



BOOK ONE

Bow
DOWN

BROKEN KINGS SERIES

NIKITA PARMENTER

Bow Down (Broken Kings)

Book 1

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OceanofPDF.com

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*Thank you to my amazing Editor loves ya Harley! And my Beta team
you guys rock!!*

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Chapter one

“Come on, Princess,” Rome grins as I stuff my books in my locker.

Oh, how wrong you are, my sexy friend. I am the furthest thing from a princess you can get. At least I was brought up the furthest thing from a princess you can get. They don't know that, though. He, along with his four best friends, also think I'm someone I'm not.

Let me explain. See, I lived in a single-wide trailer in a crappy lot a few hours from here until bibbity bobbity fucking boo, a lawyer turned up. She told me the grandmother I'd never known was dead and that I'd inherited everything with the stipulation that I attend this fancy as fuck school. I'm not fucking stupid; I mean, the amount of money she was talking about was astronomical and would change my life forever. Not only that, but I'd heard of this school; all the kids that attended here were a shoo-in for ivy league colleges. I had no idea if I wanted to even go to college, but it was nice to have the option for the First time in my life.

Of course, I agreed.

Since I'm a few months off being eighteen, I had to take my lazy as fuck mother with me. Don't get me wrong, she didn't beat me, didn't let men touch me and didn't do any drugs apart from smoke pot, a habit of both of ours. She just doesn't give a flying fuck about anything, me, a job, absolutely nothing. I've looked after us both for as long as I can remember.

I'm getting off track. I followed my grandmother's instructions thinking I'll just attitude my way through this shitty stuck up prep school for posh dicks. She threw me one last fucking curveball, though, the old bat, and sent me a death letter, pretty much guilt-tripping me into turning over a new leaf. How she knew my shitty school record, I'm still not entirely certain, but one thing I have learned already is that money can make any fucker sing like a god damned canary.

I'm guessing she paid someone a lot of money to give her information on me or access to my records. So, I decided what the fuck, the old bat has made me rich and dragged me from poverty. I can at least try to be the good little prep girl like she asked. After all, it was her dying wish.

I went all out covered up my blue hair with dark brown dye, similar to my natural shade, and I hate it. I took out all the piercings in my ears except for one set and took out my nose stud but didn't quite have the balls to remove my tongue bar. I fucking love it, so I put a clear retainer in instead. No one will know unless they have their tongue in my mouth, and that isn't going to fucking happen in this preppy as shit school. The same reasoning applies to my nipple piercings; I love them, and nobody will see them. Besides, the balls on the bars are small enough that you wouldn't be able to tell that they are pierced through my shirt, although thanks to them being pierced, they do permanently stand to attention, so slightly padded bras have become the norm for me now.

I hate that too, to be fucking honest.

The uniform, yes fucking uniform, I was going to customise the shit out of before I read the letter, but after, I decided to wear it perfectly; it covered the tattoos I had that way, and the ones it didn't, I covered up with specialised tattoo coverup.

On the first day of school, I adopted a whole new personality. Meek, softly spoken. No more cursing and no more attitude. I figured I'd try this bullshit for the day, and then at least I could say I tried, honouring grandmother's wishes. Unfortunately, it didn't quite work out that way. On that first day, I somehow managed to attract the attention of the Kings, no shit, that is actually what the kids at school call them of course, I gained a female enemy at the same time, one I had to let walk all over me since I had my new personality.

These guys are gorgeous, and under normal circumstances, I would've jumped any one of them in a heartbeat. The new me, though, she's pretending she's virginal, so I played my role perfectly. A career in acting is most definitely in my future. If I do say so myself, I fucking nailed it. They played white knights when it came to defending from the verbal attacks of

the bitch, which, if I'm being completely honest with myself, I found sweet, gag, but I'd much rather fight my battles, new me didn't, though.

Honestly, I dug myself so deep in that fucking hole there isn't any way I'm going to be able to dig myself out. So here we are four months later, a week away from summer break, and I'm still fucking playing the part; it's seriously starting to grate now.

"Hey Jynx, where'd you go?" Malachi asks, stepping in between Rome and me.

In their little group, Rome is the surly leader; although he seems to show a softer to me hence the name Princess, I'm pretty sure that would change fucking quickly if he knew the real me, though. Malachi is the identical twin brother to Mason. No one can tell them apart; I figured it out in my second week, but I couldn't really tell you how I know; there's just a couple of subtle differences that separate them. Of course, because of the meek little bitch I was playing the part of, I couldn't let on that I could tell them apart that was way too observant of the role I was playing. You learn those skills because you have to, not because you want to, and because of that, I pretend I can't tell the difference between the two, deliberately getting it wrong.

"Nowhere, Mase," I reply and giggle as I shut my locker door before I follow Rome down the corridor to our last lesson of the day.

"Still can't tell us apart then." The real Mason smirks as he throws his arm over my shoulder. The twins are touchy-feely, and I love it. Prissy me blushes like the prude she's pretending to be.

"Aw, don't get embarrassed, Jynx; most people can't tell us apart." Malachi tries to reassure me sweetly.

Rome shoots a look back at us, and Mason instantly drops his arm from around my shoulder as the twins take a step away from me. I try not to notice and keep a vacant look on my face. This has been happening more and more lately. At first, they were all quite affectionate with me, even Rome. Nothing overt,

unfortunately. Just casual touches until recently. At one point I thought that one of them was going to make a move, then I'd have to pretend to be the inexperienced little wallflower I'd portrayed myself to be. I am getting so fucking sick of this fake shit. It's starting to wear really thin and taking its toll on me. It's gone on for too long now, though, and suddenly doing a one-eighty with my personality would be far too suspicious. Recently the guys have been acting more distant with me. I've already guessed that they've got something else going on, something darker than they portray themselves to be. Something that makes my heart pound and my blood roar, but stupid mother fucking prissy little bitch me can do fuck all about it, despite how fucking curious I am.

I spend the lesson pretending I'm vigilantly paying attention to what the teacher is saying when, in reality, I spend it wondering if I could very subtly start revealing my actual personality. I discard the idea, though, because my true personality is literally the complete opposite to this one, and there would be no way to go subtly from one to the other.

Despite my best efforts, I actually kind of like these fuckers, and I don't want to lose them.

Near the end of the lesson, the door slams open. The teacher opens his mouth to say something but promptly closes it when he sees Ace and Rip; the last two of the Kings stride in like they fucking own the place.

See, this is what I mean by something darker is going on with these guys. Any normal teenagers would be in serious shit for barging into a classroom like that, but this teacher is practically cowering. I don't know why the guys are here. We've gotten pretty close over the last few months, and we usually spend Friday nights at Rome's watching movies with pizza. The guys even miss parties claiming they'd rather watch movies, anyway. I know it's because they think I'd be uncomfortable at one. I subtly check my phone to see if I missed any texts from them, not that they would ask me to ditch anyway since they think that I'm too much of a goody two shoes for that shit.

Fuck, I need a joint.

Ace and Rip nod once grimly, and all five of them turn to face me as something that looks suspiciously like regret flashes briefly in their eyes before it's replaced with determination. Shit, I have a feeling I'm not going to like whatever is going to happen next. I mentally steel my spine as I outwardly shrink in on myself; I've become damn good at keeping up appearances.

"Jynx is a fucking liar." Rome starts, standing up and gaining everyone's attention, not that he didn't already have it. With his shoulder-length black hair and piercing blue eyes, coupled with his giant well-sculpted form, he always has everyone's attention on him. "She's fucking deceived us, and what do we do with liars!" He roars, riling the crowd up.

"End them!" The kids in the class shout back.

Fuck.

"She even had us Kings fooled; she is nothing more than trailer trash." Mason roars his dark auburn hair, flopping over his forest green eyes that match his twins.

A picture of my old trailer suddenly appears on the board at the front of the room, fucking smart boards. I almost laugh out loud at what they're trying to pull, but I have a persona to uphold. And surprisingly, a stab of hurt that I will never admit to anyone pierces me as they turn their sneers on me. That's seriously all it took for them to turn on me? My perceived lack of fucking money?

"Jynx is trailer trash and from here on out should be treated as such." Rip declares, his butterscotch eyes cold.

I catch the slight wince from Ace, though, there's something more going on here, but I can't deny that the guys I was quickly coming to associate as my closest friends, even though they didn't know the real me, run this school and they've just declared it open season on me. I've dealt with so much worse, but as I said, the new me hasn't, and something else is going on here. They almost seem reluctant to do this to me. So, for that reason alone, until I know for sure what is going on with them and why they've so abruptly turned on me, I'm going to have to stick with this fucking persona.

The entire class starts laughing and jeering, and I make my eyes water like I'm going to cry, internally scoffing and wanting to cuss all these fuckers out, but I'm playing a part. I gather my stuff, shoving it into my bag and then run out of the door, barging past Ace and Rip, who are both laughing at me as I manage to squeeze a few tears down my cheeks.

“Wait, Princess Trash, don't you want to tell us about your druggy mommy or are you going to act like a scared little bitch and go cry in your trailer?” Rome sneers behind me.

I hunch my shoulders in on myself and make my feet move quicker as things start to hit my back.

His perversion of the nickname he gave me makes my fake tears seem slightly more real, though, and at that moment, I genuinely start to dislike the Kings no matter what reason they have for this. I rush out the double doors, their raucous laughter following me out. Of course, since that first day, those fuckers have been bringing me to school. I always meet them several blocks from my actual home, though, which I now realise is damn fortunate because that little show they just put on proves that although they know that I used to live in a trailer, they don't realise that I don't anymore. They have no idea that I'm probably in the top ten wealthiest kids at the school, and to top it off, it's my money.

It's not daddy's; I don't have to ask permission to use it. Well, technically, I'm supposed to ask my mother, but she's too fucking lazy even for that, so I don't have to ask her fuck all.

I start the long walk home, somewhat grateful that at least it's nearly summer, so I'm not freezing my ass off. Sweat slowly drips down between my boobs as I continue the hour walk to my new colossal mansion and to think I was going to invite the guys around this weekend and finally share that part of my life with them, fucking assholes.

I'm still about a ten-minute walk away from the gated entrance to my house when I'm hit with a large slushy cup, red slushy drenching my uniform and staining my shirt.

“Stay where you belong, you trailer trash whore!” Someone screeches out of the car window as the car speeds past.

“Mother fucker.” I growl, my persona slipping slightly.

Fortunately, no one heard or saw a thing, the car already disappearing around the corner ahead.

I fucking hate being sticky; jogging the rest of the way home,

I punch in the code and then hop onto the dirt bike I stashed just inside the gate. The driveway is, no joke, like a fucking mile long and like fuck am I walking that. I speed up the winding driveway, unable to enjoy the rush from the speed like I would usually since I’m sticky, pissed off and yeah, I’ll admit it, fucking hurt from the guy’s actions. I have no idea what the fuck I did to have them turn against me, but I’m beyond fucking pissed right now.

The worst thing is, I have a terrible feeling that this is just the beginning. They run that school, and they’ve effectively just set the fucking dogs loose on me with their declarations.

Rich kids are bitchy little sheep, who will follow their leaders no matter what.

It’s pretty pathetic.

I slam my way through the double front doors and dump my bag by the front door. I usually take more care with my things, but as I said, I’m fucking pissed right now, and inside these grounds, I don’t have to be anything I’m not.

“Miss, are you alright?” Gerald, my grandmother’s ageing butler, asks kindly. Along with a small amount of staff, he came with the house.

At first, I wanted to get rid of them all, hating the idea of anyone serving me, but Gerald pointed out that they are all very well paid, and if I fired them, I’d be causing them more grief, he made a good point so now I have staff.

So fucking weird.

“I’m good, Gerald man, just been a shit day at fucking school.” I sigh before running up the grand staircase and

jumping into the first shower I find, which is absolutely not mine and is attached to one of the many guest rooms. I did a rough count when we first got here, and I think there are around twenty bedrooms in this place; it's seriously cavernous.

In the first week of staying here, I got lost and had to call Gerald to come to find me; it took him half a fucking hour, and he's worked here for decades and knows the house better than anyone.

As soon as I'm clean, I wrap one of the guest robes around me. I honestly didn't realise that was a fucking thing and then make my way to my bedroom. My room wouldn't usually be someone's first choice, but I absolutely adore it. Mom's room is in the other wing of the house, and I can honestly go days without seeing her, which works for both of us. We check in with each other every few days by text, but that's the extent of it.

I walk past all the opulently decorated white doors that lead to lavish bedroom suites, the kind that has so much space they have seating areas in them too. I'll admit they're pretty, but not really me. Finally, at the end of the long hallway is a smaller door not nearly as lavish as the others. I pull the key out from my robe pocket and unlock the door, pulling it open to reveal a set of steep steps made from dark polished wood. I've started to decorate each step with sunflowers, but the guys kept distracting me, and I haven't finished it yet.

Guess I'll have time now, I scoff as I make my way up the steps and into my favourite place in the house, my room.

A small part of me hopes that this will have all blown over by Monday, but it's a naïve hope, and frankly, I'm not that stupid. I am slightly worried about how long I'm going to be able to keep the mask on though and keep my actual personality leashed. There's only a week until summer break. I'm reasonably confident I can last that long. I'm supposed to be spending it in New Orleans with my best friend, Waverly. She lives out there with her mom, and I often spend as many of my school breaks as feasibly possible with them and her group of friends, who are fucking awesome.

When I inherited this place and all the money that came with it, I bought the house her mom had been eyeing up for years and paid a contractor and decorator to contact her and renovate it to her wishes.

She was spitting mad at first, claiming I was wasting my future on buying her a house and that I should save it and invest in something instead. That is until I explained how much I inherited exactly and reminded her that she had been more of a mother to me than mine ever has. Family takes care of family. I also cleared her debts and set up a bank account each for her and Waverly. I'm also paying for Waverly to go to college if she wants to. It may seem excessive to some, but she and her mom have been there for me through absolutely everything, and it's nice to be able to repay them in a small way for all that they've done. Besides, I didn't even make a mild dent in the money my dear old bat of a grandmother left me after spending all that.

From the photos Waverly sent me of the finished house, the designer did such a good job that I hired her and flew her out here to help with my room. However, I didn't really see the point in hiring her to do the whole house. Not only do I spend most of my time in my room, but the rest of the house is perfectly decorated, just not to my taste. It seemed like a waste of money to redecorate it when there wasn't anything wrong with it.

My room is up in the eaves of the house, so it has various ceiling heights, alcoves with windows, and ceilings pitched at strange angles in some places. It's a massive area with the stairs coming up in the middle of the space and six giant windows with alcoves, three down each side. I've made reading nooks in a couple of them. The left side of the stairs has a large teal coloured sofa with several soft throws draped on it facing a massive tv. I have a games console set up, and it's fucking awesome for binge-watching tv shows. There's also a row of kitchen style cupboards and a mini-fridge off to one side, where I keep snacks, drinks and, of course, coffee making facilities. The main kitchen is so fucking far away it was a necessity. The dark navy-blue carpet contrasts with the soft cream walls and runs across the entire space. To the right

of the stairs is my bedroom half. The bed is positioned in the middle of the end wall with a door on either side; one leads to a giant closet that I'm still trying to fill, to be honest, and the other leads to my favourite room in the entire house, my bathroom.

It has a balcony, and since we are so high up and this property is so damn secluded with over two hundred acres of private land surrounding it, I had an outdoor shower installed up here. It's pretty fucking amazing.

I have an indoor one, too. I don't want to freeze my fucking ass off in winter. The indoor one is just as luxurious as the one on the balcony, with its multi-head shower, and it's big enough to fit at least three people in it comfortably. There's also a copper clawfoot tub that I adore. Plants are everywhere, and shockingly, I haven't killed any yet. I make my way to my balcony, stopping at my bedside table on the way past to pull out a pre-made joint and a lighter before going to sit on the comfy sofa I have out on the balcony. It's far enough from the shower it doesn't get wet. I have an awning I can pull out from the side of the house, which clips onto the edge of the balcony in the winter, effectively closing this space in and away from the elements. There are little end tables, cushions, and throws scattered around, and I have strung many fairy lights. I lean back, lighting my joint and inhaling fuck, I needed that.

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Chapter Two

The following day I awake having absolutely nothing to do. Since the weather is warming up now, we were supposed to be going to the lake today, but I checked my phone, and yesterday's drama wasn't just for the benefit of our classmates like I had started to hope that it was but included time with just me and the guys too. I'm almost sure something is going on with them. We were becoming almost inseparable. They had fully taken me into their exclusive group and had been protecting me since that very first day, mostly because they thought I needed protecting.

I can't help but laugh out loud at that thought. Anyone who knows the real me would find it ludicrous. I am the last person who needs any form of protection.

We were really close, though, until a couple of weeks ago, when their frequent touches started to become less, and Rome kept shooting them glares any time one of them slipped up. The flash of regret in all of their eyes yesterday as they stood in front of the class also makes me think that something else is going on, but I can't prove it, and to be honest, they've pulled a fucking dick move.

I dress in shorts, and a loose top, popping a couple of pop tarts in the toaster I have up here and making a coffee. I can't function without coffee, and by that, I mean I'm a raging bitch if I don't have it. As I wait for the coffee to brew, I take out my phone and video call Waverly. She answers on the first ring.

"Hey, bitch! I miss you!"

"Hey! God, I miss you too. So, you know the Kings?"

"Those hot as the devil himself, guys that I seriously think you should drop your persona for and just fuck?" She smirks.

I roll my eyes but can't help grinning. "Yeah, those fuckers." I growl.

