerk my cock. When I saw you at that clinic, looking all lost and skeletal, I got your data. Pursuit in progress." Alarm bells and sirens wail in my head as disgust rises in my throat. Red flags wave madly, and my entire body thrums.

"What do you mean? You've been stalking me?" Obviously, he knew my health status and address, but what else does he know about me? A deep laugh rolls through his chest; he's enjoying watching me squirm. Asshole.

"Stalk is such a cool word, isn't it? I do like to call myself a voyeur. Stalk, research, buy. Call it what you like, but it's done, and now you're here without too much hassle. So far." I

focus on my trauma counselling and close my eyes and start some controlled breathing.

This man stalked you? Bullshit. He should just kill you and put everyone out of their misery.

I can hear him talking as my interior world tilts on its axis.

“I’ve studied every skerrick of info available on you,” he says, grabbing my wrist. “If it’s public record, or even private, I’ve got it. I know you starve yourself, cut yourself up like a sashimi chef.” He drags his thumb over some keloid scarring on my wrist. I yank it away. “You’re suicidal. I still don’t know why, or where you came from that day, though I’ve imagined infinite scenarios. I’m going to save you from yourself, Hazy Vale, so that I can finally have you to myself.” I press my lips together and shake my head softly. My breath lingers in my mouth.

“What the fuck? Who do you think you are?... Don’t answer that...” I say, chuckling. “You probably do think you’re god and this place is your cult centre.” This guy’s a fucking megalomaniac. “Even the best shrinks in the system can’t save me from myself, and they’ve been trying for years. What makes you think you’re the man for the job?”

He laughs, and in one smooth movement grabs the back of my neck and my jaw falls open. Shoving a spoon of sweet porridge into my mouth, I gag around it. He grins maniacally. It tastes like cinnamon and honey, but I spit it out purely on principle. I don’t let anyone tell me what to eat. Ever.

“Yes. I’m your god and you’re mine. And, it’s because I care about you, that’s why,” he says, dropping the spoon and cleaning me up with a napkin. He kisses my forehead before releasing his sharp grasp on my neck. A shiver of quiet relief runs through me from the point of contact of his lips. Something inside me calms. “Those people see you as nothing more than a challenge; a number, an intellectual anomaly. There’s no urgency in their work when they’re treating you. If you die, you die. They move on to the next patient.”

“Can’t argue with that,” I say with a nod.

“Here, you will hand over all your decisions to me. I know what’s best for you. You need someone else to steer this turbulent ship you’ve built for yourself. Do what I say, when I say, and I know I can help you. I know it. I’ve done it before, just look around. From now on, just pretend you’ve been admitted to an inpatient clinic. That will probably be the best way to approach things here. I have access to anything you need, professionals on the payroll. Money is no object. As I’ve said, I like fixing my broken dolls.” He points to the maid in the corner. I take another sip of my coffee.

“That’s nice for you. But what if I don’t want to get *fixed*?” I ask. “What if I don’t want you? I know I’m fucked in the head—there is no debate about that—but at least I’m fucked on my own terms,” I say, tucking my black-and-white legs up under my chin, boots on the chair. “And I don’t hurt anyone else with my lifestyle choices.”

“Really? You think drunk driving can’t possibly hurt anyone? You think you can’t fuck up at work and ruin a family’s life at their lowest ebb?” I stare at him over the cup.

“Fuck off.”

“You’ve had long enough to sort your shit out, Hazy. You’re nearly thirty, for Christ’s sake. You had your chance, it’s mine now.” He dips the spoon in the oats again and brings it to my lips.

“Now, lick.”

I give him a savage death stare.

“I’ll vomit all over you.”

“Ooh, you’re gonna be so much fun when you’re gagging around my dick.”

“Fuck you,” I bite out, turning away and licking the oats he’s smeared over my lips. I am actually ravenous, and when I turn back, he’s observing my every move.

“See, that wasn’t so hard, was it?”

“Yes. I think I’m going to be sick,” I say as I savour the honey on my lips.

“I don’t care.” Gripping my chin, he pulls me towards him. With the other hand, he brings a spoon to my lips, and I snap my jaw shut. He chuckles as he smears it all over my mouth, then all over my chin, before licking it off me. When he lets go of my chin, I wipe his spit off with the back of my hand, eyeballing him furiously.

“Why are you doing this to me?” I say, wiping my hand on a napkin.

“Eat the fucking food. I don’t have time for this bullshit. Do as you’re told.” He brings another spoon up to my lips, but I shut my eyes tight and cross my arms.

“Fine,” he says, throwing the spoon back in the bowl with a loud clatter. “Do whatever you want.”

“Boss, can I have a word?” a man says from the doorway. How many different lackeys does this guy have?

Banks rises, nodding, then folds his napkin and drops it on the table. I stare at the napkin, but I feel his eyes burning a hole through me. The guy lingers in the doorway and Banks grabs my chin again, forcing me to look up at him. My chin is going to be bruised by tonight.

“You can play this your way, but you’re not leaving here any time soon. There’s an easy way to exist here, and a hard way. Your choice.” He shrugs as he squeezes me tight, then walks over to join his mate at the door. “A tube will be in your imminent future if you don’t comply.”

“Wait!” I call as he walks away from me. “My phone! My work will wonder where I am. My friends will call the cops,” I say, knowing it’s true. We have each other’s backs, and if I go missing, they will know quickly.

“You’re under my care now, so you have to trust I’ve predicted every possible outcome,” he says as he continues through the doorway. “I know a lot of people. I’ll contact them.”

“I bet you will, asshole.” I lean my elbows on the table and look around miserably as he leaves the room. The energy shifts as he walks away, and I hear their mumbled

conversation fade into the distance. Surely, I should admit to myself that I'm intrigued about this whole perplexing scenario. Do I even want him to help me, or do I just deep down love my fucked-up life? Is my self-destructive behaviour merely self-preservation? A way to avoid feeling anything at all?

I sip the coffee quietly—it's actually really good coffee—and stare at the plate of porridge he shoved in front of me. What the hell am I supposed to do now? I don't wonder for long because a young woman glides through the doorway and sits in the seat next to me. Her long red hair smells like flowers, and the freckles against her translucent skin are enchanting. She's like a real-life pixie or sprite.

"May I make a suggestion?" she asks, leaning in close and picking up the spoon. "Just do whatever he says, whenever he says it. It's easier in the long run, trust me. He always gets his way." She loads up my spoon and coaxes me to eat a little. "I know how hard this part is, believe me. I've had the tube plenty of times too. But his bizarre methodology works," she whispers, getting me to eat a bite of the sweet oats. I swallow it like it's a lump of charcoal.

"I guess you're one of these *broken dolls* too?" I ask, drinking more coffee to wash down the food. She smiles as she loads up another spoon, and I figure I should introduce myself. She's nice enough. "I'm Hazy."

"I know who you are. Everyone knows exactly who you are. We've been getting memos. I'm Swallow," she says, eyes dancing.

"Oh, I love your name! A memo... about me? What do you do here anyway?"

"I do whatever Banks chooses each day. I'm in service to him; one of his many slaves. He does love his food, and I enjoy cooking, so I'm usually in the kitchen. I have everything I need right here," she says, smiling with pride. "You might think he's a bit harsh, but I like him."

"Hmmmff," I grunt. "Just a bit harsh?" I shouldn't trust her in the slightest; she's his literal slave, for fuck's sake. Does this delicate creature before me think that backhanding an

innocent woman is *a bit harsh*? But something inside me does like her. Her eyes seem kind and genuine.

I take the spoon from her hand and force down a couple more mouthfuls. I am hungry, but nausea usually wins the battle between hunger and vomit.

“That’s Rosetta,” Swallow whispers softly through unmoving lips as the other woman struts back into the room, hips swaying. “Bitch thinks Banks is in love with her.” Swallow grins with an *as if* look in her eye.

“She’s a fucking bitch,” I mutter under my breath. “She’s the one who locked me in last night.”

“Come on, Hazy, finish that food now, and I’ll take you back to your room,” Rosetta says in a sing-song tone. I hate her already. Swallow glances at me sideways as she tidies some crockery and heads to the kitchen area.

*S*mall Town Witch - Sneaker Pimps

BANKS

She's such a fucking brat! Fuck me.

I didn't expect she'd backchat so much, thought I'd scare her into compliance, but it doesn't seem to be working out that way. I love a good brat like the rest of them, but this could become tedious if I don't rein her in quickly. Could be a bit of fun, though...

I had to stop myself from running my hands over her face to feel those scars at my fingertips. The ones on her wrists are so beautiful. I got around it by grabbing her jaw, which is close enough for now. But fuck me, getting her healed will be worth it in the long run. I can still taste her on my tongue. I sniff my fingers, but sadly, the scent of her is gone.

"Make sure she eats something. I don't care what it is," I tell Rosie. "Stock her bar fridge with some of the foods on the safe list. No booze if she asks for it. Be nice, but if she refuses, call the doc to come in. I could be out of town for a few days. Just don't let her out of that room, even if she begs you. Unless it's for a feeding tube."

"Yes, Sir," she says, smiling sweetly.

"I mean it, Rosetta. It's your job to watch her. I trust you."

“Yes, Sir. Thank you.”

I head downstairs to the tunnels to meet the boys, satisfied that Rosie is competent enough with such a large responsibility. I have to have faith that I’ve trained her properly. Now I’ve gotta go and sort some shit out down in Victoria. Keep the money flowing into my offshore accounts and leave some traitorous skulls rolling in my wake. I don’t have the patience to deal with a woman today when I’ve got so much to do. After a quick debrief, I head out, and Zane’s waiting for me in the Wagen with my luggage already in the boot. We leg it to the airport with fifteen minutes to spare, and he pulls into the drop-off zone.

“See ya tomorrow!” he calls out the window. I throw the leather overnight bag across my shoulder and slam the rear door.

“Catch ya, brother.”

Turning, I watch as he slips the vehicle back into traffic. *Brother*, that’s not just a platitude, I mean it with integrity. We go a long way back. I trust him with my life. We speak the same language: Brotherhood. Loyalty, bloodlust, and no fucks given in our pursuit of our own personal freedom.

I know without a doubt nothing gets Zane’s blood pumping more than riding the wind. His pride and joy is his 2018 Candy Apple custom Softail. He spends hours babying that machine and has customised every inch. When that Milwaukee Eight fires into life and the roar reverberates off the stone walls of the castle, well, I’ve even been known to take a second look. You can feel your ribs rattle with the throb of that engine.

Dressed in his Rebs, a leather vest, and grease-covered denims, he certainly gets ladies frothing. It must be the combo of a tough guy covered head to toe in tats, handling 2147 CCs of rumbling iron like it’s nothing at all. This whole ensemble he’s got going down literally drives the women insane. I don’t get it, personally, but it’s pretty fuckin’ funny to watch them.

They first notice the bike, then when he stands up, it’s his height, then when the helmet comes off and he ties his man-bun, it’s over. They see the shaved sides/beard/tats combo, and

they're peeling off their knickers for him and opening their mouths. Never short of a blowie, our Zaney-boy. He doesn't even have a pussy pad for those rare lucky chicks who get to ride with him. If they want the ride, then they have to sit their sweet little asses on the back guard and hang on like fuck. Zane reckons the vibration alone is enough to get their pussies primed and soaking wet for him to plough.

The domestic terminal is busy, and people swarm around like roaches; darting here and there with sheer bloody-mindedness. One thing I *do* miss about the military is its organisation; the routine and procedures kept my mind in check. Now I have to set my own rules.

Ugh, I hate people!

I'm not exactly forgettable, so when I fly, I like to play my cards right and keep things inconspicuous. The boys and I rarely travel together because of that; three six-foot-pluses, covered in tats, and built like brick shithouses tend to attract a bit of attention. This game is all about stealth and incognito, so I fly alone: peak hour, cattle car, faded All Blacks hoodie. I rush through check-in and finally board.

Reclining in my cramped-as-fuck seat, I pop on the headphones, crank up some *Clutch*, and tune out the rabble. The flight is full, with some kids wailing down the back, and an old bloke next to me sipping a can of bourbon, who's completely engrossed in his book. Good! Ninety minutes to myself, and then boots to the ground.

Shouldn't take long to straighten everything out tomorrow. Some disgruntled clients need my personal touch, then I can head back to Hazy with my reputation still intact. Haven't even landed at Tullamarine yet, and I'm already dreaming of getting back to my girl.

Once we land, I get my bag from the overhead locker and head straight out to meet Max. He's at the pickup zone with music blaring, having arrived this morning and already collected a Jeep.

"Hey, mate," I yell over the guitars as I put my bag in the back seat.

“How are ya, boss?” he shouts, turning the volume down.

“Not bad,” I say, sitting in the front and throwing my phone in the centre console. He’s got *Ozzy* blaring, so I happily lean back in the seat and relax as we join the slow-moving traffic and chat about *Black Sabbath*. Our destination is about an hour, depending on traffic, from the airport, and the Jeep eats the kilometres easily.

The city bustle fades as suburbia morphs into rolling hills with hay bales and livestock. Vineyards boast lush greens and yellows, which stretch as far as the eye can see. Fleet inherited this little slice of what she calls nirvana, years ago, and it’s been a real sanctuary for her ever since. I stay here when I’ve got shit to do in Melbourne and need a few extra days to myself. I love the bush walks around here, and Fleet has a sweet home gym setup that keeps my ADHD happy. She’s also got some targets set up out the back so we can get some sharpshooter practise in.

The unsealed driveway is about two kilometres long, and we pass some well-fed cows. I open and close a couple of gates until we rattle over the last cattle grid and pull up behind the old farmhouse. Fleet doesn’t live here full time, she prefers to stay with us in Sydney, so she has a guy who runs the cattle on her land in exchange for mowing the lawns and bringing in the junk mail. No one bothers her when she’s here because... well, they’ve met her! No one messes with Fleet; and if they do by mistake, they don’t a second time.

There is a small airfield just outside of town too, which has come in handy on several occasions. The whole setup is ideal. No one would know it, but Fleet has installed a security system that records from the moment anyone pulls into the front gate, right up to every room inside the house. Built covertly behind the wine cellar is a room custom-made for business. Let’s just say that the drains are deep, and no one can hear you scream.

Fleet is already here and gets some fresh towels out for us as Max and I get stuck into some Chinese takeaway; in between mouthfuls of spicy lamb Biang Biang, the three of us lay down the plans for tomorrow.

“When Zane arrives in the morning, we’ll go and pay Mario a visit. He’ll be at the warehouse, with his minion expecting to check over the next haul of AR 15s. Fleet can go in quietly and prep them for us, since they will not be expecting her. Then, when they’re bagged and tagged, we’ll bring them back here for a nice little chat.”

“Yep, all set to go here. The van’s got everything we need,” Max says.

“Cool, and I’ve got some Macs down in the cellar,” Fleet adds.

“Sweet. Thanks, guys. Get some rest and see ya at sparrow’s fart,” I say.

Max chucks the empty containers back into the plastic bag, then checks the PIDs and CCTV feeds.

“Night, mate,” he says as he retreats to his room.

Fleet wipes the kitchen as I kick my boots off and relax into the only recliner in the house, a brown velvet number. She’s practical and minimalist; something I love about her. She doesn’t waste time on furnishings and comfort. She’d be happy with a prison bed and a wooden chair.

“Sleep well,” she says as she heads for the bathroom.

I swipe my phone open and tap into the surveillance app in Hazy’s room. She’s lying in bed again, reading a book. My dick twitches, and I touch the screen, imagining the smell of her skin and wishing those skinny legs were wrapped around my head. She pauses from her book and looks up to the ceiling for just a moment, as if she senses me fucking her with my mind.

Man, I resent this greedy fucker for taking me away from her and wasting my time. I feel my jaw clench as my rage twists inside of my stomach.

You’re so fucked, Mario. Hope you’re enjoying a last supper, because tomorrow, you get to feel just how much I hate being dragged away from my girl.

I sip my beer and watch Hazy settle back into her pillows and resume her reading. Good old Shade, I'm glad he's offering her comfort. I watch her for another half an hour as my eyelids get droopy, wondering how she's coping with everything I've done to her. I worry that I'm not there to oversee her care, but I know that she is in good hands.

As she places the book on the bedside table, turns off her lamp, and settles under the covers, I wish her a healing sleep. I wish I could be there with her. Be in her. I can't wait until she's ready for me to absolutely flog her.

Soon enough, Banks. Keep it in your pants, man.

*B*ANKS

“Fuck me, you filthy cunt! Did you just shit yourself? Get over there, you sack of piss!”

I shove the huge minion with my boot. He half crawls, half shuffles, barely making it to the corner, before collapsing in a groaning heap.

“Ugh, reminds me of that guy in Berlin last year,” Max says.

“Fuckin’, gross! Thanks for reminding me, ya cunt,” I reply, laughing at him and wiping my hands on a rag.

My knuckles ache in a satisfying way, and my gaze darts back to Mario. His pretty-boy face doesn’t look so pretty anymore in the glow of the bare fluro bulbs, his hair is all matted with blood, and his stupid white shirt now red.

He’s been a damn great contact for seven years; we had a sweet deal going, and now he’s fucked it. I’m pissed. I imported the firearms, and he bought them in bulk from me, and then distributed them to his clientele for a tidy profit. I have the East Coast market wrapped up, and Mario was one of my best customers. Now I’ve gotta find a new one. He sold to the clubs and rich narcos right across Australia and New Zealand. I don’t want to deal with those guys personally, so it suited me to have a middleman. The arrangement has made

both of us plenty of cash over the years, and then this dumb fucker goes and gets greedy.

Mario struggles to raise his head and look me in the eye in a hilarious act of defiance. Both arms are broken at the shoulder and elbow, and they hang in a useless, twisted mess by his sides.

“What were you thinking, old mate?” He whimpers in answer as I crouch down, level with him. I hear the gurgle as he struggles to breathe through his pulverised nose. “You know I found out about your little betrayal before you even left shore? Tom Santos said you had a brilliant day on his yacht, getting your cock wet and guzzling whiskey by the bottle. I forgot to mention to you that Santos and I go way back, you stupid knob head.” I laugh.

Max kicks the minion in the guts, and Mario remains silent, apart from the wheezing. The scent of fear as it leaches out of his skin incites me and turns me on equally.

“You got cocky, *champ*,” I taunt as I spit on his face. “Telling Santos and the boys from the *Shivs* that I fucked up and that their firearms had gone AWOL... well...” I leave the statement hanging, tut, and shake my head in mock disappointment.

Max reaches into the coals and passes me a branding iron; *ahh, the joys of farm life!* It glows an ungodly lava red. Mario’s good eye bulges out of its socket.

“A birdy let me in on what you’ve been up to,” I say.

“Pleashh, Banks, was a mishunnerstanding,” he splutters through broken teeth. “Fucshhshake, I’ll go... leave... back to the UK. You can haff my product, man, all of it!!! Schwear.” He attempts to get up, but my boot holds his cheek down. He screams out as I push harder.

“Now, what kind of message would that send if I let you waltz on out of here? People will think I’ve gone soft,” I say, grabbing my crotch and laughing. “I *never* go soft, Mario. My dick is as hard as steel for this shit.”

I rub my bulge a few times through my jeans and feel the pre-cum dampen my drawers, before securing his face tighter with my boot. His flesh sizzles and stinks like Hannibal Lector's dinner as I bring the hot cattle iron down onto the skin of his neck.

His screams reverberate around the small brick room, and I push down harder, holding it there. I hear the *crack* of his neck and inhale deeply the sickly-sweet smell of burning flesh. Grinning, I continue rubbing my hard cock. A slight wheeze and whistle of air betrays the fact that he's still alive, and I throw the poker back into the fire. The other dude has pulled himself upright and makes a move to run. Amazing what a bit of fear and adrenaline can do. Just as Max steps into his path and kicks his knees out, my phone shrills.

"What is it, Rosetta?" I bark into the phone.

I wipe the blood off my hands as the minion crumples into a heap and Max stands over him with a knife and axe. I walk out of the cellar and into the cool night air, wandering into the yard and leaning against a rusty old hay baler. The sun has gone, and I can smell smoke burning from a wood fire from the property up the road. The eucalyptus and paperbark trees scattered around are blowing gently on the breeze. There is no pollution out here in the Yarra and the sky is alive with a million stars. Right now, though, they don't impress me. I'm pissed at the interruption, and my anxiety shoots through the roof, wondering whether Hazy is okay.

"Sorry to interrupt, Sir," Rosetta says. "Just thought you'd like to know that Hazel..."

"It's Hazy, god dammit! Jesus Christ, Rosetta, this had better be important. I'm in the middle of something."

"Sorry, Sir. I thought you'd like to know that Hazy has been refusing food all day. She's been obstinate..."

"Enough! Call the doc. Get the tube. Fuck me, what do I pay you for?"

"Yes. Sorry, Sir, it's just that you told me to call you if..."

I hang up on her.

*A*fter Dark - Mr. Kitty

House Of Balloons / Glass Table Girls - The Weeknd

HAZY

My door opens. Again. This bloody maid woman Rosetta is obsessed with me, and Banks is nowhere to be seen.

“What now?” I ask without turning around. I’m sitting at the desk, sketching moths, skulls, and razorblades in an art journal I found. The setting sun beams into pink clouds. It would be a beautiful scene if the circumstances were different. If I were a free woman, this stupid bitch would stop harassing me about eating. She hasn’t let up all day.

Who are you kidding? You’ll never be free. Not from your lunatic self.

“Coffee. Please, Hazy. Will you at least drink some of this?” Rosetta says. “He’ll kill me if you don’t have something in your belly.”

“As if I’d care what happens to you.” I shrug, keeping my back turned. “I don’t even care what happens to myself.” She huffs and nudges me off balance as she places a tray next to me on the desk.

I hear her huff as she turns to leave, then her footsteps, then a lock click. The aroma is rich and nutty, and I salivate. It is a good-looking black coffee, so how could I resist? I've been dying for another one all day.

Well, there goes the nil by mouth protest... can't even last half a day!

Of course my stalker knows how I take my coffee. I bet he's sat watching me in cafes over the last few weeks. Not sure how I feel about that. Has he been outside my window, watching me while I'm at home too? On the one hand, I'm terrified by the lengths this volatile man seems to go to, to get what he wants.

On the other hand...

I slide my finger into the small hole of the teacup handle and relax into the window nook. I wish he was sliding his finger inside me. In any of my holes, really. I imagine myself gagging on his fingers. I imagine him penetrating me with his hard cock. Fuck, I want to see that thing up close, want to study it while I'm on my knees. God, I'm such a slut.

Why do my hormones have to take over when this whole scenario is just so twisted? Why am I fantasising about this guy's dick so much? I mean, it did look sizable, but... I stare out to watch the dusk turn to darkness.

What would I prefer to be doing than sitting here? I don't know. A martini would be nice. Or sipping a martini while that psychotic brown monster licks my pussy to climax. That would be nicer.

Aside from the craziness of the people in this stupid house—the fucking collar strangling me, the bitch of a gatekeeper—it's actually a beautiful place.

The earth's energy feels really good here. I have no idea where I am, but it seems to be far enough out of the city that I can see more stars than I've ever seen before. The water is glowing a strange blue at the shoreline, biolumines-something-or-other.

As I sip the coffee, it's more bitter than I'd usually like, but I can't complain about being locked in this psychological warfare tower. At least I have coffee and the warmth feels good in my throat. The sky continues to darken as I finish the drink and lean back into some cushions, placing the empty cup down on my lap.

I might have a quick nap.

*M*idlife Crisis - Faith No More
Tusk - Fleetwood Mac

BANKS

I see Fleet in the glow of her farmhouse, doing some maintenance as she waits for me to finish with this issue in the shed. I'm just gonna get this over and done with as quickly as possible. I'm gonna walk in there and *PEW PEW PEW* these motherfuckers all over the place. Gotta get back to my girl.

I stomp inside to find the piece of shit sprawled on the concrete floor. Max hands me back my knife, which he's cleaned. I start carving into Mario's kneecaps as though they were the reason the woman I'm obsessed with weighs only 40kg.

I'm not going to let her die right after I find her again.

Stab stab stab.

If she thinks she can have a hunger strike on my watch, she's got another thing coming.

Stab stab.

Jesus Christ, as if I don't have enough to worry about right now. I don't care if they have to pump her with a tube, she's going to start gaining weight right now.

“Ahh, boss?”

I look up to see Max staring at me with an amused look on his face. I realise I’ve been flaying up this guy’s legs so much they are hanging on by sinew. He passed out a long time ago. I take my gun out and shoot him in the face.

“Nighty-night, fucko.”

Next to him lies his minion, decapitated, hands chopped off with flies buzzing around his shit-stained pants.

“Nice one!” I tell Max. “Keep the head on ice.” I laugh, then look back at the fresh carcasses.

“Think you guys are gonna roll me over? No one fucks with me and gets away with it,” I say as I kick them in the dicks and march out the door.

“Sorry, I’ve gotta get home now, brother. Trouble with Hazy. Gonna get Zane to drive us to the airport. Can you organise a cleanup?”

“On it, don’t worry ’bout a thing here. Fleet and I can take care of it—too easy. See ya back at the castle tomorrow.”

*H*AZY

A key turning in my door startles me awake, and in skulks a small man. His pointy nose and too-close-together eyes remind me of a ferret, and not the adorable kind. The snapping-tooth kind.

“Who th’fuck are you? What d’you want?” I slur.

Why do I feel high?

He says nothing and moves to me quickly, picking up my wrist and taking my pulse.

Why can’t I move?

Rosetta pushes the wheelchair through my door.

“Didn’t think it would take long with a scrawny little thing like her,” she says.

“This won’t take long at all. I can get back to my dinner plans with Wendy. Swallow can oversee the feeding bags once the tubes are in,” Ferret Man replies to her.

“C’nt,” I barely mumble.

Oh my god. Cunt, cunt, cunt, she is such a fucking cunt! Why can’t I speak out loud? This is like one of my underwater nightmares. I manage a small grunt and try to get away, but I can’t move.

“On three, two, one...” the man says.

Together, they pick me up by the ankles and under the arms and plop me into the wheelchair. Rosetta pushes me as the man follows behind, and my head rolls to the side, as I'm unable to hold it up. I move my eyes from side to side, recognising the hallway, but I'm freaking the hell out at being unable to move my body.

She brings me to the furthest room down the hall and Ferret Man opens a door, which Rosetta pushes me through. It smells sterile, a white-tiled space, with a dentist style chair in the centre. Examination tables are up against a couple of walls, and various cupboards, drawers, and other medical paraphernalia are scattered about. It looks like an old-fashioned general practitioner's office, except for the chair. It looks as though it's seen some kinky nights rather than years of tooth extractions.

I manage another gurgling sound in the back of my throat.

One huge spotlight shines above the chair and, once again, they move me as easily as a small sack of potatoes, dumping me into the bondage/orthodontist chair. I'm in an upright position, and they don't need to bother strapping me in because I. Still. Cannot. Move.

"Thanks, Rosie," Ferret Man says.

Rosie? Someone likes this hoe enough to give her a nickname?

"No problem, Doctor," she says.

What a suck-up.

She wheels the chair to the corner of the room and stands there, waiting for instructions.

"Aaaagghh," I garble.

Ferret Man takes my pulse again, then scribbles stuff on his clipboard before tapping on the computer.

"These drugs will wear off in a couple of minutes, Hazy." He frowns, preoccupied with something on the screen. "You should be feeling numb already; next a tingling sensation, and then you'll get full movement back." Ferret Man turns off the

computer and turns his attention back to me. “I didn’t want to scare you, but I had to get you in here without any hassle. I hear you’ve been refusing to eat, and Banks won’t stand for that. You are extremely underweight, as I’m sure you’re aware, and some of your vitamin levels are chronically low. Your brain is not functioning at full capacity, and we need to correct that. This shouldn’t hurt you unless you cause a fuss. Do you understand? Blink if you understand me.”

I reluctantly blink.

“Good. Will you obey me, or will we have a problem here? Blink if you will obey.”

As much as I want to punch this shithead square in his rodent face, I blink.

“Very well.”

He shuffles about the room again, humming under his breath, appearing in and out of my vision as he collects things. He’s right; I start getting pins and needles in my fingers and toes, and soon enough I’m wiggling them and moving my arms and head and legs. My first thought is to get up and bolt for the door, but I would face plant, for sure. Plus, there are a million huge thugs living here, so I stay put. He wheels an IV pole over to me, which has a bag of liquid food that looks like a chocolate smoothie.

I’ve done all this before.

Checking my nostril airflow, he looks up my nose with a light before spraying some numbing spray up my nostrils and down the back of my throat. He measures some tubing against my body and smears something that looks like lube on the end of it. Ugh, this is going to be gross, but bearable. He puts one hand behind my head and pushes the tube up my nose—it fucking hurts like a bitch, does every time—and it goes down, down, down, down. I gag and carry on a bit more than I need to, but fuck him! He can deal with my theatrics. He pauses for a minute.

“Rosie. Water, please.”

She passes me a cup of water with a straw.

“When I say swallow, you swallow, okay?”

I close my eyes and do as he says. Before I know it, the tube is inserted, and I’m sitting back with the chocolate thick shake being injected directly into my stomach. Every fucking anorexic’s worst nightmare, but I’m past the point of caring. I just want to curl up and sleep for fifty years. Or maybe, I’ll just never wake up.

“One more thing, and then that will be it for tonight, Hazy. Hold still, just a little sting,” he says before jabbing me in the arm.

“Hey!” I say, rubbing the spot, but I’m too exhausted and nauseous to do anything else about it.

“That was just some B12, nothing to worry about. Rosetta will take you back to your room now. Swallow will keep the bags fresh for you, so you will be receiving 24/7 nourishment, as per my orders. You will feel well again very soon. Any fuss whatsoever from your end, and we will have to restrain you, which I’m sure you will agree is not your preferred scenario?”

I nod in miserable defeat.

“I’ll check in with you tomorrow night. I believe we have a psychiatrist lined up to visit with you in the morning. Please, just do as we say here. Much easier for you. Have a good rest, dear,” Ferret says.

Despite what he’s just done to me, I believe he knows what he’s doing, and he does seem to have some compassion, at least. And with that, he grabs his bag and shuffles out the door.

*H*ooker With A Penis - Tool
Voyeur Girl - Stephen

BANKS

The dogs move together as a pack as we reach the top of the crest. My quads are burning, and I stop to take a drink. I look back toward the castle as the dogs sniff around, pissing on bushes and play-fighting with each other. Stretching my legs out, I think about how I'd love to stretch Hazy's legs out at every fucking angle as I ram my dick into that wet little slit. My dick jerks at the thought, and I rearrange it in my shorts.

"Come on, gang. Home!" I call as I start to jog.

Their yips and barks lead the way as they overtake me and speed across the grass. It's nice to have a run and take stock of how Hazy's been doing. I've been so busy this week, but she seems to be getting along pretty well, all things considered. She hates my guts, but I expected that. Never thought I'd be winning any *Boyfriend of the Year* competitions this early in the game. She needs to heal first, and then I can claim my doll.

And what a perfect doll she's going to be.

I can't wait to run my tongue across her. To sniff every inch of her. To play with her however I like. I can't wait for

her to be mine in every sense of the word. I've been so fucking restrained when it's come to her.

The two psychs have been to see her a couple of times each this week since the tube went in. They have all her files from the clinic and hospital admittances for the last ten years. They've also assessed her themselves and have explained to me that her co-morbid diagnosis makes her a highly complex, long-haul case. Predictably, Hazy minimises everything and defends her behaviours by shrouding them in half-truths and deflections. She's barely spoken about the eating disorder or the drinking, but they've read between the lines and can see through her bullshit.

Luckily, her bloods give us the real picture and thank fuck her results aren't as diabolical as I'd feared. She'll be on B12 injections, calcium, and folate to top her back up. Doc's been keeping a very close eye on her and, surprisingly, there's no physical symptoms of alcohol withdrawal. Thank fuck. I wasn't looking forward to managing that. Between them, they have concluded that she drinks reactively. Not a full-blown alcoholic, which is fucking excellent news, but signs of alcohol dependency. She drinks to calm anxiety, to blunt her feelings, or to black out if she's really suffering. As someone who starves and cuts, it's no surprise that she loves her booze. The shrinks think that a lot of her excessive drinking is environmental.