“Uh oh, what the fuck did they do?”

“Declared me the school pariah. Rome called me a Trash Princess.” I ignore the stab of hurt that pierces me as I remember the name. “They were all in on it, although I could’ve sworn they didn’t want to do it. They’ve put a target on my back.”

“What the fuck!” Waverly growls, “Why?”

“I have no fucking clue. There was no warning, nothing. They’ve been a bit off with me the last couple of weeks, but nothing major.” I reply, anger and confusion evident in my tone.

“So, is it time for your actual personality to come out and play?” She grins.

She’s been wanting me to set my real persona free for a while as soon as she realised how hot the guys were. To be fair, we both thought I would’ve broken my wallflower persona by now. I’m not exactly known for having the best control of my temper.

“Not yet. As I said, something is going on, and I’m not going to risk shit revealing my actual personality until I know what it is.”

“I get what you’re saying, babe, but just be careful, alright?” She warns me, “You know those girls have had it out for you since the Kings first took an interest in you, and now that they’ve declared you fair game, it could get ugly.”

“Always. You know, if it really comes down to it, I have no fucking problem dealing with assholes, and if I do get in over my head, I can always call my uncle.” I grin savagely.

My upbringing wasn’t traditional. I was brought up surrounded by death and violence, and I fucking love it. My uncle decided to separate me from that life after an incident a year ago, and I rarely see him anymore. It was the right decision at the time, and I can’t fault him for that. I had to heal and had to deal with some severe trauma. I still have panic attacks in certain situations. Without a doubt, if it weren’t for Ever, I’d be dead. It’s been long enough now, though; I’ve

done as much healing as it's possible to do; I've upped my training, so I am now even more capable than I ever was, and I am more than ready to get back into it. I miss my uncle, and if I'm being honest with my dark and twisted soul, I miss the fucking lifestyle too.

"That's true." She returns my grin; she was just as involved as I was. In fact, we used to go on jobs together when we were both in the same place.

"I've got to go, babe; Micha is picking me up soon."

I love the dreamy look she gets on her face when she talks about Micha. They're fucking cute together.

"Alright, see you later. Tell Micha I say hi!" I chuckle.

She puts the phone down, still smiling dreamily.

For the rest of the morning, I eat and watch Netflix. I go for a swim in the afternoon, and honestly, I'm fucking bored as anything. I've just arrived back upstairs when my phone dings with a notification.

Glancing down, I open up Instagram, where I have been tagged in a photo by someone I don't know.

As soon as I see the post, my vision tinges red with anger. There's a whole Instagram page dedicated to trying to destroy me. Of course, there are the usual things you'd expect, pictures of me with trash whore written over them and my face posted on porn stars in the middle of various sexual acts. None of that bothers me and is actually quite amusing. I find myself chuckling despite being pissed as fuck.

However, what sends my heart to my feet is the picture of me curled up asleep on Rome's bed. There is no way they got that without Rome giving it to them. He's the one that took it before he curled up with me. Scrawled across it are the words 'she's no longer a virgin and was fucking shit too'.

I'm not a virgin, not by any stretch of the imagination, and haven't been for a while, but that is just low. I never let my guard down around anyone, and it makes me feel violated that he would post a picture like that for everyone to see. As anger and hurt swirl in my gut, I am left fucking seething.

I grab a bottle of jack and a joint, needing to take the edge off of my rage before I do something that will blow my fucking persona straight out of the water.

Fucking dickhead.

I spend the rest of the weekend pretty much like that, bored as fuck or drunk. I found some rollerblades in one of the rooms; I have no idea where they came from, and to be honest; I don't fucking care. They're a welcome distraction. So, Sunday afternoon, I spent speeding down the hallways of this giant house and sliding down banisters, a bottle of jack in one hand and a joint in the other.

Gerald was highly amused.

By the time Monday morning comes, I genuinely consider dropping my persona, but I've put so much work into it that I feel like I at least have to see it through until I have no choice but to break it. I still have a niggling doubt that something else is going on. Even if there was, it wouldn't change the fact that they're assholes. I rollerblade down to the front door because fuck walking, and it takes less time.

"Shit," I mutter as I get to the door.

The stupid assholes have been driving me to school every morning, they insisted. Because of that, I haven't even bothered to get a car for myself yet because there wasn't a need for it, and I'm not that great at spending large amounts of money on myself. It makes me extremely uncomfortable. I don't want to walk, I can't rollerblade, and I can't ride the dirt bike that I usually ride down to the gate to school because, you know, meek and quiet personality.

"Might I suggest taking one of the cars, miss?"

"Holy fuck nuggets, Gerald man, make some noise. You scared the shit out of me." I gasp.

He smirks, his eyes twinkling with amusement in his wrinkled face.

"I'm on to you; you so did that on purpose." I grin, "Wait a second, cars? What cars?"

“Your grandmother left you a garage full of cars as well as the house. They are yours to use, or I can get Driver to take you to school?” He smirks, already knowing there’s no way that I’m going to allow Driver to take me. He’s like seventy and should be retired. He also insists that I call him Driver, and I’m convinced that it’s because he’s forgotten his real name.

“No thanks, Gerald. I’ll take a look at the cars.” I reply, “Lead the way.”

I didn’t even realise we had a garage. He leads me back through the hallways and to the enormous kitchen.

“Hi, Cherry.” I greet the cook as we walk past her. “You can take the day off today.”

“Good morning Jynx. I am making you some meals that you can just pop straight into the oven or microwave, and I’ll leave you instructions. I’ll be back over the weekend unless you tell me otherwise.” She gives me a stern look, and I know from experience there is no point in arguing with her.

“Thanks, Cherry.” I grin.

She nods and carries on preparing whatever it is she’s making. It smells delicious.

I follow Gerald through the kitchen and towards a door that I didn’t even notice was there. That’s how often I’m in the freaking kitchen.

“Are all her cars old lady ones?”

“Old lady ones?” He asks, his eyebrows raised as we walk down a short hallway.

“Yeah, you know, expensive town cars, maybe an SUV?” I mutter.

He just chuckles as he walks through the door at the end.

“Holy shit,” I exclaim as my eyes land on a row of truly beautiful cars. “I’m starting to get the feeling that dear old grandmother wasn’t quite the meek woman that I thought she was.”

The only confirmation I get from Gerald is a quiet chuckle.

“They’re all yours, so you can take whichever one you want. The keys are all hung up on the back door and labelled, so you know which car they belong to. Each one is equipped with a button that will open the gate.” He tells me before turning on his heel and walking back through the door and into the house.

I stare at the beautiful cars. There’s a mix of old American muscle cars, a Chevrolet Impala, just one of the cars I recognise, and then there are some seriously impressive sports cars. There is a town car right at the very end, but you can tell she didn’t use it that often. My grandmother had fucking good taste in cars. I’m aware that the clock is ticking, and I need to make a choice, but it’s so freaking hard. So instead, console myself that I can take one of the others out after school and give them a good run. I have a feeling today is going to be hard, and I’m going to need it.

The sensible choice would be the town car, but I really don’t want to drive it, so instead, I chose the pristine, matte black 1969 Ford Mustang Boss. She is absolutely fucking stunning, and just by looking at her, I can tell that she has had some modifications done to her. I grab the keys and slide in, running my hands over the steering wheel lovingly. I really am going to be late if I don’t get a move on now, and I grin as it gives me an excuse to speed. Just so long as no one from school sees me in this car. They’ll definitely start questioning the guy’s trailer trash story, which wouldn’t necessarily be a bad thing. Still, it would make everyone start to question everything else, and I don’t want to drop my persona until I decide to.

I push a button, and the garage door lifts. Turning the key in the ignition, the engine growls as it starts, and a grin overtakes my face. That’s a delicious sound. Slowly, I pull out and then promptly put my foot down. The drive is over a mile long, and I’ve never been so happy about it. I keep my speed up as I make my way to school right up until I have to slow down so that I don’t gain any more attention than I’ve already got. I park around a five-minute walk away from the school, far

enough that no one else should be parking here, but I will have to be careful of any kids walking home, seeing me get in it.

Thanks to my speeding, I arrive early, and I use the five-minute walk to pull on my persona again and mentally prepare myself for today. My heart flutters at the thought of seeing the guys. As ridiculous as it sounds, I've missed them. We've spent every day together since I first arrived all those months ago. That thought is quickly followed by dread and then anger as I remember the photo that Rome posted on the Instagram page dedicated to bullying me.

I'm so fucking angry at myself for allowing them in and giving them the power to hurt me.

Predictably, whispers and insults follow me as soon as I walk through the school doors.

"Trash whore." A girl hisses as she walks past me, shoulder checking me. I curl in on myself, pretending she's hurt my feelings, and I don't want to throat punch her.

"I hear you need some practice in the bedroom. I'm willing to lower myself to sleeping with a trash whore to help you out." Another guy calls out to me, grabbing his junk and looking me up and down.

I fake gasp and dart my eyes away, hurrying forward as laughter follows me.

That is going to be a problem. By putting the photo up with that quote and pretty much telling everyone that I'm fair game now means that all the creeps at this school will start coming out of the woodwork, and that's dangerous as hell.

Fortunately, so am I. I will defend myself if anyone tries anything.

The insults and lewd comments keep coming as I finally make it to my locker to get my books. I spot the guys leaning against the other wall. I hate that they all look so gorgeous, even with condescending sneers on their faces.

"Fucking disgusting." Rome grimaces as he makes a show of looking me over. The words hurt, and my display of emotion isn't entirely fake this time. They all laugh cruelly.

“Oh, is the little trashy whore going to cry?” Malachi sneers.

“Pathetic,” Mason adds, his lip curling in disgust.

Fucking assholes, the lot of them. Internally, I steel my spine, but I hunch my shoulders outwardly, turning away and sniffing.

They laugh again, and I realise that more students than usual are milling about in the hallway instead of rushing to class. I get a sinking feeling in my gut that they’re all waiting to witness some sort of humiliation that I’m about to go through. I don’t want to open my locker, but I’m playing unobservant and reasonably dumb, so I haven’t really given myself a choice.

I decide that it’s probably best to get it over with and put in my code. When I pull it open, trash falls out, and I have to move back quickly, so it doesn’t end up all over me. It’s not just rubbish from the classrooms; it’s rotting food, used sanitary products and fucking condoms. I can’t believe I didn’t smell it before opening it; the stench makes my eyes water. It’s that potent.

The surrounding kids burst into laughter; I don’t dare look at the guys. To see their cruel amusement right now might push me over the edge and make me break my character, and I’m clinging onto her like some weird life raft. I start to walk away from my locker, deciding to abandon it. I’m not fishing my books out of there; you’ve got to be fucking kidding me. I can guarantee that I’ll catch a nasty as fuck disease.

“Where do you think you’re going?” Rome snaps behind me, and I steel my spine, turning back to face him.

“To class,” I reply, adding a wobble to my voice.

“Clean up your mess.” He orders me, the slight tightening of his fist his only outward show that he’s uncomfortable.

If anyone else had spoken to me like that, they would find themselves missing fucking fingers, at the least. I leash my anger and hope that the brief hesitation that I saw I can use to work in my favour.

“I’ll get sick. It’s not my mess.” I say, my voice timid and quiet like it’s always been around them.

“Don’t be ridiculous. You’re used to playing about in trash.” Ace chuckles, his arms crossed tightly over his chest.

“Clean it up.” Rip growls. His eyes are bleak and empty, almost as if he’s completely detached himself from this situation.

I glance over at them, studying their postures. They aren’t going to change their minds, and they’re not pulling any punches. I turn around, gritting my teeth when no one can see me, and start to pick up the bits not covered in bodily fluid or rotten food.

“In your natural habitat.” Someone yells, and out of the corner of my eye, I see Mason step forward, anger darkening his features before Rome places a hand on his arm, and Mase steps back, a dark glare on his face, this time aimed at me.

Their behaviour is a contradiction; they’re treating me like shit, yet getting angry when someone else joins in on their torment, it makes little sense. I’m convinced something else is going on with them, but there’s only so long that I keep up with this stupid persona. My anger is bubbling inside, and it’s not going to be kept down for long.

I’ve just got to last until the end of the week, and then I can re-evaluate over the summer break.

Thankfully, the bell rings, and everyone disperses. The guys are the first to leave, as if they can’t wait to get away from me. I immediately go to stand up as soon as it rings, but someone kicks the back of my leg hard enough that I know it’s going to bruise, and my knees hit the floor.

“On your knees, exactly where you belong.” Richard, the same pervert from before, suggests moving in front of me and bringing his crotch close to my face. I step up quickly, my fist clenching, ready to take him down.

However, the sight of a teacher coming down the hall stops me and reminds me that I’m playing a part.

It’s just until the end of the week; I can last that long.

I step around him, keeping my face down and letting my long brown hair obscure my face so he can't see the seething anger etched into my features.

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Chapter Three

Once I'm sure that Richard isn't following me, I duck into the nearest bathroom and scrub my hands. I tried not to touch anything too gross, as I did as Rome demanded and picked up the trash, but I really don't want to catch anything. Who knows what these privileged fuckers have? They seem to think that the rules don't apply to them, and usually, they don't, but disease doesn't discriminate.

When I finish scrubbing my hands, I take a few deep, calming breaths, trying to rein my anger in. I can do this. I can last three more days. Thank god we're breaking up on a Thursday this week. When I leave the bathroom, the halls are empty, and I'm glad. My anger is barely under control. I don't share my first class with any of the Kings, but just because they're not around doesn't mean their influence isn't; the kids take every opportunity to sling insults and various projectiles at me. All of them, laughing and talking about what happened in the hall. The main ringleader of hurling the insults at me is a dark-haired, cold-hearted bitch. Tegan has hated me from the first moment I arrived, and the guys took a liking to me. She is fucking loving the recent turn of events.

"So, Jynx, did they all take turns with you?" She giggles, flipping her shoulder-length professionally highlighted dark brown hair over her shoulder. "Actually, I doubt they'd really lower themselves to sleep with someone who has absolutely no class. I told you that they were just interested in you because you were the shiny new toy. They'll all come crawling back to me now."

I try to ignore her words, but she's right; she did warn me they'd get bored with me when the new girl shine rubbed off. They were quick to reassure me that she was just a jealous bitch. It looks like they're liars as well. I will be shocked if they go anywhere near her, though, they never liked her, and she kept causing problems for me, which made them like her even less. The latter won't make a difference to them now.

The teacher hears everything that she says but other than giving me a sympathetic look and calling the class to order; she does fuck all. That's the problem with going to a school where most of the kids have more money than the teachers, and everyone has influential parents; the teachers become scared to do certain things when it involves particular students because they're very likely to lose their jobs.

The next class is exactly the same, although Tegan isn't in this class with me, so there are no well-aimed barbs this time, thank fuck. I hover back while everyone rushes to lunch, figuring they're slightly less likely to pull anything serious while there's a teacher present. I walk the emptying hallways trying to decide if I really want to risk the cafeteria; my grumbling stomach answers for me.

I guess I'm braving it.

As soon as I walk through the doors, the insults and jeering start, fantastic. I briefly gaze around the room and freeze on my way to the lunch line. The guy's table is practically draped with girls, each of them, apart from Ace, has a girl on their laps, and more are just leaning on the table, presenting themselves and sticking their chests out. What really gets to me, though, is that perched on Rome's lap is Tegan; he sees me watching, smirks cruelly and then pulls her towards him, kissing her like no one is currently watching as his hands roam all over her. The others aren't much better, their hands exploring places they really shouldn't be in a school cafeteria.

I quickly turn back around and get my food. I don't want to watch the spectacle any longer, and hurt swirls through my system. I'm not even hungry anymore, but I won't let them have the pleasure of seeing me run out of the cafeteria. They've had enough wins today. I turn and survey the room again, acutely avoiding their table and trying to find somewhere to sit. All of the tables are full, and I doubt at this point if even the outcasts would let me sit with them. No one wants to garner the attention of the Kings and risk being put on their shit list with me.

Someone pushes me hard from behind, and I fall to the floor, landing in my tray and smearing marinara sauce all over

my school uniform.

Fuck, that sauce is hot.

I groan as the kids laugh, and my already bruised knees protest the second hard fall of the day. As I look up, the King's table is directly in my eye line, and I see worry flash across Ace's different coloured eyes, one sapphire blue and one grass green; he starts to stand before frowning at whatever Rip says to him and sitting back down his body tense. I stand up. There's no point in staying in here any longer, but as I get my feet underneath me, someone tips trash over me.

I close my eyes.

This is getting really old, really fucking fast.

“Thought I might help you find something to eat. You're not good enough to eat the same food that we do.” Tegan sneers, a proud grin on her face.

I slowly stand, wiping off what I can and feeling completely grateful that at least this trash doesn't have used sanitary products or condoms in it. Remembering my persona, I wrap my arms around my waist and force tears to fall down my cheeks as I run out of the room, everyone's laughter following me out. As soon as I'm clear of the room and there's no one around, I drop the act and stomp to the changing rooms.

Fortunately, I have gym last lesson. I don't have a spare uniform with me, so I'm just going to have to wear my gym uniform for the rest of the day. When I get to the changing room, I double-check that none of the contents of the trash can have seeped through my backpack and onto my clothes, relieved when it hasn't. I quickly wipe down my bag and then hop into the shower, seething with anger as I scrub the disgustingness off me. My chest is bright red where the hot marinara sauce landed and is tender to the touch. Fan-fucking-tastic. I get dressed quickly, not wanting to give the fuckwits at this damn school any chance to get to me while I'm not dressed and make my way to my next class, explaining my situation to the teacher.

The rest of the day is exhausting and absolute hell. The insults don't stop; throwing things doesn't stop; I've been shoulder checked more than I can count on one hand. I am so happy when the bell finally rings that I rush to grab my bag from inside the gym door; I didn't trust that I could leave it in the changing rooms and run through the corridors ignoring everything being said about me. Finally, I make it to my car with no more incidents, and no one sees me climb in, although I do get a few looks when I speed past people. I'm going fast enough, though, that no one would be able to tell it's me and thanks to that damn persona, no one would guess it was either.

I stomp my way up the stairs as soon as I get home and throw myself down onto the couch. Fucking hell. I know that something is going on with the guys, but I am really starting not to give a shit, the fucking assholes.

My phone buzzing in my pocket drags me from my thoughts, and I pull it out, accepting the call from Waves.

"Oh fuck, what's happened?" She asks, her smile fading from her face as she sees me.

I spend the next ten minutes explaining everything that's happened today.

"Fucking hell, Jynx. Why don't you drop the persona and show the fuckers who you really are?"

"I can last until Thursday," I reply.

"Well shit. You've turned it into a fucking challenge, haven't you?"

I nod. "Yeah. I know I can last, and besides, it's a good exercise to control my anger."

"You're fucking insane." She sighs, shaking her head.

"You know it." I grin. I'm fully aware of my downfalls.

"Why don't you come and see us? Mom has been dying to see you, and I bet we could convince D to send us on a job," she tempts. "And you usually come out to see us, anyway."

"Maybe. I'm going to stick it out for now, though."

“I thought you’d say that. I’ve got to go. Please think about coming?”

“I promise,” I reply before hanging up.

I need a release from all the pent up shit that’s happened today; I consider going down to the gym and letting out some of my anger on the punching bag down there, but then I remember the cars in the garage and, more specifically, the Bugatti Veyron. I have always wanted to drive one of those, and speed would definitely take the edge off right now. I get up, an excited spring in my step, as I pull out some ripped light blue skinny jeans, a white crop top that shows off my tanned, toned abs and shows off the tattoos decorating my skin. I have had to stick to dull and drab clothes that cover almost the entirety of my body since I started hanging out with the Kings. My wallflower persona definitely does not dress like this, the real me, though? She fucking loves to show off. I put my nose stud back in and pull my hair up into a high ponytail, grabbing a black cap and pulling it on.

Just in case, I pull up next to anyone at traffic lights who might know me.

I pull my black bike boots on and grab my phone, taking the steps two at a time in my excitement to get out. I don’t run into anyone on the way through the house; the staff are all busy doing whatever the staff do. I send a quick text to my mom.

Me: You okay?

Mom: Yep.

That’s it; no more communication is needed. I don’t even know where the fuck she is. As soon as I enter the garage, I make a beeline for the Bugatti, sliding in and starting it. Holy fuck me sideways, it sounds so fucking good. I pull out of the garage, getting used to the car on the way down the drive and pausing to set up my phone so that I can play some music. I turn the heavy rock music up loud and speed down the road aiming for the straightest damn road I can find; I want to know what this baby can do.

It doesn't take me long until I find one, and it's late enough now that there are no other cars about on the road. I open her up and pray that no cops spot me, not that they'd be able to catch me. She growls, and I let out a whoop of joy as I speed down the road. I keep an eye on the speedometer. I know this baby can hit two-hundred miles an hour, and I aim to get her there. There's only a couple of cars on the road, and I speed past them so fast that they're just a blur of colour. All thoughts flee my brain as I focus on keeping the car under control.

"Come on, Baby. You can do it." I encourage out loud as we finally reach two-hundred miles an hour.

"Holy fuck!" I exclaim, slowing the car back down.

I drive for a little while longer, revelling in the high of going that fucking fast. I am definitely going to have to do that again. I start to make my way home, I have most definitely pushed my luck tonight, and I'm damn lucky that I didn't come across any cops, although I'm sure that one of the cars that I passed probably reported me, so the quicker I get home, the better.

Finally pulling into the garage, I breathe out a sigh of relief. I really needed that. I feel lighter and ready to conquer the day tomorrow. I say conquer, but what I really mean is that I'm ready to put on my persona. There are only two more days left. I can handle it.

Rummaging through the fridge, I find that Cherry has made several meals, stuck them in microwaveable containers and put heating instructions on the top.

I seriously love her. She's amazing. I can't cook for shit and would have no idea how to heat them if she hadn't done that; I'd probably end up giving myself fucking food poisoning again.

Not my finest moment.

After it's all heated, I start the long trek back up to my room, eating as I go. If nothing else, this house is going to keep me fit. By the time I get up to my room, I've eaten everything on the plate. It was fucking delicious. I wonder if Cherry would be willing to teach me how to make some

simple things myself. I feel like it's probably a skill that I need to have. After taking a shower, I pull on some sleep shorts and a tank and then put my soiled uniform in the bin and pull out a new one ready for tomorrow.

Just two more days, I can last two more days and then I can come up with a plan of attack over break. Going to visit Waverly, her mom and the guys up in New Orleans is incredibly tempting, especially if she can convince D to get us a job. I am so fucking done with sitting on the sidelines. Especially after the shit the Kings have pulled so far this week. My need for violence is practically begging to be satiated, and, in all honesty, I'm fucking surprised I've lasted this long without losing my fucking shit.

I'll leave it for now and see how the rest of the week goes before I tell my pilot that we're flying out.

What is my life? I have a fucking pilot, two actually, and a couple of private jets; I don't even know what my grandmother did that earned her all this fucking money. It occurs to me that perhaps I should ask Gerald; you know, just in case I'm expected to take over any businesses or some shit.

I fall asleep to thoughts of the Kings plaguing me.

As I pull up down the road from the school, I take a deep breath, centering myself and pulling on my wallflower persona. It's started to feel really fucking heavy. I make sure that the tattoos on my neck are completely covered by the tattoo cover-up I have to apply every morning, as well as the ones on my hands. It's very effective and waterproof, so I can even wash my hands, and it won't come off.

Ever since the very beginning, I have struggled with covering them up, out of everything that was the hardest, and now I fucking hate it. Two more days.

As predicted, the jeers start immediately. I don't even bother going to my locker, not wanting to risk going through the same humiliation as last time. Unfortunately, someone has put an

awful lot of time and effort into their latest bullying tactic, as lining the walls are posters of me covered in trash with the words 'campaigning to remove the trash from our school' scrawled across them.

Ah, so that's their end game. They want me to leave. Well, not only is that not happening because I don't ever run away from my issues unless I'm forced to, thanks, D, but also because my continued inheritance hinges on me finishing high school here, and I'm not risking that.

One of the school football team spots me and grins before he barrels straight towards me, I could dodge, and I could easily take him, but I'm damned stubborn, and now that I've decided to keep my persona in place, at least for today and tomorrow that's exactly what I'm going to do, so instead I stand there like a deer caught in fucking headlights as he knocks into me, sending me to the floor on my ass and spilling my books from my arms.

I groan as he just laughs and carries on down the hall smiling, like the meat-headed idiot he fucking is. Of course, the students all laugh and start to kick my stuff around the hallway as I try to pick it up. For fuck sake. I keep my head, and my expression scared, just in case someone pays me more attention than just to kick my shit.

The bell rings, and the hallways clear, and I finally manage to gather my books. As I go to pick up the last one, a foot comes down on top of it, and I take a deep breath, barely holding my growl in, as I school my features into a look of fear as I glance up.

"Just leave," Mason growls, looking down at me like this is all somehow my fucking fault. "It's not going to get better. So do yourself a fucking favour and take your pathetic fucking ass back to the trailer park that you came from."

He takes his foot off my book and stomps down the hall, his hands in his pockets, pulling his pants tight across his ass.

Damn, he's got an ass I want to bite.

I pick up my book and rush to class. The teacher doesn't even bother to ask if I'm okay or where I've been. Fucking useless.

I sit through class not really paying attention to what's going on; that sounded like a warning to me, more than that, it almost sounded like a plea, he was pissed, sure, but it was almost like he was pissed because he didn't understand why I kept coming back, why I haven't left yet after everything that's been said and done to me. Granted, they probably all thought that I would've left after the humiliation they handed out to me in class; after all, that's the personality that they knew.

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Chapter Four

Mason's words repeat in my head for most of the morning, a welcome distraction from all the shit that's still being thrown my way. Most of it is about my trashy trailer park home and how my mom must be a whore and drug addict, blah blah blah. None of it bothers me, one because it's not true anymore, but even if it were, it still wouldn't bother me, not the trailer park thing or the shit about my mom. If I'm honest, I can't help my circumstances, and I think it's fucking stupid to bully people based on where they live or who their parents are, both things that they have no fucking control over.

It's fucking stupid to bully someone anyway, but that reason has always struck me as utterly moronic.

As I'm walking the halls, having already decided that my persona can't handle the cafeteria, I hear hushed male voices coming towards me. I duck into a small alcove, not wanting to deal with any more fucking bullshit today. Thankfully they're so absorbed in their conversation they don't notice me.

"Are you going to the fight tonight, at the warehouse on the docks?"

"Fuck yes, they've got a new fighter in, Tris. He's supposed to be unbeatable."

Huh, a fight ring. That would certainly take the edge off; however, it would be damn hard to hide my identity there on such short notice. So on second thought, it looks like I won't be doing that, although, with proper planning, I might be able to pull it off, something to remember in the break if I don't go and see Waverly. Once they've passed me, I push away from the wall and carry on walking, moving through the doors at the end of the corridor and into the stairwell.

Without warning, Richard suddenly appears in front of me, backing me up against the wall as his hands start to roam places they have no right to fucking roam. I push against his chest, trying to get him off me, while simultaneously keeping

a stranglehold on my urge to gut him. His filthy lips land on mine as his hand grabs my boob. I bring my knee up, striking him with force in the dick, a move that he was clearly not expecting. Looking up, I notice one of his friends filming the entire thing and bile rises in my throat. Anger starts to bubble to the surface, and I decide to get the hell out of fucking dodge before I really do gut the pervert in the fucking hallway and get done fucking murder.

“You’re going to fucking pay for that, you cunt!” Richard screams after me as I flee, pushing out of the doors to the stairwell and running straight for the exit of the school.

Laughter follows me, and the rage builds.

We’re not supposed to leave campus during the day, but if I don’t, I’m going to kill someone, and no, that’s not me being dramatic; I have the skill set. In fact, I’ve fucking perfected the skill.

I make it to my car and yank open the door, settling inside. I am so fucking tempted to take off, but I can’t let them win. Not only that, but my persona would never skip school. I can’t go back in like this, though, one wrong word, and I’ll take someone out. I fish around in my glove box and pull out a joint. This will do nicely to mellow me a bit. That first inhale is like fucking magic, and by the time I’m finished, it’s time to go back to my next lesson, and my anger is down to a simmer, not a boil.

That whole incident has settled it, though, and I am definitely going to New Orleans tomorrow after school. I spend the rest of the day making plans and ignoring everything else that’s thrown my way. By the time the day is over and I finally get home, I take the stairs two at a time, no longer getting winded by the time I get up to my floor, which I’m counting as a win. I shoot a quick text to Waves letting her know I’m coming and then video call my uncle.

“Hey, Kid,” he smiles through the phone.

My uncle is a scary mother fucker, and no one dares to mess with him; I’ve seen grown men cry and beg for their lives in

his presence, to which he shows no mercy, but to me, he will always be a big teddy bear.

“Hey, D. I’m going to see Waverly tomorrow after school, and I want a job for us. I am fucking done taking time off.”

“I’m not sure that’s such a good idea, Jynx.” He starts, and I interrupt him.

“Look, you know that I’m the best at what I fucking do. I’m at my wit’s end. D if I don’t do a job soon, I’m going to start some shit.” I promise with a growl.

He studies me intently for a few moments before he answers.

“Fine, I’ll see what I can do. As it happens, we’ve had a bit of trouble up there anyway. I’m not making any promises, though.” He says sternly, and I nod my agreement breathing out a sigh of relief and sinking back into the cushions of my couch. “Is everything okay?”

“Yeah, nothing I can’t handle. Thanks, D. I’ve got to pack. Love you.”

“Love you too, Kid.” He replies as I hang up.

I check my phone looking for replies from Waves, and sure enough, I’ve already got one.

Waverly: No fucking way. I can’t wait!! Hurry your ass over here, babe; I miss you!

I grin, already feeling lighter and less stressed. I definitely made the right choice to go and see her. I quickly make a call to the airline, telling them that I’ll be taking the jet tomorrow, and they assure me that everything will be ready in time. Once that’s done, I quickly pack my bag, wanting to leave as soon as school is over tomorrow and send Gerald a message letting him know that I’ll be gone for the break and not have any parties while I’m not here. He sends me back a text immediately saying he’s not making any promises with a winking face, and I burst out laughing.

I have got to love the old guy. He certainly has a sense of humour.

After that's all done, I grab some workout stuff and make my way down to the gym to take some anger out on the fucking punching bag. God knows I need to. The walk to the gym is a warm up in itself, especially as I jog it. Even at a jog, it still takes me nearly five minutes to get to the gym in the basement of the house. I jog past several doors that I've never been inside, much like the rest of the doors in this house. Finally, I push open the double doors that lead to the state-of-the-art gym behind.

When Gerald told me about this place, I thought it would be a room full of ancient and dusty equipment. It was definitely a surprise.

I put my headphones in and lose myself to the music and the anger. By the time I've finally worn myself out, the sky is dark, I'm dripping in sweat, and my breathing is laboured, but I feel a hell of a lot calmer.

Just one more day, and then I can go and let off some steam with Waverly, I think as I fall into a dreamless sleep.

The next day I have a spring in my step that has been absent since the beginning of the week. I am so excited to see Waverly tonight. Before I even make it to the school's front doors, someone drags me backwards by my hair. It takes all of my effort to fight my instincts. My feet scramble underneath me as my hands grab hold of the ones gripping my hair, and I'm pulled back down the steps I only just walked up. When I get to the bottom of the steps, having gained quite a few bruises, I'm unceremoniously dumped on the slabs at the bottom. My eye's immediately land on Tegan as she grins victoriously. Of course, I should've known. I have to give it to her; she certainly is relentless. She stands over me as I try to remember my role and then sneers as she bends forward and slaps me in the face. I pull my arms up to protect my head as she continues hitting wherever she can reach, clawing at my arms.

There is absolutely no power behind any of her hits. Don't get me wrong, they hurt, but they are nothing compared to what I've experienced in the past. It's actually pretty fucking pathetic, and thanks to my history, I have a fucking high pain threshold, so other than making my anger soar to new heights, she's not really hurting me. Of course, I make sure to make pained sounds every now and again to keep up the illusion.

"P-please stop. It hurts." I sob, cursing my fucking persona. If I make it to the end of the day without fucking snapping, I'll be well and truly fucking surprised.

Tegan and her girls laugh cruelly, finding immense enjoyment in my supposed pain. Finally, the bell rings, and Tegan kicks me one last time before giggling like a psychopath and flouncing her way into the school. I make a show of picking myself up off the floor, pretending I'm in pain in case anyone is around. When I realise they aren't, I stand up straight, my anger bubbling under the surface. I check my arms, seeing that she's managed to gouge a few lines in them that have thoroughly messed up my cover-up makeup, and now you can see lines of ink beneath them. I didn't bring it to school today like I usually would. I was too excited to get the day fucking over with.

"Fuck sakes," I mumble, pulling my blazer sleeves down and making a mental note to keep them covered.

As I start to walk into the building, I see a freshman standing watching me in shock. Figuring what he's seen and how it doesn't fit my persona, I put my finger to my lips, motioning for him to be quiet. He nods frantically, his eyes wide and confused before he darts through the doors in front of me. I have no idea if he'll keep his mouth shut, but I really couldn't give a fucking shit right now.

"Miss Carlisle, why are you late?" My first-period teacher asks.

"I'm sorry, miss. I fell over." As the class snickers, I mumble.

The teacher nods, clearly not believing me, but she clearly can't be bothered to find out what happens, so she just sends

me to my seat. I glance around, noticing that all the kids get their phones out. My own phone pings with a notification, and I pull it out. Anger sears through my veins as I see the video of me being beaten up by Tegan.

What really fucking pisses me off, though, is how weak and fucking fragile I look, two things which I most certainly am not. It just stokes the flames of my anger.

“Aw, poor pathetic trash girl. Can’t even defend herself.” Ace chides cruelly from behind me.

“I am so glad we realised who you were, pathetic,” Rome adds, earning a chuckle from the surrounding students.

“Why don’t you just go back to where you came from? No one wants you here.” Malachi growls, a coldness in his voice that I haven’t heard before.

“I can’t.” I make the mistake of replying.

“We’ll fucking see about that,” Rome growls before getting up and storming out of the classroom, the rest of the Kings following.

“Just fucking leave.” Rip snarls as he walks past. These are the only words he’s said to me since this whole fucking thing began.

Each thing they’ve said not only sends a stab of hurt through me but also adds to the glowing embers of anger. The next class is the same as it has been all fucking week, but my ability to block the jibes thrown my way has vanished thanks to the rising anger. I should probably leave, but as I’ve said before, I’m fucking stubborn, and I want to know for damn sure just how far the Kings are willing to push this, just how much they want me fucking gone.

I’d forgotten, thanks to the shit they have put me through this week, that today is ending early, after lunch, in fact. I can make it that long, I’m sure of it.