Well, you and me both, babe.

She has grudgingly let the tube stay in, which is brilliant. Somehow, she's managed to continue with the cutting, but I'll get to that eventually. I have to give her something; I've taken away all her other vices. I've told the doc to do whatever he needs to do. Those fuckers at the eating disorder clinic have lost my annual funding, that's for sure.

As I push myself harder, arms pumping, sweat drips down my back, and my legs feel so heavy. She's been exercising too, and I need to put a stop to that.

I head to the outhouse and dish up the dogs' breakfasts, before heading to the north wing of the castle, which is my

personal space. I cannot get Hazy out of my head, and as a result, my dick is hard again. I beat a quick one out in the shower, the cum washing down the drain. Soon enough, it will be washing down Hazy's throat. After I dry myself, I quickly dress and head down to grab a coffee. I set the cup down on the bench and stare at the livestream of Hazy's room again on my phone.

"Damn it," I mutter to myself. I drag my eyes away from the screen and inhale a deep breath.

Hold it together, for fuck's sake.

I'm losing balance with work and am well aware that I don't give a fuck. Obsession is one thing, but this level of infatuation is new to me. She's pulling me into her abyss, and I don't know if I'm a strong enough swimmer. The business needs my attention and I have to make my presence felt. The wolves will turn on each other if I'm not there to shoot a few shots in the air. I have to pull myself back. Hazy isn't going anywhere—she needs time to recuperate anyway—so I should put my big boss hat on and get back to work. I inhale a long breath and tap out of the surveillance app. She'll still be here tonight.

I rub the heels of my palms against my eye sockets, then scrape my fingers through my hair. The coffee sears my throat, and the bitter burn revitalises me. Just as I drain my cup, Rosetta appears silently, and clears the table, wiping it down.

"Anything else, Sir?"

I wave her off and she retreats, invisible again. Max strides in, all balls and business.

"Morning, boss. Have you got a sec?"

"Yeah, mate. S'up?" I say, leaning forward.

"Just need to clarify those cross-border logistics we talked about. Zane's got the car ready to head to the warehouse if you wanna come. The products are prepped and ready to move, but it would be great if you could give it all your once over. Then it's ready to roll," he says, sculling the last drops of an energy drink.

“Yep,” I agree, giving him a nod as I stand. “Let’s go.”

I put my boots on and lead the way to the car, feeling my focus and self-discipline return. *I’m back, baby.* Smiling as I slide into the back seat, knowing that I can accomplish what I need to for today. I can tick some items off the to-do list and sign off on the final directives.

It’s all about balance, Banksy Boy!

The day is productive, and we power through. Sorting shit out like maniacs. It feels good to be back in the saddle with some focus. Even if it was only for a few hours, I managed to keep myself busy and my mind off the insanely hot woman that sleeps in my downstairs room.

At dusk, the car roars to life and Zane pulls us out into the maddening Sydney peak-hour traffic. The crimson sky and darkening clouds are a relief. Night is coming. Max hits the stereo from the passenger seat to put on *Hooker With a Penis*. He can tell that I need some time to myself. I feel the kick drums throb through my ribcage and shudder up my spine.

As the wrought-iron gates to the castle appear in view, my thoughts snap to Hazy. I swear, no one has been able to get this far under my skin for aeons. Back in my den, I drop some ice into a glass and pour myself a well-earned whiskey. Lighting a Havana, I settle back into the sofa and turn on the video feed. Ahhh, there’s my gorgeous girl! I watch as my reward. This is my time now, and I devour her every breath, every movement, every emotion. I drink in her broken body. *My body.*

I take a puff on the cigar and return it to the ashtray. My hand rests on my cock, and I palm it through my jeans. All I want to do is fuck her pretty mouth, then bend her over and fuck her until her eyes roll out of their sockets. I briefly considered getting one of the slaves up here for a blow job, but the thought does nothing for me. Not even Jade—who can usually get me off the quickest—gets me excited anymore.

I watch Hazy lying on her stomach on top of the covers, her wet hair slicked back, wearing criminally tiny pyjama shorts and a singlet. Shade is asleep on the floor next to her.

Her long, gorgeous, black-and-white legs are kicking back and forth through the air.

This is not helping. Not helping at all. I need another release. I unzip and pull my cock out, laying the phone on the couch next to me and watching her as I slide some pre-cum over the head, the slickness giving me something to thrust against.

I'm so ready to go that as I watch her move, it only takes me a few decent jerks, then a few more, before I'm painfully ejaculating all over my stomach. This is fucking stupid. Why am I still sitting here doing this when she's downstairs?

Hurry up and get better, woman, so I can ruthlessly destroy you again.

*A*ngel Zoo - Phlake
6 Inch - Beyonce, The Weeknd

HAZY

I'm sipping on a chocolate Ensure—wishing it was a gin—and staring down a giant plate of chicken and rice. Since the feeding tube debacle a few weeks ago, I've been on my very best behaviour when it comes to food. The tube came out and I've been eating to keep things running smoothly. I'm pretending to myself that this is just a normal, state-run, in-patient clinic and going with whatever they tell me to do so that I can get out and back to my life.

Though, I'm not sure about the last part here. Strangely, the ten days of the tube did wonders for me. I'd forgotten what it feels like to have proper brain function. I don't feel as nauseous now as I have for the last few years. Well, the metoclopramide has been helping. And if I do what they say, they won't force the tube again.

The weeks have ticked by here at the castle, and I've enjoyed having no responsibilities. For the last decade I've been either working, drinking, hungover, or in the hospital. That hasn't left much time to pursue hobbies. I have time to read and draw here! I've been reading eating disorder memoirs. I love hearing about how the authors grew from

obsessing over every calorie to truly enjoying nutritious meals. I want that for myself, but I'm not sure it's possible.

My moods are better now—I haven't felt so angry—and I only think about killing myself about four times a day, which is good for me. I still hate Banks for forcing me, and I hate that he took the last piece of control that I had over anything. But really, how was my quality of life before I came here anyway? Endless one-night stands, blood, booze, and self-loathing were about all I had in my wheelhouse. Now I feel alive in my skin and my thoughts are much clearer, but I wish I could talk to my friends. What has he done to keep the cops away?

Also, he's so fucking hot and in control of everything and everyone around him, and I'm sure the sex between us would be electric. I can feel it. Envision it. I do want it, but I don't want to let him know that. And I want to know what his cock looks like. Is he circumcised? How big is he, really? I hate that I'm fixated on the idea of his cock. And that I want it in my mouth so badly.

But, you're still a fat, ugly cow, and this man is deranged. Can't avoid that fact. Only a psycho wants you.

My shadow thinks I'm a fat, disgusting pig because I have definitely gained weight. I know because my thighs touch now for the first time in over a decade. For once, I like the way it feels when I gain.

I'm tired, so I decide to have another nap in the most comfortable bed I've ever slept in. I dream I somehow rob a bank with two other women and run off with a sack full of banknotes. When I'm on the run, I realise that I've fucked up, and spend the rest of the dream trying to walk to a cop station to hand myself in.

When I wake up, I yawn and stretch my arms. Switching the lamp on, I think I could really go for a gin and tonic right about now, as it must be after midnight. And I feel vaguely horny. But it's a stronger kind of horny than I usually feel. A kind of horny that can never be satisfied. Not by the anonymous sex I have every week. Not with a vibrator. Not

with a clit sucking vibrator either, and that's saying something.

The castle is quiet of voices, but I can hear music upstairs. I get up, go to the toilet, then jog a few laps of the room—it's hard to stop exercising.

I pause at the fireplace, picking up a fire poker and running the polished metal against my palm. It gives me a fun idea. I switch off the overhead light, so the lamp glows warmly by my bed. Throwing back the covers, I wriggle out of my pyjama shorts, kicking them off before I lie back and exhale. I hold the heavy, brass handle whilst caressing its decorative knob. The ridges and divots promise new sensations, and I suck it into my mouth, leaving a trail of saliva.

Moving it down my body, I run the metal along my clit, starting slow, and gaining speed as the familiar warmth spreads through me and I get a good rhythm going. I start to pant with arousal and a small groan escapes me as I push the first knob of the finial inside myself. It's a good shape, and I angle it toward my G-spot. I spend a while enjoying myself, revelling in the sensual thrill of the illicit.

I picture Banks down at the gym, covered in sweat, his quads bulging against the weight. I picture his face straining when he's above me, pumping his cock inside me. I picture him seeing me in the window, watching him, and he rushes upstairs to come in here and fuck me raw.

Within a few thrusts, I'm teetering on the edge of climax, when I hear a knock at the door and Rosetta calling to me.

"Hazy. Open up. Unlock this door."

"Fuck," I grumble. Great timing.

I withdraw the poker and slip into my shorts again.

I check my phone. It's 1.42am—late for visitors, even by this freaky household's standards.

"Hazy!"

"I'm coming!" I snap.

Bitch. I WAS coming, but you ruined it.

I return the poker to its cradle and unlock the door.

“What?” I snarl at her perfect face.

I can tell she is infuriated; there is a storm brewing in her eyes.

“Banks wants to see you. You know it’s against the rules to lock this door from the inside,” she says.

“What’s he want? It’s late,” I state the obvious.

“How should I know what he wants?” she snaps. “Hurry up.”

I stare down at my silk boxers and singlet, wondering what I should be wearing to a midnight rendezvous with the devil himself. I instinctively want to cover all my scars, but decide not to bother. Grabbing a hoodie, I follow her barefoot through the house, upstairs toward the music, until we reach a room I haven’t seen before. It’s located in a section of the house I haven’t explored. Moody, down-tempo beats hum through the wall and a female vocalist makes love to the microphone.

Rosetta knocks loudly.

“Yep,” comes a shout from the opposite side of the door.

Rosetta opens it, but stands aside so that I can walk through alone. Glancing at her, I walk inside. She pulls the door closed behind me. I struggle to swallow the lump in my throat as I stand just inside, unsure what to do next. This is fucking nerve wracking. It’s dark and the scent of weed swirls with leather and vanilla.

Candles flicker at various points around the room, and as my eyes adjust to the light, I spot a petite, naked woman in the centre. She’s harnessed in shibari rope and floating; suspended to rigging at the ceiling. Her eyes are closed, and she appears quite enraptured.

I notice Japanese features and wonder about her heritage. Her light brown skin is covered in black-work ink. I wonder who her artists are. She looks like an art installation. Horizontally, hooked under her knees, is a thick bamboo pole, around which various parts of the rope are attached. She’s

faced upward, her arms crossed over and tied behind her neck, her legs spread and secured, leaving easy access to her smooth pussy for anyone interested.

“Come in, Bones,” I hear from the shadows at the back of the room.

“Bones,” I whisper to myself. I’ve come to like that nickname.

I see Banks sitting on a low-back leather couch. He’s staring straight at me. His unbuttoned shirt contrasts against his brown flesh perfectly and all those lines of his ink wind their way around the panes of his chest. I can see where all his time in the gym goes, straight on his chest. His knees are spread, whiskey glass in one hand and joint in the other. As I step forward, he rakes his gaze over my body. I feel as though a magnetism flashes between us, something high frequency that threatens to set everything ablaze.

You need to claw at that chest, sit on his face, fuck his mouth. You need to fuck his mouth until he can’t breathe. Suffocate him with your pussy.

“Do you like to watch?” he asks.

Daddy - Ramsey

Wild Side - Normani, Cardi B

Maniac - Jhene Aiko

Summer - Badass Wolf Shirt

HAZY

I meet his gaze as he ashes the joint. Squinting through the smoke, he inhales and holds it in his lungs. A strong desire overwhelms me; one where I curl up in his lap and he raises the joint up to my lips. One where we lie in comfortable silence together. Amusement toys at his lips as he studies me.

I step forward, but glance back at the goddess splayed before us in her ropes. I want to explore all those curves with my mouth. I'm such a fucking slave to sensuality. He's not even looking at her. Long, black hair flows over the woman's shoulder and disappears as she floats almost a metre off the floor.

"Ahh," I mutter.

"Who am I kidding? Of course you do. That's how we met the second time around. You couldn't stop yourself from eye-fucking me in public."

He's got me there.

“I guess I like to people watch,” I admit, feeling a flush rising in my cheeks. I pull my hoodie tight around myself, feeling so exposed and butt ugly compared to this dreamy creature in front of me.

“How about, watching people fuck?” he asks.

I suck in a breath. Watching these two fuck each other? Take all my money.

“Because I definitely love to watch, as you know. I enjoyed your little solo display earlier... hope you licked that poker clean before you replaced it, you filthy girl.”

Oh. My. God.

I’m mortified. I’m going to be sick. He saw that? I slam my palms over my face. Maybe if I screw my eyes up tight enough, I’ll disappear out the back of my own head. I stare down at my feet, unable to look at him. Of course he would have video cameras all over this house. Why did it take me this long to realise how he knows every single time I’m exercising?

He shakes his head and grins.

“You’re adorable. Sit down,” he says, gesturing to a chair over in the corner.

I make my way across the room to a black velvet chair, which is next to a reptile tank. The intriguing music, smoky room, and raw sexuality helps shift me into a whole new realm.

Banks stubs out his joint as I take a seat cross-legged, all but ignoring the goddess swaying from the ropes before him. But I can’t take my eyes off her. How long has she been there, lost in her dream state?

He stands, taps on his phone, and the music changes. Checking the rope against the woman’s skin, he then throws some ice in glasses. He pours two generous drinks, one clear, one brown, and moves towards me, his silhouette backlit by a lamp. Handing me a drink, I take it, and he clinks our glasses. I stare at the liquid. 160 cals, give or take.

Shut up with the calories, Hazy. Drink the free drinks. Watch the live porn. What's this guy's dick look like already?

“Cheers,” I say, taking a sip.

I am grateful for this experience, and I'm just lost for words. I feel like I'm living in New York city in the 70s. The heat radiating from between my legs could be measured in a science lab.

He leans in and his close proximity just shatters me. Licking up my neck, coming to a stop in the notch under my ear, he grabs my hand. Directing it until I'm palming his cock through his pants. I gasp. My breath quickens as I salivate.

I need that thing inside me.

“Just thinking about you while I was tying her up...” he whispers with a dark voice into my ear that makes me shiver, squeezing my hand tighter around his width, “did this to me.” His lips graze the length of my jaw.

He pumps our hands up and down, up and down, gripping tighter, and my lips part automatically as I imagine putting his cock in my mouth.

“Mmm,” he groans.

His hips rock gently into my hand, liquid sloshing inside his glass as he takes a sip and I take a shaky gulp of my own. I'm going to pass out. *Breathe, woman!* My hands are trembling.

“Then your lascivious peepshow nearly sent me over the edge. Before I've even fucked her! You haven't earned this in your pussy yet.” He thrusts hard. “Far from it, girly, but you can watch me fuck her tonight.” He nods over his shoulder. “...if you'd like. And if you're a good girl, I've got a surprise for you. You should take notes, so you'll know how to please me.”

He winks, dropping my hand unceremoniously and running his knuckles down my cheek. Striding back to the centre of the room, he stands next to her. I'm trying to remember to breathe properly when he takes another sip of his

drink, throwing the empty glass against the couch and clicking his fingers.

The goddess raises her head with eyelids lowered. Her feet are off the ground, so she has no control of direction, and he grabs her by the chin to place her mouth where he wants it. Eye level with his cock, and with only her mouth—god knows how—she unbuttons his pants and unzips the fly.

“Good girl,” he mutters, looking dead at me, fingering a tendril of her hair. He winks at me. “Got your pen ready for notes, Bones?”

He doesn't take his eyes off me at all, and I press my legs together in anticipation, sipping my drink. Don't people pay money to watch things like this? A private show? How did I get here? Do I even want to be here? Is this consensual? Yes, it certainly is. I'm a pervert too, don't you know?

Shut the fuck up, Hazy! You're about to see his goddamn schlong for the very first time! You've been dreaming about this moment. Would you please, for the love of all things unholy, shut your monkey brain up?

Still staring deep into my eyes, he reaches into his boxer briefs. Out jumps a thick, heavy brown cock as it reaches straight for the sky. I'm salivating as I stare at the pre-cum, a little line of it connecting to his thumb, when I notice light glinting off a row of piercings. *A row of piercings?* From my position, I have a good angle to study. How many is that? Five? Six? Seven? His cock strains, and I see the bars are lined up on the underside, with a thick ring where the balls connect.

But the dick...it's nice to look at. The skin is slightly darker than his face and hands, and there are three beautiful, prominent veins. Those veins will feel incredible gliding over my lips. A sudden urge arises in me to grab it and stick it deep down my throat.

I blink a couple of times, checking that I don't have an ocular migraine coming on, but no. That thing is metal as all get out, and huge... I breathe and sip my drink. I lick my dry lips.

He rips off his shirt and pants as I drain the rest of my gin in one gulp, scrunching up my face as it burns its way down. I place the glass on the floor without taking my eyes off that monster cock and resume my front-row audience. If he thinks this is some kind of punishment for fucking myself with fireplace accessories, then this guy has no fucking clue about me whatsoever. I'm a maniac.

He turns sideways, dragging her by the hair. Has he shifted for my viewing pleasure? A thrill runs through me at the thought that he's doing this for my sake.

"Open," he says, looking at me as he grabs her by the back of the head.

She flips her head backwards, upside down, and with both hands, he lines his dick up with her and rams it into her obediently waiting hole. He slams it so violently that she gags on impact, then her throat seems to grow to accommodate his girth and she relaxes to become a marionette for him. She's dangling on her strings as he directs her face this way and that, the momentum of his thrusts sending her back and forth like she's on a swing.

Throughout all this, he never drops eye contact with me. It takes me back to when he was leaning against his Jeep all those years ago. That sense that nothing else mattered except for the two of us. Those brown eyes with the amber flecks. It's as though he's fucking me with his cock in another girl's mouth, and as twisted as that sounds, it's so fucking sexy, my pussy pulses uncontrollably.

My fingers gravitate inside my knickers without much thought, and I begin teasing my clit with long, languid strokes in time with their motion. A smile creeps into his eyes when he sees what I'm doing, and he pulls his cock free from her mouth, rubbing it a few times with his fist, before grabbing her chin and bending down to spit in her mouth. In one motion, he swings her around, so her legs are now facing him, and he grabs onto the bamboo pole and then spits on her pussy, which is tied open and ready for him.

“Enjoying the show over there, Pretty Bones?” he asks me, gaze drifting to my pussy, then back to my eyes.

I nod slowly, unable to form any coherent words. My eyes are wide with lust as my fingers dip inside my slick cunt.

“Show me that dripping pussy. I bet it’s the sexiest damn thing I’ve ever seen.”

I pull my shorts down a little to do as he asked, and our eye contact never wavers until his gaze drops down and flicks back up to meet me.

“I was right,” he says, eyelids heavy.

This psycho is utterly consumed with me, and I pleasure myself more furiously at his words, my fingers sliding over my arousal. His hunger is palpable. He needs to taste me; I can feel it thick in the air. I’m his prey, and he’s been starving for far too long. That knowledge sends my self-confidence soaring. My shadows have fucked right off and I’m lapping up the attention. I’m tapping into my dark goddess energy as my eyes stay on him.

The way he fucks me with his eyes only ramps up my desire, and my pussy is engorged. I’m edging near climax. He pads over to a side table and pulls a condom from a drawer. Slipping it on, he keeps eye contact with me the entire time, and my gaze flicks to the row of barbells and that thick ring at the top of his balls. I realise I have no fucking idea what to do with a fancy eggplant emoji like that. I want him to fuck me, but I’m explicitly unprepared for the hardware.

He then grabs the floating woman by her hips, lining himself up, and he plunges in, still only looking at me as we hear her exhale. As the music changes and builds in tempo, her eyes flick up to meet mine for a fraction of a second, long enough for me to see the pure ecstasy she’s feeling and for my jealousy to spike through the roof as my body temperature rises.

“Do you wish it were you I was fucking instead? Hazy girl?” he grunts in between shoves.

I nod my head, my hips pumping into my fingers as I'm nearing climax.

"Get your ass over here, then."

I swallow the saliva pooling in my mouth and somehow manage to climb to my feet. Didn't take much convincing. I rush over to him, my fingers sticky, and he points to the woman's face.

"Hazy, Jade. Jade, Hazy."

Well, this is awkward. I look down into her black eyes. It's the first time I've had the opportunity to take a good look at her face. She has utterly stunning facial features, high cheekbones, pouty, thick lips. I feel like a fucking white fat lump of lard standing here next to her. I guess I was a bit distracted by Bank's thrusting before, I didn't notice how beautiful she was when she was being fucked. No wonder she's his woman of choice.

She glances up at me through her fog of pleasure. Smiling briefly, she closes her eyes again, concentrating on the sensations that I'm sure are coursing through her body.

"Hey," I say, abashed.

"Get those clothes off," Banks snarls, his rhythm slowing, a hand under her ass, dragging his slick cock in and out of her pussy as she whimpers quietly.

"Shut up," he says to her.

I don't think I've ever removed my clothing so quickly, everything kicked off and forgotten in my haste.

"Stand there." He points to a spot in front of Jade.

I obey.

"Touch yourself again. That was hot."

Don't need to tell me twice. My fingers delve between my legs, our eyes are locked and loaded, and I exhale. He has complete control over both of us. She is his puppet, and he lowers her ropes slightly, so it appears that she is diving down into my pussy and up higher at her ass to level with Banks

dick. He guides her face toward me, steering her by her hips. He is fucking me through her. Goddamnit.

New kink unlocked. Bing bing bing!

“Let me be very clear, Hazy, I am about to fuck you. I’m controlling my lust to an unbelievable degree right now, but if you were a healthy woman, I would be preparing to decimate you in a very unnatural way. Lick,” he says, and before I figure out what’s going on, Jade’s face is between my thighs, and her mouth delves a delicious warmth through my veins. My hand instinctively reaches for her hair as her tongue penetrates me with intoxicating pleasure.

“Oh,” I sigh, grappling to keep myself upright as my thighs shake and my head falls back. I grasp onto the ropes suspending her for balance. It’s been so long that I’ve been turned on before anything happens sexually; usually I fuck strangers from the bar and I’m lucky if I’m horny by the end of the entire act. Lucky if I get to come at all. Usually, the only time I come is with myself these days. This whole scene unfolding is just so hot that it knocks the breath out of me.

The woman’s tongue laps me up and down desperately, devotedly, sucking on my clit and probing my lips with an intensity I’m not used to. Burying her tongue deep inside me, then back to my clit as Banks maintains eye contact with me and he jolts her away with his thrusts. Hooded lids and his raw masculinity fill the room. I can’t take my eyes off him; it’s like somehow I’ve jumped through a screen and am taking part in some convoluted BDSM porno with James Deen.

“Eyes on me, Hazy. I need to see your face when you come. But not yet,” he says with a dark and lust-filled voice.

Banks spanks Jade hard across the ass, the sound shocking me, and she moans loudly into my pussy. She groans a delicious, raw sound, and he hits her again, this time much harder. Her breaths come in ragged bursts as he continues to fuck her with primal urgency.

“Hit her,” he says to me.

I stare at him through hooded lids. “What?”

“I said, hit her across the face, Hazy. Now. She knows she’s just a puppet here. Puppets don’t make any noise unless their masters make them. Hit her. Now,” he orders. His arrogance and assumption that he can do whatever he likes to this woman... that he can do whatever he likes to me... it excites me, and I groan with an overwhelming need to please him. His dominance.

The thought of hitting a woman across the face goes against everything I’ve ever believed in, but as I look down at her, she winks at me and grins. She wants me to hit her. I slap her across her cheek, and she gasps at the impact. So I do it again, and Banks pushes her back into my pussy, her tongue ramping up speed. I’m teetering on the edge again.

When I glance up at Banks, his eyes tunnel into my soul. I struggle not to let my eyelids flutter closed as my pleasure rises. He’s calmed to a slow thrusting now, leaning toward me over the woman splayed between us, her tongue consuming me and escalating me toward release. My thighs are sticky with our lust.

This is the hottest ‘not sex’ I’ve ever had with a man.

“I’m going to come,” I cry desperately, feeling the unfamiliar building of tension and a glimmer of euphoria on the horizon.

He reaches across the woman between us to grab the back of my neck roughly and pulls me into him.

“No, you’re fucking not. Not until I say so. That little pussy is mine now, and she will do exactly as I say,” he says gruffly. “I saw you fucking yourself in the bedroom. That won’t be happening again without me. Got it? That tight little cunt is mine, and you need to ask permission to touch it.”

I whimper and nod.

He’s holding my head as we’re fucking Jade from both ends—a true Eiffel Tower—but we’re really just fucking each other, eye to eye. We are connected via this stunning creature between us, but it’s just him and I here in this room. Breathing. Thrusting.

I'm just struggling not to come, as I can feel the flutter of climax. Hunched over, squeezing my eyes shut, trying to think about doing my taxes or taking the garbage out so I don't careen over into a blur of insanity. His hands tighten around the back of my head as my hips thrust involuntarily against her sensuous mouth. I'm a rabid bitch in heat.

He squeezes my nipple hard, and I let out a yelp as he forces me into a kiss that lights up my existence. He tastes like whiskey and weed and perversion, and I moan urgently into his mouth as he groans into mine.

"Now," he says. "You can come now."

"Fuck!" I shout my release into the room, as the tide crashes. Shaking me to my core, my knees buckle, and I grab onto the ropes with my hands to steady myself. Wave after wave consumes me. I scream and groan in torturous rapture.

I swing and float and grind as our lust swirls, and we come hard together. Pounding Jade from each end, not really caring about her pleasure, impaling her as she purrs her own climax between us. She's filled completely from both ends as I thrust my pussy deep into her willing mouth, Banks stuffing her pussy with his rigid length.

The sound of Banks groaning and the sight of him shuddering sends me directly into another violent climax that has me jerking and groaning and hanging onto the ropes for dear life. Fucking this stranger's face like my life depends on it.

Banks and I stare at each other as something flickers past his eyes. A look of what? I can't figure it out—not lust, maybe desire? Then it's gone, and the cold, ruthless monster takes his place.

You piece of shit. You don't deserve to be this aroused. You deserve shitty one-night stands that end with you running away unsatisfied. That's your destiny. You don't deserve pleasure, and you don't deserve a man like this.

He exhales and slips his glistening cock out of Jade's trembling sex. Then he checks her ropes, running two fingers

through every rope that is connected to her skin. Flicking the condom into a wastebasket, he reaches for a cigarette.

“Get back to your room, Hazy. Show’s over.”

As he sparks up his smoke, I take a step back from Jade, wiping my thighs with my hands. I awkwardly glance into her sleepy-looking eyes as she floats on her cloud. Her neck flops down as gravity claws at her. A smile has settled over her glistening lips, and she’s oblivious to anything outside her own world.

But I don’t know what the protocol is here.

“What?” I squeak.

My brain kicks into overdrive to assess this moment in time. Banks ignores me and wanders to the couch to change the music on his phone, smoking his cigarette and wiping his balls with a hand towel. He offers me nothing to clean up with. No towel. No wet wipes. Typical fucking douchebag.

I’m stark naked, knees giving out while being wracked by the tail end of one of the strongest orgasms I’ve ever experienced in my life.

My clit pings with hot flashes of energy, my thighs are drenched with a mixture of pussy cream and saliva, and he’s kicking me out? Like, right now, are you fucking kidding me?

This guy has no idea how to treat a women; what a fucking cock-head! No aftercare? Probably never heard of it. He’s as useless as all the others. I thought I was a sexual fuck-up, but this guy takes the absolute cake!

I bow my head and look away, my brain spiralling. Did I break some unspoken threesome rule? I did everything he told me to. I’m so confused, but I shouldn’t be.

You fucking idiot, Hazy! You do this to guys all the time; tell them to fuck off or fuck off yourself! You stupid slut, this is your promiscuity karma coming atcha.

I step back, covering my tits with my arm as I scurry around, collecting my scattered clothing, wiping dripping thighs and sticky hands on the fabric. I pause to chance a look

at him over my shoulder and stumble toward the door. He is releasing Jade from the ropes and tending to her limbs.

“Get out, Hazy,” he says, focusing on Jade entirely. He’s fucking hotter than he has any right to be when he’s angry.

I have no idea what I did to switch his mood like that, and I fend off the tears pricking my eyes as I stab my legs into tiny damp shorts. I throw my singlet on inside out and mutter to myself under my breath.

A sudden sharp pain ricochets inside my chest, which I try my best to ignore as I grab my hoodie and shuffle through the door, slamming it behind me and trying not to breathe because I think I’m having a heart attack. I lean up against the door with tears tumbling freely, breathing through a panic attack until the pain in my chest subsides.

I can’t believe I’m crying over a complete and utter narcissistic son of a bitch who kidnapped the fuck out of me. Jesus Christ. How did I end up here?

You are too ugly to be desired, let alone loved, Hazy. You know that. You can’t compete with that stunning goddess in there. He doesn’t want you, he’s laughing at you right now. Of course he’d rather spend the night with her. You’re disposable.

I wipe my eyes and catch sight of Rosetta perched on a stool in the shadows. I see her eyes glinting with glee on her ugly-gorgeous face. She makes her way toward me slowly; her maid’s uniform is as immaculate as always and her toned, tanned thighs are a study on perfection. Obviously, he keeps her around for more reasons than the cleaning, it seems.

“Great. What do *you* want?” I say, mortified.

Her sneer drips venom as she flounces toward me, her boobs bouncing and skirt swishing around her ass with that satisfying *thwomp* of latex.

“Well, I have to take the garbage out now that he’s disposed of you, don’t I?” she says in a saccharine tone. “Follow me, trash-bag.” Looking at my thighs, she adds, “Looks like he couldn’t get rid of you quick enough! Didn’t

even towel you off?” She actually laughs now. “God, you must be super pathetic. He usually gives out hand towels, at the very least.”

Bitch! What choice do I have anyway but to do what she says? I could make a run for it down the stairs, but I don't even know where the front door is. And then what? I have no idea where we even are and the pack of wolves outside are waiting to eat me whole and lick my blood off the driveway.

Shade. I wonder where Shadey is. He'd save me.

“Follow me,” she says, and I take the chance to look around. She's fucking loving this. There is a word for her type of asshole. Schadenfreude. I learned it on a crossword one time, and it's always stuck with me. She's more of a Schlut-tart, I think. She comes to a halt abruptly in front of me, so quickly that I bump into her back.

“What the fuck, bitch?” I mutter. Fuck it, I don't care if she knows I hate her. She's been nothing but a cold-blooded cunt to me from the moment I was carried through that door. What kind of woman has no sympathy for another woman who's been abducted? She never once offered to call the cops for me. Never once asked if I was okay.

She turns slowly and grabs me by the arm, pulling me close.

“I'm going to kill you if he falls in love with you for real,” she whispers with a sickening tone to her voice, and my stomach rolls. Her ear is up against my hair. She's pulled me so close that no camera would have picked up her facial movements. I remember to breathe. What kind of psycho is she?

The house is quiet except for the music in Banks' room, and I spot a couple of big guys loitering downstairs. I don't know who to trust in this place, and I realise how vulnerable and uneasy I am out here with real people walking around. Rosetta scares the fucking shit out of me, if I'm honest. And without warning, she turns and continues down the hallway. I trot to keep up as she marches past the landing, then shoves me into my room before locking the door.

“Have fun rotting away in there! Don’t get any bright ideas about making him fall in love with you,” she sing-songs outside the door.

“I want my phone!” I screech, on my knees where I landed after she pushed me violently. I bash the door with my palms and the pain calms me. Silence greets me from the other side, then her distant laugh rings out. Fuck, I hate her so much. And Banks hates me.

*S*tripper – Miss Kittin, The Hacker

BANKS

The low hoot of an owl grabs my attention away from the task at hand. The whisper of metal blade against the hanging leather strop halts as I pause to listen. Sharpening blades to be scarily sharp is one of my favourite meditations, and I like to do it up here at night while I have a drink and unwind from the rat race.