Deciding to give myself the best chance of succeeding in my self-imposed mission, I avoid lunch again, this time avoiding fucking stairwells as well. If Richard tries something

again, I'll fucking cut off his dick, not just knee him in it; I've done it before.

My shoulders relax as I start to think that I've gotten away with avoiding the drama, and I might just make it through today without stabbing anyone. Of course, the fates were only toying with me, which is proven when two big guys come around the corner, their eyes lighting up when they spot me.

"Rome has requested a meeting." One of them grins.

"I don't want to," I say feebly.

"You don't have a choice." One says as they both grab hold of an arm each and pull me in the direction of the cafeteria. Just keep your calm, I remind myself.

They push me through the cafeteria doors, and I find myself faced with what seems like the entire school.

Ahh fuck.

I study the entire room and all the exits without being too obvious, just in case. They've moved all the tables out of the way and created a ring around the empty space left in the middle. The two dickheads push me into the ring, and I pretend to hunch in on myself as I pretend to glance around nervously.

What I'm really doing is cataloguing the situation.

My eyes land on Tegan, smirking and standing slightly inside the circle. I think I see where this is going.

"We warned you to stay away, and now we're going to make you," Rome growls. I look over them all, and even though I see the hesitation in their gazes, not one of them moves to stop this from happening.

"Please, I can't leave. Just leave me alone, and you'll barely know I'm here." I plead, adding a shake to my voice, just to help really sell it.

The guys all send hopeful looks to Rome, who grits his teeth, his jaw clenching as he fists his hands.

“It’s too late. We don’t want the likes of you at our school.” He sneers before turning to Tegan and giving her a nod.

She wastes no time charging for me, her hand raised. I drop my bag to the floor. Her slap rings out against my cheek, and my head snaps to the side. That was actually a good hit, better than the ones she delivered outside of school earlier, but unfortunately for her it fucking snaps the last of my control.

I am fucking done pretending I’m someone I’m fucking not so that I don’t lose them. I’ve forgotten who the fuck I am, and it’s about time I fucking started to remember.

“You know what?” I ask, my voice still timid and quiet as they’ve always known me to be.

“What was that, Trash Princess?” Rome sneers, his voice icy cold.

I am done.

I drop the act entirely, standing up straight and lifting my face to the Kings. My signature fuck you smirk on my face. Their eyes darken with confusion as Rome starts to say something, but I’ll deal with them in a minute. Instead, my gaze lands on Tegan, who, for once in her life, actually looks cautious as I approach.

My grin widens as she stands there stubbornly. Before she can comprehend what’s happening, I move quickly, grabbing the back of her head and pulling my knee up as I push her face down hard. I hear the snap of her nose as blood spurts, and she screams in pain as I force her to fall to the floor.

Grinning, I shake my arms out and bounce on the tip of my toes. The entire cafeteria is silently watching me, apart from Tegan, who’s still screaming like a fucking banshee.

I turn to face the Kings and point at Rome. “Fuck you and your mother cuntin’ bunch of fucking friends. You’re all fucking pathetic, backstabbing, prissy little rich boys.” I laugh as Rome’s jaw drops in shock, his eyes wide.

The boys and I say boys because that’s all they really are, stare at me in shock for a moment longer, looking between the

still sobbing Tegan and me before almost simultaneously a look of pure panic crosses their features.

I'm done playing their fucking games, though. Fool me once, shame on you, but fool me twice? Very definitely, shame on me. I will not waste a single goddamned second trying to figure out what the look they just had fucking meant; as far as I'm concerned, there is no fucking redemption for them.

"Holy fucking shit balls, man, it feels good to curse again. Do you know how hard it is not fucking curse all day? I think poor Gerald's had enough of my cursing at home by now." I chuckle. Feeling free and oh so fucking good. My chuckle turns into a grin as I see Jealousy cross all of their features. Fucking idiots. "Sorry, Grandmother," I add, feeling a little bit guilty that I've gone back on what she asked me to do in her letter, but she can't say I didn't give it a good fucking go now, can she?

The guys just stare at me in shock.

"What ..." Rip starts, and I interrupt him, not willing to listen to any more of their fucking bullshit.

"I've got to say, I really fucking missed the sound of a nose breaking. That shit is fucking addictive, you know?" I shrug, messing with them and thoroughly enjoying it. I check my phone. Time for me to go. "Right, I've got a plane to catch motherfuckers. Hope you get syphilis from Rachel's cunt." I add, unable to help but give them a parting shot as I look at Malachi. "She got tested last week, Malachi." I grin at his horrified stare.

She didn't, but it's fun to fuck with him. It's the least they deserve after what they've put me through.

He suddenly pales as the penny drops, and I smirk.

"Wait, you got my name, right?"

"Of course, I fucking did dickhead. It's not that hard to tell you two fuckers apart." I grin.

Mason grips his arm, and Malachi turns to face him. They share one of the twin telepathy looks before once again panic descends over their gorgeous features, and their heads snap

towards Rome, an almost pleading look in their eyes. Rip and Ace both do the same, but Rome's eyes stay on me. There's a storm of emotional turmoil in those dark blue depths, but I can't be fucked to figure it out.

Even though curiosity starts to demand that I do. I walk back to my bag, done with this shit now and my little speech, which I think hit all the fucking right spots. Not sparing the fuckwits another glance, I walk to the edge of the circle, the silent students parting like the goddamned red sea for me.

That's more fucking like it.

The doors slam closed behind me, and I take a second just to appreciate how fucking good that felt. I shouldn't have let them get to me like that. Guys never do, but there was just something about them that made me feel like I fit, you know? I know that sounds absolutely fucking ridiculous, but it's damn true. However, I know that you should never change who you really are just to please someone else, and you definitely shouldn't do it to fucking please a guy or, in my case, a bunch of guys.

I will admit to myself only that they hurt me. I genuinely cared for them, and although it's more than obvious, especially now that something else is going on with the kings, there is no reason that would be a good enough excuse for them to treat me like that.

Chapter Five

“Fuck!” Rome roars from the other side of the cafeteria doors as the sound of crashing quickly follows his yell.

Time for me to go. I really don't want any more drama, and I don't want to be late for my flight. Although it is my plane so can I even be late for it? I don't know how it works; will they just hold the plane indefinitely? I guess it is at an airport, and not my own private airfield, so I assume that they have to abide by the flight times and plans of the main airport? I don't know, and I honestly don't know why I'm thinking about this so in-depth right now. It's not like it matters.

I push out the front doors and start walking towards my car. I can't wait to fucking leave this place for a while.

“Well, hello, Trash, fancy running into you here?” Some sleazeball of a fucking guy starts. “Why don't you get on your knees, and I'll let you suck my cock.”

I don't even bother to say anything as I throat punch him, making him grasp his throat as he struggles for breath, and I start to walk past him as if nothing happened. I hear the doors to the school open behind me and glance back to see all five of the Kings searching the parking lot. When their eyes land on me, they start in my direction.

“Jynx, wait!” Rip calls an edge to his voice that I haven't heard before; it almost sounds like panic.

“Oh, gotta go,” I say cheerily to the guy on the floor who looks at me like I've fucking lost it. Although to be fair, I may have.

I briskly walk through the parking lot and out of the gates to school, making my way around the corner and down the road towards where I've parked my car. I'm in no rush, and although I don't particularly want to talk to the Kings, I know I can handle whatever they try to do next. I shoot a quick glance over my shoulder and see that they're no longer

following me, which is good. I said I didn't want any more drama today, but if that's true, why is disappointment churning in my gut because they gave up so quickly?

I carry on walking, trying to ignore my troubling reaction to them giving up so easily before I can fall too far down the rabbit hole of fucked up feelings; Rome's Maserati pulls up next to me, just as my car comes into sight. I ignore it, not even glancing their way as it slowly trails beside me.

"Jynx, please, let us explain?" Ace says, hanging out of the passenger window.

I carry on walking, whistling now just to wind them up.

"Come on, Princess. At least let us give you a lift home?" Rome adds, big mistake, asshole.

"Don't you dare fucking call me that again, asshole." I glare at him, and he looks taken aback by the venom in my voice before regret clouds his features.

"Ignore him." Mason tries to smooth over the situation as I carry on walking, my car only meters in front of us now. "Let us take you home?"

"No, I told you I've got a plane to catch," I growl, pulling out my keys and hitting the unlock button. The guy's car screeches to a halt, and I take their momentary distraction to my advantage, quickly getting in my car and slamming the door.

"Wait!" I hear a panicked yell from Rome's car as I turn mine on, and my music from this morning blasts through the speakers, effectively blocking out anything else they could say. I pull away, grateful that I parked facing the right direction and can get away from them quicker. I've known them long enough that I know that they are relentless, and because of that, I wouldn't put it past them to block me in or something until I listened to them. The problem with that is I'm not ready to hear what they have to say, and I doubt I ever will be.

Rome's car stays glued to my ass, and as I look in the rearview mirror, I can see the determined look on his face. If he thinks he can force me to listen to him, he's got another

thing fucking coming. I grin as I put my foot down, weaving through traffic and incredibly grateful that not only have I been trained to drive in high-speed pursuit situations, but I also have a car that can handle it. Of course, by training, what I really mean is that I've been in a fair few high-speed pursuits, and I've picked up a few things.

Rome stays with me right up until we hit some traffic lights, and at the very last second, I make the call to blast through them, narrowly avoiding the traffic and making car horns blast in my wake.

I keep my eyes on my mirrors as I finally make it to the airport and pull into the long-stay parking lot. I pull up the instructions that the airport sent through to my phone, on where I'm supposed to go, as I grab my bag from the trunk. I am kind of nervous about leaving my car here for such a long time, but the airport reassured me that they had top-notch security, so I guess I'm just going to have to take the risk. Walking through the airport is somewhat surreal. I haven't really gone anywhere, but school and there, I get insults thrown at me regularly. Although their words didn't bother me, constantly being on guard was fucking draining. It's nice to have anonymity here. No one is paying me any attention, and it's refreshing. Thanks to my driving, I've arrived early, and I've lost the Kings, so I have time to stop off at a Starbucks and grab a much needed coffee.

Once I've ordered, I leisurely make my way towards the gate where I've been told to go, which will give me access to the tarmac and my plane.

"Jynx!" Malachi calls out, and I turn in surprise to see all five of them barrelling down on me.

I pick up my pace, weaving between passengers and starting to jog. Fortunately, I'm not that far from where I need to be now. It does cross my mind that I could stop running from them and listen to what they have to say, but everything is too raw right now, and I'm still angry as fuck. Nothing good will come of having that conversation now, if ever.

Besides, they fucked up, and there's nothing they could say now that would make me think otherwise. I can hear them gaining on me, but a steward by the door sees me coming and glances over my shoulder before opening the door immediately.

"Miss Luther, I presume?" He grins, and I nod, glancing at his name tag, and making a note of his name, Carter. "Do you want me to stop them or let them through?"

"Stop them, please. And ignore any threats they throw your way. I'll make sure they don't do shit. Also, please don't say my last name in front of them."

He grins and ushers me through, closing the door behind me, and I find myself in a long hallway that slopes down. I pause for a second, listening to see how this is going to play out. I decided not to use my Grandmother's last name while I was at school since it carries a lot of weight, and I wanted to fly under the radar. I know what rich kids are like, and I wanted to see what the kids at school were really like, not the fake they'd present me with if I used her last name. It may be time to change that, though, when I go back, and I will be going back. Not just because it's a stipulation in my Grandmother's will but because I like my life there despite everything. Besides, I never run from difficult situations, not really.

"Let us through." Rome snarls on the other side of the door.

"I'm ever so sorry, sir, but Madam has requested that you do not follow her," Carter replies calmly, almost sounding bored.

I like him.

"I don't give a shit. Do you know who we are?" Rip growls.

"I am well aware."

"Then let us through. How much is it going to take?" Mason adds.

"I will not take bribes. Madam has asked me not to let you through, and I won't. So don't make me call security." He says firmly.

Satisfied that he's got this handled, I start to make my way down the slope and out onto the tarmac. As I step up to the plane, the flight attendant looks me up and down, curling her lip in disgust at me. You have got to be fucking kidding me right now.

"I don't know how you got out here, but we are waiting for a very high-profile customer, and it is clear that you are in the wrong place." She says snottily.

"No, I'm not. This is my plane." I reply, rapidly losing my patience.

She snorts and pulls out her phone.

"I highly doubt that; I'm going to call security. I suggest that you leave before they arrive."

"Louise!" A male attendant snaps from behind her, pushing past, his apologetic gaze landing on me. "I am so sorry, Miss Luther."

Louise pales as she tries to backtrack, and I hold my hand up, stopping her immediately. So cool, it actually worked. I look for the nametag on the male attendant.

"Warren, I don't want this woman on the flight. Is it possible to get Carter out here and have him replace her?"

"You can't do that!" Louise screeches, and I arch my eyebrow.

"Actually, she can. I'll get him now. Louise, you're on leave pending a disciplinary hearing. You should treat all passengers with respect regardless of whether or not you think they are worthy." He says harshly, dismissing her.

Her mouth flounders like she's trying to come up with something to say that will save her ass, but when Warren and I just stand there staring at her, she huffs indignantly, turns on her heel and stomps away.

"If you'd like to step aboard, miss, I'll get Carter here right away. He'll need to grab his go bag, so it might take him a few minutes. Will that be okay?"

“Absolutely,” I reply, making my way up the little steps that lead into the aircraft.

“Whoa, this is nice,” I mutter under my breath as I take in the interior of the plane.

It’s like in the movies, there are a few massive and seriously comfy looking seats with the standard seatbelts, but there’s also a bar area, a row of seats that look like a couch, lines the edge of the plane. In addition, there’s a small kitchen area, and figuring that I’ve got time to explore now that we’ve got to wait for Carter, I move to the back of the plane and open the door; it leads to a small hallway with a door to my left and one at the end. The door on my left leads to an overtly lavish bathroom for a plane, and the end door leads to a large and opulent bedroom. Sweet, I didn’t know jets had those.

When I make my way back into the central part of the plane, Carter is just climbing aboard.

“Miss Luther.” He greets, a twinkle in his eye and a broad smile on his face.

“Please, you’ve chased off unwanted followers for me. I think we’re on a first-name basis now. Call me Jynx.” I reply.

My cell starts to ring, and I grab it from where I put it on one of the tables when I went to explore the plane—seeing that it’s Rip and that I’ve got over twenty texts from him and the others, I promptly reject the call. When it immediately starts ringing again, I sigh heavily and turn my phone off instead. That’s going to get old really fucking quickly.

“That them?” Carter asks as Warren shoots him a warning look.

“Oh yeah, they’ve got to be out of their fucking minds if they think that I’m going to answer the phone to them.”

“Since we’re on first name bases and all that, can I be candid with you?”

“Of course, take a seat. Is there whiskey on this thing?” I reply.

“Absolutely, one second and I’ll grab you one.”

Before I can protest, he goes to the bar area and pours me a drink, coming back and handing it to me before he takes a seat.

“You were going to be candid?” I remind him.

“Oh yeah,” he looks at me cautiously, as if trying to decide whether I’m testing him and trying to get him to slip up.

I just smile and wait for him to make his assessment. I’m not sure anything I could say would reassure him anyway. Finally, he makes his decision and continues, “They were fucking hot and looked like they were ready to fall at your feet grovelling. Are you sure you didn’t want me to let them through?”

“Trust me. They fucking deserve it and a lot fucking more.” I growl.

“I got you.” He smirks. “If you need any help planning revenge, let me know. I’ve dragged a few men over hot coals in my time.” He winks, getting up and going to the front of the plane.

I might take him up on that offer. It would be interesting to get another perspective on it, one that doesn’t necessarily go straight to violence, like my plans tend to. Halfway through the flight, I’m bored enough to turn my phone back on out of pure curiosity more than anything. However, before I can read anything, a message pops up on the screen.

Rome: We will find you, Koroleva. No matter where you go, we will find you, and you will let us explain.

It doesn’t escape my notice that instead of calling me Princess, he’s changed my nickname, and since I’m unsure what it means, I’m not sure that it’s any better if I’m honest. However, it does piss me off that he thinks he can tell me what to do. No one succeeds at doing that. It’s highly amusing that he thinks they can find me, though.

Me: You can fucking try, Rome. Good luck.

I reply, adding a winking emoji for good measure, knowing that it will piss him the fuck off. The second the message is delivered, it’s read, and my phone starts to ring. I let it go for a

while before answering it and immediately hanging up again. I do it a couple more times before I get bored and put it on 'do not disturb', laying it face down on the little table in front of me.

Finally, we land, and I get off the plane, saying goodbye to Carter and Warren and making sure that they're going to be on my flight home. Although I let the guys think I wasn't coming back, I will. I have a good thing going, and I'm stubborn. They're not running me off. I will not allow it, besides now that my actual personality has been exposed, I can have a lot of fun at the school. I do need this break, though, and I haven't forgotten that D promised that I could go on a job. It's been too long.

"Jynx!!" I hear a squeal, and then a purple-haired bombshell suddenly tackles me.

It's a good fucking thing that I recognised her voice, or this would not have ended in a hug.

"Hey, Waves! God, I missed you." I grin, hugging her back tightly.

She steps away and looks over me critically, "I hate your hair even more in person, and your lack of tattoos is just fucking weird." She says, and I grin.

"Me too. I thought that after I've dropped my stuff off and showered, the hair salon would be our first stop."