I need to read up on the local owls around here, if I'm right that one could be a Powerful.

I'm sitting on the roof above the loft, smoking and sharpening. I needed fresh air after that little scene earlier. Christ, I don't even know what to think. I felt like I was suffocating inside, and I like it up here after dark. The wildlife and the constant roll of the waves breaking against the rocks far below. It's such an enormous energy that it helps me realise how insignificant I really am in the grand scheme of things. I think the fact that I can even have this train of thought surely means I'm not a complete psychopath. Aside from the atrocities I act out on a daily basis, at least I have some perspective on my actual role on this planet. Maybe? I'm not a good guy, but I refuse to believe I'm a lost cause.

Fucking woman! Christ.

I had to send Hazy back to her room prematurely. I would have liked to have more fun with her, but if I hadn't thrown her out, I would have had my cock rammed so far down her throat, there is a significant chance I could have lost control again and killed her. I cannot risk that. I'd fucking die if I killed her accidentally during a blackout. My problem is that I just don't know when to stop when I'm this consumed. So around her, I need to be very careful, very measured. I can do that; I just need to stop myself before a certain point.

Dark things were swirling in my mind as she was shuddering from her climax. I've never shot a load as hard as that in all my life; it was insane. Her scent, the sight of her. Those little scars all over her body do unholy things to me. The feel of my tongue in her mouth. Her collarbones. That sweet, sweet little cunt that I cannot wait to devour. I could smell her.

I shouldn't have brought her up to the den at all. I'm such an idiot. I should have just watched her on the phone while Jade sucked me off and called it a night. Instead, I put my foot in it again.

After Hazy left, I got Jade down from the ropes without a word and sent her packing immediately. Normally, I like chatting with Jade for a while after we fuck, but tonight something shifted. Hazy is all I want now.

But, I've got deadlines looming at work, which can't be forgotten, and this broken porcelain doll is too much of a distraction. I need to keep my head on straight or I'm in trouble.

You cannot let a tiny woman fuck up everything you've worked for Banks. Get your shit together, man.

I finish working on the knife and look at the moon. Fuck, I love living here; so peaceful and grounding, and I can do whatever the fuck I want with the local cops in my pocket. I climb inside and get ready for bed. I select a vintage Miss Kittin vinyl and settle the needle on it, before falling into bed and trying to reminisce about the 90s.

Keep your dick in your pants, big boy. Try your best to ignore her. She'll be here, locked away, with that sweet little cunt splayed wide open after the next dispatch is sorted.

*M*idnight Sky - Miley Cyrus
Shake It Out - Live - Kelly Clarkson

HAZY

I've been laying on the floor since Rosetta threw me through the door, but I finally manage to drag myself up and sniff at the tray of food she left me. I dip a finger in the luke-warm hot chocolate. How many calories is in that thing anyway? Probably close to two hundred. Maybe more. Bitch. I take a sip just to see what it's like, but spit it out immediately. Definitely two hundred; there is cream in that thing, for sure. Fuckers tricking me with calories. I jump up and down a few times to burn off whatever I just ingested via osmosis. Then I head to the writing desk, where I grab the pencil sharpener before locking myself in the bathroom. I would rather be at work than here, now. That's saying something.

Dejected by constipation again, I manage to pull apart the rusty old pencil sharpener with my fingernails while I shiver with embarrassment. Why does he make everything so difficult? After semi-successfully doing my business, I dive into the scalding shower, where I attempt to wash my crippling mortification down the drain.

Tears stream, and wretched sobs escape me. Once again, I've escaped a man in a state of humiliation. Wiping my eyes,

I look around for hidden cameras because now I'm absolutely certain Banks is watching my every move, every moment of the day, but I don't really care if I'm honest. That thought equally creeps me out and turns me on. Why don't I care that this complete stranger is watching me? Do I actually like the idea? Am I that far gone? What does this mean about me as a person?

My aching swollen pussy pulses at the memory of the life-changing sex I was having earlier. And then I was tossed out like garbage.

He wants that hot Japanese girl. Who wouldn't? He only chose you because you're weak and pathetic and he can do whatever he wants with you. You're nothing but a skanky notch on his very large bedpost. He kicked you out, remember Sunshine? Remember! No one as disfigured as the likes of you can ever be loved, not even by yourself. No one would pay for you in a Swiss peep show, that's for fucking certain.

I push my way out of the shower door and ransack the drawers for a real razor. That sharpener does look pretty sketchy, but it's either that or my fingernails. We've all been there before.

I want to die. I hate myself that much. I will never be whole. Come to think of it, have I ever been?

Of course you want to die, you idiot. You brought this all upon yourself! You know, just a thought, but you could use that desk chair over there to smash through the window and jump out? It's a pretty decent drop, you might die.

Yeah, or I could end up paralysed.

Noted. Well, how about this? Use the desk chair to smash the glass, then use a nice, noble shard to slash your wrists? That would work for sure! Pretty way to go out. Hey? Hey?

Yeah, then bitchface Poppins out there would hear glass breaking and alert Old Banksy Boy, who's watching his monitor, remember? I'm fucked from every angle here, baby. I can't even die in peace. I just want to ride my nightmares for eternity, all weird and fucked up. I roll over on the bathroom

floor to lie on my back. I do a few pilates moves before realising my back is hot. Who has heated slate floors in their bathroom anyway? Stuck up, large cocked, hot fuckwit. No one would miss me if I ended it all right now. June, Patrick, and Xanthe would get over it soon enough, I'm sure. They'd find another drinking buddy, another bong smoker. Another bestie. Fuck, I miss my crew so much it hurts. What I wouldn't give to be sitting amongst the industrial garbage bins in the back of Enmore right about now. Fuck my life.

Fucking useless idiot! You can't even kill yourself? You're so pathetic.

I crawl back into the steamy shower and sit on the floor, water raining over my head. I start hacking at my thighs with the dull sharpener blade, which I finally managed to get out of its casing. Tiny flecks of blood turn into a river. Release. This crap-show is better than nothing.

Ahh, sweet Scarlet. Go deeper. That's where the chronic pain ends. Go for your jugular. Go for the kill.

Blood dilutes and floats away. I ride the high and wish I could float away with it. I'm tired to my marrow, stomach clenching with a familiar cramp, and I dry heave. The booze and remnants of dinner come up, followed by bile. I get caught up on the vertigo whirligig and lie down under the spray. All too familiar. Strangely, I feel at home here. I'm just missing my fancy-posh martini glass.

When the room stops spinning, I sit up and carve more ragged cuts in my thighs to keep it symmetrical. Relief overwhelms me and I lie back down and cry woeful tears. I remain still until the blood stops seeping, and the steam is thick in my lungs.

Hitting the tap off, I crawl onto the bathmat, pulling down a white fluffy towel from the rail. White? Don't they know anything? I drag it with me into the bedroom and lie down on the rug. Using the towel as a blanket, I snuggle into a ball.

*M*eteorite - Banks

BANKS

The scrape and jangle of metal rings out as I unlock her door. My girl's asleep just on the other side. A vision flashes across my mind of me kicking this door down to get to her urgently, and before I know it, it's gone. Dawn was forty-three minutes ago, which happened when we were training outside, the sun breaking the horizon as I slogged my guts out doing cuntish cardio. I've shit, showered, and shaved since then, so now it's time to get my girl up.

"Breakfast," I say merrily as I walk into her room and open a curtain. "Time to get up, pretty lady." I'd make a magnificent lady's maid.

Hazy groans loudly from her pillow. Rosetta follows behind me with a tray, setting it on the desk, and leaving wordlessly.

"Fuck off," Hazy says from under a pillow. Pretty sure she hates Rosie.

I smile and grab the bowl of oats, sitting next to her on the bed. She throws the pillow away, frowns, and squeezes her eyes tight. Her head rocks back and forth. Not a morning person. Got it.

“Sit up and open your mouth,” I tell her. “I want to inspect that pretty pink hole this morning.”

Opening her eyes, she’s about to protest again when she sees the shade I’m throwing. She pushes her torso up to sit, and crosses her legs with a humph, before opening her mouth like the petulant brat she is. She knows not to fuck around with me, really. She loves pushing it, but Christ knows I won’t put up with that bullshit for long. I spoon a decent amount into her mouth, and she dry heaves around the spoon.

“Good girl,” I say, grinning. I’m a sick fucker. I can’t hear her retch without imagining her mouth wrapped tightly around my throbbing cock.

She concentrates, her pretty little face so serious, as she closes her eyes and swallows.

“Bad day, Princess and the Pea?” I ask, and she scowls at me. I love stirring her pot.

“Wonder why,” she replies snarkily. “I *can* feed myself, you know. Fuckstick.”

“I know. But you don’t do it!” I say, handing her the bowl. “I’ll just sit right here and watch you finish this before I go to work.”

“Whatever.”

She proceeds to scoff through the entire bowl, proving with stubborn finality that she’s not useless after all. Then she shoves it back in my hands before heading for the bathroom. I follow her and jam my boot in the door before it closes.

“Nice try, you know the rules. No privacy around me, Bones.” She huffs in reply. “I know all your silent toilet tricks.”

I watch her squat and a trickle starts up. It takes all my self-control not to barge in there and get her to piss on my face. I watch as she wipes herself and pulls her panties up, an oversize *Megadeth* t-shirt swamping her. She looks delicious. The t-shirt hangs down to her knees and falls off one shoulder entirely, revealing her collarbone.

She glares at me as she pushes past. I stop myself from grabbing her as I watch her walk back across her prison cell. Her thin tattooed legs call my name, and those angry green eyes welcome me home.

I am looking forward to watching her every day for the rest of my life. She looks good in my ratty old clothes.

She stumbles back to bed, and I notice fresh scars on her arms and legs. I'm furious, but keep it to myself. I'm having relative success this morning, and I don't want to spook her. I pour her a coffee from an insulated stainless pot and hand her the cup.

"I should be home by 8.00 tonight, sweetheart. We can have dinner together, so get some sleep today if you can. I'll be watching. Don't try anything stupid. You haven't seen me angry yet."

She ignores me completely and disappears into an array of gothic soft toys. She's obsessed with those squishy things, apparently. I take that as a sign to piss off.

"Great chat, babe!" I say before heading towards the door. "See you tonight!"

"Give me my laptop and phone, you asshole!" she calls out.

"That's *Sir Asshole* to you," I say, closing the door and locking it.

"At least give me my fucking music, Sir Asshole. This is complete torture! You are denying my basic human rights! And I need some Blu Tack! Fucker."

I can hear her ranting as I walk down the hall, smiling. Sassy little bitch. I love her so much. As I reach the bottom of the stairs, I call out to Zane, who's scoffing a huge sandwich in the dining room.

"Hey, mate, can you get Hazy whatever music she wants and a decent portable speaker? And have Rosetta find her some Blu Tack."

He gives me the thumbs up as he chews a huge bite.

HAZY

The days blur into weeks here. Has it been a month or two? I've lost track. I miss my crew.

Crows keep sitting on the wrought-iron outside my window, shouting at me at all times of the day and night. I've been locked in this room while the sun is up with only my art, books, coffee, food, and music to keep me sane. Actually, it doesn't sound too bad on paper. Kinda like lockdown all over again.

Thank fuck Banks gave me Spotify, because without it, I definitely would have killed myself by now.

The pretty native flowers keep me smiling; Swallow comes to refresh the bunch every few days. Today it's a mix of banksia, grevillea, and the wax flowers are stunning too.

But I'm so bored. The best thing about this whole fuckupery, has been my accidental discovery of *Banks*. The singer. I found her because I was trying to stalk *my* Banks online, but I only had Spotify. Her music helps the days tick by a little faster. I connect to her on a fundamental level.

After my little peepshow with the fire poker, he had delivered an entire kit of sensual toys that I have been using to pleasure myself furiously. Only top-shelf toys from this man, of course. The sleek, black and gold silicone, beautiful stainless-steel and glass, and all manner of things I've never

used before, but happily explore. Like, the clit sucking toy and the vibrating butt thingy that only has a setting of low and HOLY SHIT.

All these things turned up in a sleek-looking leather travel case on wheels which opened up into a cabinet and smells like it costs ten thousand dollars. What the actual fuck does this guy do for money anyway? I want to know. I hover somewhere between despising and lusting after him. And I think that's right where he wants me.

*H*igh for This - Original - The Weeknd

BANKS

It's been about a week or so since the Jade threesome. Hazy's been snarky with me since, and fair enough, really.

I've kept my head in the game and chill with her when I get home to let her out of her room. I feel so relaxed when I'm in her presence. I've never felt like it before.

Right now, we've been hanging for about half an hour, chatting about a few things, mostly music and films, and the sounds of her playlist hums from the stereo. She's curled up on my faded leather couch, wrapped in a blanket. She's cold. She's reading a book with a mug of tea, giving me the evil eye as she catches me staring at her pretty hair.

She's made visible improvements with her health. I can tell her cheeks have filled out slightly, and she has a little shape on her hips and thighs. Her cognition has vastly improved too. When she first arrived, her black hair was falling out in chunks, but it's starting to thicken up now. I don't think she's brushed it since she arrived, but I don't care about that.

She could shave her hair and eyebrows off, and she would still be the sexiest woman I've ever seen. I don't see the dark circles, pale skin, and hollow cheeks as negative. I love them

all because it's her. I know it is the disorder. Once we get some nutrients into her, they might work themselves out?

Also, I haven't really let her out of her room much; I should change that so she can see some sunlight. I've been too scared that she'll take a swan dive off the cliff. She can't be trusted with herself.

I'm stretched out on a rug nearby, sipping on a beer and working on my phone. Mostly pinging messages to people who need to hurry up and sort a bunch of shit out for me. I've got a shipment of cargo arriving tomorrow in a container, and I need to confirm transport from the docks.

Still haven't heard back from all the depots around the country. The road trains don't fuck around, and I'm not sending shit into the middle of nowhere if no one's gonna sign for it. These particular sick fucks are another dirty pedo ring in Asia that was uncovered by some tech-genius kids. The hackers were snooping around on the deep web and found a group of grown men obsessed with dolls. They traded pictures of their collections of toy dolls, but when these hackers dived a few levels deeper, it turns out they all had kidnapped children in their basements for years!

Well, naturally, I've brought these teen genius hackers into the fold to help uncover dirty rings. We need to flush all of these child molesters out.

We saved all those kids, and the cops came, but it was engineered so that the paedophiles were nowhere to be seen. Little do they know, they're locked in our containers on the way to Australia now, ready for the next phase of their long and painful lives. My wonderful clients will have a field day with these sick bastards. I know they are going to the right hands.

I've just gotta make some more calls and we can avoid customs. I've taken the afternoon off so I can work from home. The beauty of being the boss.

We're on the top floor, my favourite space in the entire building. There is one access point, which is via a secret doorway, hidden behind a full-length mirror in the hallway

downstairs. My architect renovated this entire floor to look like a New York warehouse loft. White-washed brick, high ceilings, oversized steel window frames, timber beams, polished concrete flooring, green pot plants. There is a king-sized bed, small bar, kitchenette, pool table, and bachelor's essentials.

The views over the national park and ocean trick you into thinking you're further away from the city than we really are. I could get there in half an hour in the middle of the night if we slammed it. In peak-hour traffic, it's another story.

Anyway, I've been working, but watching this gorgeous creature splayed out like a buffet on my couch. I'm so ready to fuck the shit out of her. Literally. I've dreamed about fucking that ass for longer than would be proper to mention. But there is nothing proper about a man like me.

I've decided that Hazy is ready to take me now, in some form or another. Her health and brain function have increased and after her body's reaction in the den, I know she wants me.

"Bring those pretty little pink scars over here, Bones," I say, sneaking a glance in her direction.

Her head snaps up with a glare that could kill a mere mortal, as though I've asked her to chop off her own foot with electric hedge trimmers. I'll admit it's been awkward between us since the Jade thing, though that hasn't kept my hands off her, and she hasn't stopped me either.

I know I fucked up royally by kicking Hazy out. It's a force of habit with whores, so I'm attempting to make amends like a gentleman would. I'm not used to having to deal with women's emotions. Proving I'm not a complete jerk is tough. Speaking to women isn't my forte.

Her eyebrows and nose crinkle adorably as she studies the smirk on my face. I want to dive on top of her. I wish someone would recognise my self-control right now. Seriously, I need a medal for this bullshit. My dick pulses, pushing against my pants as my need for her grows.

“I said bring those pretty little scars over here and sit on my goddamn face right now, Hazy Vale.”

Her mouth falls open with a disbelieving snicker, her eyebrows shooting up as she drills me with an exasperated stare. Dragging the blanket up to cover her hard nipples—probably because I keep staring at them through her singlet—she tells me to get fucked.

“You lock me up in this wanker castle of yours, you don’t let me call my besties, and now you outright tell me to sit on your face? What the hell is wrong with you? Jesus Christ, you’re such an egotistical swine. You still haven’t apologised for kicking me out of the threesome.”

Righty-o then. That’s pretty accurate. Sometimes verbal diarrhoea just sloshes out of my mouth unplanned. Maybe I’ve said the wrong thing again. She glances around the room like she’s planning an escape route. Laughter erupts from low in my chest.

“I will never let you go. Ever. I’ll always know where you are, even if you make it past the dogs and fences. Anyway, I was joking, of course.”

“Psychotic asshole,” she says, sticking her nose back in the book.

She’s clearly not impressed by my antics, and it suddenly dawns on me that I’ve never had to work at getting women on the end of my dick. No matter what I’ve said, they just smile and sidle on over and sit on my face. They’re just after big dick, or money, ropes, or power. I’ve always had women to choose from.

“Yeah, I’m a psycho, but everyone knows that. Now, come here,” I say, running my fingers along the soft silk rug. This thing cost more than her annual salary at the funeral home. I know because I’ve got all its financial records for the last seven years. I’m going to slide my cock so far inside her as I shove her face first into this carpet.

“Well, that’s not happening,” she says. “Anyway, how dare you assume I’d even want to do anything sexual with you?”

You've never even asked me. You're an outright rapist."

Game on!

"Oh, really?" I laugh, despite knowing that it's the wrong thing to do right now.

But this has got to be a challenge if ever I've heard one.

"Yeah. Really. Now stay the fuck away from me while I finish my cup of tea because it's now lukewarm, just like your company!"

Oof! Touche.

She goes back to pretend-reading her book, eyes flicking back to me over the top of the pages periodically. I send and receive a few more text messages, managing to line up all the drivers I need. As I glance at her, my cock continues to strangle itself in the denim confines, and I need to get it the fuck out of there before it castrates itself.

"Why do you tease me with your body in those tiny little shorts if you won't let me fuck you?"

"Wow!" she replies, her eyes savage. "Rapey much, Mr. Rapist? You're fucking incredible, you know that?" She shakes her head that anyone could be this much of a misogynist.

I kind of agree with her. Not sure why these stupid words keep falling out of my mouth, and I wish I could shove them back in. I do feel like a bit of a cunt, but I guess this is just me trying to flirt.

"What I wear has *absolutely nothing* to do with you, ever. These clothes were in my room when I arrived. Remember, *Mr. Kidnapper, Mr. Dealbreaker*? It is not an invitation to fuck me. You're the one who threw me out like rubbish the other night. Before I even finished coming, I might add. What kind of fuckstain are you, anyway?"

"Say the word *coming* again," I say. "I want to see it in your mouth."

"How's *get fucked* sound?"

I chuckle and spring from my place on the floor, flipping onto my knees, then to my feet. Heading to the couch, I rub the back of my neck.

I remember the way her voice cracked when she was about to come. I remember the way she sounded as she climaxed. Those wails echoing around the den and through my head, with her cunt lodged firmly on a highly trained slave's mouth. It's enough to leave my cock and balls aching with compulsive desperation. The sound of her climaxing is the most indescribable thing I've heard.

I stare down at her, taking the mug and placing it on the floor. She faces up to me with a questioning look as I throw her book aside and rip the blanket off. Grabbing a handful of her hair, I jerk her up to meet me. Her breath smells of tea and honey. She scrambles to keep her scalp attached to her skull and a pretty whine escapes those lips. Here we go.

"Oh, sweetheart, I'll eat you no matter what you're wearing. I'd look at you the same way if you were wearing a potato sack." I smile my most devilish smile.

She stares at me with her otherworldly eyes, tears welling. A shadow of pain and horror fall across her features.

"Ooh, there she is! My lost, little imp. Thanks for coming out to play with Daddy," I whisper along her cheek, pulling her hair tighter.

She melts into me, giving me her energy, which flows just as any natural sub's would when

I take control. My dick lurches at having her in my hands. I must be careful not to break her. Something inside her tightens and coils, so I release her hair. I reach down and grab her under the ass cheeks, pulling her to the edge of the couch. I'm surprised by how light she is, and it scares me a bit.

I grip her sinewy thighs as I kneel down in front of her. I think I am hypnotised as I pin her down easily. My heartbeat races at the prospect of what is laid out in front of me. I settle myself down as she wriggles underneath my grasp.

I can smell her, almost taste what's coming, and I've been such a good boy. I've waited so fucking long and she is mine, goddamnit!

She sucks in a deep breath and pushes my head away hard with her open palms.

"Oh, good girl!" I say, smiling.

She's screeching, slapping, and biting me. She punches and claws at my face. I laugh at her as I gently defend myself, enjoying the sensations against my flesh and undivided attention from her.

"You're *so* fucking adorable when you struggle. And hearing you scream, fuck, I'm so hard."

The legs of her shorts fall up to her hip crease as she thrashes from side to side in her attempts at escape. I manoeuvre both her wrists into my one, just to stop her from clawing my eyes out.

"Sick fucker! Get off me!" she shouts. "Rape! You arrogant prick! Why are you doing this to me?"

The tendons in her throat strain as she struggles. Her eyes search toward the doorway that leads downstairs, her black hair falling across storm green eyes. Oh, I want this so badly.

"Don't get any ideas, sweetheart. No one will be coming to save your bony ass, so just quit it."

"Help! Help! Rape!" she screams, panic choking her pretty throat as she thrashes.

"Shut up!" I growl, shifting her weight so I can rub my dick against her. "I told you, no one is coming, so you may as well just shut the fuck up," I say, loudly enough that she can hear me over her tearful squeals. "Everyone in this house knows you belong to me. They've all received the memos and signed the papers." She quietens down but continues to pant. "It would be extremely shortsighted of them to interfere in *my* sex life. They know how hard and debauched I like it with my women; they've all seen what I'm capable of. So no matter what you try to yell down that stairwell, no one will be coming to your aid, Princess of Darkness."

As I ease my grip on her, she pushes against my hands. I can see the cogs turning as she processes what I've just said, contempt flashing in her eyes. The thrashing and wailing starts up again, and I enjoy her enthusiasm. I roll my eyes, applying light pressure again to hold her still.

I don't want to hurt her yet, but I'm taking what's mine now.

I position her how I want her, just like a good dolly does. She braces herself as I dive down to push the apex of her thighs apart. My attention is riveted on the hills and valleys of her self-harm scars. The patterns she has made in her flesh aside from the black lines of ink. I lick along one scar, ecstasy overwhelming me, and I can hear some grunts and groans escape between her outcries.

"Fuck off!" she screams.

She pulls from my control and knees me in the throat. I let her wriggle free and her lovely foot kicks me square in the nose. I cough and gasp.

"Feisty!" I grin through blood-stained lips.

She makes a well-timed break for it. I'm very proud of her self-defence instincts, but it's just a shame she's up against a man like me and not some wannabe. She knocks over the mug as she crawls on hands and knees, shuffling away.

"Stay away from me, you son of a bitch!" she screams.

I wipe my nose and sniff as she finally scrambles to her feet and bolts. Then she disappears into the darkness of the stairwell. I wipe my nose again on the back of my hand and follow her slowly. I make a point of sauntering down the last few steps, where I find her scratching at the door, trying to find an escape route.

"I told you to fuck off! To get away from me!"

I spin her to face me, then bend down to flip her over my shoulder. She smacks me on the back and wriggles.

"That's not how it works around here, you adorable little thing," I say, standing up again. I secure her knees tightly this

time and jog back up the stairs. “Told ya, no one was coming, didn’t I? I get what I want, whatever it is. Now shut the hell up and do exactly as I say.”

She’s bleating again, but I’ve stopped fucking around now. I’m fucking horny, and I need a fuck. I clear the room in a few paces and throw her on the couch. Spreading her legs so wide, she’s almost in the side splits, her screams of protest reach an all-time high and sound like music to my perverted ears.

“Stay still, or I’ll be shoving this mahogany dick so far down that pretty little throat of yours, you’ll need to breathe through your eyeballs,” I snarl. “Now. Shut. The. Fuck. Up.”

I squeeze her cheeks together and dip my tongue into the wet, succulent hole of her mouth. It works, she’s quiet. Letting go of her face, I carry on securing her thighs underneath me, getting ready for this unholy feast. I’m going to fuck her so hard, she comes three times. It’s my mission to make her come, to hear that sound I’ve been dreaming about again.

I begin to lick one thigh, then the other, my hands holding her twig-like legs apart. The many thin ripples of scar tissue caress the tip of my tongue as I slide along her upper thigh. I’m intoxicated.

She submits momentarily; I can sense it because her arms relax and stop scratching me. But then the pushing and fighting begins again, and fuck me, it turns me on so much when she struggles like this. I want to chase her, to watch her run while I gain on her. After waiting so many years to find her, always assuming that I never would, I don’t know what to do now I’ve got her pinned underneath me.

My eyes close as each tiny bump runs across the flat of my tongue. Her muscles soften under my fingers, and I let out a small groan. She whimpers and sniffs. Her legs flop inward ever so gently. I notice. Oh, I notice every micro movement she makes. I repeat the caressing motion with my mouth on her thighs again and again; little nips and sucks, then back to long, languid licks. Feeling it with the different parts of my

tongue; the flat, the tip, the underneath. Her skin is salty from sweat, and I want to devour her right here.

When her pelvis wriggles oh-so-gently toward me, I glance up to see her cringing. Her eyelids are screwed tight in disgust, but her hips are rocking into me, seemingly against her own will. As though she's possessed by a demon who needs to fuck. I can tell she's battling those demons, just like I am, and she wants this. She wants me, I know it. I'm not a good man by any stretch of the imagination, so I inhale a lengthy sniff—my dick as hard as a pillar—and I notice a couple of bright red new scars.

“These are new. How?” I ask.

I know there are no razors in her bathroom. There were none in her personal items.

“Fuck off!” she screams, her voice hoarse.

Her tears fall as she struggles, her hips bucking against me with a strength I'm quite shocked by, and I hold her down with even force.

“Stop struggling, Pretty Bones. It'll make everything easier, promise.”

Oddly, her body goes limp beneath me, a moan rising from her lips.

“Oh my god,” she breathes, sounding exasperated.

Her tits tease me with their perfect little shape and the outline of the nipple rings makes my dick throb murderously. Her hands grasp the back of my head; fingers fisting my hair. Her pheromones swirl around, and I have a feeling I'm about to be ruined.

100% succubus, for sure.

“Stop!” she cries at the exact moment her mound shoves roughly into my lips. There are only two thin layers of fabric between her pussy and my tongue, and I run my teeth gently along her clit.

Oh, this body is mine now. Every single black and white inch of it.

“Banks, please,” she moans, thrusting. Wet.

I smile as she yanks my head closer, feeling tangible evidence of her arousal. Her pubic bone grinds against my face roughly, and I moan. Then I use every ounce of willpower to pull backwards. I stumble up and sit up on my knees, panting. Her eyes are half closed, she’s horny as fuck. I can smell her pussy as we sit there for a pause, just staring at each other.

I can’t stop thinking about the fresh cuts. How did she do it? Why did she do it? I realise my mind has sped into hyperdrive, and my dick has started going soft. Fuck it. I wish my brain would shut up.

Running a hand through my hair, I get up to grab a smoke, lighting it and pacing the room as I inhale the cancer-inducing relief.

“How did you make the cuts, Hazy?” I ask. “I made *sure* there were no razors in your bathroom!”

My voice is even, as though I’m speaking to a batty old lady, and I’m not sure whether my frustration is evident. She looks up at me, wiping tears and snot onto her top.

“Pencil sharpener blade,” she says, breathing heavily.

“Fuck.” I exhale the smoke, kicking myself for overlooking the art supply kit.

Here I was thinking I was looking after her so well with something artistic to do, and she uses it to slice herself up. I move to sit next to her, placing one arm around her gently and raising the cigarette to her lips. She takes a drag, her eyes on mine. I feed her more nicotine, and she speaks with a shaky voice.

“Why were you licking my scars? Why weren’t you just eating pussy like a normal pervert?”

I shrug.

“I’m a sicko, so I don’t know the answer to that question. I just know that you fascinate me endlessly, and I have this compulsion inside to understand you completely. Everything about you. Why you cut.”

She looks out the window, quiet for so long, I think she's in a trance.

“Why couldn't you just eat my pussy? That's what I expected.”

I kiss the top of her head, then finish the cigarette.

“I'm not normal, we've established that, and as alluring as I think your scars are, I do not want you hurting yourself under this roof.”

“You're not telling me what the fuck I can do with my own body. I'll always find a way to slice it open. Fingernails work, as I'm sure you're aware.”

“Oh, you have no idea just how much I know about mutilating a human body, my darling. You won't be hurting yourself again. Ever. That's my job now, and I don't like other people making decisions for me. I agree you need the release, but your body is mine. Got it?”

I push her torso over the end of the couch, and her head dangles toward the floor, her inked little ass raised sky high. Bumpy scar tissue is visible as I pull down her panties, and I run my fingers across it. She groans loudly and leans into the couch, appearing to make herself comfortable for what's to come. I hold her down with a forearm across her back, just in case.

“I know you crave this, baby. Give it over. Breathe.”

She rocks gently from side to side, pushing her pelvis into the couch and doing as I suggested as I raise my open palm. As I see her exhale, I bring it down firmly across her ass. The *thwack* rings up my arm with a feeling of release. Not too hard, but hard enough to have her stinging nicely. She squeals, squirms, then is quickly still again, letting out a very satisfied groan.

“You needed that, didn't you, my baby?”

She shakes her head no, but I know different. I wait patiently, rubbing her clenched ass, until her head nods yes.

“Yes,” she breathes. “Do it again, please, Sir. Harder.”

“Of course you love it because you’re *my* dirty little slut, aren’t you? I know exactly how to take care of you, don’t I, pretty one?” I say, inspecting her exposed vulva and watching the rise and fall of her breath.

I spank her four more times in quick succession, then blow cool air onto the pink welts forming under her black ink. The subtle globes of her ass are delectable in this position, and I lick her ass, reaching deeper with each next sensation my tongue discovers.

Pulling back, I spank her again. Her body reacts so predictably, so cathartically, that I know I’m right. She’s a fucking masochist and loves this shit. It’s what her soul needs.

After each slap, I run my fingertips softly over the red, raised flesh. With the reverberation of each slap, my dick pulses with need. I lean in to lick up her centre, and I dip my tongue inside her. Moaning at her flavour, I straighten and deliver another five blows, ten all up. She’s whining and moaning, so I reach between her legs and insert a finger.

“You’re mine, little one. Don’t fight it anymore.”

She looks up now, tears dampening her face and a soft, happy sub smile on her lips. The madness behind her eyes has lessened. I pick her up under the arms and return her to the seat; she winces from the sting.

Taking her tiny face in my hands, fresh tears spring in her hollow eyes. I pull her in for a kiss. It’s been too many years, decades, really, since I’ve cared enough about a woman to want to take care of her like this. To tend to her every need. I kiss her, curling my tongue into hers as I search for all her answers. She tastes like tea and tears.

As we pull apart, she buries her face in my neck, sobbing quietly and reaching her arms around my neck. She curls into my lap like a cat.

“This will never work. You don’t want me, not really,” she says, her voice muffled by my shirt. I squeeze her closer to me. I need to protect her at all costs.

“What makes you so sure of that?” I ask.

“I’m broken. Men can’t deal with this level of insanity and instability,” she says, pointing to her head. “No one ever makes it past the doomed third date.” Her glassy eyes look up at me. “It’s just better for everyone to keep the casualties low.”

“Well, Bones, I’ve got enough battle scars of my own. Nothing inside that broken skull of yours is going to scare me away. You’re mine, and as unconventional as I am, I know how to take care of my treasures.”

She nods, hiccups, then snuggles deeper into my chest. I tingle all over as she finds her way right into the crook of my neck. She must be so exhausted after all that useless flailing. I stroke the damp hair away from her face as she hiccups again.

Leaning back against the couch, I hold her in the circle of my arms as I breathe in her scent. Fear and arousal. My two favourite scents. I smile to myself and soak up this moment, just in case I never get another one like it in my life.

“You’re the most valuable of all,” I whisper.

Her breathing slows and I realise she’s fallen asleep on me. I may be a fuck-up of monumental proportions when it comes to women, but I know how to spot a good thing when it knees me in the throat.

Daddy Issues - The Neighbourhood
Do It For Me - Rosenfeld
Meet In The Middle - Ta-ku, Wafia

HAZY

Oh no, I don't want to wake up again. Please... dammit. Why am I still alive?

My cheeks are sticky and salty, so I must have been crying. Standard. My butt is stinging beautifully and feels a little bruised. Mmmm... nice. How? I feel good. I can probably go back to sleep again before work.

I yawn and open my eyes, blinking a few times before realising where I am. The writing desk, bookshelf, huge windows, aaaaand I'm back in this bloody castle again. *Fuck!!!* Hang on a minute, how did I get back in this room? Last night comes whooshing back at me like a wind tunnel; memories of my hips and ribs digging into the arm of the chair as I felt the cathartic smack of his hand on my ass. At just the right pressure.

My demons went bolting with that spicy-sweet sting. The warmth of his heavy breathing and groans as he doled out my measured spanks. A heat wave surges through me and my adrenaline spikes.

I need to pee, so I push the sheet off, and Shade readjusts his nest at the foot of my bed. My leg is cramped from having his heavy body on it. I hobble across my room to the toilet by moonlight, squinting just enough not to bump into the wall. I sit down to relieve myself, then wipe, and wash my hands with eyes still closed.

Opening one eye, I fumble my way back across the bedroom. God, my mouth tastes like ass; I didn't brush my teeth tonight, did I? I also haven't purged for two weeks, which is a miracle and makes my breath smell fresher in general.

"Where's the blade, Hazy?" I leap out of my skin when the voice breaks through the darkness.

"Fuck! Fuckety-fuck!" I shout, pivoting and clutching at my chest.

Laughter. My heart sprints from zero to sixty; this is heart attack material, for certain. I can see the white spots dancing across my vision.

"Oh, did I spook you, sweetheart?" Banks asks, as he switches on the art deco lamp next to him. He's seated in the wingback chair next to the old fireplace. Watching me, like your friendly neighbourhood peeping Tom.

"Fuck me, Banks, seriously? How long have you been sitting there?" I grumble as I search for the Spotify-only phone to find music. I need to calm down, get my breathing under control, and I know just the song I need.

"Since I carried you down and tucked you into bed four hours ago."

"You what? Okay..." I say as I tap on *Morning* by *Goldilox*. "Did you f... I mean, did we fuck?" I stammer, flopping down face first on the pillow and groaning. Shade kicks me in the leg.

"I asked you where the blade is, Hazy," he says, ignoring my panic.

I sit up and clench my pussy tight to see whether I can sense a hint of violation in that region. Thankfully, no. I'm

certain that if a mammoth cock, with its array of barbaric bling, had been anywhere near this sweet, sweet kitty, I'd know all about it now.

“Well, I'm not giving you the blade. You've taken everything away from me; my friends, work, control over food, my freedom to drink booze at any hour. So I'll be keeping the blade. Thank you. Come again.”

He laughs now as he sparks up a joint and holds it between his teeth. Using the armrests, he pushes his tall frame up. He grins as he moves towards me.

“The fuck you are. I'll rip these rooms apart to find it,” he says. “Let me tell you, I've torn entire mansions apart, searching for gear before, so it won't take me very long to strip one room and a bathroom.” A trail of smoke lingers behind him in the lamplight, it smells so good. “Or you could just hand it over and we can finish up here for the night. Then I'll go back to bed and fantasise about you while I tug myself. How's that sound?”

“Fuck you, I'm going to sleep,” I sneer, rolling toward the window.

I close my eyes and get comfy, pulling the sheet over myself, and snuggling into my favourite Squishmallow. He heads to the door and opens it.

Well, good! Fuck him. I can go back to sleep now.

“Shade, out,” he tells the dog.

Ahh... bum, bum, bum.

Smoke drifts from his joint as the dog jumps off the bed and trots out the door, nails clacking. Banks shuts the door and keys the lock.

What have you got yourself into here, fuckface? You're reckless as shit. No wonder only a psychopath wants you. He's going to rape you properly now.

“Are you pissed off?” he asks.

Cool air touches my legs as he rips the covers off. The mattress dips where he settles next to me. I'm caged between

his thigh and an arm leaning over the top of me. The glow of his joint casts a soft light on his features. His thick lips are so damn edible, and the little crinkle next to his wide set nose is adorable. Why does he have to be so fucking attractive? Makes this shit twenty times harder.

“Of course I’m pissed off,” I say with a huff. “You’re an A-grade bastard for that stunt you pulled earlier,” I say. “That was flat-out rape.”

“You’re not the first woman who’s called me a bastard,” he says. “And if that was rape, you were literally pushing my mouth *onto* your horny little pussy. You might want to remember that part.”

“Shut up, and don’t gaslight me. You know what I meant.” I roll my eyes. “You *are* a giant prick. Like, a ginormous one.” I side-eye him with a slight smirk.

His hand trails softly up my thigh, and a shiver runs through me. Leaning over, he puts his joint out on an old plate of food, then reaches for my skimpy, pyjama singlet, pulling it up over my head. The thrill of exposure runs through me. I feel studied, admired, wanted. His fingers search underneath my shorts as his eyes rake down my body and I exhale.

“Spread your legs for me.”

The contemplation process bypasses my brain, and my thighs drop wide at the sound of those words, like the traitorous sluts they are. His expression is one of lust, wonder, and sheer devotion. His whiskey eyes follow the trail of his fingertip along the lines of my *Frankenstein’s Bride* tattoo.

“Flawless,” he whispers.

I feel his fingertips trace the black-and-white lines toward my pussy, and he caresses me through the damp fabric. He drags his fingers so that they push the cotton into my opening. I gasp at the sweet intrusion.

“Now, tell me, when you get home from a shitty day at work, what do you do?” he asks, large fingers probing their way along my intimate folds.

“Drink, starve, cut?” I say, making it sound like a question. I focus on my breathing.

“...not allowed to starve anymore; I feed you now,” I hear him saying, unsure if I’ve missed anything. My body reacts instinctively to his fingers slowly circling my clit, and I can’t stop myself as I buck into his hand like a hussy. “You can drink alcohol when I give you permission. Do you understand?”

I nod and try to swallow, but my mouth is a sand dune.

“I can’t hear you.”

“Yes, Sir, I understand.”

“Good. Now, why do you cut yourself up?” he asks, abruptly stopping the rubbing and standing up.

Faaaarkin’ son-of-a-bitch!

I clench my pelvic floor and rock from side to side, a delicious shiver running through me.

“I’m a horny little slut clawing for more. Please don’t stop,” I beg pathetically.

“Answer the damn question, woman. I understand the drinking, I’m guilty of that too,” he goes on, completely ignoring my shameful declaration. “The drugs... sure, I need my weed... I even understand starvation to some extent. But cutting? And on your face like that, I need you to explain that one to me.”

“Because, like starvation, the cutting is all mine. The pain then release, and the tribal cuts are just the story of my life. Nothing more,” I say.

“Keep going,” he says, starting the slow circles over my underwear again. I can smell my own pussy as he works me back up.

“I mean, no one can really stop me,” I pant. “I like that. It’s mine, and it’s beautiful, and I never want to stop.”

He rubs me with the perfect pressure and tempo, and I let out a quiet groan as I push against him, gripping his arm for

leverage.

“Oh, you are a greedy little whore, aren’t you?” he teases.

I bite my lip and our combined laughter sounds perfect together. Keeping eye contact, he leaves me again to grab a duffel bag from the desk, settling back next to me and placing it on his lap. What’s in there? I can never predict him.

Power exchange, with a man as strong as Banks, it’s what I’ve always wanted, but because of my issues it’s always been just out of reach. And now I’m living it, I’m scared of the reality. My self-control is the only thing I have left.

“This is a little show bag, just a taster of the bondage and impact play I know your body needs. Earlier today was a trial, and now I’m going to go a little deeper. Do you trust me?”

I nod, breath catching in my throat as I eyeball the bag. He tugs on the zipper, and I catch sight of a coil of dusky rose coloured rope, some silver chain, and safety scissors resting on the top of the pile.

“I need a verbal answer please, sweetheart.”

The Party & The After Party - The Weeknd
Hold Me Down - Mansionair

HAZY

“Yes, yes, I trust you. Hurry, please,” I plead. He laughs. This guy wants to tease me with his bag of tricks, then take his time? Sadist. Tie me up already.

“Thank you. Now, what’s your safe word?”

“What? Why?” I say, my eyes alight with intrigue.

“Everyone needs a safe word. What’s yours?”

“Pleiades,” I say, visions of sparkling night skies appearing in my vision.

“Of course it is,” he says, smiling. “What else would it be with you? Orion?” He winks as I force steady breaths. He understands me. Is it possible that he could within such a short space of time? I want him to hurt me, release me, expose me.

“I’m going to give you what you crave. Now, palms together in front of you, please,” he says. The way he demands things makes me feel weak in the best way.

I nod gently, mind racing, as I follow his orders. I’m hopeful that this could be a good thing for me, psychologically speaking, if it’s anything like the catharsis I felt earlier. With

my torso bent over his couch and my butt stinging from his control. He binds my wrists with the pretty rope, my flesh tingling where his fingers touch me, and he yanks my hands over my head.

The sudden jolt throws me off, and I shift into another, more beautiful space. He's flicked a switch, and I can't help falling for him a little deeper. Deeper than my underwater nightmares.

I feel each vertebra elongate as my back arches, my small chest pushed forward as I allow him to control my hands with the rope. It feels soft against my skin, and I can't help but wonder about his choice in using silk rope tonight. He trails his fingernails down my side, eliciting an involuntary giggle from me, as he pulls me close. It tickles, and the feeling is so exquisite I smile into these new sensations. I'm melting into his energy, leaning into his muscles and the safety net he's thrown around me. I feel protected.

He lays me back in a comfortable position and secures both my wrists and ankles tightly. My heart races as he bites my tattooed nipples, his teeth clicking against the piercings, one after another, trailing his tongue around the heart shapes, before attaching clamps to each. A little chain runs between the nipple clamps with a silver charm saying *'Owned'* dangling between them. He squeezes me hard, and gives the chain a little tug.

"Relax," he says, his nails scratching lightly over my thigh. "I want to hurt you, because it's what I know you need. But the masochist inside you has got to learn how to hand control over to someone else. You're safe with me here, and it's time."

I wriggle against my binds to test them out, and find the perfect tension greeting me. He pulls a small knife from the bag, resting it on the side table. I smell leather as he holds a hood up, and I close my eyes as he places it over my head and zips it up the back, carefully making sure my hair doesn't get stuck. There are large holes for my mouth and nose, but I can't see. I feel the heat from his chest and breathe the scent of leather in again.

“Do you trust me?” he asks again.

“Yes, Sir.” I listen to my breath, my blood, and my body aches with need.

“I’m going to clean this pretty little knife and then your skin because I take care of my girl. You should know that I’m practising extreme self-restraint right now.” I hear him breathe deeply, then feel the gentle scratch of his nails running the length of my torso, tender and exquisite. Two words I would never have imagined using to describe this devil of a man.

I nod, grateful, wishing he would hurry up. My face feels hot and clammy, as my sight and hearing have been diminished inside the leather. I’m breathing hard. He kisses me deeply, through the hole in the hood, his tongue searching for mine, and I respond.

I can see a vision of my body laid out on a mad scientist’s table, with bottles and smoke spilling potions everywhere. If he cuts me somewhere I don’t want him too, well, shit.

“Please... please, just make it symmetrical,” I say. “That’s all I ask.”

“I’ve got you, Bones,” he says. I feel a kiss on my thigh before the alcohol swab cools my flesh. Shivering, I realise I’m not afraid of any pain; I’m afraid of the emotions that may be released, and of not being the one in control. I want this, I do. I want to try something new because my current methods aren’t working. I’m not going to safe word tonight, no matter what happens. I’d rather exsanguinate than safe word with him. I want to see how far we can go together.

He holds my thigh down firmly, and I go with it. No struggles. His palm secures me, and the binds are just an added safety measure because I’m not planning on moving one inch. When he makes his first meticulous slice, I sit like a rock. The sharp sting from the knife is quickly overtaken by the torrent of emotion. Tears seep down my temples under the hood as I try to hold as still as possible and savour every second of this exquisite exchange. I don’t pretend to hold on to any shame here. I choose to let it go for once.

He holds me so tenderly, with just the right amount of pressure, that it allows me to actually enjoy myself. He's hurting me for mercy. He instinctively understands the way in which my shards fit together. Another small sting, then another, and one more; all on my right leg. All close together and symmetrical, I can feel it.

The liquid drips down my thigh and his warm tongue laps it like a wolf tending to its injured mate. He's healing me in the most sacred of ways possible for a damaged human like me. I didn't know this level of trust was possible.

"How are you under there, Bones?" he asks, the tone of his voice comforting.

"More, please," I say, the sound of my pulse continuing to rush in my ears.

An intoxicating rush takes me over, and I remember to breathe. I'm floating; higher than from any drug or sex or booze I've tried before. And I've sampled most of them. I want him to drag that knife up the entire length of my body and slice me in half if it means I can revel in this feeling a little longer.

He switches legs and expertly slices at just the right depth to take me even higher in my abyss. This fuzzy, underwater release. I groan as I lean into the blade a fraction, as much as my binds allow. He laps at my other leg and groans loudly. Is he getting something out of this exchange too? Is this turning him on?

"Is that what you need, my baby girl?"

I nod *yes* because I can't speak.

"Have we finished here for now?"

I nod *yes* again. He removes the hood swiftly, and even though my breathing wasn't compromised at all in this scene, I take a few deep breaths of relief. The binds fall from my limbs quickly in his capable hands. Taking me into his arms, he wipes the tears and snot from my face, before lowering me back down onto the cushioned bed. I snuggle into the softness.

“I’m going to play a little more now that I’m here, if that’s okay with you,” he says, smiling. He’s just so fucking big. Everything about him is oversized, and I feel tiny in his hands and under his gaze. I nod. I want him to continue this exploration into the unknown with my body. I love trying to see myself the way he sees me, but I can’t do it. He kneels next to the bed, gently grabbing under my ass cheeks and dragging me close. The way he moves me around easily—just like a rag doll—turns me on to no end. I glimpse the knife on the table and stare at the small crimson streaks; my exquisite, beautiful lifeblood.

I watch him as he worships me, his intense gaze, licking the little rivulets of blood from my flesh again and his tongue making its way up my leg.

“You’re so fucking perfect,” he says before his tongue continues higher. “This is my job now. You come to me when you need clemency.”

“I hope you’re always here, then,” I say, nodding through tears. The words sound like a warning as they fall from my sulky lips.

Without warning, he yanks my shorts and black panties off, sniffing, then pocketing them. I squeal and giggle at the shock of it all. He tosses the pyjamas over the end of the bed, then pulls my legs apart, avoiding my fresh wounds, and he sucks his thumb before going to work on my clit. While the other hand plunges straight inside me, I groan from the urgency and overwhelming sensations of being filled by him. When he pauses, I crane my neck to watch him suck my juices from his fingers, holding eye contact with me all the while in the low light.

I’m groaning and whining for more of those thick fingers, in and out, as he pushes my body up the bed. When he bends to lick my pussy, soft, warm and primal waves of relief roll through me and I realise that my shadows—my beloved, tortured demons—are utterly silent. They’re not even lurking. I don’t want him to stop, but he does, and he grabs some antiseptic and sticky bandages for my legs.

“Thank you,” I murmur, floating in my blissful headspace as he takes care of my needs so tenderly. I’ve never been treated so lovingly, so intuitively, by a lover before. This whole ritual with the blades, blood, and bandages has always been so sneaky. So private and taboo in my shower late at night. But to share it with someone...it’s different.

“Thank you for trusting me,” he says, stroking my hair. “This is what I’ve always wanted. Now, where’s the blade, Hazy? Let me look after you properly.”

Fuck. I thought he’d forgotten about that.

I glare at him as he heads to my bathroom, flicking on the light and opening drawer after drawer. Shuffling lotions and toothpaste tubes around in the overhead cabinet, I can hear him rustling. I’m so fucking horny it’s ridiculous, and he’s chosen this moment to look for the fucking pencil sharpener? I was on my way to a happy ending and now I can hear him washing his hands. He returns, settling down in his earlier spot.

“I didn’t say you could move,” he says, flipping me over and laying me across his thigh, before spanking my ass a few times in quick succession. The warmth only turns me on even more, and he rolls me onto my back again and holds my legs apart. As he bends down, I feel him plunge his tongue deep into my engorged pussy. In and out, I am excited by his hunger. His tongue laps circles around my clit, as my head spirals with it. Up and down; all my ability to hold down a conversation just evaporated. His touch is forceful, and his fingers find their way to my G-spot as he sucks on my clit gently, and I grasp the back of his head with an aggressiveness and urgency I haven’t felt in years. I wrap my legs around his neck and grind my pussy into his face. He groans an unearthly, demonic sound and mumbles through my slickness.

“Are you going to come for me?”

He’s ramped me up so expertly, every sensation with him is amplified. I tumble over the edge, shattering as I cry out, release enveloping me like a blanket of energy. Gripping on to his head so tightly I’ll probably draw blood, I shudder under

his mouth. I never understood how anyone could come on demand, always assuming that it was bollocks, but now that I've been initiated into the cult, I finally get it.

Hypnotised by his mouth, his tongue flicking and sucking, I writhe in feverish delirium, moaning and grinding into his face as wave after wave clenches and rips its way through me. This is savage ecstasy. I writhe, sobbing and convulsing against his face, his tortured moans enough to prove that he's enjoying my climax as much as I.

How can he work my body like this when no one else has ever been able to?

I focus on breathing deeply, his tongue tracing my labia, lapping my juices, as my oxygen levels slowly return to normal. He sits up with swollen lips, having not stopped until my legs ceased their trembling.

“Water, please,” I beg through my scratchy throat.

“You can have anything you want after that little act.” He chuckles, licking his lips.

Pushing himself to stand, he jogs to my bar fridge, grabbing two bottles before returning to stand over the bed.

“What are you? Where did you learn that?” I ask, still barely able to speak, and not sure I want to hear the answer. I roll over to sit up and accept the bottle, but not before flailing a few times like a cockroach on my back before he pulls me up, laughing.

“What am I?” he asks, opening his bottle and sitting down. “You need to learn some manners, young lady. Open.”

He squeezes my jaw, and I do as he says, feeling the bottle on my lips. The water slowly trickles in to rehydrate my parched mouth.

“I need your holes accessible, at all times. Do you understand?”

He sits back, lowering the bottle and watching me.

“Holes? Plural?”

“Yes. Now drink this, then get that razor blade. Or I will do what I really want to do to that mouth, and you’re not ready for that yet.” I stare at him, my lips wrapped around the bottle and my eyebrows raised. After I guzzle, I hand him the bottle, then climb off the bed.

“Yes, Sir.”

Fucking hell. My pussy is swollen and still pulsing from his efforts. How does he know all of my drunken secrets? Lucky for me, there was a double blade in that sharpener. I wobble to the bathroom, stopping at the toilet for a pee before grabbing one of the blades from behind the vanity. I return to place it in his open palm, like an obedient little cum slave.

“Good girl, that wasn’t so hard, was it?”

I shrug and flop back onto the bed, closing my eyes and smiling.

“I believe the words you are looking for are ‘*No, Sir.*’”

I keep my eyes shut and continue to grin like a lunatic. I expect I’m about to be murdered, so I open one eye to peek. His expression is stern with a hint of humour. I like the way he plays, and judging by the way he works his way around my body, many other women before me have liked it too.

“Right. We will discuss this again later. For now, no cutting. Got it?”

“Got it, Sir. Just keep doing that tongue/finger combo.”

“Shut up, my sleazy little slut. Go to sleep,” he says, before kissing me gently, tucking me under the covers and locking me in.

*O*h my God - Sevdaliza

Staying - Koda

Not Sober - The Kid Laroi, Polo G, Stunna Gambino

HAZY

Laughter from the kitchen rings out. Banks and I are downstairs in the conservatory—the bright room off the side of the kitchen—sitting on one of the couches side by side.

Potted plants sit in every corner of the room, the glass ceiling brings the outside in, and huge windows make up every wall. It's a happy space. The landscaped courtyard beyond is quite formal, with geometrically shaped shrubs and greying fountains dotting the mossy stone pathway. All this is framed by the seascape in the distance and arches of brambly roses climbing for the sky.

Staff are bustling about preparing food and cleaning, but no one interrupts us. Swallow winks at me quickly as she pops her head around the corner to check we're okay. We've just finished lunch—ham sandwiches and fruit—which, thankfully, I've kept down so far. It's getting easier to accept the food he gives me, still, only food on my safe list, and occasionally something from my maybe list which I can choose to try or not. I glance around at the sixteen-foot windows, the wooden

fans doing lazy rotations on the ceiling. The sleek styling and furniture are just an added bonus to the blue backdrop.

After the blood play the other night I've felt a peaceful sense of calm. The loss of control was a huge step. I haven't seen him for a few days and being with him now feels different from before all that. I feel safe in his company.

He slides his fingers ever so lightly along my shoulder, and I don't push him away. His entitlement with my body makes me feel a strange combination of submission, resentment, and bone-deep contentment. It's confusing, but comforting.

"Who did this to you?" he asks, touching a fine scar.

I don't understand what he means; it's obvious I did the damage myself. Even the larger scars on my face form a perfect geometrical design. They were no accident, and he knows it.

"Who do you think?"

"Shh. I meant, who drove you to start hurting yourself in the first place, baby. And when?"

I tug the skirt down over my scrawny knees, but he yanks it back up to the curve of my hips. Shade raises himself off the floor to nudge Banks' hand away from me. Guardian doggo of the century.

I don't care that the scars are there; I don't hide them, but having this much attention focused on my psychological traumas makes me jittery. His direct questions catch me off guard. The scars kept me alive through countless nights of oblivion, but their stories are achingly personal.

I nervously pick at my nails as I swallow the caustic taste which has appeared in my mouth. Procrastinating, I run my fingers over Shade's velvet face. Unable to look Banks in the eye, I scratch at my cuticles harder till one bleeds a pretty spot of blood. I stare at it, seeping slowly onto my nail bed. Bittersweet.

"The cutting started when I was twelve," I whisper to my fingers. "I couldn't breathe any longer. I needed something."

“Twelve? Christ. Who hurt you, sweetheart?” he asks tenderly. I feel a wall of protection settle around me, I sense that he is holding back his emotions.

You got what you deserved, because you were ugly. We’ve told you this repeatedly, you idiot. You’ll always be an ugly trollop. Rotten whore. So you cut yourself up to make sure no one would ever want you. Not really.

“Because I couldn’t deal with what was happening to me any longer. Cutting hurt slightly more than the hurt I felt inside for a fleeting moment, but it never lasted. It’s just chasing the dragon. I didn’t want to die, but I couldn’t live either.”

“What was happening?”

I see panic settling in Banks’ eyes. Does this monster of a man care enough about me rehashing my trauma? And if so, why?

No idea. You’re a fucking fruitcake.

Shade shoves his cold, wet nose onto my arm repeatedly, and then wanders away through the concertina doors to sprawl in the sunshine. I never really talk about my history of abuse because, frankly, no one cared then, and no one cares now. Of course Juney and Xan know the major plot points, but I never get all sappy about it in their presence. We all have our own private traumas we are battling. No, I’m happy for my child abuse, and the sinister fact that my own father sold me to paedophiles, to stay buried in the chilly graveyard of my mind.

“Honestly, I’m struggling to understand why you care?”

He leans forward, staring me head on.

“Why do I care?” he asks, the pitch of his voice rising. His calm exterior is cracking. “Goddamnit, I’m obsessed with you. I need to know everything, and I haven’t been able to find any info about you from before your arrival in Sydney.” He cracks his knuckles and reaches out to touch me gently. “I want to know who hurt you so badly, that you continue to do this to yourself.”

I stare at him, searching his noble face for the truth. All I find there is concern for a flawed and marred girl. My eyes drift across his brown skin, his broad nose, and that wicked, sensuous mouth.

“I’ve not told anyone my story, not really. The day I met you, I decided to put it all behind me and got on with my new life. It doesn’t matter anymore. You don’t need to do this. I’m fine.”

He laughs at the last part of my speech.

“Of course it matters. Have you met yourself? Bones, you’re not fine.”

He’s right. You’re as dumb as a carrot.

He reaches over and picks me up as though I were as light as a kitten and places me across his lap in a straddle. My clit grazes him. I’ve spied on him when he does squats and leg presses down in the gym early mornings and I know how his thighs got to feel this good. I wriggle to get comfy.

I can’t believe I’ve known him for this long and we haven’t really fucked yet. He’s the most twisted kind of gentleman I’ve ever met before. His self-control is next level.

His arms circle my lower back, fingers stroking the flesh above my skirt. My hand flexes against his art gallery of a chest. I could gaze at his body for days straight. Right here, I just want to fuck him. I don’t want to talk about my horrifying upbringing.

I feel his gaze as I continue to pick at my cuticles, ripping a hangnail off and watching a little line of blood seep through the pink flesh. He sees the blood too, grasping my hand and placing it in his warm mouth and sucking. Rolling his tongue around my finger, he holds eye contact with me, drawing on the droplet of blood, swirling my finger again and again, licking suggestively. A surge runs through me, a current of longing. I sway on his lap as his lips curl up, and a twinkle sparks in his eyes.

As I watch him, I see nothing but concern and care there, so I take a chance.

He drags my finger out from between his lips, making a *sllrrrrp* sound when it pops out, and folds my tiny hand inside his. I look out over the ocean, the birds riding the air currents, before turning around and settling myself down into his chest. I exhale a shaky breath. If I'm going to talk about it, I'm glad it's with him. I feel like he is strong enough to carry the weight of it with me.

"The sexual abuse started when I was five," I say, looking up at him. "My fifth birthday, in fact. I remember my party dress."

I shiver as the energy in the room shifts, a heaviness descending with a chill. His usually amber irises darken to deep brown as I watch.

"Go on," he says, with a light squeeze. His voice is controlled, but something ferocious is brewing.

"I was a strange child. I know, weird, right?" I joke, trying to lighten the mood. "A gross old couple got their claws into me by making me feel special. The usual grooming story, unfortunately. They preyed on me because my mum died from a heroin overdose when I was a toddler, and my dad spent more time at the pokies than he ever did at home. So these creeps told me I'd be a Hollywood star, that they had connections for a dancer like me, and I believed them. Why wouldn't I? They showered me with expensive gifts and opportunities that I wouldn't have otherwise. They were so nice at first. I went to their big house for dance parties, but that very quickly changed..." I cringe, the long-buried memory resurfacing.

He doesn't speak, just nods and continues to hold me on the couch.

"The abuse worsened until it was so hideous, I couldn't tell anyone anything. I wasn't the only kid either. It was some kind of ring that shared kids around. By that stage, the threats were so bad, they had threatened to kill me, and I knew they would do it. So they hurt me sadistically, yet continued to shower me in gifts and opportunities as a dancer. God, they were so creative about it. Worse every time," I say, dropping

my head into his chest and heaving a great sob, choking on a sudden pain in my throat. I can't help but remember some of those nights, laying in a huge bed, being given sleepy tea which made me fall asleep, and then waking up later being carried out of a fancy room and back to a car, driving into the night.

Shade runs back to me and hops up on the couch next to us, popping his long pointy snout on my leg as I sob. I give him a pat as Banks pulls me tightly against his chest, wrapping his giant arms around me protectively as I cry. He caresses my hair, wipes my tears, rocks me like a baby, but doesn't say anything. I finally calm down enough to go on.

"I believed them, that if I told anyone—the cops or my dad—that they would kill us all. She was my dance teacher, and he was her cop husband. I believed them when they said they would kill us and get away with the murder."

His large nostrils flare, and he cracks his neck, a forced smile baring his teeth.

"How long did this continue?" he asks, his tone gentle, but his jaw clenches and unclenches a few times.

"Till the day you saw me in St Kilda. I was sixteen. It would have kept going too, unless I did what I did to them with that knife in their car. I hate thinking about other kids who they did the same thing to. It still haunts my dreams, the fact that I didn't kill them. That I let them get away to do it all over again."

"That's who you were running from that day? You'd just hurt them, hadn't you?"

His eyes blaze with anger as he gently moves me to sit next to Shade. He stands up and walks to the doors. He stands there for a moment, hands in pockets, staring out to sea. I quietly plunge my fingers into Shade's fur, kissing his furry snout, thinking of that day when we first saw each other, when I was covered in blood and shivering in the rain.

"Are they still alive?"

“No idea. I don’t want to know,” I say, nausea creeping in. “I never looked back. I started drinking, and the cutting escalated. The eating disorder joined the mix, and here I am. Pretty as a picture!” I laugh because, otherwise, I’ll cry.

He turns, forcing a thin smile.

“How about a joint and a drink?”

“That sounds perfect,” I say, exhaling and wiping my nose with the back of my hand.

*B*ANKS

“Come on, then. Let’s go upstairs. I wish I had found you an hour earlier than I did that day. I would have thrown you into my Jeep and never let you go.”

“I hate them so much for taking my innocence, not giving me the chance to explore my sexuality at an appropriate age. It fucked up every part of my life. I spiralled from there. The cutting, the eating, the purging, the booze, the drugs, the promiscuity. Everything started with those kiddy fuckers, and I hate them more than life itself,” she says, sniffing.

“Come on,” I say, holding out a hand and watching her small one grasp it. Our tattoos join together, her black-work hands melding into my own. I pull her up to standing, and wrap an arm around her frail shoulder.

I love all the geometry and alchemical symbols she has across her entire body. Horror inspired portraits and other gothic works of art. I lead her through the house. Half-heard conversations pass us as we walk upstairs to my den, hand in hand, just like a real happy couple. It’s a nice feeling, not having to force her to do anything.

Being happy? A man like me? Home with my girl. Could *we* be a possibility?

I release her hand as we enter the den, and I shuffle a few things around in the desk drawers, looking for weed. Hazy

wanders around the room, checking things out in the daylight. She seems to like my vintage posters, antique furniture, and the tanks containing my pythons, *Fatty and Esmerelda*. She inspects the rugs, antique printer's gear, black-and-white fetish artwork, seemingly in awe.

"Love your style," she says, picking up an art deco ink blotter.

I laugh while sticking a few joints and a lighter into my shirt pocket, then grab a bottle of whiskey and two glasses.

"Follow me," I say, opening the balcony door wide. The breeze licks the curtains, and I inhale the salt air. "I love living here. I had help decorating this place. Plus, I have a large stack of architectural magazines for inspiration." Her eyebrows shoot up and I laugh freely. "Surprised?"

"No, not at all. Totally compliments your bad guy, killer vibe," she teases, eyes twinkling.

God, she's so beautiful.

I lead her outside to the balcony and pause at the railing.

"Been enjoying the view from your room?" I ask.

"Thank you, yes. The white sands are divine."

We listen to the waves breaking, and I raise my face towards the sun.

She must get bored down there day in and day out and I do feel bad about that. The sun is good for her, and she could use more of it.

I place the glassware onto the concrete table and flop into the two-seater egg chair. After I pour us each a large slug of whiskey, I spark up two joints. Leaning into the chair, I exhale a puff of smoke and pat the seat next to me. I pass Hazy her joint and light it for her, bracing against the wind. We sip and smoke together.

"I'm so sorry that happened to you as a kid, Hazy. I really mean that. It helps me understand you better, though."