"Hell fucking yes," she grins, threading her arm through mine and dragging me along beside her as we make our way to the car. "You seem happier than when we last spoke. Did the real you come out to play?"

"Ding, ding, ding, got it one." I chuckle.

"And?"

"And I broke a girl's nose, said as many curse words as I could in one sentence, told Malachi that he was going to get syphilis and that it was easy to tell the twins apart and then told them I had a plane to catch and left. All of that in front of the whole school, I then had a car chase with them to the airport, which they insisted on following me to, begging that I

listen to them and let them explain, they then chased me through the airport and had to be threatened with security.” I take a breath, “And they fucking haven’t stopped calling or messaging since. Fucking look at this.”

By the time I’m done recapping the events of the day, Waverly is staring at me in shock, her eyes amused. I pull out my phone from my pocket to show her the missed calls and sigh as I see Ace’s name on the screen; I press ignore and then turn my phone to show Wave’s the missed calls and messages.

“Whoa, they’re trying really fucking hard to get hold of you.”

I grimace as we get into her car, and she starts the drive to her house.

“Tell me about it. You’d think they’d get the fucking hint.”

She side-eyes me, “Would it be so bad to hear what they have to say?”

“Yes, it fucking would. I’m still too fucking angry to talk to them. I might when I go back after I make them grovel for a bit, but I’m not in the right mood to do it now.”

“You are going back then?” She asks.

“Yeah, I have to.”

She nods in understanding and then, sensing that I don’t want to talk about it anymore, changes the subject. It’s not long until I bring the conversation back to the King’s myself, and I spend the rest of the car journey to her house, catching her up on what the fuckwits have done. It’s not long until we’re pulling into her drive.

“Wow, this place looks amazing.” I gush as I get out of the car and look up at the big house, surrounded by lawn and trees.

“Yeah, mom loves it, and so do I. Come on; she can’t wait to see you.”

Just as she’s finished her sentence, the front door swings open and out of it bounds three dogs, all great Danes and fucking softies.

“Jynx!” Maria calls out excitedly, rushing down the wide porch steps and wrapping me in her arms.

Maria is in her mid-thirties and looks after herself really fucking well. She’s got a rocking body. D’s always had a thing for her, but she continually turns him down, saying she’s better off alone and he’s got enough damage he doesn’t need to have hers piled on too. Personally, I think they’d be great together, and no one can deny the sparks that fly between them whenever they’re in the same room. If Alaric, Ryan and D are all in the same room as them, the sparks turn into an inferno, and you have to leave before you get burned. I think that she should just have all three of them.

“Come on, let’s get your stuff inside. How long are you here for?”

“Until the week before school starts, I’ll need to go back and do a bit of research before going back.”

She smiles knowingly. She’s perfectly aware of the world Waverly and I are involved in. After all, she is too. I take my bags up to my room; I insisted on having my own, not because I’ve become spoilt or anything but because if I have to wake up to Waverly and Micha’s sex noises again, I’m going to need to block my ears permanently.

The interior designer really did an amazing job, and it looks even better in person than it did in the photos. I might have to send her a bonus.

“Your room is the third door on the right. If you want to go and put your stuff away?” Waverly asks, and I grin. I managed to change out of my uniform on the plane over here. Thank god, I don’t think she would’ve let me live it down if I’d arrived in that. I do take a quick shower to scrub off the makeup that covers my tattoos, though.

“Have you eaten?” Maria asks as I come back down the wide, traditional staircase.

“Nope, I left in a hurry.”

“Sit down and let me make you a sandwich.”

I know there’s no point in arguing, so I just smile.

“I’ve got you booked in at my salon in half an hour,” Waverly says, coming into the room and plopping her ass down beside me and motioning to my uncovered tattoos. “That’s much better.”

“Wow, you really hate my hair, huh?” I grin.

“It’s just not you. I don’t like it.”

“I’m aware.” I grin, “Thanks for sorting it. I’ll call D after and see if he’s got that job for us.”

“He fucking better.” Waverly groans, “You’re going to cause absolute hell here if he doesn’t. You’ve got that fucking look in your eye.”

I smirk, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Sure you fucking don’t.”

“Here you go, girls, I’m going out. I’ve got a few errands to run. If you do end up doing a job for D, let me know if you’ll be back late, so I don’t think someone is trying to break in and shoot you.” She teases.

“Sure thing, mom, love you.”

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Chapter Six

“Honey, I’m home!” A familiar voice yells before Maria can make it out of the house. She rolls her eyes, an easy smile on her face before she leaves.

“Micha!” I happily greet him as he engulfs me in a big hug.

“I missed you. It’s been far too quiet around here!” He replies, letting me go and going over to Waverly, kissing her thoroughly and making me smile.

They’ve been together for as long as I can remember, and we’ve been the three amigos even longer.

“How’re you doing?” I ask, stuffing my face with the food Maria just made.

“Awesome as always. Did you give those boys hell?” He smirks like he already knows the answer.

“You know I did.” I grin, lifting up my phone, rejecting Malachi’s phone call and showing him my screen with all the missed calls and messages. “They haven’t stopped.”

“Let me guess; you showed them the real you?” He asks, his eyebrow raised in question as he pinches some food off Waverly’s plate.

“Yep.”

“You know that’s pretty shitty,” he points out. “They didn’t want you and made your life hell when they thought you were some pathetic, poor girl, but now they’re suddenly interested.”

“Oh, I know, but I also know that there’s something else going on with them. None of them particularly looked like they wanted to be doing it throughout the whole thing. But, don’t get me wrong, I’m still going to give them hell, and I won’t be talking to them for the rest of the break, at least.”

“Good, they deserve it,” he grins. “So, what’s the plan for today?”

“We’re going to sort out the monstrosity that is Jynx’s hair, and then we’re hopefully going on a job for D.”

“Sounds good. I think I’ll skip the hair appointment, but give me a call when you’ve got the job, and I’ll tag along. I know you girls don’t need backup, but you can’t have all the fun.”

“Deal.” I grin. It’s always more fun when we do jobs together, and it’s been far too long since we’ve been out on one together. Even before the incident, it had been a while. Micha and Waverly don’t do the same sort of jobs that are my speciality, and because of the nature of my jobs, it tends to be better that I go alone anyway. I know that it’s doubtful that D will give me one of my usual assignments. He’ll want me to ease back into slowly. I’ll do whatever he asks just so long as I’m not sitting twiddling my fucking thumbs on the sidelines anymore.

Micha’s face becomes serious. “Don’t bite my head off, but are you sure you’re ready to head back into the thick of it?”

I sigh heavily, “I’m not getting panic attacks every day anymore, and I’ve upped my training, so I feel more prepared than ever to handle anything that gets thrown my way. I need to get back out there. It’s like an itch under my skin, and I know that D’s been sending some of the others after the targets, but they’re not as effective as I am.”

“That’s for damn sure. I just wanted to make sure.”

“Thanks.” I grin. If anyone else had asked me that, I probably would’ve flipped my lid, but it’s Micha. He’s like family to me.

“Speaking of, do you know if D’s sorted anything for Ever?” Waverly asks.

Ever was the only bright spark in that dark time, and I quite literally owe her my life.

“No, it’s gotten too complicated. He’s still trying, though.” I sigh.

“It will all work out. From what you told me about her, she’s fucking tough as nails.”

“She is, but she’s still so young.”

“I get it,” Waverly says with a frown. We’ve had this conversation many times since I got back after the incident. “Alright, enough of that. Unfortunately, there’s nothing we can do about it and D’s handling it, so let’s go and sort that hair out.”

“You make a good point,” I say, pushing thoughts of Ever away. “Let’s go.”

We put our plates in the dishwasher, ensuring that everything is left tidy. Maria may be pretty laid back about many things, but keeping the house clean and clearing up after ourselves is not one of them.

“Alright, I’ll leave you, girls, to it. Don’t go on the job without me!” Micha says as we walk towards the front door.

“Don’t worry, we won’t,” I call over my shoulder as I make my way towards Waverly’s car. Their goodbyes get pretty hot, and I have no intention of sticking around to watch that for the forty millionth time.

Once I’m settled in the car, I pull out my phone for something to do. There are even more missed calls and messages, but the top one makes my heart ping with something akin to hurt.

Rip: Please?

That’s all it says, and to many people, that wouldn’t mean much, but coming from Rip, it’s colossal. He doesn’t plead for anything, and because of that, I very nearly give in and reply even if it’s just to him, but I can’t bring myself to do it. The shit they pulled to get me to leave that school was fucking horrific and would’ve broken the girl I was pretending to be. An image of that guy in the stairwell grabbing my boob and trying to stick his tongue down my throat comes to mind, and instantly a haze of anger takes over any sympathy or hurt that I was feeling.

Fucking dicks. That situation could’ve ended so much worse; as it is, I’m fucking lucky that it didn’t trigger a panic attack.

“Are you okay?” Waverly asks as she finally gets in the car and pulls out of her drive.

“Yeah, I’m fine, ready to be me again,” I reply.

She side-eyes me like she doesn’t quite believe me but lets the subject drop. Of course, it helps that my phone starts ringing at that point.

“It’s D,” I tell her as she gives me a curious look as I answer the phone.

“Put it on speaker.”

I nod. “Hey, D.” I greet happily.

“Hey, Kid, how’re you doing? Did you arrive safely?”

“Yeah, it’s all good. Have you got a job for us?”

“Wow, straight to the point and no pleasantries.” He teases.

“D, I’m going out of my fucking mind here. I need to make someone bleed.” I admit, honestly.

“I’m not surprised. It has been a while. I do have a job for you. It’s not quite your usual since I want to make sure you’re fully back before I let you out of those jobs. No arguments.” He replies as if he knew I was about to argue. He is right, though I was.

“Alright, fine. I guess you’re probably right.”

“Damn straight I am. I’m also insisting that you take Waverly and Micha.”

“I was going to, anyway.” I huff. “What’s the job?”

“Good. I need you to get back one of our guys. He was undercover at a motorcycle club up there to get some intel on some shipments, but we haven’t heard from him in a few weeks. I need you guys to figure out if he’s been compromised or if he’s switched sides. If he’s switched sides, bring him in. Jynx, I mean it, I will deal with him. If you do, I will not allow you any more jobs.”

“I’ve got it. I’ll bring him to you alive.” I grin.

“And able to answer questions, not needing to be rushed to the hospital immediately.” D clarifies with amusement evident in his voice.

“Damn it.” I grumble, and he chuckles, “What’s the time frame?”

“We need answers tonight.”

“Wow, okay, we can get it done. I’ve got an appointment right now, and then I’ll go and prepare. Any idea of his location?”

“Yeah, tonight is their local meet down at Percy’s. Waverly should know where it is. I’ll send you his file over.”

“Excellent. I’ll have an update for you tonight.”

“Good, be safe.”

“Always am,” I reply, our usual goodbye when he sends me on a job.

“So, Percy’s.” Waverly grins, “They serve one hell of strong drink. Did you bring your weapons?”

“No, I wasn’t sure if I could get them on a plane. Do you still have my stash?” I ask. I always had Waverly keep a stash of weapons for me, but I don’t know whether she moved them to the new house with her or not.

“Of course I do. You don’t really think I’m stupid enough to mess with your babies, do you?”

I smirk as we pull up outside of the hair salon. “Well, no, but you never know; you could’ve lost your mind since I’ve been gone.”

“Fuck you.” She grins.

The trip to the hair salon took longer than I expected it to because they had to bleach my hair and get rid of the dark brown before they could put the blue on. But, finally, it’s done, and they do a damn good job too. For the first time in months, I actually feel like myself again.

“Did you let Micha know to meet us at the house?” I ask as we pull through the gates.

“Yeah, he’s just grabbing his stuff, and he’ll meet us here.”

“Awesome. We’ve only got an hour or so to get ready. I want to get this job done fairly quickly. It should be an easy as fuck one, and I want to prove to D that I’m ready to be back in the game. Hopefully, he’ll give us more jobs while I’m out here.”

“I don’t see why not. We’ve handled a lot worse than this.” She replies.

I nod in agreement as we make our way through the front door. An email alert from D pops up, and I read through the file that he’s just sent me.

“Alright, he’s called Theo, heavysset, tattoos, bald and brown eyes,” I say, turning the phone so that Waverly can see the photo.

“Looks like a biker then.” She shrugs, showing it to Micha as he steps through the door just as we’re about to close it behind us.

I didn’t hear him arrive, but then again, he only lives a few doors down. He probably walked.

“What are his specialities?” Micha asks.

We all make our way up the stairs, me following behind and reading as I go.

“Retrieval. People and information, that’s all it says.”

“Well, that makes sense D sent him on the job to get information from them.” Wave’s points out.

“Alright, let’s get ready. Where are my weapons?” I ask, putting my phone back in my pocket.

“In your room, in the bottom of the closet.” Waverly replies, “I’ll meet you back downstairs in twenty, and we can go. Are we just observing at first?”

“Yeah, we’ll see how he interacts with them all and then corner him,” I reply, mulling it over.

“Sounds good.”

I leave them to it and wander into my own room, instantly searching out my weapons.

“Ah, I’ve missed you,” I lovingly say as I pull out one of my guns.

They aren’t my favourites. I’d never leave them in the care of other people if they were, but each of my weapons holds a special place in my heart.

I’m aware that makes me sound crazy, but then again, whoever said I was sane?

I start to pull the weapons out of the duffle bag I left them in and lay them out on the bed, checking them over and trying to decide which ones to bring. I technically shouldn’t need them. I’m only supposed to be getting information, but you never know, and it’s safer to be armed than not.

I’m so distracted by trying to make my choice that when my phone rings, I automatically answer it without checking the caller id.

“Yo, this better be fucking important. I’ve got a truly sexy sight laid out before me on my bed.” I joke, assuming it’s either Waverly and she can’t be bothered to yell for me or D.

“What the fuck did you just say?” A dark voice growls, and I pull the phone away from my ear.

Fuck, it’s Ace, and I realise how that must’ve sounded. I open my mouth to correct myself before it clicks shut with a snap. Why do I feel the need to defend myself and reassure them that I wasn’t talking about a naked man on my bed? It’s not like I can tell them I was actually referring to an assortment of guns and knives. One, that would make me seem crazy, and two, they probably wouldn’t believe me anyway.

Besides, I owe them nothing.

“Oh, it’s you. I thought you were someone else.” I growl back.

“Jynx, I swear to god I’ll rip the fucker limb from fucking limb if ...” Ace threatens.

I hang up because, holy fuck was that hot. Not the whole he can control who I sleep with bit, because let's be honest that's never going to happen, my body, my rules, but the jealousy and viciousness of that statement, yeah, that was hot. For a second, there was a high chance I was going to end up saying something that would not go along with the whole I'm pissed, and you will fucking grovel before I even think about talking to you again thing.

I'm still not sure I want to talk to them again. I mean, I shouldn't, but every time I think about not talking to them, not having them in my life, my heart hurts, and my gut churns.

I care about the stupid fuckers.

Mason: JYNX ANSWER YOUR GODDAMN FUCKING PHONE!

Ace: I'm sorry if I scared you.

I burst out laughing. He thinks he scared me. That's pretty damn cute. I wonder what he'd think if I told him it turned me on.

I immediately dismiss that, putting my phone on silent and deciding to ignore everything they've got to say for the rest of this trip. Nothing good will come of it. I should probably block their numbers at least, then I don't have to see or read anything they send to me, but a small part of me is enjoying their multiple messages. At least for now.

I look down at my outfit: black ripped jeans, a tight black tank, a leather jacket and chunky black boots. Good enough, we're going to a dive bar. I don't think they're going to give a flying fuck what we look like. Besides, we want to blend in, and showing up all dolled up is a surefire way to get noticed. I take my jacket off and grab a holster from out of my bag. I pull it on. My jacket is bulky enough that even with two guns under it, it shouldn't get noticed that easily and if it does well, everyone will be carrying in there. I pick out two guns, securing them in the holster and then pull my jacket back on.

I glance in the mirror to check that it's sitting correctly and look over the rest of my outfit. My hair still looks incredible

since they styled it at the salon, and my make-up is still fine from when I reapplied it after my shower earlier. It seems like I'm good to go. As I walk past my bed to leave, I pause. It can't hurt to take one of my knives too. Sometimes a knife is a much better persuasion tool than a gun. So I grab one and stick it into the hidden sheathe in my boot. God, I love these boots. They cost a fucking fortune because I had them custom made, but they're worth every penny.

I step out into the hall and hear the unmistakable moans of Waverly and Micha. Rolling my eyes, I make my way downstairs.

Getting into the bar shouldn't be any problem. We look the part, and we're hot. Not being big-headed or anything but that tends to help. Of course, we might get a few idiots try something to show their dominance, but that's easily dealt with. The hard part is going to be getting Theo alone and if he recognises me. I don't remember him, and it's been a good few months, almost a year since I was in the game, so I doubt that he'd know me, by appearance anyway. He probably knows of my reputation.

Hopefully, it's relatively straightforward. He's forgotten or was under suspicion and had to stop all communication for a while. Even if it was the latter, though, he still should've checked in, sent the code and let D know that's what was going to happen. I pull out my phone.

Me: How new is this guy?

D: I was wondering when you were going to ask me that. A couple of months tops.

Me: And you sent him in any way?

D: He's very good at what he does. I've had my eye on him for a while. We're short on people at the moment. I didn't really have a choice.

Me: And who's fault is that? I could've easily been doing jobs for you.

D: We both know you weren't ready before now, Kid.

I choose to ignore that last message because he's right, and I don't want to admit it.