"Yeah. Explains why I'm bat-shit crazy, huh?" she says.

“Don’t do that. Don’t minimise your pain. You’re not crazy.”

“I’ve been in and out of therapy for years now, and I’m barely alive. No one can fix my suicidal ideation, and if you think you’re going to fix me...” She shrugs. “Good luck and thanks for all the fish, is all I have to say.”

I nod, impressed by her Hitchhiker’s reference, and continue smoking, taking in the view of the horizon. She still thinks I can’t help her, but she’s wrong. I know I have the ability if she just gives me a chance. I’ve already made a great crack at it, and she’s definitely improving.

The gulls screech overhead like the annoying bastards they are, and I watch the dogs on the grass below running, snarling, and jumping at each other.

“Hey, don’t you shit on my fresh cut lawn!” I shout down at them. “Bastard things.”

“How do you know so much about eating disorders anyway?” she asks, as I knew she would eventually. Her head is relaxed back on a cushion, eyes closed, and her leg thrown over my lap. I’m in bliss over here. “I mean, why do you care so much about starving chicks? Why were you even at my clinic that day?”

I bury my face in her hair, sniffing her and kissing her forehead. Finally, I get up to refill our glasses.

“A girl I was in love with, a long time ago, killed herself. Starved herself to death because I loved her and she loved me, but we were forbidden lovers,” I say.

I take a long gulp of my drink and place my elbows on my knees, head hanging low. Nausea rises, my misery must be palpable because I catch a glimpse of Hazy’s expression. She has no idea what’s coming.

She reaches over to caress me with sympathy. Just as she starts backpedalling, blathering useless apologies about overstepping, I interrupt her.

“She was my sister,” I admit, watching her face process that piece of information.

Is there Someone Else? - The Weeknd

HAZY

I freeze, my skin prickling and my mouth barren. He cups my hand in his trembling one, and brings it to his lap.

“Sister?” I say, searching his eyes.

“Harmony. Her name was Harmony.” His voice is pained, like it’s torturing him to remember. I’ve never seen him like this. I’m not sure I’ve ever seen a man like this before.

“I’m so sorry,” I say, watching him closely.

We are silent, just breathing in each other’s arms and struggling in our own heads.

“It’s okay. I need to speak her name aloud. It’s been too long. No one here knows about her, none of their business, really. Hang on a sec.” He disentangles our limbs and heads inside, emerging quickly and tapping two cigarettes out of a packet. Handing a lit one to me, he sits down, weaving his fingers through mine and giving me a sad little smile.

“She was the most beautiful creature, Hazy, really,” he says, pulling my hand up and holding it tight. “The most beautiful; that is, until I saw a girl soaked in the rain like a horror movie cast member.”

I smile and squeeze his hand, taking a drag on my smoke. My system relaxes somewhat with the nicotine, but my mind is reeling.

“She was an angel, too pure to be related to my evil ass. My heart was torn clean outta my chest the day she died. I’ve been nothing but a zombie shuffling around, killing people ever since. I mean...” Pausing for a moment, he sips whiskey then takes a toke, blowing smoke rings. He looks me dead in the eye. “I loved her as... much more than a sister.” He holds my gaze, awaiting my reaction.

It takes me a beat to understand what he’s saying.

Here we are.

Bewildered, and feeling as though my breath has been knocked out of me, I await more information as my malnourished brain *clunks* into gear.

“You are telling me, you were...” I ask, barely above a whisper.

He nods.

“We were insatiable lovers. Couldn’t keep our hands off each other.”

My heart overflows with emotion as I process my ingrained societal opinions. I watch them skew my initial judgement about what he’s just told me. I look down at my lap, embarrassed that I could even fleetingly judge someone for loving their sibling. Maybe I’m just super high. I don’t know why I should be shocked by anything this man has ever done or said. At every turn. He opens his mouth and a hand grenade shoots out. I suck on my cigarette and hold the smoke in my lungs, waiting for the head-spin.

“Can I have another drink, please?” I ask, sculling mine.

He pours me another large one and hands it over. Something in my heart softens towards him. For once, I’ve had a glimmer of the man underneath the blunt exterior, and I feel for him, I really do. I drag in a breath as my thoughts wheel out into space.

“Tell me more,” I say.

I see tears pooling in his eyes now, but he’s afraid to blink in case they break through. He slides down onto his knees, placing his drink on the table and stubbing out his smoke, his throat bobbing back emotion. Reaching his arms around my waist, he leans his forehead against my lap. I feel tears through the fabric on my thigh. I can’t help stroking his coarse hair as he breaks down in my arms.

“You loved her more than anything, and she killed herself because of that?” I ask, trying to piece together what happened.

He nods into my thighs, sniffing. His hands grasp me with need.

“Oh, Banks,” I soothe, running my hand across his back. He’s so childlike in this position, so vulnerable. I don’t know what else to say, so I keep massaging. He wipes his cheeks on my skirt, then leans back against the table to take another sip of his drink.

“Fuck, I’ve never cried about this. Not even at her funeral,” he says. “Why am I now?” His cheeks are flushed, and I sense his embarrassment.

“Because I’m your girl,” I whisper. “You’re safe with me, if you want to be,” I say. And I realise I mean that. I am his girl, whether I like it or not.

I sink down next to him on the cool floor, holding him closer, tighter. I wipe a fresh tear off his cheek as my heart breaks for him.

He focuses on me over the rim of his glass. Drawing me in with his teary eyes, he smiles sadly.

“You’re right about that, *my girl*. Forever. Not even death will tear you from me because I would follow you into the abyss, haunting you.”

I nod, smiling at his intense words, my face burning as I absorb this moment for what it is. I finally said it out loud; admitted it to myself and to him at the same time. I do want to be his girl. At this point, I crave it, and nothing he can say can

make me run. His obsession is weaving its energy through me too. I can't get him out of my head and today's revelations settle into my bones with a quiet knowing.

“She killed herself in a painful and drawn-out suicide, Hazy. It was the most traumatic thing I've ever been a part of, hideous. And I've seen a lot of fucked up shit in my time. Afghanistan just for starters! I've seen shit no one deserves to see.” He pauses, eyes glazed. “My sister and I had this crazy tight bond. She thought she was so disgusting. Said we were both disturbed, hideous. She was seriously fucked up over loving me, over wanting every inch of me inside her as often as we could get away with it. She was tortured and humiliated by our desires, embarrassed that she was so rotten on the inside. She hated me and loved me in equal parts and punished herself daily. It started with controlling her food and unravelled from there. Her organs eventually shut down,” he says, holding eye contact with me, but obviously lingering somewhere else in his head. “She did rehab many times, but other than tube feeding, no one could force her to eat. She hated herself, and her love for me wasn't strong enough to keep her alive. I told myself I'd never love anyone that much ever again. I couldn't stand going through that much pain, so I just kept girls at arm's length.”

“Fuck.” I know what that's like. If you don't want to eat, no one can force you. That's why he's been dealing with me the way he has. Around food. Around exercise. He's an expert on all my stupid lies and not-so-secret habits. I think about my friends, the desperation I see on their faces when they see fresh scars or hear me purging.

I sigh and touch his jaw with a shaky hand, running my fingers along the stubble. I don't know what to say, so I just sit with him in silence. He's a human, after all. After all the crime and immoral actions, he's just a man who's lived a life wracked with a forbidden grief. A grief he can't even talk about with his best friends.

“What was she like?” I ask, leaning against the couch. I want him to remember the girl he loved, not the tragic end to her story. His smile is instant and, my god, the light that

appears on his face, I've never seen anything like it. He wipes his eyes and leans his head on his hand, thinking. I sit back to listen.

“She had this thing for synth pop music. I hassled her relentlessly about it. She danced around the house in my boxers and an old band t-shirt. She was obsessed with Star Wars in a way I will never understand, a real geek. And she loved gaming and unicorns,” he says, smiling.

“What did she look like?”

He thinks for a minute.

“It's sad, you know. Sometimes I forget what her eyes looked like, or her face entirely. I sit and think for an hour, just trying to remember before I allow myself to look at a photo. Or I can hear her voice come in and out of earshot like she's just in the next room and I forget that she's dead and all this time has passed me by. Time sucks. I hate forgetting her. In the end, it was her beauty that was her downfall.”

“When did you guys, you know...” I ask, not sure whether I'm about to vomit.

Well, this is awkward.

“I always loved her. When Mum and Auntie brought her home from the hospital, they said, ‘*You have a sister now,*’ and I remember thinking, ‘*Yep, she's mine, not yours. Get your hands off her.*’ And I was right. No one loved her like I did. Mum pissed off out of our lives pretty quickly, fucking around with different guys, and then one day she just never came home. Auntie Linda raised us with no money. Same cycle that she couldn't break either, but at least we had somewhere to call home, together. In primary school I stalked Harmony around the playground to make sure no one hurt her. When she got to high school, the number of guys I punched in the face because of her, well, I can't remember...” He pauses for a moment, taking a breath.

“We were both teased a lot at school for being Islanders, and biracial at that. Australia is such a racist country, and kids are assholes everywhere. But back then, it was even worse.

The names they called us were horrendous. We were the only kids with mixed heritage, at least visibly, at our school, and we were picked on mercilessly. Little shits called us a whole raft of slurs that I won't repeat. So if I wasn't punching some idiot in the face for wanting to rape her, I was punching them for harassing her about her skin colour. I smashed one guy's hand with a brick after school because he tried to feel her up. I dragged him out to the footy oval and got him in a headlock and bent his hand back until I heard it crack, then smashed it with the brick for good measure. They called the cops and Auntie flogged me so hard with an electrical cable that I bled through a shirt. And when the rumours about us started... Well, they weren't just rumours, because they were true... but word spread about us being a couple. The bullying was relentless, and she never stood a chance. She stopped eating, and the depression drowned her."

Shaking my head, I drag us both back up onto the couch and settle him down, holding his head in my arms and soothing him with the rise and fall of my chest.

This is next level shit.

The Sweetest Taboo - Henry Green

BANKS

Her cool touch soothes the hell inside my head. I close my eyes and cling to her. No idea where this has come from, but it feels like a weight has been lifted. Ancient demons have been brought into the light.

Get your shit together, man. Jesus Christ.

Even though I'm embarrassed, I feel as though I can be unguarded with her. My grief turns to anger.

"On her deathbed, she said that she'd been molested by an older kid from school. She hid it from me, and looking back, I should have seen the signs. Not letting me touch her, crying all the time, nervous, stomach aches, apathy. He'd threatened her if she told anyone, of course. The night she died, I drank a litre of JD and bought a gun from a bloke at the pub."

"Holy shit," she says, her pretty little head trying to process what I've just laid bare. Sometimes I forget just how fucked up my life has been.

"I don't want to upset you, baby. If it's too much, just say. I know it's a lot."

Fuck, what am I doing? I can't tell her all this. But she isn't just a random. I am obsessed with her in a way that

makes me question my own sanity.

“Strung that rapist from school up, swinging from the bare pipes with electrical wire. Fuck...” I say, my chest tightening at the memory. “The way his screams echoed around that bare concrete, I was more aroused than I’d ever been. I tortured him for days, really drew it out, cause I had nothin’ better to do. It got my dick so fucking hard, I jerked off over his pulped, bruised body, and blew my load on his face. The release and power I felt was new. As far as I know, none of his pieces were ever found. Just logged in the records as another runaway kid who never made it home.”

“What a tragedy,” she says, her skin pallid.

She clears her throat.

“Did you ... consummate...?”

“I get it, it’s taboo. Illegal. You can be honest with how you feel about this. I don’t even know why I told you.”

“I’m not sure whether I feel ill or have an insatiable desire right now.”

I stare into her eyes.

“I know that feeling. And yes, to answer your question, we fucked for years.”

A disturbed little smile reaches her eyes.

“That’s so hot,” she says.

“We loved hard. We grew up in each other’s arms, wrapped in each other’s sheets from an early age while sharing a room. And her hands always found me, exploring. Playing. She was so soft and when she laid next to me, I felt I could be gentle too. We took each other’s virginity. We were too young, but we knew exactly what we were doing. She snuck into my bed every night; and it continued until she died. I’ve never been seriously interested in anyone since her, really, until you.”

“Do I remind you of her, maybe? In some way?” she asks, looking tormented.

“The frailty from the eating disorder is the only similarity. Here, I’ll show you a photo of her,” I say, picking up my phone and scrolling to the photo of Harmony on the beach. I keep her photo on my phone, even though I choose not to look at it often.

“Oh, her collarbones! Do I look like this?”

“Exactly like that. It’s why you’re here.”

I look at the photo again when she hands the phone back, and my heart stabs with pain. Harmony’s black afro hair is windswept, like she’s hiding behind her mane.

“She was beautiful, Banks.”

I nod with tears spilling, wishing I could have saved her.

“I don’t know what I’d do if you died too, Haze,” I plead.
“Please, eat.”

*H*AZY

I want to cry for Harmony, for their taboo love, which never stood a chance against this cunt of a world. I know some of what she must have been feeling. I know what it's like to want to end it all. But I never have the guts to actually go through with a big fucking spectacular suicide, like blowing my head off or jumping in front of a truck. Now I understand why he's so desperately trying to save me. Why he donates to eating disorder charities. He feels so guilty that he couldn't save the one person he loved the most. Makes perfect sense. What a shitshow. I thought my life was a mess. I guess this just proves we are all fighting our own demons. We can't compare our darkness to anyone else's. We can only try to make it through to the other side alive, side by side.

I'm going to try to kick it this time. I would be such a bitch to let his generous help slide. He's offering me so much, the least I can do is accept it.

I reach into his pocket and pull out another joint and a lighter, sparking up and blowing the stream of smoke up into the sky. Ahh, I need this. When I raise the joint up to his lips, he inhales and takes it from me.

"Thanks, baby," he says. "Thanks for listening."

He smiles sadly as he smokes, standing and walking to the railing and looking out across the blue sea. I can hear a murder

of crows cawing from the other side of the castle, and I feel like they are trying to pass me a message.

I just wish I knew what it was.

*B*ANKS

I sit at my desk and pull out a Moleskine notebook, opening it. God, what a fucking shit-biscuit. I run my fingers along the paper and press down on the open pages. I feel so awkward and flustered for having poured my heart out like that. What a fucking crybaby.

I had to ask Hazy to go back to her room. What I feel like doing is blowing my goddamn brains out, but I will pick up a pen instead. I've been journaling for as long as I can remember. It helps stop my brain spinning into overdrive and gives me something to focus on. Fuck, I miss Harm. I don't let myself think about her very often because nothing good ever comes from that downward spiral. I usually take myself out on a drinking rampage, and that's never a good idea for anyone involved. Especially innocent people out driving the streets when I'm blind drunk and behind the wheel.

I'm still reeling. I can't believe I just spewed my darkest secret all over her and she took it all in her stride.

I was bawling my eyes out and she comforted me in a way I've never felt before. Not even from Mum as a kid. Especially not from Mum. She was the least maternal person I've ever known.

Hazy could see the real me. I showed her my shrivelled-up heart, and she didn't bolt. Like the fucking dark goddess she is. My dark goddess.

But the suppressed guilt and grief over Harmony doesn't allow me to let her in fully. I want to, so bad. It's all I've ever wanted. A good woman by my side. But, fuck me, this is bullshit.

I snort a generous line of coke and take a swig of whiskey, then I settle back in the chair and let the words flow. Breathe in. Breathe out. Wax on. Wax off. I neatly write *Xenophobes under concrete* at the top of the page and make a list of the 26 letters of the alphabet vertically. Write your trauma down, the quacks always say. Ha! I have a lifetime of trauma stored in this deranged skull.

Here you go, motherfuckers. Get ready to be fucked sideways.

XENOPHOBES UNDER CONCRETE

A PERVERSE CLOUD SETTLES; TURNSTILES OF
BENTLEY'S PARKED WHERE BEFORE WERE ONLY
BIKES.

CUT LINES ON GLASS, CURVY ASS AND PURSES FULL
OF SNOW.

DON'T TEST MY GENEROSITY I SAW YOU SNEER.

EVERYONE HAS A PRICE - I KNOW A GUY WITHOUT
CONSCIENCE - I KNOW NINE.

FUCK. HOW LONG HAVE I BEEN AWAKE THIS
TIME?

GET MY SMOKES, JERK OFF, GET TO WORK.

HEATHENS ON EVERY STREET, BUT

I'VE GOT THE DIRTIEST VENOM OF ALL.

JUST GOTTA WIPE MORE BLOOD FROM MY SHIRT.

KICK DRUMS SOUND LIKE THE PULSE IN MY HEAD.

LISTEN. I RENT THREE PENTHOUSES IN HELL SO
DON'T FUCK WITH ME OR

MAYBE, JUST MAYBE I'LL DRAG YOU BACK DOWN
TOO. DIDN'T ANYONE TEACH YOU

NEVER TO UNDERESTIMATE A MAN WHO'S LOST
EVERYTHING?

ONLY LUST KEEPS ME GRINDING. FOR SEX. FOR
DEATH. FOR SELF-DESTRUCTION.

POISON IN AN OLD FASHIONED, SLID SLOWLY
ACROSS MY EBONY DESK

QUIET DEATH AS I WATCH YOUR LIPS; CURVE THEM
THEN OPEN DISTORTION.

REAP WHAT YOU SOW; I'LL SEW THOSE LIPS SHUT
AND I'LL BE HARD THE ENTIRE TIME.

SMOKING WEED ON ROOFTOPS WITH STRIPPERS.
WATCH THE BOURBON SUN RISE.

TOSS A CUBE OF SUGAR; THE FANCY STUFF. TAKE
TWO.

UNFORGIVING, RUTHLESS, DEVOID OF REGRET.

VELVET LINED CASES, ARTILLERY CRATES LOADED.

WHAT DID I TELL YOU? DON'T MISJUDGE UNHOLY
MEN.

XENOPHOBES WIND UP UNDER MY CONCRETE.

YOUR SHADY ASS IS PUSHING UP SKYSCRAPERS AND
EVEN

ZOMBIES COULDN'T ESCAPE YOUR ETERNITY.

*S*ooky - Dusty Springfield
Twenty Eight - The Weeknd

HAZY

This morning, Rosetta dropped off a big, glossy, black box with a white card attached. It said: *Be ready at 7pm sharp. B xo*. Inside was this outfit, which probably cost more than one month's salary.

Tonight is the first time Banks has let me out of the castle, and I'm nervous. He said it's to celebrate because I've gained five kilos, but I don't care why. I'm just glad I can get out of that cell.

After his outpouring about his sister the other day, I felt ambivalent and shocked. But I think we all have monsters slithering through our veins, so who am I to judge?

He's been so attentive with me. When he's home from work, he makes sure I'm happy and entertained. But I'm still locked in that goddamn room.

My body image is a constant struggle, and one of my favourite people on the planet is Lizzo. Her confident self-love and sexy body positivity message fills me with hope that I can feel like that about myself someday. That maybe I even

deserve happiness like that. I have been eating and doing what they tell me so I can get better.

I look around the back seats of this Mulsanne as we glide through the night in luxury. I'd never even heard of a Mulsanne until about thirty minutes ago when I walked down the front steps. I haven't been in a car so fancy in my life, and I'm worried that I'll somehow make a mess. I don't know how, but I'm sure I will. I'll spill something, for sure.

I'm pretty certain Banks isn't going to kill me while I'm wearing this dress, though. Would he? The dress is a black midi number, with gorgeous, soft-ribbed fabric. It's backless, with criss-cross straps at the shoulder blades and cut-outs in all the right places. I never in a million years would have chosen this dress for myself, but it's cute. The heels are strappy, and the little clutch is made of the softest leather with little skull studs that are so adorable. If he chose this outfit, he has great style.

The initial ten minutes of the drive, I spend quietly hyperventilating. I still hate other people driving me anywhere after the old cunts abducted me in their Ford, but I managed to calm myself down by staring at the red and black interior details. Who knew there could be so many places to hide a whiskey glass? Zane—the big mountain man Viking guy—is the chauffeur; his playlist swings between *Eminem* and hardcore death metal. He's so pretty, in a ripped warrior kind of way. Not my type at all. Not into blondes.

We've finally emerged from dark coastal scrubland and skirted the suburban city limits. I still don't know where we are headed, but I sip my whiskey and try to relax. The serpent of the unknown slithers through me. The deviant thrill that could bring me to my knees and put me in all sorts of compromising positions. I almost want this sick fuck sitting next to me to murder me. What would it feel like for him to slice me up, show me my organs while I was still alive? What if he removed my eyeballs from their sockets and pointed them at each other? Would he fuck me when I was dead?

A woman came at lunchtime today to do my mani-pedi while I sipped mimosas. She didn't speak one single word to

me, but I didn't care. Banks ordered her to do black matte coffin fingernails and black matte toes. After my shower, she did my hair and makeup too.

Banks smells magnetic as usual; black musk and strange spices, swirled with honey whiskey. His hand slides across the leather seat and grips my knee. I grab his hand, tingling at his touch.

"You are aware that this is mine, are you not?" he asks, squeezing me. His hand travels further under my dress until it grazes the fabric of my panties. "This too," he says, rubbing.

I look up to see Zane's eyes watching us in the rear-view mirror, and Banks flicks a switch so the clear glass becomes frosted.

"Of course that fucker wants to perve on you. You're the hottest fucking goth chick in the world."

I shudder, glancing sideways at Banks. The thought of someone watching me have sex makes me hot. Banks grins at me with more than a hint of depravity behind his eyes. His thumb grazes my pussy again, and I can feel that the lace is already wet. His palm rubs circles with more pressure, and I let out an involuntary whimper, feeling his fingers slide the fabric away and deftly slip inside my pussy.

This man knows what he wants.

He rubs lazy circles against my G-spot, as casually as you'd scroll through your phone in a supermarket line. I groan from the intoxicating sensation and the agony of waiting for this man to hurry up and fuck me senseless already. Holy shit, this is the slowest fucking burn imaginable.

"Oh, really?" he whispers. "Panting, are we? You like being fingered, don't you, my dirty little slut?"

I nod and hold a breath, trying not to rub against his hand like a proper harlot. One lonely finger is such a cruel tease. I need three, four, more. One is not enough to fill me up, but more than enough to get me begging. I hope I don't make a sticky spot on the expensive seat, or ruin this designer dress.

The scent of my pussy starts permeating the cabin of the car, and he inhales long and deep. Letting out a sharp laugh, he removes his hand, covering my pussy again with my panties and holding eye contact with me as he sniffs his finger before licking it clean.

“Oh yes, you fucking love it. Proof is right here.”

He’s very happy with himself, as we whizz down the motorway.

I squeeze my legs together and the heat rises. But the bastard picks up his whiskey glass and swirls it with his pussy-soaked digits. As though he fingers girls in the back of his car every day. A wave of jealousy hits as I realise that he likely does finger different girls every day. This man can do whatever the hell he likes. And I’m just another slut along for the ride.

After about an hour of me groaning inwardly, and him drinking two more whiskeys, we pull up into a secluded property at the top of the Blue Mountains. The gates swing inward as Zane navigates the driveway. High stone fencing wraps around the perimeter, CCTV cameras watch us from every angle, and willow trees line the long winding drive. The gate swings shut automatically behind us as we pull up to the circular drive.

In front of a house; a large black, multi-tiered fountain stands in the centre lit from below. The tyres crunch the gravel as we approach.

The glass, steel and concrete architecture of the house would be more at home in Los Angeles than Sydney. But somehow, it works, nestled in the Australian bushland with the screech of flying foxes above. No neighbours. No streetlights. Just us, the landscaped garden, and this strange, eerie house deep in the middle of nowhere.

And here I am, with two men who could wring my neck without a second thought. But little old slutty me is in the corner, fantasising about being anally penetrated by both at the same time. I need to get a grip on reality, so I clench my thighs, but my clit just thrums indignantly.

Tart.

The doors to the garage swing open, and Zane steers us inside, opening the door for us. This space could easily fit ten cars, but there are only four here tonight, all luxury.

I have to wriggle with my ankles and knees together in this skin-tight dress, just so I don't stack it getting out of the car. Banks holds my hand and leads me into the grand foyer of the house. Very sleek and modern furnishings greet us, with mirrors above a vase of death lilies. Nice touch.

"Welcome to *Mortelle*," he says, gesturing around the spacious lobby.

"I'll be in the green room, boss. Buzz us if you need anything."

Banks nods as Zane wanders off into another part of the house where I can hear a couple of low, muffled male voices.

"Before we go in here, I want you to remind me what your safe word is," he says.

I stare at him. What the fuck are we about to do?

"Pleiades," I reply.

"Good," he says, as he turns a key, and we step into a small, dark booth. An internal window gives us a view into the adjoining room, interrogation style. Classical music winds its way to me from a speaker. One corner of our suite is filled with video screens and technology, which appear to show footage of a number of rooms; the garage, a lounge suite, the three men in a rumpus room, a kitchen, dining room, the exterior of the house, the perimeter of the property. And the room beyond this window.

"One Way mirror," he says, nodding toward the window. "Sound-proofed. She can't hear us."

My eyes adjust to the lighting, and the tableau comes into focus. There's a woman in her sixties, with ash blonde hair styled to perfection, wearing a full face of makeup, and diamonds dangling from her lobes. She's perched on the edge of a stainless-steel surgical trolley—similar to some I have at

work—and she has a glass of wine in her hand. The red cocktail dress hugs her tanned, sculpted body.

The room is stainless, from the floor to the wall to the ceiling. It's fitted with a variety of expensive medical furniture, tables, and other trolleys with implements all displayed in well-organised offerings. Three surgical lights hang from the roof with various switches and levers. Metres of plastic tubing, and modern and vintage instruments. Some of which I recognise as mortuary and veterinary tools like emasculators are hung on the wall within easy reach.

The flawless woman smirks as she drains her glass and places it down. She settles back to watch something, and I follow her gaze.

How the fuck did I miss him? On a table lies a skinny, grey-haired man. He's secured by his arms and legs with thick leather psychiatric cuffs. They look frightening. I've had those forced on me before. The table is tilted so his feet are elevated above his head and blood is trickling down the table. It slides past his bright red face and collects in a trough under the rim. It continues its course through a funnel and collects in a metal bowl on the floor. His face is blotchy and wet from crying, his torso covered in fresh bruises, his cock and balls are severed half off, dangling at a very unnatural angle.

Is he dead?

I glance at Banks, then step up to the glass to observe his chest rising and falling at a ragged tempo. He's unconscious, but alive.

“What is going on here?” I ask, glaring at Banks in confusion. “Aren't you going to help that man?”

He simply smiles at me with no explanation. I stare back at the woman as she pours herself another drink.

“Who are they?” I whisper.

“That is her husband,” he replies, watching my reaction closely.

My jaw drops open as my breath forms fog on the window. This is like watching a car wreck and an episode of *Dexter* at

the same time. If my guts weren't churning, I'd be eating popcorn. I see dead bodies on the daily, but this is unadulterated torture. Apparently gleeful, heart-wrenching torture on the purest level.

I can't hear anything from the room directly and Banks walks to the corner and clicks something on the computer. A speaker crackles to life so I can hear her heels clicking on the floor. Soft classical music plays in the background, and the clang of metal against metal rings out as she pushes a scalpel to one side and selects a syringe. She prepares it and injects something into his arm. The man slowly regains consciousness, his eyelids fluttering open. I can read the abject horror on his features as the pain kicks in and he remembers what's going on. His eyebrows knit together in terror, eyes searching the woman's face for answers.

"Welcome back, Robert," she purrs. "We can't have you passing out before the best bit, can we, love? I'm told this lovely little drug will make sure you stay awake for the rest of our exclusive party." She smooths wet hair off his face. "You love exclusive parties, don't you, darling?"

"You fucking witch," he cries, arching his back against the restraints. "Jenny! Why?" A sob escapes him.

"Oh, come on now. This can't be a surprise. Forty years you stole from me. Forty years I wasted supporting your endeavours while I played tennis with vapid Stepford Wives. Shuffle me off to the club while you raped our daughters and grandchildren in our beach house."

"Jenny. I was gentle with them. They loved every second," he says with conviction. A dark wave washes over the room.

"You fucker!" she yells before spitting on his face. "No wonder the grandchildren resemble you so much, you Monster! I'll never forgive you. You've broken my heart." She chokes on a wave of emotion.

I stare at Banks, gobsmacked. He's grinning from ear to ear, sipping a drink, as he walks over to slide an arm around my back. I lean into his chest and turn my head to continue

watching the shitshow unfold in front of us. Jenny covers his mouth with her manicured hand.

“Shhh,” she says in a creepily soothing, nurse-y tone. “Don’t worry, darling, I know everything. They told me every little detail about the last thirty-six years.”

She reaches into her luxury handbag and brings out a small wooden box. Opening it, she pulls out a cigar, snipping the end off with some scissors and putting it between her teeth. Puffing as she lights it, she leans over to exhale a thick stream of smoke straight into his face. He coughs, groaning in pain. Then she snips off the end of his pinky finger as an afterthought, and he screeches like a bat.

“You don’t love them, though, do you? You couldn’t possibly love any child who you rape and psychologically damage for the rest of eternity. But you could fuck them every Saturday morning for fifteen years while you sent me off to the tennis club. Tell me how that works? You’re so full of shit, Robert. So full of shit.” Clicking her tongue, she takes another puff on the cigar and flicks some orange flecks onto his chest. He gurgles in pain.

“I decided to celebrate my initiation into this fabulous murder club here”—she gestures around the room—“by smoking one of your extra-special Cubans. Hope you don’t mind.” She laughs. “Of course you don’t. You’ll be dead by dawn. I hear they get rid of the bodies by feeding them to crocodiles. How exciting is that! Don’t worry, I’ve got a great story cooked up to tell the police. No one will suspect a thing! Not from little old me anyway! I’m just the dutiful Stepford wife!”

He’s outright crying now, fat tears falling down his temples and settling into his hairline as his body silently shakes.

“Till death do us part and all that. I guess it’s coming sooner than we anticipated,” she taunts, smirking.

I’m glued to the window and realise my lungs are burning because I’ve been holding my breath. I don’t want to miss a single word. I hear Banks swirling the ice in his glass next to

me, and he takes a sip. I snuggle a bit closer to him, feeling his warmth and his strong arm tighten around me.

“Fun, huh?” he says, and I don’t have an answer.

The woman, Jenny, selects a scalpel from the tray and moves around the table, dragging her nail along the inside of his thigh. It would be an almost erotic gesture if half his penis wasn’t detached from its base. Hanging limply with blood pumping out in time with his heartbeat. She scoops some blood onto her fingertip and draws a slow line up over his stomach along his chest and finally puts her finger inside his mouth. He turns his head to the side, trying to get away from her.

“Taste your horror, Robert. I’ll be swallowing it shortly when I sauté your tiny prick with some garlic asparagus. Delicious!” she says, laughing like a woman with nothing left to lose. “I hate you with such a burning passion that killing you isn’t good enough. Just to make sure you’re as disgraced as possible, I’ll be eating your shrivelled, putrid little organ.”

He writhes around, but it’s no use. He’s growing weaker by the second and doesn’t have any hope of surviving this blood loss. He’s a pasty shade of grey. I glance at Banks, then back again so as not to miss anything.

“You’re crazy,” he breathes, followed by a raspy cough.

“This is just the half of it. You had no idea who you were dealing with, did you?”

She walks back to the side of the table and ever so slowly begins working on the rest of his cock. Small, thin, precise slices, and her smile is radiant, glowing the whole time. She takes a puff on the cigar, pries open his eyelids with her thumb and forefinger, and brings the burning tip down on his eyeball.

“Ughh,” he gurgles.

His leg shudders, but then he seems to be paralysed as his chest rises and falls.

I turn away from the window as nausea swirls. Stepping away from Banks, I slump onto the seat, awkwardly, in my

tight dress. Banks follows me, pouring a drink and handing it to me. He sits on the arm of the couch.

“You okay, Bones?”

I look up at him, all gorgeous in his expensive clothes.

“I will be in a second. Just need a quick breath. You have to tell me what the fuck this is, Banks!”

He tilts his head to the side.

“This”—he points to the torture room—“is one of my favourite side hustles.”

I gawp as I take a huge swallow of booze, a rivulet trickling down my chin. He reaches across to wipe it onto his thumb, then licks it clean. I shudder and look at him to continue.

“Mmm. I dreamed this up years ago in my twisted brain, and finally launched it last year to the global elite. I set it up purely because I’m a voyeur. I get off on watching this shit, and I wanted somewhere secure where I could sit privately and view things like this.” He shrugs. “The 1% deal in some dark shit, and I wanted to cash in.”

I finish my drink, coughing, and Banks passes me a linen handkerchief. Who carries these things anymore? I hand it back to him after I wipe my mouth.

“Side hustle? One of? What do you mean?” I ask, head spinning. “I’m just trying to figure out how spousal suffering could possibly be a moneymaker.”

“I have my finger in a lot of pies. This enterprise is a pet project. It caters to a very specific clientele who are interested only in bespoke products and services. The very specific fetishes and requirements that are not altogether legal. I have the market sewn up for their demands, and they know I deliver. With complete privacy.”

“Demands, like murder?” I ask, glancing back at Jenny, who has now removed his junk entirely and is holding it between some surgical forceps.

“Like murder.” He nods.

He raises his glass and clinks it against my empty one. I feel sickly and slightly blasé about the whole thing.

“Rape, cannibalism, necrophilia, selective amputation, bestiality, the list goes on and on. I’m open to all requests, nothing is taboo. My moral compass is exceedingly wonky, but I promise you emphatically, no children. Ever.” He raises his eyebrows, a little shrug on his shoulders. “I provide what the clients need. The space. The victim. The cleanup. The kitchen, bedroom, bathroom. A guarantee that they won’t be bothered by any authorities. All at an exorbitant top dollar, of course. These logistics and privacy don’t come cheap. Not everyone can afford the luxury and peace of mind, but I have more clients than you would imagine. We are fully booked through the next year. It’s all word of mouth.”

He studies my face again, and I feel as though this is some kind of test. Of what, I don’t know. But he wants to know if I can handle whatever this is. To see whether I can handle whatever kind of man he is. I’m stunned into silence. I know dark shit goes on in the world. I’m a mortician, for fuck’s sake. I’ve seen all kinds of end-of-life experiences, all kinds of murder victims. I’ve heard about the dark web—in a vague kind of way. I’ve heard of human trafficking and sex trafficking, but I don’t know what that means in reality. How deep do those avenues go?

I thought these things were just in Hollywood movies. Surely real-life people didn’t have these kinds of fantasies, let alone pay a small fortune to act on them?

The husband’s peen is now laid out ceremoniously on a silver platter. Jenny is leaning over, arranging the balls perfectly next to it as though she has OCD and needs to have them straight. She looks so happy with herself. Robert must be well and truly dead now.

“She’s going to eat it,” Banks explains matter-of-factly with a little snicker.

“Christ, I thought she was joking. This is all too much. I need a top up,” I say, tapping my glass with a pretty fingernail.

He pours me half a glass of whiskey and leaves the bottle within reach.

“Where do the victims come from?” I ask.

I’m not entirely certain I want to hear the answer. I know Banks is not a good man. But I’m not convinced he’s nefarious either. What would I do, though, if he plucks people off the street? The thought had never crossed my mind before now. Does he have people raping innocent animals? My stomach turns over.

“Great question, but I don’t organise the day-to-day running. That’s Ember’s department. She’s a sadist in every sense of the word, and she runs a tight ship. I will repeat, never kids. I can promise you that, and no innocent victims. Junkies who are on the path of self-destruction anyway, and they volunteer. People with terminal illnesses. The elderly, some who have lost their partners and the will to live along with them. Some sickos even have the fantasy of being eaten alive, did you know? Did you know that’s a fetish in and of itself?”

I shake my head in disbelief, with equal parts fascination and revulsion.

“I had no idea, but I can’t say it surprises me.”

“So these are just the next-level type of people. Then there are the outright evil motherfuckers who deserve to die in horrific ways. There are plenty of those people in this world. Those ones are known to my clients and are requested as the victims, like old mate Bob here. Our team research, background check, then go collect and prepare them for the clients so they can stroll in and start on the fun stuff.”

“I see,” I say, leaning back and taking it all in. I can hear the blood rushing in my ears.

“Are you okay? I know it’s a lot.”

I swallow down a sour taste, and my throat burns, but something inside me is intrigued. In a major way. What the fuck is this place, and how can I be a part of it? Slaughtering paedophiles? Sounds good to me. My mind is freewheeling

with the possibilities, and the fact that he came up with this himself just blows my mind. He continues to amaze me.

“I’ll be fine. It’s just a lot to process, you know? I’ve never seen anything like this, and I’ve seen a lot of death over the years. But”—I take a breath and look him in the eye—“it’s the coolest thing I’ve heard of in a very, very long time. Kills two birds with one stone. Gets rid of scum like this bastard here, and fulfils someone’s fantasy that cannot be fulfilled elsewhere?”

“Yeah, it’s a great little investment. Quite often, the bad guys beg and plead for us to let them go. Occasionally, we get them to transfer large sums of their dodgy money into our British Virgin Islands bank accounts. Of course we never let them go, though. We just take their money, and the clients kill them as planned. Win-win for me.”

He laughs as he moves across the room to pour us ice water, flicking the switch to change the sound from the medical room to another room of the house. An old crooner can be heard over the airwaves and high heels click against the floor.

Banks hands me my water and sits down next to me, running his cool fingertips along my arm. I soak in his touch.

On the monitor, we see the woman has taken the small lumps of flesh on a silver platter into the kitchen. The obviously deceased man is left to drain into the awaiting bucket. Funny. I could march straight in there and take over right now, tidy him up to be presentable for his... *wife?* ... to come and view. We watch on a monitor as she chops vegetables and heats oil in a frying pan, humming to herself along with the music.

“Have you seen enough here?”

“Definitely. I never would have guessed such a thing existed.”

“Come on then. Follow me, sweetheart.” Grasping me by the waist, he leads me through the door.

“Ember, meet Hazy,” he says as we enter a room, where a very petite woman sits behind a desk. Her golden blonde hair is coiled in a French knot and her suit screams money. She puts a large, steaming mug down and stands to greet me.

“Hazy, this is Ember. She runs the show.”

“Don’t know about the last part, but hi, I’m Ember,” she says with a warmth in her hazel eyes.

“Hello,” I say, scanning the room.

“Ember oversees everything to do with this business. I help out only when needed, which isn’t often. She does a brilliant job,” he says, squeezing her elbow. “No detail is overlooked to keep our clients happy.”

“I’m still taking it all in,” I say, my heart beating wildly. “I never dreamed this could exist.”

“It’s a lot to take in, I know. When Banks approached me about a new project, I thought he was pulling my leg. When I realised he was serious, and he explained the logistics, I jumped in. Anyway, welcome. If I can help you with anything, let me know.”

She returns to her computer and Banks shows me through the house and back into the car where Zane is waiting in the driver’s seat. As we snake down the mountain roads, I still can’t wrap my head around everything I just witnessed. I was a witness to a murder, unfortunately not for the first time.

Banks plays some kind of sad, down-tempo, electronic beats as we sip water and hold hands without speaking.

“I just needed to show you a sample of the type of man I am.”

His expression seems to be one of searching, a need for acceptance. I nod and stare out the window for the rest of the drive, every orange and white light we speed past hypnotising me as the torture scene replays in my mind. Could I ever do those things? Of course I’ve thought about it. I don’t know how anyone could be abused like I have and not plotted revenge. Could I really go through with it, if it came down to it, though?

*C*ontaminated - Banks

HAZY

The clock on the dash says 11:43pm, and I recognise the road we're on now, heading toward the city. As we approach, we head into China Town.

I squeeze Bank's hand, and he drags his eyes away from the window. Apparently, he's been lost in his own thoughts too.

"Where are we going, Banks?"

"Dinner. You must be hungry. I am."

"Starving. But it's midnight?"

"Doesn't matter where I'm taking you. One of the only late-night joints left in town."

Zane circles around into a filthy side street and the car stops.

"Come on," Banks says, as Zane opens our back door.

We step out onto the grotty footpath, and the scent of garbage hits me, followed by well cured urine. I feel completely overdressed, or underdressed—not sure which way to look at it, really—so I wiggle my tight frock down. This

only serves to widen the gaps in the cutouts around my stomach, and Banks grins down at me with approval.

“I’ll text when we’re done,” Banks says.

“No worries. I’ll be here. Got some work to do on my laptop.”

They fist bump like idiots and Banks takes my hand and leads me through the doorway. There is no signage in English and the red curtains have faded to pink.

I glance up as he steps aside and manoeuvres me to go first up the stairs. Of course, he’s a pervert, we know that. I’m just scared of the food at the top.

Banks reaches around me to push a heavy, black door open. Inside, there’s not a speck of dust or grime, but the scent of fresh seafood smacks me across the head. All the surfaces gleam in the low light. The decor is black and red, the centrepiece of the space a huge two-metre brass bell, which is mounted above a gurgling water fountain. Rice paper lanterns light up the perimeter, and the staff, all wearing black, look every part the professionals.

Due to the late time, there are only a few scattered patrons, seated up at the open bar, sipping cocktails where chefs are preparing sushi and sashimi. A couple is sitting in a booth along the back wall, and a few others are scattered around at tables for two. Trendy music is playing at an acceptable level for conversation.

Banks nods, but doesn’t wait for them to seat us. He leads me through the maze of small tables and we sit at arched windows overlooking the street. I notice that everyone keeps glancing at him. He is a big guy. Standing, he removes his jacket, and settles me into the booth.

“I love this place,” he gushes as he sits next to me. “I come here at least once a month if I can. The Hokkaido Scallops are the best!”

“I hate China Town, but my friends drag me here occasionally.”

“I’m going to blow your mind tonight, Bones. Wait and see.”

I crinkle my nose in disgust, feeling the usual bile rising at the thought of fish, or *gag*, shellfish.

“Just so you know, this place is scary for me as far as food goes,” I say. “I’ll have a bowl of plain rice and a miso soup, please?” I fiddle with my purse, trying not to hyperventilate or be overly rude. I stare at my arms, wishing I could be anywhere but in this current predicament. My worst fucking nightmare, regardless of my company.

He leans back with a short, husky laugh and clasps his hands together over his taut stomach.

“I will feed you whatever I choose. You will open that pretty little hole of yours and swallow, every. Last. Thing I put in it.”

I sip my water, trembling uncontrollably. I feel like my blood sugar levels have just dropped. A waitress appears and Banks chats with her in Japanese—*what the hell?*—and she giggles behind her hand as she floats away to fetch whatever he’s ordered. I chug most of my water before turning to him.

“I’ll fill you in on a few major points about eating disorders. I’m deathly afraid of food. I know you think I’ve been doing really well back at the castle because I’ve been gaining weight, but the food there has been relatively safe. A lot of the weight I’ve gained was because of the feeding tube and those meal replacement drinks I’ve been having four times a day. And the eggs and bread and other boring things I’m okay with. I have been trying really hard. I promise. But this here”—I fling my arms to gesture around the kitchen—“this is *waaay* out of my comfort zone.”

My heart thuds, and I gasp for air. The waitress returns, all smiles, with a beautiful black bottle of sake and little cups that she places in front of us. I bite my nails and pick at my cuticles. This could be the heart attack that finally ends me. He’s going to force feed me and no one will do anything because who would fuck with Banks? I wipe my sweaty hands

on my napkin. Suddenly, I need to poop, like immediately. I start staring around the restaurant in desperation.

“I need the bathroom. Quickly, please,” I say, clenching my butt cheeks. “I’m really scared, and this tends to happen.”

“No purging, Bones. It’s through there,” he says, standing to get out of my way and pointing to the signs for the bathrooms. He grabs my wrist as I pass and gives me a stern look, before dropping it to let me go ahead.

I grip my clutch as I rush down the hall, making it with seconds to spare. I was literally about to shit myself in the middle of a restaurant because I’m panicking about food. It’s fucking ridiculous, really, I can see that, but there is nothing I can do about it.

Thank god, there is no one in here to listen to me poop, how embarrassing. It’s like a fucking explosion in here.

I stay seated for a good four or five minutes, feeling woefully sorry for myself and having a pep talk about how I should broaden my horizons. I really should try new things.

I take a moment to thank Rosetta for stocking my purse with wet wipes so I can wipe my ass properly. When I wash my hands and freshen up, I look in the mirror. I’m shocked when I can’t see the fat girl. I just see the real me. A raw-boned doll covered in precision scars and black ink, tied up in an overpriced dress. Before I can start obsessing over my reflection, I rush back to the table.

“I’m sorry, but look,” I start as I shuffle my way back into the booth. “I’m terrified of eating.”

He sits himself back down, an amused look on his face as he pours himself another sake and takes a sip, settling back in preparation for my rant.

“No shit.”

“Strange, deep-sea creatures are *unsafe* food. Extremely unsafe. Especially anything raw, and things like jellyfish, sea snails, fish sperm, live sashimi... oh god, I’m going to be sick.” My stomach clenches just thinking about it. “I will vomit.”

“Ooooh, I look forward to that!” he says, amused. “I’ve fantasised about you doing that around my dick when I’ve pushed too far.”

I raise my eyebrows as he places his teeny cup down. Then he picks up my cup, bringing it to my lips as a signal to shut the fuck up. Oddly, I find it a highly erotic gesture. I’ve never allowed anyone else to feed me. I take a little sip, and ooh, it’s good!

I’m not a sake drinker—granted, the ones I’ve tried tasted like petrol—but this expensive one is delicious. I guess having money does that; it affords you the best of everything. No polyester, no bottom-shelf booze, no tiny apartments overhearing domestic violence every night. Money feels like silk, and tastes like top-shelf sake and the salt breeze of the ocean. The sake glides down like spring water, and Banks continues to watch my lips with an intensity that slightly scares me.

With a boyish grin, he hands it to me.

“Cheers,” he says as our pottery cups clink together.

“Cheers,” I say, smiling. “Well, isn’t this more civilised than the time you dragged me up the stairs and threw me on the couch?” I laugh.

He’s sizing up my mouth.

“Take your panties off, Bones.”

I choke on the sake.

Oh. This is old chestnut?

My gaze finds its way back to his amber-flecked one. It always does.

“Give them to me now.”

“Why?”

He laughs.

“This is not a conversation, it’s an instruction. You do as you’re told, when you’re told. No bratty backchat. Panties, now.”

A shiver tingles up and down my spine. Fuck, he's hot as lava when he's direct with me like that. I hurry to wriggle my ass in this stupid dress, desperately wrestling the lace down without making a big show of it. I manage to lower them mid-thigh where I half stand, half squat to pull them down. I'm not winning any stripping comps here, but I get them off. Rolling them into the tightest ball possible, I pass them to Banks under the table. My face and neck feel warm and my arms curl around my middle with scintillation. This is fucking fun and terrifying in equal measure.

"Thank you very much," he says, unfolding them from their ball. He sniffs them and holds them up above the table, inspecting the gusset, the lace, straps, and every line of stitching. I slink down in the booth, gripping my mortified face, groaning. I don't want to know who is staring at my lingerie right now. I lie down sideways on the bench and hide completely, my tummy grumbling at me.

"What are you *doing*?" I whisper-shout through my fingers.

"Just admiring this pretty little thing that I will hold up to my nose with one hand as I jerk off with the other tomorrow," he says coolly as he takes another sniff. "Your lingerie makes its way to my bedroom before it gets to the laundry hamper. Didn't you know that, Bones?"

A thrill runs through me that he jerks off to my dirty knickers every day, and I peek back to stare at him, but the knickers have disappeared. He's sipping his sake with a smirk on his big, sexy face.

"Stay down there," he orders. "Spread your legs."

Holy fuck, this dinner has escalated quickly. I open my legs a little and the degradation slut and exhibitionist in me celebrates. I can never predict him.

He picks up some black chopsticks; the thin, fancy kind with pointy tips. *Snap snap snap*, they sing teasingly, as he taps them together.

“What do I see here?” he asks as I shiver with anticipation.

The devil himself grins as he leans across, forcing my knees apart easily and pushing my skirt up to my waist. I look around to see a guy at a nearby table making eye contact with me in my hole under the table, and I close my eyes. Banks traces his hand toward my exposed yoni and another shiver follows.

He drags the chopsticks over my heavily scarred flesh. All my black and white and pink lines on display for his amusement. I push my cheek into the seat and exhale as he squeezes my inner and outer labia hard in the vice of the chopsticks.

Excruciating. Exquisite.

And I breathe evenly throughout and lean towards the pain. The idea that a stranger is watching turns me on. If Banks wants to fuck me right now, I would do it. Banks is relentless with the attack and the elicit pinch forces a deep gasp out of me. The pain is delicious; his smile, predatory.

“Ooh, you love it when I pinch your pussy hard, don’t you, my pretty little slut? I knew you would, and you take it so well. I just love watching you squirm,” he says at a volume the other patrons can hear. I cry out as he pinches my labia sharply again, not even attempting to muffle my voice. In the back corner of this restaurant, I don’t give a fuck who hears me.

Every emotion is heightened by the risk of getting caught. He releases the pinch and removes the glossy sticks, before licking them and placing them back on the chopstick holders. I pull my dress down and return to sitting in my seat. Pouring a thimble of sake, I quickly repeat the process.

“Can I drink straight out of the bottle here? Why are these cups so tiny?” I ask.

He laughs loudly as my head spins. I’m horny as hell. As though she knew I was ready to be swallowed up by the floor, Miss Sunshine arrives with our food. Banks reaches over and grabs me around the waist, sliding me right next to him in the

booth so our thighs are squashed together and his fragrance overwhelms me. I've never met a guy that smells so good, and so different every single time I see him. It's so weird.

Terror clutches me as a wave of seafood stench smacks me. I stare at it, hyperventilating, as though it's an artwork. A neat little row of white soup spoons, each containing one mouthful of some fucking delicacy or another, is arranged beautifully. Looks like some kind of sliced cucumber and daikon, wrapped in thinly sliced raw fish... tuna?... with a few dollops of caviar and a slice of chilli.

My throat closes and faint white spots are threatening my vision. He reaches for my hand and kisses it, then from his pocket, he produces a grey strip of silk, blindfolding me.

"Oh, fuck," I say, vertigo kicking in.

"I'm going to feed you now," he says, his voice calm and gentle.

"Is there a bucket anywhere? I won't be able to keep it down, Banks. I'm serious!" I can't breathe.

"Shut up and open your pink mouth," he whispers against my ear, before nibbling my lobe.

Deep breath, then with full-body shakes, I open my mouth.

"Good girl," he says.

A spoon clinks against my teeth. I'm terrified by a thousand possibilities of what could hit my tastebuds. How many calories will it contain?

"This is about four calories," he says as he drops the contents into my mouth.

Salt.

Three little salty peas roll around my tongue. I'm going to choke at the thought of the unknown, but instead I chew because I am brave and I want to show him that he's helped me.

The flavour is nutty and sweet. I push two of them to the roof of my mouth before they roll down to my teeth. As I

chew, it's a buttery texture, and it's surprisingly bland enough that I can finally swallow without any drama.

This is a huge deal for me and somehow, I think he understands the gravity. No one else would get it, of course.

I open my eyes under the blindfold, my eyelashes tickling against the silk. I'm not only surprised that anything in this place other than water could be so low in calories, but that Banks would even think to let me know. Also, that he would choose something I could tolerate straight up. That he wouldn't feed me fish sperm or pufferfish right out of the gate.

"Edamame, did you like it?" he asks, his voice smooth as velvet.

"Surprisingly, yes," I say, licking the salt from my lips. "I do."

"Water," he says, and I feel the cool glass against my lips and the rush of liquid down my throat.

"Open," he says, and once again I feel a rush of adrenaline at the unknown.

Fish sperm coming up, Hazy, gird your loins!

I open my lips tentatively, and I feel his own press hungrily against mine, his tongue thrusting its way inside. His hand grasps the back of my neck, drawing me closer, his mouth demanding a response from mine. On autopilot, my arms reach for his neck, just as the burn hits.

I moan with pleasure and pain as spicy heat courses through my mouth. I jerk my head back, startled, as a fresh burning sensation increases and tears flood my vision.

He pulls back and laughs a hearty sound that pisses me the hell off. Holding me tighter by the back of the head, he plunges his tongue deep. He swirls that sensual motherfucker around, painting wasabi as he goes.

"Bastard!" I laugh, tapping him on the chest before pulling the blindfold down around my neck and glaring.

“Hey, there’s less than 4 calories in what we shared, so calm your tits!” He laughs.

“Shut up, that’s not funny!”

“It kind of is, though,” he says, wiping his eyes.

I pour myself some water.

“You don’t need that. Just breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth.”

I do as he says, and the pain subsides.

“It is yummy,” I admit.

He nods and eats three of those white spoons of fish and vegetables, one after another, as I stare at him, open-mouthed. He smiles at me.

“It’s so good.” He grins. “You should really try one. Very clean.”

“No thanks, you go right ahead.”

I lean into his side and savour a few more non-wasabi kisses until the waitress brings me my miso soup and rice, and a whiskey bottle with two glasses.

“Leave us alone now, please. If I need you, I’ll call you over,” he says to her, and she nods and heads back to the kitchen.

I have enjoyed this more than I thought I would, and now most of the patrons have left. A few couples are sitting at the bar, drinking cocktails, and two tables are noisily eating their meal.

Banks runs his finger along my shoulder, down my arm, and grabs tight around my wrist.

“Get under the table,” he says, staring me dead in the eye. “On your knees and lips apart like a dirty girl.”

With a thrill at the anticipation of finally tasting him, I melt to my knees between his boots. His grasp is rough on my hand as he directs me. I innately know I belong here. The heavy white tablecloth obscures my view of the other patrons,

and that's half the fun. Knowing others can see. This kind of illicit play gets my heart racing.

He directs my hands to his zip, and I work quickly to free his erection. Being this close to him, on my knees like this, is electrifying. He's as thick and large as I remember, and to feel his smooth skin under my fingers makes me insatiable. I blink, remembering where I am—definitely not at home watching masturbation porn—and open my mouth. I try to open it even wider when I visualise the cock to mouth ratio ahead of me. My math isn't great at the best of times, and horror quickly dawns on me. As I open wider, he wraps my hair in his fist, and I take him onto my tongue for the first time as my enthusiasm swirls with his pre-cum. He's been enjoying our evening out as much as I have, evidently.

I work him up and down, my lips gliding over the barbells, and I suck hard to satisfy my oral fixation. He groans, not caring who knows he's getting a blow job from a slut under the table. And I moan a little in elation. After all the dicks I've seen, I'm amazed this is the first ladder I've encountered; the only piercing I've ever seen is the Prince Albert, which I think looks gross. But these are seriously chef's kiss.

The degradation fascination swirls under my skin. That little succubus is leading me into the darkness, and I want to follow her deeper. After sucking for a little while, I feel him building, and he sits rigid as he begins to come with a groan. With his hands on the back of my head, he thrusts deep to activate my gag reflex, as he pulses deep into my willing throat. My tongue swirls his juices when I hear him say, "Don't swallow it and come up here."

I hold him in my mouth as I return his cock to his boxers and zip him up. I swirl it as I wipe my lips and crawl back onto the seat. "Snowball me," he says with a wicked grin as he grasps the back of my neck and pulls me in for a deep kiss. His tongue presses into me, and he sucks his load into his own mouth, and winks at me as he swallows.

That is the most disgusting yet sublime thing anyone has ever done with me.

“You’re just my beautiful little, portable dumping vessel.”
He takes a swig of his whiskey and kisses me again. “My cum
is yours, and you will do with it whatever I tell you.”

*B*ANKS

Fleet thumps the living shit out of my boxing mitts as she throws a quick stream of punches. Light on her toes, she dances around me, doing some kicks at my waist, then a flying kick at my face. Jesus Christ, she is a machine.

The fact that I tower above her in height does nothing whatsoever to save me when it comes to a real fight against her. I've no doubt in my mind that she could take me down quickly in hand-to-hand. At least we're only training.

"Whoa, Fleet. Careful, mate, you're gonna kick my face off!"

She laughs and puffs as she continues bouncing around, jabbing and striking me.

"How'd the kill go last night?" I ask.

"Good, good!" she puffs in between flying kicks. "He was a fat fucker, though. I don't know why the guys sent me in. A bullet would have done the job just as well as me." She shrugs.

She rolls her shoulders as she paces up and down, grabbing her sides. I remove my mitts.

"Because you scare the fuck out of everyone," I say, laughing.

“How did Hazy do at *Mortelle* the other night? Did she spew?” she asks, guzzling a sports drink as her two afro buns bob in the breeze. She laughs and breathes heavily as we rest for a minute in the open-air gym.

“She’s awesome, Fleet. She didn’t seem too phased by the chick cutting off her husband’s dick. Sautéed it up with veggies, and Hazy took it all in her stride. Then I took her out for sushi afterwards at *Miso Ya*, which she didn’t really love, but she loved what I did to her.”

I laugh, remembering the look on her face when I sucked my own cum out of her mouth. Not really my thing, but I am all for a bit of shock value every now and then.

I have a drink and Fleet finishes hers and unwraps her wrists. Sweat glistens off her dark brown skin. She’s just wearing a sports bra and little gym shorts with her neoprene ankle foot grips. Not one ounce of fat on her. Not one ounce of fear either.

“I’ve known you for a while now, Banks,” she says, strutting around breathing hard, “and I’ve never seen you gush like this before. She’s got you all kinds of fucked *up!*” She laughs. “Don’t lose sight of the business, though.”

I don’t really talk to my brothers about matters of the heart. Fleet is one of only a few people that I open up to about this stuff. I know I can come to her if I need to be knocked down a few pegs. I hate people advising me on my love life, but Fleet is right. I’m head over fucking heels with this tiny goth bird, and I can’t afford to lose the plot.

I drop the mitts in the bucket and walk over to the weight bench, picking up some dumbbells and lying back to start my flys.

“I can’t stop thinking about her, but I need to go to Africa in a few weeks. How am I gonna deal with being that far away from her, even for a few nights?”

“Jesus, you’ve got it bad, man,” she says, her Yanky accent ringing in my ears. “Get her out of your system before you go, take her on a date. Chicks love that shit. Maybe let her out of

that room once in a goddamn while. Poor thing. She sits up there all day like Little Miss Goth Rapunzel. I see the way she stares at you out that window.” She laughs, raising a tattooed brow. I love that Fleet lives here with the rest of the gang. Even though she’s got her country house in Victoria, she chooses to be in the thick of the action here with us, and I appreciate it. She came out from the US a while back to do some work for me, her particular set of skills came highly recommended. She never left Australia, settling in here with our group and enjoying the laid back Aussie lifestyle.

I finish one set, then start on the next, muscles burning nicely. Fleet takes a seat at the end of another bench, leaning back on her elbows just staring at me, her flat stomach like an old school washboard. “She’s got the hots for you. She’s getting better, so take her out for some fun.”

“There is a theme night coming up at Sanctuary in a couple of weeks, I dunno. I guess I could take her there, haven’t been for ages,” I say. “Would be great to test the waters, see how kinky she is.”

“Well, block it off in your diary then,” she says. “What are you waiting for?”

“You’re right. She’s got me eating my own tail. I’m so fucking crazy about her, Fleet. The connection with her is... I’ve never had it before. Ever.” I sit up and get rid of the weights, inhaling body odour and the sea breeze.

“Damn, man. She might be the one?”

“Might be?” I laugh. “She’s it. I’ve never wanted anyone or anything like this before. Now, how many squats are we gonna do?” I ask, changing the topic.

I’m getting hard fantasising about how kinky Hazy might actually be and how hot she’ll be hanging from a hook at the club. Oh my god, speaking of hooks, I need to get an anal hook into her. I’m so fucking impatient to play with my born little masochist. Oh, she’ll love medical play too. It’s going to be really embarrassing in a minute here if I keep exploring this train of thought while I’m only wearing a thin pair of gym shorts.

“I dunno, five hundred? Let’s go,” she says.

We smash out the rest of our session, and after we’re done, I head upstairs for a shit, shower, and shave.

I think about what Fleet said, and she might be right. I’ve had Hazy locked away here, selfishly confining her to her room the majority of the time for my own sanity. But she is probably really bored in there. Her drawings are awesome; she’s stuck them all over her walls, so I know she’s been losing herself in her art, but that’s not enough. She’s an intelligent woman. I should take her out for a night she’ll never forget.

I wonder whether she’s ever been to a club like Sanctuary.

As I select which fragrance I want to wear today, I think about my pretty little slut and how I’d love to smother her in warm oil and fuck her brains out. Then I choose a watch and head into the den. I manage to keep my thoughts on track as I video call with Susan to catch up on the legit tax stuff, and then the boys come up to debrief me on the latest in South Africa.

Our dirty dealings over there have taken a positive turn, and I need to fly over for some meetings about future territories and logistics. I don’t want to leave Hazy here on her own, but I have to be there. Might not get this chance again.

After dealing with the boys, I grab my journal and head up to the roof to write a few pages. I must remember to check on Hazy’s journalling. I’ve given her some simple projects as part of her training. Or healing. Same thing really. I’ve asked her to journal every morning when she has her coffee. Some of the shit she channels is out there, and I am happy that she’s been sitting down and getting her thoughts out of that pretty little skull of hers.

The sound of waves crashing against the rocks below is soothing and the sea mist is fresh. The thought of my girl wearing a sexy latex doll outfit circles through my thoughts. Translucent latex, with a pink blush in it. I want to marry her in latex. Every detail of her fully inked little body showing

through. The thought of her sweat being trapped between her skin and the rubber...oof!

I rub my cock through my jeans and my imagination dances. I'd rip her little latex panties to the side, sweat and lust dripping, and I'd lick it so fucking clean. I unzip my pants and form a fist around my dick, the piercings hard to the touch. When I got my first couple of dick piercings decades ago, I remember I had to re-train myself to masturbate, it changed everything about how I tugged myself. Didn't take long to get used to it though. I dream that I'll slide my hand up into her rubber dress, all hot and wet, and slide it off before rubbing myself against her slippery flesh. Rub my cock all over her tiny hot body, and then fuck her so hard she'd have to hold on for the ride, unable to do anything except scream her lungs out. I'll tear a violent orgasm clean out of her.

Hmm. Come to think of it, I don't want her in latex when I marry her. I'm going to make her a harness out of rope so I can hold on as I fuck her the first time under the stars as her husband.

*E*ry - *Ashnikko, Grimes*

HAZY

Swallow wakes me when it's still dark outside and slides a tray onto the desk.

“Morning,” she says cheerily. I’m happy it’s her face though, and not Rosetta’s. “You ready for this morning?”

I groan and put a squishy over my head. I wish I could get to know Swallow better. She seems so sweet and pretty with her flaming red hair and freckled nose, but Banks keeps her as a kitchen slave most days. I wonder what her story is, as I wonder about everyone in this weird, incestuous circle.

Maybe I could start doing some work in the kitchen with her and find out more. I do have to admit that the food here is usually simple recipes made from fresh ingredients, which makes it bearable to eat. Not having a real job or purpose here makes me bored. My work in the funeral home kept me focused on something outside my own head and I miss that. My shadows circle my every thought here. Maybe if Swallow showed me some healthy ways to cook, I might overcome some fear in that area.

I dress quickly in leggings, a tight cotton t-shirt, and trainers, and sip black coffee. Sitting in the window watching the sky shift through the pastel spectrum, I feel a sense of eerie calm.

My sleep patterns have been all over the place since I've been here but, in general, I'm getting more rest than ever. As the cormorants swoop across the whitecaps, I see Fleet in the low light, emerging from the gym and heading off across the lawn to warm up. She's like clockwork. The boys aren't here this morning, so it's just her and I.

I don't want to eat, but just in case Banks is watching—which he usually is—I choke down some avocado on toast and scull some OJ. I make my way nervously downstairs to the grassy area next to the gym. She's finished setting up some gear, and I watch in awe, fascinated by the way she moves with such a controlled power. She owns her body and moves like a sleek panther. Flexed, balanced, and power personified.