"Hey, you ready?" Waverly asks, coming down the stairs, dressed similarly to me, with a grinning Micha trailing behind her and staring at her ass.

"Yep. Let's go."

When we step outside, night has already fallen, and there's a definite chill in the air that wasn't present earlier. I'm even more grateful for my jacket now. As soon as we're all loaded into the car, I tell her what I just found out from D.

"You're joking?" Micha groans, "So there's a really big fucking chance that he just didn't know fucking protocol?"

"Yeah, I'm betting on that, if I'm honest. Few people are stupid enough to betray D, no matter how fucking new they are." I reply.

"Everyone knows that's an instant death wish." Waves adds.

"Yep, we just go in there, and if you guys keep a lookout, I'll talk to him privately. We need to make sure that none of the other bikers gets suspicious, or it'll blow the entire operation for D," I explain.

"How is he going to know that you're working for D, though and not trying to get him to slip up? Will he even know the code word if he's that new?" Micha asks.

"Good point, hang on. I'll ask D."

Me: Does he know the code word?

D: Give me some credit, kid. Yes, he does.

"D says he knows it," I tell them.

"Well, at least that's one less thing we have to worry about," Waverly mutters as we pull into the parking lot outside a rundown bar.

"Come on. It's been ages since we've done a job together. I'm kind of hoping something goes wrong." I grin mischievously.

“That look right there,” Micha says, pointing directly at my face, “Worries me.”

My grin widens as I shrug and get out of the car.

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Chapter Seven

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” I shrug as they both join me around by the side of the car, and we start to make our way inside.

The gravel parking lot is practically overflowing with motorbikes, and it’s very obvious that this is a biker bar and that all the club is currently here. From what I understand of club rules, these meetings are mandatory for all the members, so I think it’s safe to assume that if Theo isn’t here, he’s most likely dead and has probably given up secrets to D’s empire as well. The good news is that he’s new, which means that D won’t have trusted him with any critical information, just the basics, and none of that would really affect D’s operation if any of the information got out.

All eyes turn to us as we enter the bar, and we ignore them all as we walk further into the room and towards the bar to get a drink. The bar is scarred and old, clearly having seen a good few bar fights, and with any luck, we might see one tonight. I love a good bar fight. Of course, I’m usually the one that starts them. I know that D wanted us to do this job subtly, but I struggle with that when we go on jobs normally, and right now, I am practically screaming for a fight.

“Jameson, neat, please,” I say to the bartender, who eyes me warily.

His eyes move over my shoulder, and I raise one eyebrow in question.

“Sure,” he says, starting to pour my drink. The other bartender is serving Micha and Waverly. “Look, tonight might not be the best night to be in here. They’d have a fucking field day with a pretty little thing like you.”

I smirk, “I think I’ll be fine.”

Bless him, little does he know, but I’m probably the most dangerous thing in this bar.

I thank him for my drink, ignoring his warning and then turn, leaning my back against it and sipping the whiskey as I survey the bar. Micha and Waverly come to stand next to me, doing the same thing as I am. As soon as I walked in here, I clocked the exits, including a hallway that leads to the bathrooms, next to the bar. We've gained quite a lot of attention already, but I ignore all the curious and heated looks I'm getting off the leather-clad bikers.

I'm sorry, guys, but if you were looking for another club whore, you're definitely looking in the wrong place. The bar is practically crawling with half-naked women, trying to land themselves a biker in the hopes they'll upgrade them to being someone's old lady.

No thanks.

I mean, I think being someone's old lady would be pretty cool, and I love motorbikes, but I wouldn't be willing to be a club girl first. It's just not in my nature.

Micha nudges me, and I look to the left, where he's nodded. Sure enough, there's our guy, club whore, on his lap and looking like he's having the fucking time of his life.

"With the empties on the table and the way he's pounding his beers back, he's going to need to pee soon. When he does, I'll follow you two keep a lookout." I mutter quietly, bringing my drink to my lips to hide my words just in case anyone in here is clever enough to read lips or is paying close attention to anything other than my boobs.

I mean, I can't blame them. My boobs are fucking awesome.

"Got it." Micha nods.

"If I don't come back out, there's a side door I've gone through, so meet me out front."

They both nod in understanding.

"We'll go and dance. There's a better view from there." Waverly grins.

"And you want to shake your ass," I smirk.

“That too.” She replies with a wink, grabbing Micha’s hand and pulling him out onto the dance floor.

They’ve barely been gone for a minute before an aging guy wearing a motorcycle cut, his belly hanging over his jeans, saunters up to me thinking he’s god’s gift to fucking women. I barely manage to suppress my eye roll in time.

“Hey darlin’, can I get you a drink?”

“I’m good, thanks,” I reply simply, ignoring him and watching the dance floor and, more importantly, Theo.

“Aw, no need to be like that. One drink is not going to hurt.” He tries again, and I sigh. Turning to face him, I look him up and down, and he smirks, thinking I’ll like what I see and take him up on his offer.

“Like I said,” I reply with a cold grin, “No thanks.”

His eyes flash with anger at my blatant refusal, and he grabs hold of my arm in a tight grip, preparing to spit vitriol at me. I’m aware of eyes on me, and a quick glance around shows that it’s the club’s president. Now I could play this one of two ways; I could shake him off and keep the peace, or I could do it my way. The sleaze makes a grab for my crotch, which settles it. I wink at the president, who starts to frown. I grab the hand that’s aiming for my crotch and snap his finger back, making him screech like a fucking banshee. He tries to come for me, his big meaty fist slowly swinging for my head, and I swing, landing the punch and knocking the ugly fucker out cold.

All eyes are on me as I grin down at him, taking a sip from my drink that I never put down. This is where it could get dicey. I look back at the president, raising my eyebrow in question. He smirks and holds his hand up, stopping the forward advance of his men. I incline my head slightly in thanks. Well, that worked out, at least. It was fucking fun too. My eyes catch on Micha and Waverly as they track back to Theo, and they both just shake their heads at me with amused grins on their faces. They’ve known me long enough that I think they’d be more surprised if I didn’t punch someone in a bar.

Everyone soon loses interest in me and goes back to drinking and dancing. I feel the president's eyes on me a couple of times, but it's not long until he has a club whore rubbing herself all over him, and he's thoroughly distracted. The last thing I need right now is to have his attention on me while I'm trying to interrogate Theo subtly. It takes another ten minutes. The fucker on the floor eventually gets dragged away from me and propped up in a corner until Theo finally disengages his mouth from the club whore's tit and gets up, heading down the corridor to the bathrooms.

My eyes catch on Micha and Waverly, and they nod that they've seen. I drain the last sip from the glass and then follow him. Thankfully no one pays me any mind. I lean on the wall outside of the men's room and wait, pulling one of my knives out to clean under my nails as I do.

"Hello, Theo." I grin as he exits, and his eyes narrow on me, his gaze dipping to the knife I hold casually in my grasp. He moves to step around me, "I don't think so, renegade."

Recognition flashes in his eyes at the code word, and he crosses his arms over his chest, not moving to get around me this time.

"D is wondering where his update is."

"And he sent a little girl to find out?" He retorts.

My eyes become cold. "Careful, this little girl will have your dick cut off quicker than you can say help."

His eyes dart away as he gulps.

"They were getting suspicious. So it was too risky to do the check-in. I've gathered a lot of information, though, and I'll send it in a file to D." He makes a move to step around me again.

"Send it now," I order.

"I've already been gone for too long. They'll get suspicious."

"Tell them you were fucking me." I shrug.

His eyes flash with anger, but he pulls out his phone and presses a few buttons.

“There, happy?” He growls.

I hold my hand up with a wait motion and pull my own phone out. D answers on the first ring.

“Get it?”

“Yep.”

I hang up. “Now you may go,” I smirk. “We’re watching you very closely,” I warn.

He pushes past me, not uttering another word and moving back into the central part of the bar. I sigh. That was far too easy and not nearly exciting enough. I was hoping that this job would satiate the itch that has been plaguing me the last few months, but it looks like I’m going to have to do some more along the lines of my usual work before that happens. Shrugging, I make my way to the end of the hall pushing through the emergency door and out into the alley, whistling as I make my way back to the parking lot and the car. Micha and Waverly are already in the car, and they both chuckle as I get in and we pull out of the parking lot.

“That’s quite a pout.” Micha grins.

“That was a boring as fuck job.” I grouse.

“You knew he wasn’t going to let you jump straight back into the thick of it,” Waverly smirks.

“No, but I was hoping for a bit more excitement,” I admit, pulling my phone out as it buzzes in my pocket. “D said well done. He got what he needed, and if Theo misses another check-in, he’ll be dealt with.”

“Hey, maybe he’ll let you do that one,” Waves tries to cheer me up, “And at least you got to knock that guy out.”

“And we all know how much you love breaking bones,” Micha adds, and I grin.

I spent the rest of the trip hanging out with them, and after a few bitch fits to D, he did send us out on more jobs, nothing quite like I was doing before, but I got to get a little bloody, so I'm happy. The guys are still trying to call me, but it's become less frequent over the last week, and as before, when I thought they weren't going to follow me from school, a small part of me is sad that they've given up so easily. Well, I guess they haven't given up that easily. I haven't spoken to any of them since I accidentally answered that phone call, and they all went caveman on me, which I surprisingly found hot. I'm also not reading the messages that they have continued to send because I know they'd say something that will push my buttons just right, and I'll end up breaking my silence and replying. I have caught glimpses of a couple of the messages, though, and Rome has taken to only calling me Koroleva now and the frustrating thing about it? I'm actually starting to fucking like it, even though I'm still not entirely sure what it means.

"Do you really have to go?" Waverly pouts as she sits on my bed, watching me pack.

There's still a week left before school officially starts, but I need time to readjust to living there and put plans in place to deal with the guys. Plus, I miss my bedroom. I'm even kind of missing Gerald. I haven't had any contact with my mother, but that's nothing unusual. She probably doesn't even realise that I haven't been there all summer.

"You know I have to," I reply.

"But you're going to be all alone. Dealing with the fuckwits, I know you can handle it. I'm just sad I'm not going to witness it." She grins.

"How would me, staying here help with that? You still wouldn't get to witness it." I point out.

"True, but I also wouldn't miss it." She reasons with a smile.

I pause and look at her, an idea forming in my head.

"What? Is there something on my face?" She asks, swiping her hand over her face. "Oh my God, is it a bug?"

“Why don’t you come with me? Micha too.” I ask, ignoring her bug question.

“What?”

“Think about it. I could use the backup, and it’ll make D even more comfortable sending me on jobs again out there, which he’s still not sure about, and you’ll get to see the fallout with the fuckwits.”

“What about school?” She asks, excitement bleeding into her eyes.

“Come to the academy with me, you’d have a fucking field day with all the rich assholes there, and it’s one of the best schools in the country. I doubt that Maria would mind, and Micha’s emancipated.”

“Can you get us in that quickly, though? Isn’t there a waitlist or something?”

“I’m sure I can throw enough money at them to get you both in. Plus, you both have fucking amazing school records you could probably get in without me.”

“Let’s do it then. I’ll call Micha and tell mom, and you do your thing with the school.”

“Fuck yes.” I grin, watching her jump off the bed and practically run out of the room, her phone already to her ear, calling Micha.

Something inside me settles now that they’re coming back with me. She’s right. I don’t need the backup, but I do need company and having my two closest friends with me will be absolutely amazing. It might help to make the house seem less cavernous and empty too. Also, because they’re unknown to anyone back home, it means I can send them to check out the underground fight scene that I heard those kids talking about in the last few days of school. I still haven’t got a decent enough fight, and regularly fighting there would keep my skills sharp and help curb the bloodlust that just keeps fucking rising.

I pull out my phone and call the school. I’m not really sure how to go about this but throwing money at them seems to be

an excellent way to go. I'll try the way that doesn't involve money first, though. There's no point wasting it if I don't actually need to. The Luther name may be enough to persuade them. Which reminds me, I also need to tell them that I will be going by my grandmother's last name at school from now on.

Surprisingly, the school seems to want to bend over backwards to accommodate me and do as I've asked. It probably helped that I reminded them that I was a Luther from the start. I learnt pretty damn quickly that the name held a lot of weight. There were even rumours going around school about how much money she had and how kids had wished they were related to her, and these are kids that have fuck loads of money themselves.

"Mom said it's fine, but she wants me to call at least once every two days," Waverly says, coming back into the room just as I've hung up.

"What about Micha?"

"He's packing. He said he couldn't let us have all the fun." She grins.

We both know that he'd follow her to the ends of the fucking earth and back if she asked him to. They've got something that most people search their whole lives for and are lucky to find. I hope one day I can find something like they've got. The trouble is I'm not the easiest to love, and I accept that. I'm prickly on my best days, sarcastic, bitchy, stabby and violent. Add in the trauma and baggage, and do I sound like a fucking keeper? I think not.

That's okay, though. I'm quite happy to fuck and move on swiftly. There's less fucking drama, and no feelings get involved, which suits me just fucking fine.

"What did the school say? How much money did you have to throw at them?"

"Surprisingly, I didn't have to give them anything. I just mentioned that I wanted to start going by my grandmother's last name at school. The old woman held a lot of weight."

“Awesome. So all those kids that bullied you thinking that you were poor are going to get the shock of their lives when you walk in with her name.”

“That’s just the beginning,” I smirk.

“You’ve got that look in your eye.”

“You can fucking count on it.”

“I can’t fucking wait. I’m going to go pack fuck, when does the plane leave?”

“We’ve got to be there in an hour. Just pack enough clothes to last you a few weeks. We can have everything else shipped over. I’ve got plenty of spare rooms that are already furnished, and the school has a uniform.” I wince as I tell her the last thing.

“Oh fuck, I forgot you had to wear a fucking uniform.”

“Still want to come?” I ask.

“For sure.” She grins, rushing back out of the room to pack.

I chuckle as I watch her practically skip out and then throw the last of my stuff into my bag and take it downstairs to put by the front door, ready to go. As I place it down, Micha arrives with a single duffle bag, and I raise my eyebrow.

“I figure I can come back and grab anything else I might need.” He shrugs, and I grin. “Wave’s upstairs?”

“Yep, but before you go up there, we have to leave in thirty minutes to make sure that we get to the plane on time,” I warn him.

His grin widens. “I can be quick.”

“What every girl wants to hear!” I yell after him as he takes the stairs two at a time and flips me the bird, not missing a stride.

I chuckle and start to make my way to the door when it opens again.

“Uncle D didn’t expect to see you,” I say, not expecting him or the men that follow in behind him. “And Alaric, Ryan.” I

nod in greeting.

D takes giant strides towards me, pulling me in for a tight hug, “Hey kid, how’re you doing? I was hoping I’d catch you before you left.”

“I’m good,” I smirk, knowing full well that if they’re all here, we want to be out as soon as possible, shits about to get explosive.

“Guys, what are you doing here?” Maria asks, coming out of the kitchen, crossing her arms over her chest and levelling all three of them with a look that would make lesser men wither.

“We need you for a job,” Ryan says, his eyes travelling the length of her, the heat in them unmistakable.

“What kind of job?” Maria asks, her curiosity piqued.

“I’ll explain later.” Alaric answers.

It’s not often that they all get together, but when they do, it’s obvious how close they all are despite the distance that usually separates them.

“When do you leave, Kid?” D asks me changing the subject before Maria can ask any more questions, and she narrows her eyes in response.

“Your niece is taking Waverly and Micha back with her, and they’re starting school out there.” She answers for me.

“That’s a great idea. I’ve got a couple of things that need to be sorted up there, and I’d feel better if you had back up.”

It’s my turn to narrow my eyes, making Alaric and Ryan chuckle as D raises his hands.

“Now, before you argue, I’m allowed to worry; I love you. I know you are perfectly capable, but it just makes me feel better.”

“Fine, I’ll let that one slide,” I grumble, and he grins like a little kid who’s just gotten away with stealing a cookie.

“Hey, guys,” Waverly says, coming down the stairs with two suitcases and Micha following with a third. I can’t help

but grin at the amount she's managed to pack in such a small amount of time.

It doesn't take long for us to say our goodbyes, and then we're finally off. Being here has been great, and it was definitely the break I needed, but I can't wait to get home.

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Chapter Eight

It didn't take Micha and Waverly very long to settle in at all, we've only been back a few days, and it's like they've always been here. I love it. We each have more than enough space but still spend most of our time together. They're easy to live with, especially since this isn't a new arrangement for us. I practically lived with Waverly and, by association, Micha for all the school breaks that we had when we were growing up. The guys haven't turned up at my door yet, so they obviously don't know I'm back yet. But, of course, they didn't know where I lived to begin with, so that might be why too. As soon as we got back, I messaged my mom and got the usual one-word reply. I was right before; she had no idea that I'd left. I don't know why I bother, really, but it makes me feel better. It used to make me sad when she showed so little care and attention to me, but after years of her behaviour, I realised that there was nothing I could do to make her behave any differently. Some people just shouldn't have children, and she's one of them.

I've had to stop myself several times from looking up the guy's social media accounts or answering their calls or text messages. For some reason, now that I'm home and they're closer, it's a hell of a lot harder.

I fucking miss them.

I spent months spending almost every single day with them, they wormed their way under my skin, and I'm fucking miserable without them. Why did they have to fuck it up? I don't fucking understand, and that's what's really pissing me off. If I had done something wrong, I would've been able to move on easily. Hell, even if they had been entirely committed to their torment of me and not hesitant like they seemed to be at times, I would've found it easier to forget them, but they weren't, and because of that, I'm struggling, and I want to know why they suddenly turned on me.

Waverly can read me like a fucking book and knows that I'm close to losing my shit, so she offered to go down to the underground fight ring tonight with Micha and check it out for me. If the guys aren't there, then I'm going. I need the fucking release. As I wait for the text from Waverly to say if I can go, I am bouncing on the balls of my feet. I'm dressed in stretchy jeans and a tight tank that won't flash anyone while I fight.

Finally, my phone vibrates in my hand.

Waverly: They're not here. I've already put you in the next fight. It took a hefty persuasion of the money kind. You're up against the reigning champion who hasn't been beaten in the last twenty fights he's had. He should give you the fight you need.

Excitement thrums through my veins as I rush through the house, grabbing the keys to one of the muscle cars on the way. I'm so amped up that I don't even remember the drive to the warehouse, which probably isn't a good thing. When I arrive, the place is packed, and I push my way through the crowds. I recognise a few faces from school, and I know I will have to be out of here quickly afterwards because as soon as they recognise me, I have no doubt that the Kings will be informed.

"Jynx!" I hear Waverly calling, and she rushes over to me. "You've got ten minutes before your fight. Changing rooms are back there. They want all fighters to wait back there regardless of whether or not they're changing."

"Got it, thanks, Waves, I owe you."

"I'm going to cash that in later. Now go."

If she's already got a favour in mind, that can only mean trouble for me. I push it from my mind as I make my way to the changing area that's being guarded by a big ass motherfucker; he stares down at me with a smirk.

"I'm sorry, lass, but I can't let girlfriends back there before the fight."

"I'm Jynx."

His eyes widen, "Holy fuck, do you know who you're up against? You should cut your losses and get out of here."

“If I were you,” I purr a dangerous edge to my voice that has him looking at me differently, “I would put money on me.”

“Well, I like your confidence.” He mutters, moving to the side and letting me in.

I smirk as I walk past him and into the back room. Several of the guys turn to me, and all sound stops as I enter. Here we fucking go. I’m actually pretty disappointed that there aren’t any women fighters back here.

“Jynx?” One of them asks as he and three more approach me.

A wide grin crosses my face, “Rico, fucking hell man, what are you doing here?” I greet him warmly.

“Hopefully not fighting against you.” Rocky grins.

“Nope, I’m up against the reigning champ,” I smirk.

“Poor fucker.” Drew replies with a wince.

“I’m going to enjoy watching this one. He’s a cocky little fucker.” Tommy growls.

“Awesome, I need a good fight,” I smirk, and the boys wince as one this time.

All the guys work for D in various areas, and are all friends, have been since they were kids. They know my reputation and how ruthless I can be; they’re good guys. I knew that they were based somewhere around here, but I had no idea that they were so close.

“I had no idea you guys were up this way,” I say as I bounce on the balls of my feet. This has to be the longest ten minutes ever.

“Yeah, we go to the college,” Rico mutters, watching me closely. “Have the rules been explained to you?”

“Nope.”

“You can’t kill anyone.” Rico starts, and one of the guys, not doing a good job of pretending they aren’t listening to the conversation, scoffs. I roll my eyes. “Anything else goes.”

“Okay sweet, no killing. I can handle that.”

“Are you sure? You seem a bit wired.” Tommy points out.

“Yeah, I’m sure.” I grin.

I hear my name being announced, and I instantly become laser focused, my twitchy restlessness calming until I’m still an icy mask falling over my face.

“Fuck, I hate it when you do that.” Rocky shudders.

I shrug. “Can one of you grab my phone?”

“Sure.” Tommy grins, taking it off me and putting it in his pocket.

I walk back out into the arena, the guys following me and the crowd falling silent when they see me, I climb into the ring, and the ref looks at me in question.

“Jynx,” I say simply, studying the guy I’m up against, keeping my body loose and ready to move at a second’s notice.

“Well, it’s too late to back out now.” I hear the ref mutter quietly.

The guy I’m up against is six foot four and built like a fucking fighter, he’s got a shaved head with tattoos weaving across it and down his neck, chest and I’m presuming his back. He sneers as he studies me in return, his eyes like death.

“I would question why I should fight a little girl, but I’ve never been one to turn down easy money,” he taunts, and I just stare. “Don’t worry, little girl; I’ll take it easy on you.”

I let a dark grin take over my features. “I make no such promises.”

His expression becomes calculating as he studies me closer.

“In the ring, we have the undefeated Champion!” The ref starts, making the crowd roar, and I realise that the fucker actually called himself champion. “And Jynx. First to be knocked out or taps out, loses.”

I get laughter; we’ll see how long that lasts.

Champ immediately lunges for me, trying to get a hold of me to take me to the floor. If he does that, I'll be hard-pressed to get out of it. He's so much fucking bigger than me. Usually, I'd take him down quickly, but I've been craving this fight for a long time, and I want to play. I dodge his grasp easily, landing a punch to his kidneys as I spin out of the way. Once behind him, I lift my boot and strike him in the back, making him stumble once again as the crowd falls silent.

I know he has to be an excellent fighter to get through twenty fights and be undefeated, but clearly, fighting against a woman is his limit because he's already lost his cool. He swings for me in quick succession, and on the very last hit, I let it through instead of blocking it. I like pain; what can I say? I'm fucked up. His fist connects with my lip, splitting it open and instantly, blood starts dripping down my chin. He looks smug for a moment until he catches my grin, and his face switches to recognition. I think he may have just clicked what kind of fighter I am.

As he comes towards me again, there is a slight hesitation in his movements. I take a running leap, using the small spring in the floor to help launch me as I jump and land a punishing hit on his jaw. He crashes to the floor, struggling to get up for a second, dazed from my blow. Blood trickles down the side of his face from his split eyebrow. Rage once again overtakes any other emotion, the hungry look in his eyes raising red flags. He comes at me again in a flurry of kicks and punches, landing a kick on my thigh that's going to bruise like a mother fucker and threatens to give me a dead leg.

Playtime's over. I need to end this now. I've fought with bullet wounds and still come out on top. This leg is nothing. I run at him, slightly slower than usual and dodge his fist at the last minute. I then grab his arm, pulling it behind him and using the leverage and his forward momentum to yank his shoulder out of joint as I place my boot in his back and force him to the floor. I then pull his arm up further, making him bellow in pain as I snap his elbow and dig my knee into his kidneys. Still keeping him immobile beneath me, I aim a direct hit to his temple, knocking him out cold.

I stand up, sweat dripping down between my boobs, mixing with blood from my lip. The crowd stares at me in shock before roars erupt from them, along with some pretty pissed off faces as people start to realise they just lost money.

“And we have a new champion!” The ref roars, making the crowd go wild.

I smirk, the movement pulling at the split on my lip and grounding me. Looking out in the crowd, I see a couple of the guys from school tapping away on their phone screens, and I know it’s time for me to make a hasty retreat. Someone rushes past me to check on the fallen champion as I leave the ring. I didn’t kill him. I know how hard to hit someone to knock them out and how hard I’d need to hit to kill him. The guys greet me with massive grins on their faces.

“You look a hell of a lot more relaxed now.” Tommy grins, handing me my phone.

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen someone look as happy as you do after a fight.” Rocky smirks, shaking his head.

“Fighting is my happy place. Is there a back way out of this place?” I ask, and they eye me curiously.

“Sure, follow us,” Drew says, leading me back towards the changing rooms.

“Any reason why you need a back way out?” Rico asks.

“I just have a feeling that some people I’m trying to avoid are going to show up,” I smirk.

“Got you.”

I tap out a quick message to Waverly and Micha, telling them I’m going out the back and I’ll meet them at home. The guys lead me quickly through the back hallways and out a door that brings us to the side of the building, the parking lot in view.

“Thanks, guys,” I say, giving them each a hug. “We need to catch up soon.”

“Absolutely. Let us know if you need any backup on any jobs.” Rocky replies.

“I will.”

As I start the walk across the lot to my car, a familiar one pulls in. How the fuck did the guys get here so fast? Keeping my head down and hoping they don't notice me; I quicken my steps to my car. I'm not wearing the things they're used to seeing me in, so I'm hoping that will give me more of a chance to get away, but if those guys from school took any video evidence of my fight, then they'd know what I'm wearing, and my effort will have been for nothing.

I'm still riding my high from the fight. I don't want it to be ruined by fucking drama, and recently that's all those guys have brought to my life.

“Jynx!” I hear Rome call out, my hand on the door to my car. I hesitate. I'm going to need backup to handle this one.

Even his voice sent a spear of longing through me. I look over my shoulder to where Rico and the boys are still watching, he raises his eyebrow in question, and I nod—motioning for no killing, the sign that all of the people who work for D are taught in case speaking is impossible.

They move swiftly across the lot and towards the guys intercepting them. I jump in my car, starting it up and peeling out of the lot without a backwards glance. I know I'm going to have to face them soon, and I will, but I'm still hurt, and I'm angry as fuck. My stances on the situation are starting to change from ignoring them forever to warming to the idea of hearing them out, but I'm not there yet.

Once I get home, the adrenalin from the fight is starting to wear off, and my leg is fucking killing me. I hobble through the door from the garage and into the kitchen, almost running straight into Gerald, despite the late hour.

“Good evening, miss.” He greets me with a twinkle in his eye.

“Good evening, Gerald. Shouldn't you be at home by now?”

“I had a feeling you might be needing these.” He replies, handing me some cotton pads, antiseptic cleaning fluid and butterfly bandages. “I'll be off now.”

I stare after him, confused. How the fuck did he know that I was going to need the stuff to patch myself up. I shrug it off and put it down to Gerald and his all-knowing wisdom. Sitting down at the large table set up in the kitchen, which I can honestly say I have never used before, I pull out my phone to use the camera to see the damage.

I wince when I see the blood crusted on my chin, smeared up the side of my face and covering my neck and chest. He must've caught me better than I thought. That's a lot of blood. I get up and get a wet washcloth to clean the worst of it off, grabbing a can of coke as I go so I can prop my phone up. Once I've started cleaning, it occurs to me that Gerald saw me like this and didn't bat a fucking eyelid. Anyone normal would've. I make a note to ask him about it when I see him next, there are just too many things about him that seem not to add up. Yet, I don't get a bad feeling from him. A yawn tries to overtake me, and I suppress it. It's nearly three in the morning, and I'm starting to feel it now.

"Feel better?" Waverly asks, coming through the kitchen door, Micha close behind her.

"I will never get tired of watching you fight." Micha grins, grabbing himself a beer from the fridge.

"Yeah, I feel loads better. I had a close call with the guys in the parking lot, though. There were a few kids from school there, and someone obviously messaged them. I should have realised that could happen, but I needed the fight, and I don't think it would've stopped me. Rico and his boys intervened."

"Rico? I didn't know they were out here!" Waverly grins.

"Yeah, they go to college close by or something. So I said we'd catch up." I mutter, prodding the cut on my lip and then wincing. It'll heal reasonably quickly.

"Speaking of run ins with the guys, you know you said you owe me one?" She starts, and my gaze moves away from my reflection to her as I narrow my eyes. Her innocent expression just means trouble.

"Yeah?" I say slowly.

“Well, we got talking to some people at the fight. There’s a party tomorrow night, and I want to go.”

“Okay,” I reply, knowing where this is heading but wanting her to say it anyway.

“You’re coming.” She adds, “I’m cashing in that favour.”

“Seriously, of all the things that you could use that favour for, that’s what you’re choosing?”

“Yep.” She says, crossing her arms over her chest.

“You know the guys are probably going to be there?”

“You can’t avoid them forever.” She points out and then adds, “I’ve never known you to be a coward, Jynx.”

I narrow my eyes, “I know what you’re doing.”

“It’s working, though, isn’t it?” She grins smugly.

Micha’s eyes are amused as he watches it all play out in front of him. He learnt a long time ago not to get involved when we have conversations like this.

“Yes, it is.” I admit, picking up my phone and standing, “Fine, I’ll go. Any blood that’s spilled is on you, though.” I grin.

“Deal.” She smiles, and I shake my head, amused in spite of myself.

“I’m going to bed. If we’re going to a party tomorrow night, I plan to sleep for as long as possible. Plus, that fucker got me fucking good. My leg is killing me.”

“Alright, I’ll wake you when it’s time to get ready.” Waverly grins, still smug that she so easily got me to agree to the party.

I nod my agreement and make my way up the billions of stairs.

On the journey, and it is a journey since it takes me so fucking long, I admit to myself that the only reason that she managed to convince me so quickly is that I want to run into

them. I don't know how I'm going to handle it, but I want to see them.

When I finally make it upstairs, I really want to just crash into bed, but I have dried sweat coating me, and there's still blood in my cleavage that I didn't manage to get with the washcloth. So I strip on my way to the bathroom, leaving a trail of clothes behind me. As soon as the hot water cascades over me, I'm glad that I didn't just crash. The hot water instantly relaxes my muscles. I check out my thigh. A large bruise is already forming that will look spectacular by tomorrow and spans most of my thigh. Fabulous.

As much as I want to stay in the shower, I start swaying on my feet with exhaustion and decide it's probably better to cut the shower short. I don't bother with any clothes as I quickly dry off and make my way through my room, turning the lights off and then crawling under my covers. I'm asleep before my head even touches the pillow.

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Chapter Nine

“Jynx, we’ve got to get ready!” Waverly sings as she slams her way into my room.

I groan and bury my head under my pillow. “Fuck off.”

She chuckles, “I brought you coffee in the biggest cup I could find.”

I pop my head out from underneath the covers, ignoring her smug face. Sitting up, I make sure that the covers are still over me before making grabby hands at the coffee, my eyes still half-closed. She sits on the end of my bed and waits until the coffee kicks in before she tries to make any conversation.

“I can’t believe you’re making me do this.” I grumble after a few minutes and then properly look at her, “Wait, you’re already dressed to go. How long do we have?”

“About fifteen minutes, and don’t for one second think that I don’t know that you secretly want to go.”

“I kind of hate that you know me so well,” I mutter, throwing the covers off and walking towards my dresser. Waverly’s seen me naked thousands of times; she doesn’t even bat a fucking eyelid, although I do see her eyes catching on my new scars, the ones I got from the incident.

I push the memories away, not today fuckers. I’m here. I’m safe, and I will murder any of them if I find them again.

Mark my words, I am going to fucking find them.

I pull out some leather pants and a dark red tank top. I’ll pair it with my bike boots and leather jacket. I feel like riding my bike tonight, just in case I need a quick getaway. I pull on some underwear and my clothes as Wave’s sits on my bed, messing with her phone. My hair and makeup take minutes. Finally, I strap on a couple of knives, deciding to forgo strapping on my holster for my guns and leave them at home. I’m just as deadly with my blades.

“Let’s go.” I grin.

Waverly tries to argue with me when I say I’m taking my bike but backs down when I explain why. She knows it’s dangerous for me to feel cornered or like I don’t have a getaway. The incident may have done some fucking damage to me, but I left behind a few bodies of my own.

Feeling trapped makes me trigger happy.

I follow them to the party, parking around the corner so I won’t get blocked in by anyone else. By the time we get there, it’s in full swing, and the majority of attendees I recognise are from school. Well, this is going to be fun. They’re used to the meek and mild version of me, the person that I seriously hope I don’t have ever to be again. Eyes follow us as we walk through the party, but none of them flashes with recognition, and I start to hope that maybe I can get through this party without any drama. I mean, I really do look a lot different. My tattoos are all on show, my hair is bright blue, and my entire demeanour is different.

“Have fun, come on, you need it, Jynx.” Waverly orders, shoving a drink in my hand before grabbing Micha and pulling him out onto the makeshift dance floor.

“Jynx?” Someone asks from behind me, and I sigh. Great, so much for flying under the radar. Thanks, Waverly.

I turn around, a brittle smile on my face and ignoring the guy’s shocked look. I push past him making my way out onto the back porch. There are just as many people out here, but since there’s limited lighting out here, I figure I might be able to hide in plain sight. My eyes scan the crowd searching for the guys. They aren’t here, and I’m not quite sure how I feel about that. I swallow my feelings with a large gulp of beer, wishing it was something more substantial or, better yet, I had a joint.

I’ve been successfully hiding in the shadows for the past half an hour when people start noticing me and whispering. I guess the guy inside has spread the word. Sighing heavily, I decide to weave my way through the crowd and down the side of the house to the front.

I step foot onto the front lawn, where the party is in full swing. It's a damn good job that the closest neighbours are a mile away, or the cops would've definitely been called by now. Stepping over a passed out guy on the floor, I only make it a couple more feet onto the lawn when Tegan steps into my path, flanked by her girls. Her nose looks perfectly straight again, and instead of commenting, I cross my arms over my chest and wait for the shit that's about to erupt from her fucking mouth.

"Hi, Trash princess," she sneers, and I roll my eyes. "I'm surprised you've shown your face again. I thought the Kings made it perfectly clear that you and your poor as fuck self was not welcome back at the school."

I just stand there and stare at her, hoping that she'll get bored and fuck off.

"Oh, did the little poor girl lose her voice?" She sniggers the idiots beside her laughing along.

"How's your nose?" I smirk.

She splutters, shocked that I dare talk back to her. It's hard to remember that although I've spent the entire break as myself, these fuckers know me as someone else entirely.

"You stupid whore, just because you change your clothes doesn't mean that anyone will fucking like you, you're pathetic..."

She carries on ranting, and I tune her out as a beat-up grey truck pulls up outside the house. I narrow my eyes. I swear I saw that truck in the parking lot of the warehouse last night. My suspicions are proven correct when Champ gets out of the front looking pissed as fuck.