“Morning, girl. How did you sleep?” she asks in her Aussie-American accent as I make my way down the stone steps.

“I didn't sleep much, but I'm ready!”

She grins, and adrenaline surges through my veins.

“Great! Let's do some quick stretches before we start, okay?”

I nod and follow her lead with some basic stretches. My muscles feel so nice. It feels amazing to be moving my body this way rather than just the sit-ups and leg lifts I usually do in secret. When I left Melbourne at sixteen, I quit dancing, which only added to my mental decline. Denying it is only another conscious form of self-flagellation. This is going to help ground me, instead of living so far up in my head.

And up your ass.

Banks has arranged for me to get some knife fighting skills as well as Krav Maga. I am trusting his process with a smattering of trepidation. I don't want my confidence to be at the mercy of two sick paedophiles anymore. The sense of fear I've carried and embedded into my psyche; it's soul destroying. Obviously. It's taken a deranged stalker to shake my foundations and call me out on my shit to take note of my trajectory. I don't want to be a useless alcoholic like my dad

was. Or an OD-ing junkie like my mum. Maybe Banks *can* stop my decline. Maybe.

“Hope you’re ready to get your grit on. I’m going to convert you into a badass bitch, and you’re gonna be able to cut the fuck outta anyone who tries to hurt you. Okay, baby? Ready to slice and dice?”

“Hell yeah!” I say, throwing a few silly *Karate Kid* chops and kicks in her general direction. I have no idea what I’m doing. She laughs and manoeuvres me into position, placing herself just out of reach.

The sun breaks over the cliff face and its warmth soothes my goosebumped flesh. Thousands of fluffy white seeds blow on the wind over us, coming from the bush.

“Oh my gosh, they’re beautiful!” I say, looking up and trying to catch some.

“I know, right? Shame they’re weeds!”

“They’re only weeds ’cause no one wants them,” I mutter.

She introduces me to some weapons basics, like safety and good posture. It comes easily to me with my dance training, as I have a good sense of balance.

“You do realise that by the time I’m done with you, we might just have to register you as a concealed weapon?”

“I wish!”

I want to believe her, I really do. She is devout with knife weaponry and says that I don’t need lots of muscle, but what I do need is to use the element of surprise and develop my reflexes. I can do that. She hands me a blunt trainer to begin with and laughs at my visible disappointment.

“As if I’d let you loose with a real blade, baby. You’d cut your damn leg off.” She laughs. “And I’m still healing a cracked rib!” I know she’s right, so I rein in my warrior-wannabe ego. “I’ll let you know when you’re ready for some real steel, okay? Now, we can slice the X formation like I showed you.”

I start out hesitantly and realise quickly that I should not be so cocky. This is far harder than I imagined. Fleet demonstrates an amazing level of patience as she goes over the kill spots until I finally get it. She is firm but encouraging, and we begin to synchronise. It becomes a ballet of offence, defence, and counterattack.

I smile as I wipe the sweat off my brow and guzzle some more water. My confidence has grown as my skills improve. The red ink siding of the blunt shows my contact hits and Fleet grunts comically as I land another slice perfectly across her inner thigh, hypothetically severing her femoral artery. Repetition by repetition, I perfect some beginner moves.

My training exceeds my expectations and my arms burn using muscles I haven't used for ages. We put in a solid couple of hours, and I'm done for the day. Lying back on the grass after stretching my arms and chest out, I feel really good about myself. Almost a sense of euphoria for the first time in forever. I actually feel that rush of endorphins and it feels amazing.

I think about Banks and the club night he has planned for me in a few days' time. He hasn't given me any details other than to say that I will love it, and to get ready for some bizarre, kinky fun. I'm intrigued and super excited to get out of this house again for a few hours. I can't wait to see what outfit he has ordered for me this time. He seems to get a real kick out of dressing me up, and I can't say I mind being his own personal dolly.

After the session, I head back to my room, where there is a tray with fruit salad, granola, and yoghurt. I devour it before heading to the bathroom. Muscles I didn't even know I had are aching, and I put the plug in the bath and turn the faucet on warm. I look in the little cupboard at a box of bath oils and salts. All different blends of herbs and botanicals. I select a small glass bottle with a wooden lid and a pipette. Inside is a combination of rose petals, rose quartz, and gold flakes floating in the oil, so I dribble a bit of that in. I also choose a small jar of bath salts, mixed with various herbs, and I dump that whole thing in the bath too.

Relaxing back into it, I let out a deep breath. I feel alive. Then I hear a key in my bedroom lock. Shit, I forgot to shut my ensuite door! Before I know it, Banks is standing above me over the bath.

“Well, isn’t this a nice view?” he says, squatting down next to the bath and dipping his fingers in the water.

“Ever heard of knocking?” I ask with a raised brow.

“I don’t knock on doors in my own house,” he says as he rolls his shirt sleeves up. He reaches under the water. “Especially when my dirty little slut is behind that door getting clean.” Caressing my inner thighs, he traces over my many scars. He continues to smile at me as his fingers find their way to my pussy, and I squirm at the sudden intrusion. “I couldn’t miss this. I’m hard at the sight of you, and I’m gonna come so hard in that bratty mouth of yours again very soon. I had fun at the restaurant, with you between my legs.”

He stands and moves to the vanity, pulling something from his pocket and washing it in the sink.

“On your knees and ass in the air,” he says, coming back over with a butt plug in his hands. Fuck, he is so hot.

I sit forward, water sloshing, and I raise myself up to my knees with a grin. He leans across me, studying my ass and running his palms across my wet flesh. He spreads my cheeks and probes around the entrance of my ass before inserting a finger, and I feel a strange kind of contentment as he does, wriggling it around a little before pulling it out and gently inserting the plug. I feel full as it presses against all my happy nerve endings, and I smile up at him.

“You can finish your bath now. You can remove the plug when you’ve had enough,” he says, watching me settle back into the water for a minute, before leaving the room and locking my bedroom door shut behind him.

*B*aby's On Fire - Die Antwoord
Nightmare - Astroglitch
Red Eyes - Phonku
Fuck the Pain Away - Peaches

HAZY

Banks leads me by the hand down a narrow walkway between two buildings. A light mist is falling, and he seems a little distracted.

My six-inch Louboutin platform stilettos echo against the concrete, *click clack click clack*. I feel sexy in this short leather dress, fresh mani-pedi, and my makeup done to look like a Goddess of the Night. I have missed the many nights out with my crew, teetering around bars on my heels. I wish my girls could be here tonight.

The smell of engine oil and wet cardboard fills my senses as we hurry towards the club. I've never been here before—either to the club itself or the industrial area in general—and it feels good to be out of that fucking castle. I can hear a low rumble of music as we hurry around a corner and a huge graffiti mural appears in view. Up ahead is an alcove with a small neon sign flashing red in the shape of a martini glass. If

not for the sign, it would look like any other doorway, maybe a mechanic workshop or a printing company.

As we get closer, the door opens, and a man emerges flanked by two women dressed in something cabaret dancers might wear on stage. All fishnets and latex and feathers, they are laughing, and the man leans over to nuzzle one of the women on the neck. They look utterly fabulous and move together as one fluid, sexy creature, wafting some delicious perfume along with them.

I lower my eyes, a fleeting sense of inadequacy growing until I remember whose hand I'm holding. A small metal sign says *Sanctuary* above the door, and we descend the few steps to the alcove. Banks knocks loudly and the iron hatch slides open before shutting abruptly. The door opens revealing a wall of a middle-aged white dude with arms thicker than Banks'. He's chewing on a toothpick and nods at Banks.

"Sir," he says.

"Charlie," Banks replies, as we slide past him into a dimly lit passage.

Never letting go of my hand, Banks approaches the door bitch and whispers something in her ear. She's a plump redhead with red lips and a diamanté corset. She smiles as she presses a stamp to my wrist.

"Lucky girl," she whispers to me as she touches my arm.

We're about to have the usual laugh about how you can't see anything on my heavily tattooed skin, when she notices my arms are covered in scars. A shadow of pity crosses her features, but I don't care what people think anymore. I put myself through enough hell.

Banks squeezes my hand and the music swirls around us seductively, and I feel my body begin to sway. Evocative drums, rich vocals so filled with yearning that it turns a switch on inside me. I can feel the blood rushing through my veins and pooling between my legs. Banks looks right at home here, stalking us along the corridors with me hanging on for dear life. Like the parting of the sea, everyone gets out of our way

as though he was the fucking king. Women and men glance coyly at him. I've never seen anything like it. I feel a little rush of power that he's holding my hand. How do they know him?

"Do you come here often?" I blurt out in a fluster, aware that I've asked the most cliché line of all. I wonder, though, because *everyone* seems to stare at him.

"I used to... but ... I've been busy lately." He winks at me. "I knew you'd like it." Stopping us, he kisses me on the nose.

I touch my metal collar and follow him. It's like we've walked onto a film set. Dramatic lighting shines from unexpected places and smoke machines jet smoke into the atmosphere at intervals. The crowd is a far cry from the low-brow one I'm used to. I didn't think we had any clubs like this in Australia. It oozes sophisticated Fetish Fashion and Kinky Performance Art. I'm utterly smitten with this fantasy world he is leading me through.

We emerge into a cavernous room with high-vaulted ceilings and steel against brick against stone. I can make out couples grinding against each other on the dance floor. A *Die Antwoord* track comes on, and I squeal, jumping up and down as much as I can in these heels. Banks grins at me.

He thinks you're a loser.

I dance as I follow along behind him, and I watch the crowd. It's an absolute freak show. Of the highest order.

Banks leads me through it all to a bar and we pass by all sorts of people in all states of erotica. Lips on necks, glossy hair swaying to the music, and such a heightened sense of sexuality it's palpable. The energy here throbs and flows; everyone is hot and horny. *Fuck the Pain Away* by *Peaches* starts up and the dance floor gets crowded, everyone shouting out the smutty lyrics and bouncing up against each other. Different perfumes intermingle on the dance floor and latex scent weaves with sweat. Every colour, shape, and size of human is represented here, all loving it up. All probably high on something or other, but I don't care.

No one is agro, and anything seems to go.

I feel welcome as we press up against strangers on our way across the room. Discreet chains connect collars to wrists. Gender bending beauty at every turn, and I marvel at the effort everyone's gone to with clothes and makeup. June and Patty would be frothing over this crowd. And Xanthe would be the queen of them all.

Low-lying Chesterfield couches are scattered around, near naked people reclining in exquisitely erotic tableaux, and ropes and chains are the norm. There are more eight-inch heels here than I've seen in one place ever. A huge, gilded birdcage takes the pride of place in the centre of the room, a contortionist folded within. Her face is painted white, with red lips and pink blush spots on her cheeks.

Three blonde darlings, each wearing latex tutus, hang from hoops attached to high-wire rigging. They spin at dizzying heights to entertain the crowd below. A giant, hairy bear-looking man wearing a leather harness licks another giant, hairy bear-looking man on the chest.

A beautiful black-and-white mural is painted on one wall, depicting a hedonistic circus carousel, strange creatures all around. Dark, occult motifs can be seen placed about as part of the decor.

I raise my arms above my head and spin, enjoying the newfound freedom, enjoying the way I feel filling out this dress with some curves. Throwing my head back, I see rich maroon drapery falling from the ceiling and fairy lights following the lines of the stripes. The entire space is cast in an eerie glow.

This place is batshit crazy, but I've never felt so at home anywhere. The energy is electrifying. I can hear screams and spanking and—is that a chainsaw?—I don't want to know. Do I?

Banks lights a cigarette and squeezes my hand, tugging me along. Smoking has been illegal inside venues for years, but I guess people just don't hassle him about stuff like that because, well, look at him! He stalks through the club, leaving

a trail of ash behind us, nodding to people who recognise him and keeping a very firm grip on my hand.

We weave our way through the crowd, and I catch the scent of weed. Saliva pools in my mouth like Pavlov's dog. He finally pushes me up against a swanky bar, up-lit and displaying top-shelf liquor. He indicates our order to the barmaid via some kind of secret code.

The music shifts into throbbing, down and dirty electro beats, and my hips sway. Banks grins at me like I'm prey. I throw my head back and sink into my body for the first time in a very long time. When I open my eyes, Banks is leaning on the bar, staring at me.

The barmaid is a gorgeous South American-looking creature in head to toe glossy, black latex. Opera gloves, hot pants, waist cincher and top, although the top is technically more of a harness because it is not supporting or covering her breasts in any way. Which is fine by me. She's a goddess. The music is loud, and she winks at me as she pushes a tall glass of iced water with a wedge of lime across the bar to me.

“Drink!”

I see her mouth the word rather than hear it. I realise how thirsty I am, and I take a sip and then a few more. I'm a crow; sidetracked by all the shiny things. I take a few more sips, my skin prickling and extremely aware of the tall brown man staring straight at me.

A procession of pony girls trot past us with their Mistress close behind, dressed in jodhpurs, knee-high leather riding boots, a pressed white blouse and felt equestrian hat. Two of the girls are trotting in unison, their full, bare breasts bobbing. Every now and then, one of them receives a light crop from their Mistress to keep her in line. They are each wearing identical outfits. The highlight for me being the hoof boots; a leather ankle boot, with a ridiculously high arch, yet lacking any heel so that they are high on their toes. The sole of the shoe is a metal horse iron, so they make the real clip clop sound. White ostrich plumes sprout from their browbands, and

delicate leather body harnesses finish the look. They are completely naked.

Oh fuck, I'm pretty sure I would be dripping through my panties if Banks had allowed me to wear any tonight. My thighs are starting to feel sticky. He's leaning with his elbow on the bar, gaze on mine like he's reading my mind. He spins me around by the shoulders, so my stomach is pushed up against the bar. His thigh pushes between my legs.

"Does watching the pony girls turn you on? Do you wish it were you up there, being pushed forward by that Mistress?"

My heart skips three consecutive beats as my hips hit the wood of the bar. His erection nudges my back as his weight traps me.

"I want to see how wet you are, my dirty little scopophiliac. Freud would have loved to study you, I'm sure," he says as he reaches under my dress, dragging fingers through my arousal and cupping my bare pussy with his palm. I push against his hand as his thumb rubs my clit. Standing in the middle of a packed nightclub, with people standing less than a metre away, he bites along my neck, whispering filthy things into my ear. I can hear a few of his words: *mahogany dick... pretty mouth... gag around...* so I'm fairly certain I know where his mind is at. A groan escapes my throat at the thought of sucking his dick again, and I grind back into his bulge.

"I'm so fucking wet already," I say up to him.

"Good. All the better for you to lick yourself off my cock later," he says, and my thighs clench. Is he finally going to take me?

One of the bar staff stares at me as Banks' left hand grabs my martini glass and brings it to my lips, forcing me to guzzle, and a splash slides down my chin. I swallow, and the familiar booze slides right into the fun part of my brain. He places the empty glass on the bar as he runs a finger along my sex, gathering my essence before bringing his finger up to my mouth and forcing it inside. I lick my desire from his finger, embarrassed to be doing this in public, but at the same time

groaning with the thrill of how turned on I am by this debauchery.

His giant hand grips my throat, and I can't help but take a peek across to the mirror above the bar. We look so fucking sexy together, and that same bartender takes another long look and grins at me. I look at myself in the mirror just like he's planned; a tiny, undead, goth girl, with warrior scars across her face, standing next to Banks, who is a physical manifestation of a warrior god if ever I saw one. And he's holding me by the throat and leaning over me, degrading me in the most delicious ways with his thick fingers plunged knuckles deep in my pussy.

"Who's a horny little hussy, then? You love watching me finger you in the mirror, don't you, little slut?" he asks, breath hot on my skin. "Open your eyes and watch me finger you in public."

Watching me in the mirror, dipping his fingers between my thighs so leisurely, like he does this every day, he squeezes my throat.

"This lovely little cunt is all mine, got it?"

I nod, eyes rolling back in my head from the delicious choking and the clit stimulation I've been so desperate for. He loosens his grip on my throat just enough that I can take a proper breath. I have no control over what happens next, and that's liberating. The things he does to me, makes me do. I've never enjoyed giving over control to anyone before him. I wanted to, but could never do it. I'd never met the right person.

I buck wildly against his hand again, groaning.

"I own every inch of you, understand me? Every freckle, every fingernail, every one of those scars," he growls into my ear, loud enough so that the people next to us can hear. I rut my hips forward again, hoping for friction.

"I'm going to utterly destroy this when I finally get inside it," he says, voice deep with lust. "And it's going to be much sooner than you think."

He starts properly finger banging me now, my pleasure escalating quickly, hips bucking and I don't care who watches. Hell, I wish they would watch!

"I'm going to come," I pant, my breaths coming in ragged gasps, my hands pawing his thighs.

"Oh, are you really?" he growls, stopping everything, removing all pressure from my clit and just whispering in my ear. "Did I say you can?"

"No, but...!" I whine. Not this again!

"No," he says, rocking his hips against me and grabbing my inner thigh with his hand.

I suck in a breath, my vision spinning me back from the brink. I think of boring things—paying the car registration, disinfecting the prep room at work, washing bloated, dead bodies that have floated ashore. Gripping the bar top, I force myself to swallow the scream lodged in my throat.

"Good. You can wait," he says, sipping his drink whilst making a big deal about sniffing his finger.

I pant and my head drops over the bar for a second before I look up to study his face in the mirror. Those eyes that captivated me so much when I was sixteen are now hooded with lust, *for me*. This is exactly what I wanted all those years ago, but I was too frightened.

The power in his stance, everything about this man, screams authority. The disparity between us is immense. His tall physique and violent background show in the way he carries himself. I come up to his shoulders with the heels, but somehow we do make the perfect couple. No one has come close to making me feel the way this man does, right here, right now.

He has absolute control over me as he goes back to tugging ever so gently on my inner labia, my heartbeat hammering wildly with every touch. I take a drink while making eye contact with a stranger across the bar, while Banks goes back to pinching and rolling my clit between his fingers. My thighs are so wet now, I'm not sure if people can see my lust. I let out

a shuddered yelp, and my bodyweight leans back into him. I lose all sense of gravity in these heels, my knees wobbling.

His laugh is throaty against my ear as he takes all my weight, my attention drawn between his fingertips again as he begins rubbing with perfect tension on my clit. I watch the staff mix elaborate drinks with fire and smoke. The scent of charred rosemary fills my nostrils as I grasp his forearms desperately, willing him to make me come.

Digging my long nails into his shirt sleeves, slowly at first, then faster, he picks up his demanding pace, rubbing to a faster rhythm, and my eyes squeeze tight. My pleasure trips up to a crescendo as my body shakes in time with his fingertips. My chest heaves, nipples so sensitive under the leather, and finally he thrusts deep inside me and whispers.

“I think you should come now.”

Passion arcs through me, with those words straight from his lips, and I come, blindingly hard and fast as his fingers continue their warpath. I writhe and jolt against his hand as the orgasm wracks through me. Waves pulsating as I scream out my release, clawing at the back of his neck. Through foggy vision, I see the barmaid turn and watch the show, and I catch a glimpse of myself, cheeks flushed, deeply content as the last pulses of lust course through me. I never knew how much I loved edging until right now.

“Oh, that was quite the show. I’ve got a little exhibitionist on my hands, haven’t I?” Banks says. “That scream of yours... so fucking sexy.” Pushing his cock against me, he cups my pussy with his hand. “This is mine,” he repeats, in case I could have possibly forgotten within the last minute or two.

I really feel like the way he had a hold of me was bigger than the known universe. The way he manipulated my pleasure felt as though it was on a molecular level, like we are tuned in on the same frequency and we move with pure instinct. Something sparked inside me.

My breath comes hard, and I shift balance, as his weight disappears from my back. He grins, bringing his fingers up to his nose, then licking them. He drains his drink, then gives me

a wink as I finish mine. As he sends another secret code message to the bar girl, I can feel my juices trickling down my thigh.

I clench my legs together, straightening my dress and fixing my hair, noticing how dishevelled I appear in the mirror. But I look hot, post orgasmic. Our drinks arrive and we cheers with a knowing look. He sips his drink and I gulp half my martini in one slug, then follow it by draining my new water glass.

“Thank you,” I say, peering up at him. I’m floating on a cloud; I just want to cling to him and cuddle. I finish my drink as he wraps me in his arms and kisses the top of my head.

“Come on, let’s explore,” he says.

“I really need to use the little girl’s room,” I say.

“Follow me, then.”

As we head back through the throng, I see a medical setup, all white walls, stainless trolleys and appliances, and a latex nurse standing above a naked man strapped down. She’s threading needles through his skin and checking the catheter emerging from his cock, while another two ‘nurses’ look on, giggling at him.

The next stark medical room has a woman face down on a sterile table as strips of her flesh are carefully removed with a scalpel by a man in sterile gloves wearing a surgeon’s mask with a magnifying glass attached. Now that fucking intrigues me!

But I’m busting, so we carry on, back through the main room where people are dancing and kissing and, oh yep, those three are definitely fucking each other in the middle of the dance floor with everyone else just swirling around them like a warped kink Regency ball. There are others fucking with strap-ons too. This is not simply a fetish-themed club night. This is balls to the wall debauchery.

*E*ngel - Rammstein

*E-Girls are ruining my life by Corpse , Savage
Ga\$p*

BANKS

I adjust myself and grab her hand, leading Hazy through the thumping, swaying, latex mass toward the elevator. The dance floor is hot and sticky, and it's at that point in the night where depravity is in full swing. Latex devils are doing their rounds of the club; dressed in red and black rubber catsuits handing out drinks, condoms, offering a latex shining service or perhaps even a blow job if you are that way inclined. I click the button for level two and it jolts us upward.

Fuck, she looks delectable tonight, an absolute showstopper, and that is the perfect leather dress for her petite little frame. I'm happy I bought this one. It highlights the scars against her cadaverous flesh and makes me want to devour her.

"Excuse me, Miss," I say as I grab her ass, pulling her roughly towards me.

I bash blindly for the hold button of the elevator, and we jolt again as it stops. She giggles as I move in for a kiss, exploring her open mouth with a lust I haven't felt for years. Our tongues coil and I think about how urgently I need to

claim her. It's a lawless feeling. She pulls back and looks up at me, and as I look into her eyes, I realise I'm losing control at a rapid pace tonight.

"Oh my god!" she says, that adorable little grin of hers shining as she rubs her horny clit up against my leg.

"No, baby, I'm godless," I say, laughing at my dumb joke. "You know that, my little slut."

"So stop talking yourself up and fuck me like a demon already."

I finger her bare clit while I kiss her. I love knowing that I'm kissing her straight after tasting her sweet pussy; she's such a dirty girl. I wiped some of her juices under my nose earlier so I can smell her for longer. Tasting her isn't enough.

"You want my cock buried deep inside you?"

I hear her panting, writhing up against my hand as I slip two fingers inside her. She starts riding my hand again. She's throbbing.

"I want this, but I need to pee desperately. Please, hurry!" she begs. "I don't want this to stop, but I'm going to pee right here!"

She loves it. She's pushing herself into me and grabbing fistfuls of my hair.

"You need to control yourself, Hazy. Ride the pain."

I surprise her by falling to my knees. I shimmy her skirt right up to her waist, exposing her completely, and her fingers continue to grasp at my hair. I spin her around so her ass hits the cold mirror. I devour every inch of her with my gaze, taking in the scars on her thighs and hips. They're so beautiful, I can't stand it. I drag my tongue over her lovely hipbones and groan into her.

"Goddamnit! You are perfect, woman."

"Oh, fuck! Please!"

I'm nipping and nibbling, so near to her pussy that I can feel the heat radiating. She smells so fucking good, I can't

control myself.

“How drenched is this pretty little cunt of yours, Bones?” I ask, as I hold her by the hips.

My tongue slides over cross-hatched scars, and I realise that at least some of these self-mutilation scars have required medical attention.

“You’re so dirty, Banks,” she says, her hands tracing my shoulders.

“Piss in my mouth,” I say to her.

She laughs at me and smacks my arm.

“You think I’m joking.” I laugh as I stand, straightening her dress down and pressing the button.

“Banks, we forgot to pay for our drinks!”

I ignore her as the lift arrives at the second floor, and we head to an internal balcony overlooking a section of the dance-floor. Here we have a view of below. People gyrating in each other’s arms, spanking, kissing, fucking, spinning. Dark industrial blasts over the sound system and anything goes.

“Come on,” I say, and with long strides, pull her along the narrow bridge. We come out into a long corridor lined with alternating black and red doors. The carpet is black, and the ceiling is mirrored. “These rooms are where some of the best fun takes place,” I say, winking down at her and knocking. “You’re gonna find out just how filthy I really am.”

*H*AZY

I don't think I can walk much further without wetting myself.

“Banks, please, I'm begging. A bathroom?!”

He ignores me again and knocks on a glossy black door about a third of the way up the corridor. The letters G.S. are printed in brass, and it's opened by a short, curvaceous woman. Her long hair falls in glorious waves to her waist. She's dressed in the softest leather knee-length dress, elegant black pumps with a pointed toe, and simple gold jewellery. Her warm brown skin is highlighted with some kind of shimmery powder makeup. She looks stunning. She would fit in at a high-end gathering at any swanky function in the world.

She glances up at Banks and her deep brown eyes glow with familiarity. She flicks her eyes down to me, then back to Banks, and a small smile forms on her lips. I grasp his arm tighter and start bouncing on the spot. She steps back a pace and gestures for us to enter.

When I look up to him with curiosity, he ignores me and walks straight through, dragging me behind him with a firm grasp. I take two steps to his one.

I grind my teeth as jealousy burns its way through my ribcage. I wonder about their history. Have they fucked? Highly likely, judging by their chemistry. Has she sucked his

cock? Probably. They would look so hot together, naked, moaning and sweaty as he rubs his cum all over her magnificent tits.

She closes the door behind us, and I snap out of my porn fantasy. I need to get over this. I need to just assume he's fucked everyone. Why wouldn't he? I've certainly slept my way around Sydney; I'm no blessed Virgin Mary, that's for fucking certain.

I glance around the small, sparse room. It smells like candy, booze, and perfume, with a hint of mint drifting in from somewhere. The combination of scents reminds me of a strip club. The music is quieter up here. There are chairs scattered about, with people sitting in small clusters, chatting in hushed tones and sipping drinks through metal straws. This is a much more subdued space, but one thing is in common with downstairs. The latex. They are all head to toe.

"I still need the bathroom," I whisper up to Banks through clenched teeth as we make our way toward the front. My bladder is in full ache mode now. I'm consciously clenching it every second.

"I know. Hold it in for a few more minutes," he shoots back at me.

Fuck. Why couldn't we just make a pit stop? What is so important about this dull little room?

The woman leads us through the space, and every pair of eyes glance up to stare and Banks lets go of my hand as he takes a seat at the front. The woman gestures for me to step up onto a small stage area. Silence ripples through the room and all eyes are on me.

I'm squirming inwardly, a mixture of emotions reeling through my body, but the overriding one is that I need to pee out that giant glass of ice water and the two martinis. STAT. Immediately, people begin to stand; a sexy Asian woman in black hot pants and a translucent latex bra, a brunette guy wearing a pink mini dress, a blonde woman in pink latex, and even more people continue to stand and walk towards me.

No one would ever want you for anything useful, so this is some kind of mistake. There is nothing special about you. You're just a worthless cunt.

I look at Banks, but he's ignoring me. A line forms beside the stage. What is this? There are now around a dozen people lined up next to me and my mind is racing through all the possible explanations as to what the hell could possibly be happening. The woman in leather steps forward.

"Take your pick from the volunteers, please," she says, as she gestures toward the line of people.

"What am I choosing them for?" I whisper quietly to her, feeling stupid that I seem to be the only one in the room without a clue. This feels exactly like one of those god-awful naked work dreams. She looks to Banks with amusement.

"Just choose your favourite one, Bones," he says, glancing up from his phone.

I take a step forward, searching along the line. How can I choose my favourite when I don't know what I'm choosing them for? This is stupid!

"Her." I point frantically.

The blonde woman's eyes sparkle when I select her and a wide grin spreads across her face, but she quickly lowers her eyes.

"Right then, follow me. Everyone else can clear this room please. We're done for the night," Lady Leather says, flicking glossy hair over her shoulder and turning on the spot.

She leads Blondie through another door, and before I can go through, Banks pockets his phone and grabs me. Pulling me into his chest, he nuzzles my ear.

"You're going to give her a golden shower in that room," he says, matter of fact.

I am not sure I heard him correctly, so I replay his last words in my mind to check. And yep, that's what he said! My thoughts scramble all over each other. Is this something I want to do? I can't say I've never fantasised about it before, in the

privacy of my own bed with my battery-operated boyfriend, but I never imagined I would get this close to it actually happening. And with such a spectacularly hot woman too! I realise I've been staring at him blankly, my mouth agape. He gives a quick nod as he watches the cogs turn in my eyes.

“Through that door is a little glass room. It's completely sanitary, disinfected thoroughly between each client, I can guarantee it. The only thing in it is a toilet. It's up to you as to what happens. You're in charge; you can pee wherever you want. Have fun. I'll be watching.”

I stare at him, and he leans in, kissing me on the lips before picking me up and carrying me to the door, putting me down and smacking me on the ass on my way through. I feel a drop of pee start to emerge, and I clench like there is no tomorrow. I take tiny steps so that I don't need to open my thighs at all.

He's right. The room is all glass and tiles, and three sides are curtained off for privacy with heavy rubber drapes. Inside there are mirrors at various points for optimum viewing pleasure. In the centre of the room is a Perspex ghost chair with a high back, giving the appearance of a throne, and a hole cut out of the seat. It is balanced atop a Perspex ledge with more holes cut out.

Lying face up on the ground is the submissive woman I selected. She is smiling at me as I approach the steps. I see Banks sitting on the other side of the glass in a small peepshow room. His eyes are fixed on me as I hobble my way up the five steps to the chair. As soon as I arrive, I lift my dress and sit down. Dragging my eyes from his, I make eye contact via a mirror with the girl underneath me.

“Move your body up a bit,” I tell her.

She wriggles up a little and I open the floodgates, exhaling the pain and discomfort I've been holding on to since we were in the bar downstairs. I watch the pale golden stream fall down through my legs and hit her chest, droplets cascading and splashing over her face and hair. It's such a strange, powerful feeling to watch the joy on her face to be receiving this bizarre

gift. I stop mid-stream and get up, wobbling down the stairs in my heels.

“Get up,” I tell her, “and come with me.”

Little warm droplets of liquid are dribbling down my leg as she follows me on hands and knees, and I point to a spot right in front of the glass where Banks is sitting on the other side. I make eye contact with him, and I can clearly see he’s unzipped his pants and pulled his cock out. Lust glazing his eyes.

“Head against the glass,” I direct her. “Feet over there.”

The top of her head is touching the glass wall facing Banks. I flip the skirt of my dress right up onto my shoulders, so my entire lower half is exposed up to my waist, giving Banks the perfect view of this peepshow. My legs are straddling her face as she looks straight up to a view of my pussy.

“Open your mouth,” I say.

She does so, and I let it rain down into her awaiting, lipstick-clad hole. She groans, gurgling and swallowing my piss as though it were the most delicious wine in the universe.

I look up at Banks, who is pumping his rigid cock in his fist, the glint of metal shining. I study his face as the last drops land on the girl below. His full lips are parted, eyelids hooded, flickering between my pussy and the girl on the ground. I can see his fist’s tempo shifting between quick and slow, and as I finish, the girl rolls around in the puddle, licking the ground beneath her.

I leave her there without a word, stepping over her and lowering my dress. Then I find Banks in the adjoining room, cock in hand. Closing the door, I lock it behind me.

*M*antra - TroyBoi
Frozen - Madonna, Sickick

HAZY

“Get over here and sit on my face,” he growls, his tone leaving zero room for my usual bratty banter. “Immediately.” I get there in three strides and kick my shoes off before climbing him like a tree. He’s reclined in an old school barber chair, so I teeter precariously. “Get this fucking thing off,” he barks as he grapples for the zip. He pulls the dress over my head, and I’m naked.

I lower myself down so my knees are resting near his neck, and his tongue makes an urgent track up my thigh, lapping all my spills. I had no idea he was so into water sports and can see how hot my little peepshow must have been for him. I’ve never seen him so horny before. Hair flicks across my cheek as I glance back through the window. The curtains have been drawn for cleaning, and I smell apple disinfectant.

“Oh god. My mouth was watering watching you up there on that glass throne. So fucking hot.”

The room is dark, but for a few scented candles, and the chair shakes as I push my pussy desperately into his face. Metal squeaks as he tugs his cock violently. His other hand wraps around half my waist firmly, and he lets out a throaty,

primal growl. The thought that he licked the piss off my leg is a turn on. Could this guy be as filthy as me? Is that even possible?

He pushes both his arms through the space between my widely splayed legs and grabs onto me under the ass cheeks, hands gripping up through to the curve in my lower back. I feel his warm breath on my pussy. He stands up—I repeat, *stands up*—and I grip onto his shoulders for dear life. My abs clench as my legs fall down his back and he walks us over to a wall.

“Holy shit!” I giggle as he pushes me up against it.

“Thought this might be a good place to eat my dinner. I’ve been waiting far too patiently for this feast,” he says.

With my body secured firmly in place by his punching bag arms, my legs fall across his back as he leans forward to caress my labia with his tongue. A warmth spreads to my feet and shivers back up to my neck, heat gripping my core like my body has forgotten how to feel this way. The wet heat of his tongue traces my clit ever so gently, and *fuck me*, I jolt my head back as though I’ve been high voltage electrocuted. Before the night with Jade, I had never climaxed from oral alone, with a lover’s mouth wrapped around my pussy. This, *this...* he flicks his tongue, and I’m alive.

“Unholy Mother of Fuck...” I shout, fingers clawing his scalp as I buck forward.

Adrenaline spikes as his tongue laps gentle circles, sucking hard on my clit, pulling back on the tender flesh until I think my head is going to detonate. I moan, as he licks and probes my folds and fucks my entrance with his hardened tongue. I’m vaguely worried he’ll drop me, but my cervix is starting to contract and convulse with that familiar wave of rapture, and my pelvis is unrestrainedly assaulting his lovely big mouth.

“Banks....”

“Uh, Uh... Nah...” he grunts, nestled deep within my pussy. “I hath other plans.”

I'm pretty sure there's going to be a *glitch in the matrix* if I'm not allowed to come.

"I'm gonna..."

"No," he says.

I squeal as he removes his mouth from my aching pussy and lowers me quickly to the ground. My thighs are slick with our hunger. From my view down here, he towers over me at his full height, his gorgeous brown dick standing straight.

"Come," I finish my sentence.

"Open your mouth," he says, ignoring my statement and ripping his shirt off.

His erection, veins throbbing, has been swinging out of his boxers this whole time. His belt is unbuckled, waistband dangling under his firm ass before he removes the pants. He takes it in hand and firmly tugs, the ladder of metal on the underside dragging against his long fingers, creating tension on his flesh. His face contorts, and I guess the metal makes everything more painful for him.

"You love pain too, don't you?" I ask, watching him closely as he jerks off, and I can't help but touch myself too.

"Hazy, shut up and open your slutty mouth."

His sheer girth has me second guessing the size of my jaw, as I think back to the blow job under the table in the restaurant.

"Banks..."

"Shut up."

"Banks."

"Hazy, goddamn it," he says, the fisting ramping up in speed along with his temper.

I open and close my jaw a few times in preparation.

I just don't know how to deal with this thing coming at me like a freight train. I hallucinate that his cock gets lodged in the back of my throat and Zane has to race us to the ER, fused

together like a human centipede. I start to sway. Fainting or puking is imminent. He grabs the back of my neck and yanks me forward, and I lean into the pain and smile. He doesn't care whether my mouth is open or closed; he rams his dick down my throat with such a force that I gag and retch around him. When he pulls out, I taste his salty pre-cum on my lips.

“That mouth is far too fuckin’ chatty.”

My eyes are wet, and I open my mouth as wide as is humanly possible.

“Better. Now take it,” he says gruffly. No room for argument.

He pushes the entire tip inside my mouth, and I suck on it, eyes rolling back. I want my tombstone to read, ‘She died doing what she loved, choking on a spectacular cock.’ Xanthe will look so hot at the graveside, sobbing behind her black lace parasol in her latex nun’s outfit.

The smooth and salty combination of his gentle rocking lulls me into a dream-like trance, and I slurp and suck to keep from choking. Primal instinct takes over, and my lips form a seal around his dick that elicits an immediate groan. I swallow, and he bends at the knees, pushing into me slowly and a barbell grazes my bottom lip, then another and another. He drags me up by the hair as he pushes me with his cock back over to the chair.

I stumble and drool and my thighs are drenched with my juices from the rough manhandling. What is wrong with me? Why am I such a slut for this punishment? Why is this animalistic behaviour turning me on? I’m disgusting, and loving every second of it.

I desperately suck air in through my nose, greedy for him to fuck my throat harder. He lines himself up and pumps his length a few times with the tip still in my mouth. I feel the fingers of his other hand dig into the flesh of my jaw, biting in at just the perfect angle to make my mouth ready to accept him.

“You’d best open really fucking wide now, Bones. Final warning.”

He pinches my nose, and I gasp through my mouth as the bulging brown head perfectly fits between my parted lips. He drives deep in one smooth attack, and I hear metal on teeth inside my head. The crown nudges the back of my throat, and I gag happily.

“That’s it,” he says, voice velvety smooth. “You’re doing so well, baby.”

He strokes my hair softly, before grasping a fistful again. The pounding is relentless as I gag and retch, and it only makes him harder, drive deeper inside me. Little thrusts nudge the back, and he groans louder, forcing my head back as he pulls all the way out to the tip, before pushing back in. I feel so thoroughly used, so degraded and yet revered. No one has ever treated me like this before. I’m a sex toy at his complete disposal.

“Ugh, you’re such a horny little slut, aren’t you?” he says, getting rougher. “You fucking love this.”

I try to nod. *Yes, I’m the most industrial strength slut you’ve ever met!* But his firm grasp on my hair leaves my scalp burning from the friction, and I have no control over any part of my body. I desperately try to breathe through my nose, but with the tears comes the snot, and I’m choking, trying to inhale some fresh air so I have to tap out. He pulls out immediately, standing back a step and rubbing his cock slowly in my overflowing saliva. I gulp in a lungful of sweet, sweet oxygen and inhale and exhale a few more times, drool cascading down my chest. I smile up at him like a harlot.

“That’s enough breathing for you,” he says, picking me up out of the chair and setting me onto my knees on the floor.

“Stick your tongue out,” he grunts, voice dark with need.

He grips my hair again, and I feel his smooth, heavy balls land on my tongue. I tremble with anticipation. He tastes like salty sex, and smells of his body wash.

“Suck ’em,” he growls, pushing his balls into my mouth harshly.

My senses explode as I suck him into my mouth, trying my best to pull them all at once, gently rolling him over my tongue so I don’t earn myself a backhand for biting his goddamn package. This man gives off definite vibes that he would not be putting up with that kind of behaviour. I’m trying to be gentle, but I feel the feral animal rising inside me, and I go lower and lower, licking around his hole with my warm tongue. I groan and take his balls back into my mouth.

“Oh, you are a nasty girl, aren’t you?” he asks, eyes locked with mine, hips pushing, fist pumping as he spits into his hand.

“Lick my asshole,” he says, moving himself in line with my mouth.

I lift my head and do as he asks, my tongue sliding and nudging the entrance to his ass. I am thrilled at the way he cuts me straight down to size with this one action. Claiming his ownership over me, and I’m his for the taking. He won’t take any bullshit from me because he makes me *want* this. Crave it.

When he angles himself away, I reach greedily for his cock, which juts to attention above me. His gaze follows my inked hand as I rest it on top of his own. I grasp hungrily as our hands move together, and I try to drag his cock into my mouth. Our eyes stay locked, and he slips his hand out from under mine so I’m holding the bloody weight of his erection myself.

This is definitely my new favourite place in the world. Between this man’s feet; worshipping his magnificent cock.

I lick with the desperation of a slutty virgin, my fingers slipping up and down, over pre-cum and titanium on his dick as his balls swirl around in my mouth. His eyes alight as he groans deeper into his lust, and I drop his balls from my mouth, licking up the underside of his shaft. Pushing to my knees, my tongue traces its way in a zig-zag pattern through the hardware. I spit on his cock and smile up at him—people

with dicks really fucking love that—and his hips jerk into my face. He yanks my hair, hard.

“Oh, you are a filthy little porn star. Do that again,” he says, yanking me back violently and spitting into my mouth. I’ve heard that spitting into each other’s mouths is a love spell, and I’m enamoured by his filth. “Do that again now.” The look in his eyes dares me to disobey him.

I grin as the soft degradation puts me firmly back in my place. His toy, his doll. Nothing more. Nothing less. I spit and wonder how he has not climaxed yet. One-night stands finish up either *too fast*, or they have the old *coke dick, can’t get it up* scenario. When I arrive at the tip—and it’s a fucking long journey from base to tip—I swirl my tongue around the end to lick off the salty goodness before pulling it into my mouth and grinning up at him like a hungry beast.

“Oh fuck, I’m going to blow if you keep doing that,” he says, pulling out. “You’re going to need crutches when I’m done with you tonight. You know that, don’t you?” He moves to get comfy in the chair, dragging me by the hair.

I’m slippery as fuck and swallow the lust in my throat, hallucinating my death whilst impaled on a ginormous black dick.

Hey, if this is how I gotta go, it’s how I gotta go!

I rise up onto the arms of the chair and hear the leather squeak under my fingers as I leverage myself for the best angle, and as I slide down on top of him...

“Unholy...” I exhale. I feel every last inch of his girth piercing into me at my own pace, so slowly.

He stays still, and I feel my pussy engulfing him, even though it’s just the head inside. I lure him in as he grabs my waist with one hand and guides his length with the other. I’m forced to sink down as he pulls me in and ruts up at the same time, each one of those barbells thrilling me on entry. I feel them deep inside my vagina, grating my cervix like an alien sex toy. He holds me down, raking my flesh with his nails.

It's excruciating and exhilarating. The pain inside is beautiful. As he tears his way through me, I feel a sense of being filled that I've craved for so many years. I suck in a breath and clamp down. He's staking claim over every cell of my body. I let out a sharp yelp, and he groans with a satisfied pleasure at the sound of my pain.

"Oooh, that's it," he says. "You're so good at this."

He likes hurting me, and I love taking it in equal measure. If he makes me bleed tonight, I want it all. How is it possible for two people to be so fucked up and yet meet perfectly somewhere near the middle? I was built a masochist for this man.

His thighs settle into a tempo; slow and building. I undulate down, and his hands spread my ass cheeks as he grinds into me brutally. I bounce around and try to hold on. The difference in our physical sizes makes it no effort for him to pound me from any direction he chooses. And he knows a lot of them, apparently. Leaning over, I run my hands on his perfect ass. I fall down onto him, unable to hold myself up any longer. I claim his lips. Drawing myself upright, he continues driving us home, and I'm his slave. The look in his eyes as he devours my body is ravenous.

"Oh my god," he says.

Our eyes lock. He's breathing hard, pleasure escaping as he grunts into me. The pain heightens every movement between us; I can feel it ripping me apart inside, but I don't want him to stop. He pinches both of my nipples at the same time, and I lean into his hands as a delicious rush of pain shoots through me. I smile. I can *feel* something. Finally, this is what I need. This is what's wrong with me. I need to be fucked like this. I giggle as his dick falls out of me during a giant thrust, and he puts it back in as fast as possible.

He's wild.

My nails scrape flesh as his arms wind their way around my waist. My back arches and his mouth finds a breast, nipping, sucking, biting, *ooh, fuck...* and his fingers find my

clit, scooping up some juice, with just the perfect pressure, begins to circle, and...

“Banks...”

“I wanna feel your pussy clench me harder,” he says between body slams. “Ride it out, baby.”

He’s rearranging my organs with a brutal force, and white stars begin to spin in my vision. Please don’t let me pass out and miss this! My G-spot finds the right angle for friction, and waves of pleasure rise further.

I’m standing on the edge of no return. Atomic-sized convulsions shudder through me. A fierce energy explodes. I shout the beginning of my release as the muscles in my core clamp down around him. Pulsing, pulsing, pulsing, and I’ve lost all control of my body as I convulse. He holds me up easily as I writhe.

“Fuck, I love how you sound when you come,” he groans as he supports me and continues to do what he was doing as I began this climax.

I’m levitating breathlessly and I’m riding him, bucking, hands on his chest as we gyrate together in a sweaty mass. My internal orgasm finally subsides, but he doesn’t let up with the clit stimulation, and his relentless impaling intensifies in speed until I’m thrown over the edge of insanity, straight into a clitoral orgasm. He groans as he hears my second climax, and I feel his own release pulsating inside of me, gushing out of me as he continues his stake on my heart, shouting his release.

If I die tonight, I am one happy woman.

He stills and I fall on top of him in a big sweaty heap, trying to catch our breath.

“My thighs are going to explode.” He laughs, wiping the sweat from his brow.

His arms wrap around me protectively, and his legs wrap around mine. I feel so very tiny next to him, so secure. My clit throbs as my body tries to recalibrate after that out-of-body experience, and I slide my fingertips along his chest, just enjoying the chance to be this close to him.

“I didn’t know pleasure like this was possible,” I whisper, almost to myself. I feel my goosebumps rise under his soft caresses. Tears begin to pool in my eyes as I hold a floodgate of overwhelming emotion back.

“This is what normal is like for us now, baby. It will always be this way. We can never do boring. This is where you belong,” he says, running his fingertips over me. I watch his chest rise and fall in the flickering candlelight.

Does he mean that? That I wouldn’t have to fight on my own anymore? That he is here supporting me along the way?

“I’ve never come so hard in my life,” I whisper. “Definitely never come twice in a row before, ever.” That’s no lie. I think I’m still floating in another dimension as I lean into him.

“I’m obsessed with you beyond the limits of normality. All I want to do is please you, own you, fix you, make you happy, make you my wife,” he says, and I inhale sharply as he says the last word.

Wife? Fuck, he really means it. Surely, he doesn’t throw the W-word around with all the girls. He doesn’t seem like the kind of man who would do that. He has too much money for one thing.

“I’d be happy with water right now...” I say, a connectedness establishing itself between us at a level it hasn’t before, and my nose tingles as I inhale a happy breath.

“Water coming right up,” he says.

I belong here. He reveres me in a way that leaves me feeling transfixed.

He slips out from under me and passes me a towel from the cupboard. Then he wipes his dick and balls as I wipe myself off. After typing something into his phone, he comes over to finish drying me off.

There is a soft knock at a door, and he opens it to grab a kit that a slave has dropped off, and he hands me a long, silk robe.

I put it on, and he picks me up, walking me back out into a corridor.

“Banks, what is this place? How do you know your way around so well?” I ask. “And where did you get that key card?”

“You’re a smart girl, Hazy. You’ll figure it out soon enough.”

I nuzzle into his neck.

“You know what I mean. It’s not fair you don’t tell me what’s going on. This place is freaking insane in the best way possible, and I want to live here. Can I bring Xanthe and Patrick?”

“You’ll figure it out, Bones. You can bring your friends here once you’re better.”

We come to another shiny black door, and he gently kisses me on the nose and lowers me to the ground. He swipes the key and kicks the door open, holding it for me to pass through first.

He’s the best thing to ever happen to me. If I decide to kill myself tonight, I’ve experienced something in my life that’s worth living for.

Shit, this is a super swanky hotel room! Five-star, by the looks of things. Not that I’ve spent a whole lot of time in five-star hotel rooms, but it’s definitely a step above the roadside motels I’m used to on my interstate business trips. He switches the lights on with the card, and the smell of bleached towels and linen welcomes me, along with some kind of fragrance. My feet are shocked by the cool tiles as he shows me to the bathroom, where I find every type of lotion, soap, and shampoo a girl would need to wash away the hottest sex she’s ever had in her life.

“There are some clothes for you to choose from in the wardrobe. I’ll be showering and dressing next door. There are drinks in the bar fridge and some snacks on the bench. I’ll be back to get you soon. Enjoy your shower!”

After my shower, I find some brand-new makeup waiting for me, so I add the basics to my face, then wander around the room, enjoying the cool air conditioning, and peeping out of the curtains while I snack. I look at the metal gates, mist on the rooftops, a few scraggly Ibis snacking in bins. I pop more brie and crackers into my mouth, and sip red wine.

Opening the wardrobe, I find a selection of strappy and lacy black lingerie and high heels, but nothing more. Umm, where are the clothes? I select my favourite shoes. They are strappy Jimmy Choo stilettos. I step my feet into them and instantly feel like Cinderella. How did he know I would need fresh shoes tonight? Were these put here just for me? How did they get here? Did he plan all this? Did he plan on me pissing on my own shoes and him ripping off my dress before fucking me into oblivion? My guess is yes.

I turn around as the door opens and as he enters, looking delicious in a fresh new all-black three-piece suit and smelling of piracy. He stops dead in his tracks. The door slams behind him and his gaze rapes my naked form.

“You are the hottest thing. That collar looks good on you,” he says, as I stand there naked but for expensive shoes.

He gets to me in two strides, hoists me up, and my legs wrap around his waist. He sucks a breast into his mouth roughly, before throwing me onto the bed and settling over me.

“You are so fun to fuck, Hazy Vale Williams.”

My lips burn as he devours me whole.

“Now, get up and choose your outfit. We’ve got more to see downstairs.”

“But, there’s nothing in there.”

“What do you mean?” He leaps up, flinging the doors open and selecting a few scanty bits of lace on hangers.

“Well, that’s underwear. Where are the clothes?”

“Here!” he says, reaching on top of the cupboard to bring down two lengths of soft rope. “I’m going to make it for you.”

Now put this on, and stand up straight,” he says, handing the hanger to me.

I don't bother asking. I know he's not going to explain anything to me at this point, and hell, I don't really give a shit anyway. I'll go wherever he drags me. I'm happy to be anywhere with him. So I slip on the briefs—all bondage inspired, strappy, black, soft elastic—with a matching, high-neck bra with strategically placed bondage straps. The way this fits me gives the illusion of some kind of cleavage, which is an added bonus. When I'm *dressed*, he pushes the hair away from my neck and bites me, shivers clawing their way down my torso again.

“Now, get over here,” he says, pointing in front of a floor to ceiling mirror.

“And remember to breathe, baby,” he whispers as he kisses my lips.

I realise I've been holding my breath with anticipation.

He unravels the first length with obvious expertise, and the moment it touches my flesh, I'm gone, floating into a dream state. I feel his chest behind me, supporting my weight as he leans over and flicks the rope around me. I'm born for this. The ropes dance across my flesh, and a happy moan escapes me. I had no idea the profound effect being bound would have on me. That feeling of constriction comforting me.

Goosebumps prickle and my nipples tighten against the bra as lust swirls. The energy undeniably shifts in the room as he works his methodical and tidy magic. First, a vertical pass straight down my centre from my neck, between my breasts, under my pussy, and then loops up my back, which then begins to take shape with other loops, knots, and weaves.

I give myself over to him entirely and let him push me where he wants me to go. He pauses to brush the hair from my neck and kisses me. He winds the rope in an asymmetrical, serpentine harness around my torso as I watch him with awe in the mirror. I can't believe what I see. A few gentle curves in all the right places, my ink looks fucking awesome against the rope and the sexy lingerie just tops it off. The sensation of the

rope hugging me and the psychological power exchange combine to form a slick wetness in my panties.

“Oh,” he says, as he passes the rope between my thighs another time. “You were born for my ropes, little bunny.” Pausing to kiss my nose, he then runs two fingers under the ropes where they touch my flesh.

My hips thrust forward, and my clit catches his wrist with a delicious friction. He snakes the rope around my torso. The way he moves my body slightly so he can position the rope to be exactly where he needs it to be, it’s incredible. He’s creating a meandering, asymmetrical design from nothing, which is a work of art in and of itself. This man is a Master with the rope, and I realise I’m holding my breath again.

Once he’s happy with his creation, he turns me back to face the mirror and stands behind me and I notice his eyes are glistening.

“You’re an absolute glamour, Hazy. Don’t let anyone tell you differently. Everyone will be staring at you when we head back downstairs, but if anyone touches you, so help me, I’ll shoot them in the dick.”

I laugh as he kisses the very crown of my head, and I look up at him and he kisses me upside down.

“Thank you, Sir, for the best night of my life.”

“So far.”

“This rope, I can’t describe the way it makes me feel. I’ve never felt more beautiful. Or alive. Or sexy.”

He squeezes me.

I apply some lipply, throw a few things in my clutch, and squeal as he scoops me into his arms again and carries me down the hall to another elevator.

*W*erewolf Heart - Dead Man's Bones
Angel Zoo - Phlake

HAZY

I love that he won't let me walk anywhere, kissing me on the ride down, and leading me into a black room.

Crystal chandeliers hang from the ceiling, and painted in chalk are nighttime, twisted carnival scenes. Nomad wagons are pulled by ostrich-plumed horses, and blood-stained, decapitated bunnies hop along next to a fortune teller's tent. In the centre of the room, under a spotlight, there is a contortionist up on a Perspex pedestal. She is a buxom Korean woman, naked but for a diamanté chest harness and some latex thigh-high stockings. It is refreshing to see a neat tuft of pubic hair, since I had all mine lasered off years ago. A tall, blonde woman comes up behind her, as the contortionist is literally bent over backwards, and eats out her pussy. The contortionist moans, her body rippling in a wave of pleasure, and I grin to myself.

I used to think I was kinky before I met Banks. I know nothing. Thinking back to my drug-fuelled threesomes or spanking with a hairbrush, I had no idea what went on in this land of fetish.

"Do you trust me?" he asks.

I stare at him, cogs turning in my brain, unsure what level of trust I should be demonstrating here.

“Absolutely,” I reply.

He taps a message on his phone, winks at me, then throws me over his shoulder, my ass in the air. I giggle as I bury my head against his back, excited to be so exposed, and a part of such a fun night. He walks us into the adjoining room and sets me down, where I notice various rigging points set into the roof.

I stare at him, unmoving. Neither of us speaks, as I listen to the thrum of the music, but something in his eyes tells me that I signed up for this, so I’m going through with it. Whatever *it* is. I hug myself with my arms over my breasts, gripping my clutch tightly. Even though it’s just the two of us in this section, I can feel interested eyes peering at us through the open doorway.

“Come here,” he commands, so I place my purse down on a nearby chair.

I stand in front of him, and he spins me around, pushes my arms up, crossed behind my back, and my breasts are forced to thrust forward as my back arches.

“Stay there,” he says.

He slowly walks around me in a circle, when we hear a knock at the door.

“Sir?”

“Thanks, Vi. Pass them here, please.”

I turn my head to see an androgynous leather maid pass Banks a few coils of rope.

“New,” he says. “For you.”

He runs a fingertip over my collarbone, sending shivers down to my core. He binds my arms, and as he finishes behind me, he begins expertly and efficiently secures my legs in the shape he wants them. Next, he hooks my harness made previously to the suspension rope, and ties it off.

“Lovely,” he says, grazing a kiss over my lips, and begins to tug on the rope.

Gravity defies me as I leave the floor, ropes digging into flesh, burning, calling me home. It hurts so good, and excitement consumes me.

“I’m flying!” I cry out, a grin spreading over my cheeks in childlike wonder. “Banks! This is fucking epic!”

He laughs at me, and our eyes lock in my excitement. Winking, he lowers me down a bit more and locks off the rope. I’m now hanging about a metre off the ground, gently swaying from side to side and finally coming to a gentle rock as the ropes settle into place and the pain dulls into a cloudy headspace. He checks to make sure I’m comfortable, tracing a fingertip along my goosebump-covered flesh, grazing a kiss along my collarbone.

“You look so hot up there, just waiting for me to fuck you,” he says, eyes alight. “What I wouldn’t do to stick my aching cock up your ass right now, but I’m going to contain myself like a good scout.”

He winks again, checking the ropes are flat against my skin and not hurting me. People are sticking their heads in to see what’s going on now. He selects a decent sized flogger from the wall and, *holy fuck*. What have I gotten myself into?

“I never signed up for this,” I squeak as he drags the tails across my shoulder.

“Oh yes, you did, little one. You signed up for the whole nine yards tonight. And I’ll deliver them now. Ready to count to nine?”

He steps toward me and squeezes my right breast hard, then nipple even harder until I yelp and he moves back. He looks so damn sexy when he laughs, with that playful look in his eye is something I could get used to seeing. Gently tossing the handle of the flogger in his hand to get a good grip, he takes aim and brings a light flick down across my ass, which he has cleverly tied so he can get a good aim at it. It stings like a bastard, and I let out another yelp. I make eye contact with a

woman standing by the doorway, and I see jealousy in her gaze.

Instinctively, I want to reach my hands to my ass to protect it from what I know will be a repeat affair, but of course, my hands are secured behind my back, so I just have to take the dreadful and delicious lashings. And he's only warming up. After the sting comes the pleasure, and the warmth grows. More kinksters have started filtering into our room, standing around the perimeter, chatting to each other and sipping on their drinks, smiling, and I can hear snippets of their conversations.

“So pretty...”

“Don't know... never seen her...”

“God, he's so good with the ropes! Wish he'd tie me.”

“Where does he find the girls?”

*B*ANKS

Curious punters are lining the room to watch my impromptu display. I don't scene much at the club, but when I do, it always draws a big crowd.

After a gentle warm-up comes her flogging. The pain and the pleasure mix in her vocal display until tears are running through her mascara. I'm floating on a high as I administer her rhythmic release. I feel centred, in control, and I hope she's loving it too. It's been so long since I've enjoyed giving a good flog. I love that she's right here with me.

Her eyes let me know she is flying. This girl, built to withstand anything I throw at her. I know just how to work her little body when she doesn't even know what she needs herself.

I can hear people talking about us, about her, but I don't give a flying fuck. I feel like a wild-eyed demon with the wrath and burning desire of the ages behind me. I don't know how long I have her up there, probably not that long in reality, but in my mind and in my experience, it feels like an age. I regularly check the pressure points to ensure all is safe and well. Her little yelps are like music to my soul. My dick is hard again.

She's in a daze as I release the ropes one by one, bringing her down. I hold her in my arms and relish how tiny she is.

How protective I feel over her. The depths of my obsession and need to care for her are out of control.

Once the rigging is gone, I leave her harness, and she reaches up to wrap her arms around my neck. I grab her purse and carry her back through the club and up to the hotel suites, with her pretty head resting on my shoulder.

It's dark now, and quiet in here. I soothe her in calm, hushed tones, removing the ropes, lingerie, heels, and makeup with a gentle hand. She's so fucking precious, it hurts. Aftercare is so important. I see time and time again how guys treat women, and it pisses me off to no end. Which is why I kicked myself that night I threw her out of the threesome with Jade, but it had to be done. I couldn't control myself around her naked body.

"I'm right here, baby girl," I say, and she smiles up at me with a happiness on her face I've never seen. I put her under the covers and hand her a glass of water, then run her a bath and tend to her needs with a spoon of honey to the lips. Her intoxicating kisses are melting me. I can't leave her alone. I need her.

"You're some kind of demon-angel-magician. I've never met anyone like you in my life," she blathers incoherently. "Except that one time we met in Melbourne." She giggles and hiccups.

"Shhh," I try to soothe her, patting her hair and chuckling at how fucking adorable she is when she's all subby and tipsy.

"Seriously!" She flings the sheets off, and I laugh with raised eyebrows. "How do you know so much about stuff? Like, how did you know your way around this kinky playground? How did you get into this hotel suite? We didn't check in anywhere! Who gave you a key? Who brought you those ropes downstairs? How did you know what G.S. meant on the pissing room? It stands for golden shower, doesn't it? Doesn't it? We didn't even pay for one drink all night! Why didn't we get arrested?" She sets about as though she's going to figure all this out right now and pay for the drinks.

“Shh, I look after everything you need now, remember?” I pat her arm like she’s a dithering old lady at the supermarket checkout.

“Whaddya mean?” she asks.

I laugh at her earnestness and wipe the corners of my eyes with my shirt, and hold her down on the bed with one hand.

“Thank you for bringing me here,” she murmurs, relaxing back into a mountain of pillows.

“I knew you’d like it,” I say, smiling, holding my head up high. “I’m really glad you do.” I feel a lightness in my chest, and it’s strange to me. I smirk with delight. I want to savour this, right here, with her.

“I cannot think of a place I like more than this. Every detail. Every body shape and colour is sexy here. There is no kink shaming. I like that so much.”

“You are smoking hot, you do know that, don’t you? People were staring at you all night, tongues hanging out as we walked by. You are the foxiest goddamn creature to ever slink around these rooms. I know, I’ve been here enough times. I didn’t find it, Bones,” I tell her with a low chuckle. I lean back, running a hand down her face. “I own it. Sanctuary is my baby. Like I said before, it was my second home for a while.”

She looks perplexed for a minute, her cogs grinding.

“Exsqueeze me? What kind of ballpark rich are you?”

“Shhh,” I say, raising my finger to her lips.

“Like, millions?” I continue to stare. “Billions?” she questions, wide-eyed. Her face is a pretty, confused little thing.

“Not now, gorgeous. Let’s just enjoy the night.” I pull her close to me, her softness still surprising me to this day. Just how sweet and soft and delicate she is. And how tragically light.

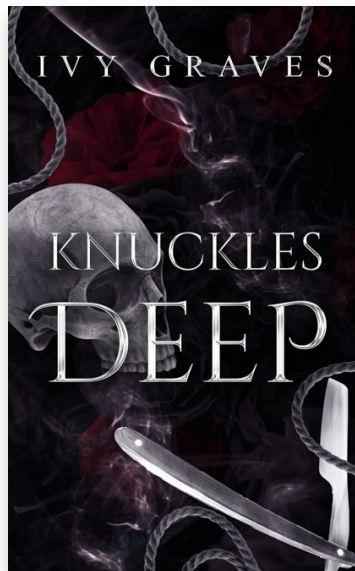
Picking her up, I carry her through to the deep spa bath and place her gently through the layer of rose petals and into the

rose-scented water. A bath fit for my strong Queen.

THE END.

KNUCKLES DEEP

Banks and Hazy's love story continues in Book 2 of the
Shadows and Obsessions Duet
Knuckles Deep by Ivy Grave.



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o'clock somewhere! Thanks for the laughs and hilarious questions such as: *Where does a werewolf keep his boner when he's standing on his hind legs?* Answer: In his trouser pocket, of course! Girls, your dark humour and penchant for smut kept me going through many a late night.

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To my fellow *No Triggers* smut readers who connected with this story, thank you for the opportunity to invent a glorious, bedazzled peen. Honestly, you were my inspiration. Keep advocating for Dark Romance, Taboo and Smut in general. It heals.

Lastly, the musicians. Especially, Abel "The Weeknd" Tesfaye, Banks, Doja Cat, Ramsey, Billie Eilish & Finneas. Creativity inspires creativity! Please never stop.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ivy Graves is inspired by the dark, cold and macabre sides of life. If you've read this book, that should be obvious. She dreams of living in a remote, crumbling castle in the Far North of Scotland. Ironically, she lives by the beach in sub-tropical Australia where it's sunny and revoltingly humid three hundred days per year.

When she's not spending time with her extremely patient husband, kids and three dogs, she loves worshipping nature by swimming in the local creeks and sticking her feet in the sand. Publishing a novel has always been on her bucket list, so this duet is literally a dream come true.

An avid crime buff, Ivy spends countless hours devouring serial killer documentaries and Nordic Noir dramas, and her favourite films are Chappie and the John Wick series. Her favourite TV shows are Peaky Blinders and Taboo.

Her natural habitat is a king sized bed, or cafés with her laptop and a Piccolo within arm's reach.

In 2022 she listened to Spotify for 36,275 minutes, and was in the top 0.1% of The Weeknd listeners. She's pretty chuffed with that useless and arbitrary fact.

She loves making new friends, so feel free to say hi! ivygravesauthor@gmail.com



PLAYLIST

Bones Deep by Ivy Graves