Shit, really? He wants to do this right now? Surrounded by fucking people that go to my school. Talk about introducing them to the real me via a baptism of fucking fire. I shove past Tegan, making her screech like a fucking banshee as she falls to the floor dramatically thanks to her stupidly high heels. Her screeching draws a crowd, and I spot a familiar set of eyes watching me from one of the windows.

Well, triple fuck, it looks like the guys arrived while I was out the back. I can't deal with that right now. I paste my signature smirk on my face as I stride towards Champ.

“Jynx!” He bellows, “Where the fuck are you, you cunt!”

Wow, that's just rude, and now everyone is staring at me.

A quick glance back shows the guys pushing out onto the porch, concern and anger painting their features as they hear what the idiot screams at me. I ignore them for now and turn back to face Champ. When he sees me, his hate is apparent, and I sigh.

“You owe me bitch!” He spits at me.

I roll my eyes, “I don't owe you fucking shit, Champ, and you fucking know it.” I purr. “So, why don't you turn your pretty ass around and crawl back to where you came from before I do something you're really not going to like? There are even fewer rules out here.” I smirk.

As predicted, he doesn't take my suggestion kindly and instead roars in anger before charging me.

“Jynx!” One of the kings yells, panic in his tone, and I roll my eyes. I'll deal with them in a minute.

I see them all start to move towards me, ready to intervene. I don't fucking think so. They don't get to have the fun this time. I run towards Champ, momentarily startling him as I use his size to run up him. My legs go around his head, and I drop backwards, flipping him underneath me, so I land on top of him. Before he can recover, I jump up, kicking him hard in the side and making him rollover. I waste no time securing his arm behind his back, his broken arm crushed between himself and the floor. My knee presses down into the middle of his back, making him hiss in pain as it pushes his damaged arm into the hard ground beneath him.

I hold my knife to his throat, forcing him to lift his head at an awkward angle to avoid getting cut. I press a little harder, drawing blood, and he starts to struggle beneath me, making my knife dig into his neck deeper.

“Ah, ah, ah,” I tut, “I wouldn’t do that if I were you.” He stills beneath me. “There’s a good boy. You know you fucked some shit up for me tonight? I won not once but twice. So take the fucking defeat and crawl away. I’m sure you’ve heard enough about me by now to know that I am not afraid to use this knife in creative ways,” he shudders beneath me, and I grin savagely, “I’m going to get up now, and you are going to walk back to your truck. One false move and I’ll fucking gut you; witnesses be fucking damned. Got it?”

He nods frantically, and I feel his throat bob against the edge of my knife as he swallows thickly. I slowly get off him, standing back and idly spinning my knife in my hand. He turns to face me as he stumbles back towards his truck, and I get a grim sense of satisfaction go through me when I see that I scared him enough to make him piss himself.

My grin turns savage as I watch him.

When he reaches his truck, he hesitates, and I know that he’s not going to be able to stop himself from giving me a parting shot.

“Psycho bitch.”

Before anyone can comprehend what’s happening, I lift my arm and launch my knife towards the idiot, I warned him. It strikes true, scoring a deep cut in his ear as it flies past and imbeds itself into the side of the truck. He shrieks in terror and pain, pulling open his door and scrambling to get inside.

“Learn to keep that fucking mouth of yours shut. Next time it might be wise to listen when you’re warned, you stupid cunt.”

He glances at me in terror, blood pouring down the side of his face, his truck veering as he pulls down the road, making me chuckle. I don’t think I will ever tire of scaring someone that much.

His psycho bitch comment wasn’t strictly untrue.

I turn around, a broad grin on my face, as I temporarily forget where I am. I’m met by shocked stares, and pale faces as all the party-goers watch me.

My smile falls, “Shit.”

I glance towards where I last saw the King’s to find them all paused in their forward momentum and staring at me with savage grins and heated eyes. It’s hot as fuck, but I’m guessing that the shock of what they just witnessed me do is going to wear off any second now, and then they’re going to be on me quicker than I could escape. As I watch, their eyes dip to my split lip, and brutal anger crosses their features. Okay, time to go. I take a bow for everyone still watching me because I can and make Micha and Waverly shake their heads in amusement from the front porch. They are the only two people who look amused instead of scared shitless. I turn on my heel and quickly make my way back down the street towards my bike, hearing one of the King’s call after me. I carry on walking but glance over my shoulder, grinning when I see that Tegan has intercepted them. Maybe she has a use after all. All of their eyes are still on me, though, as they try to get past the group of girls.

Because I’m a bitch I blow them all a kiss just before I round the corner. I swear I hear one of them growl. I swing my leg over my bike, put my helmet on and pull away from the curb. As I drive past the party, I can’t help but wave at the guys as they finally break away from the group of girls.

I take a leisurely ride home, just enjoying being on my bike as I drive without a real destination in mind. I know I’ll end up at home eventually, but I’m just cruising, for now, enjoying the freedom I always feel when riding my bike.

My phone rings, and it comes through the speaker in my helmet. I answer it immediately, even if it is one of the guys calling me I could do with the entertainment.

“Hey Kid,” D’s voice comes over the phone, and I suppress the slither of disappointment that it’s not one of the guys.

“Hey D, what’s up?” I ask. It’s late. I know for a fact he’s not called just for a chat.

“I’ve got some newbies up your way. Richie was supposed to be showing them the ropes, but I’ve just got word that he’s been messing with them. These guys could be amazing once

we have shown them how we work. They are already extremely well trained. I don't want anything to mess it up. I'd much rather they were with us than against us. Can you go have a word with Richie?"

"My pleasure." I grin.

"Thought you might say that. Speak soon." He says, a smile in his voice as he hangs up.

After getting my bearings, I make the short drive to the club. I sit for a second and watch all of the people lined up outside waiting to get into the prestigious club that they have no idea is owned by a pretty ruthless criminal. I swing my leg off, placing my helmet on my bike and then stride towards the doors, forgoing the line altogether. These fuckers know me.

"Koroleva, you shouldn't be here. It's not safe." Rome says from behind me, and I spin on my heel.

"Fuck me, you followed me?" I growl, much to their shock, "Are you fucking dumb?"

It's too late to do anything about it now, though, as Mark and Tony push past the bouncer at the door and Rome moves in front of me.

"Follow us," Tony says.

The guys surround me, each one of them tense as fuck, and it makes me wonder what they know about this place. Rome still walks in front of me and won't budge when I try to get him to move, so I give up for a second. Even when we get to Richie's office, he doesn't move, obviously trying to shield me from him. I roll my eyes.

"Boys, what are you doing here? Come to play again, already?" He asks, and several pieces fall into place.

Son of a bitch, the guys are D's new team. You have got to be fucking kidding me.

"I'm sure we can find a toilet that needs cleaning, or was it something else you wanted to do? Was your first round in Hell not enough?"

He put them in Hell. That fight club is two fucking hours away and has no rules, meaning death happens regularly there, and the fighters have nothing to fucking lose. I've heard enough. I push past Rome, surprising him and the others as they all make a grab for me. As soon as Richie sees me, he stands up from behind his overtly large desk so fucking fast I think he's probably given himself a head rush.

"Jynx, what are you doing here?" He asks, the harsh voice he was using to intimidate the guys before fading into something meeker as the guards all put their hands on their weapons.

The guys look between us, confused and tense even further, when they notice the guards. I stand there calmly, raising my eyebrow.

"Stand down," I order the guards, ignoring the sharp intake of breath from one of the guys as they do as they're told. "I'm not here to kill him yet," I add just to fuck with Richie.

"I-I er," he stutters, and I feel the guys stares boring into my back.

"A mutual friend sent me to make sure that you weren't fucking around with the newbies. Clearly, you are. Maybe I should suggest that you do a round in hell?"

He pales as he gulps nervously. We both know that he won't last a round in Hell. "That won't be necessary. It won't happen again, Jynx. I wasn't aware that you were in town."

"That shouldn't make a difference, Richie. Make sure it doesn't happen again. You know what will happen if it does." I say, trying to keep the threat vague as I grin viciously. I think the guys have found out enough about me for tonight—more than I wanted them to know.

"Absolutely." He gulps nervously before his attention falls back to the guys, "My apologies."

I see Rome nod his head once in acknowledgement. Satisfied that I've done my job, I turn on my heel, pushing my way back through the guys and whistling a happy tune as we make our way back through the club and out the door into the

parking lot. The guys follow me in silence, right up until I get to my bike. They surround it, making it so that I can't even get on it, let alone leave.

I pause for a second, waiting for the panic to overtake me, but surprisingly it doesn't come. Huh, even my traitorous panic attacks feel safe enough around them not to make an appearance, even though this is the exact situation that would typically trigger them.

Fuck.

“Hold on a fucking second. How do you know Richie?” Rip asks, usually, a man of few words and even fewer expressions; his blue eyes are narrowed on me, the manic gleam that is typically prominent in them more subdued.

I cross my arms over my chest, about to ask him the same fucking thing, although I already know the answer when Rome interrupts me.

“Why the fuck did he listen to you?” He growls, confusion colouring his features.

“He's a dangerous mother fucker, Jynx, and he acted like he was scared of you,” Mason mutters.

“How do you know what Hell is? What the fuck is going on?” Malachi asks.

“Fuck all of this for a moment. What the fuck happened to your lip?” Ace asks. Then, when I just stare at him with my arms crossed over my chest, he tries again, “Please let us explain what happened?” He adds, and just like that, any amusement I was feeling disappears, and my grin drops off my face.

“You fucking idiot.” Rip growls.

Chapter Ten

“Please, Jynx?” Rip asks, and his question spears me. Again with the please, he knows what he’s doing, but I also sense that he’s being serious, not trying to manipulate me. However, I’m still fucking mad at them, and I don’t want to end up saying something that I can’t come back from, that our friendship can’t come back from because let’s face it, I will talk to them again, I miss them too much not to.

“No,” I reply.

“It wasn’t even that bad,” Rome mutters, and Ace smacks him, all of them glaring at him.

“Not that fucking bad!?” I ask, my voice cold, “I’ll admit all the petty shit I could handle. It was more amusing and pissed me off more than anything. But thanks to that fucking picture that you posted, saying I was no longer a virgin,” I scoff, as the guys, all look at me, regret covering the features, “Which, let’s face it, I’m the furthest thing from a fucking virgin.”

They growl, and I glare at them. They don’t get to be all fucking possessive of me right now.

“Do you realise what sort of trouble that caused me?” I ask, and they all look at me blankly. They really have no fucking idea, “Because of that picture, I had disgusting fuckers proposition me every five minutes, doesn’t sound that bad, right? Wrong, Richard didn’t know how to take no for a fucking answer. If I had been any other girl, he would’ve fucking got a lot further than he did. So don’t you dare fucking say that it wasn’t that fucking bad.”

“Fuck,” Rome growls, devastation coating his features. He reaches for me and pulls me into his arms. I struggle for a second before completely melting into him, and he lets out a shuddering breath.

I feel the guys surround me, laying their giant palms on me and offering comfort. Being in Rome’s arms, surrounded by

the other guys, feels like home, and that's the fucking problem. I have never truly felt like I had a home like I belonged until I met them, and then they turned on me. I push out of their arms, swinging my leg over my bike and feeling far too vulnerable.

"Jynx?" Rip asks.

"You guys really hurt me. I don't trust easily, but I trusted you, and it bit me in the fucking ass. I just need some space, please?" I ask, my voice small. He studies me, his gaze sharp, and then he nods.

"Fuck that," Mason growls, stepping towards me as I start my bike.

Rip puts a hand on his chest, holding him back. "Let her go, man."

All the guys' gazes switch between Rip and me, indecision on their faces. Finally, I decide to make it easy for them, I peel out of the parking lot and race home, being extra vigilant that no one has tried to follow me this time. I'm usually a lot better at keeping my eye on my surroundings, but what happened at the party and, more specifically, seeing the guys messed with my head enough that it threw me off my game, and that's worrying. I can't afford to be off my game. It's too fucking dangerous.

My heart hurts, and I hate myself for getting so attached to them. I don't get attached to anyone except D, Maria, Waverly, and Micha. They are the only exceptions, and even then, it took me a while to let Waverly in and even longer to let Micha in.

I hate that hugging Rome felt like coming home, and I hate them for fucking it all up. When I finally get back to the house, I storm up the steps, slamming the front door behind me. Waverly and Micha won't be back yet; it's too early, and they are no doubt enjoying the drama that I caused at the party and most likely adding to it if I know Waverly. I'm mad, sad and feel like eating my feelings, so I stomp my way to the kitchen, my mind going a mile a minute now that it's had the chance to catch up on the events of the evening. I can't

fucking believe that they're working for D. I wonder how long that's been going on? Actually, I'm not sure I want to know right now; I just want to have a joint, eat my weight in snacks and then fall asleep. But it's fucking Monday tomorrow, and I'm going to face them again sooner than I'd like. I wasn't lying to Rip before, I do need space, but I think it's fairly inevitable that I'll end up talking to them again.

Of course, that could bring up a whole new set of issues now that I'm me and not the wallflower I was pretending to be. I wanted to jump their bones then. Now nothing is holding me back, or at least there won't be if we sort our shit out.

"You're back early, miss." Gerald greets me, making me jump as I stomp into the kitchen.

"Gerald, man, you have really got to stop doing that," I grumble, and he grins at me.

"Now, what would be the fun in that?"

That reminds me, I have a question for him, "I looked like a horror show when I came in last night. Why didn't it freak you out?"

His eyes twinkle, "Your grandmother used to walk through the door in much worse conditions than you did last night."

"Oh," I mutter and then his words register, "Wait, what?"

He just smirks, "Your grandmother was a fascinating woman. I think you'd be surprised at how much you had in common with her."

"What do you mean?" I ask, my curiosity piqued. I've started to guess that my grandmother wasn't the average old lady. You know one that knits, wears old lady cardigans and pearls and has her hair in that traditional old lady haircut that they all seem to have. I mean, logically, I know that she must've been in her fifties, maybe sixties, so she wasn't even that old, but I have never had grandparents, so when someone says grandmother to me, that's what I picture. However, I'm starting to think that my grandmother was nothing like I initially thought. Just look at her cars. They're definitely not the cars I'd associate with a grandmother. It occurs to me that

I've been a bit judgemental in putting her into a specific box just because she's a grandmother, but really, I was given no other information at all, so I just drew my conclusions from what would be considered normal. It's becoming clear that there's so much more to her than I first thought.

After all, what do I really know about her?

Fuck all. I don't even know what she looks like, and I've tried to find pictures of her. There are none in the house and none online, which I find suspicious. The whole town knew who she was, so there has to be one somewhere unless someone has deliberately removed the pictures from the internet, which isn't a simple thing to do.

"Not yet," he replies, and I frown. "You have school tomorrow. Shouldn't you be getting to bed?"

I study him, "You're not going to tell me anything more right now, no matter how much I ask, are you?"

He grins, turning on his heel and heading out of the door.

"I'm going to take that as a no," I mutter to myself.

I grab as much food as I can carry, make my way up to my room and dump it all on my bed. Kicking off my shoes, I pull open the top drawer in my bedside table and pull out a pre-rolled joint. Grabbing a lighter, I make my way through my bathroom and out onto my balcony, lighting up, taking and taking a drag, breathing a sigh of relief before I pull out my phone. I have a text from Waverly telling me not to wait up, and she hopes I'm okay, and I send a quick reply. A message from Rip pops up, and I hesitate before clicking on it.

Rip: We'll give you space for now, but I won't be able to hold them off for long. We need to explain what happened. We know we fucked up. Sweet dreams, Hellcat.

My heart skips at his nickname for me. My fingers hover over the keyboard to type out a reply, but I sigh instead. There's no point. I finish my joint, make a decent dent in the food I brought up and then fall asleep.

“That looks good on you,” I compliment Waverly as she pulls at her skirt and scowls in the front seat of my car.

“Fuck you. I am not a fan, although you look fucking good.” She says to Micha as she turns and studies him in the backseat.

He grins, his smile smug and his eyes heated.

“You’re not hiding anymore, are you?” Waverly asks, checking for probably the fifth time since we got in the car.

“No, I’m not,” I reply, pulling into a parking spot outside the school. “Unless it’s for a job, I don’t think I will ever conceal who I am again.”

“Good,” she replies with a broad smile, “I hated it.”

All eyes are on my car, and I ignore the shocked looks as we make our way through the front doors. We stop at Waverly and Micha’s locker. It’s sheer luck that they managed to get ones next to each other.

“Wow, this school is something else,” Micha mutters.

“You haven’t seen anything yet,” I reply, my eyes scanning the hallway and landing on the guys. They’re all watching me closely but make no move to approach.

Reluctantly, I drag my eyes away from them as we start walking down the hall. Before we get even a few steps, Tegan approaches us, her face in a dark scowl. She looks over to the guys and grins as she adds extra sway in her step before she reaches me. Unfortunately for her, I’m not in the mood to play her petty little games today.

“Oh look, the trash princess has brought some trash friends along with her.” She sneers.

I grab her by the throat and slam her up against the locker. Her hands grip mine as her eyes bulge, becoming panicked, her little friends screeching and one of them crying.

Fucking pathetic.

“Not today, sweetheart,” I snarl, “I’m feeling stabby.”

I abruptly release her, making her fall to the floor, gasping for air dramatically. I step over her and try to ignore the grins on the guy's faces. But my eyes catch on them, refusing to move. They fill out the uniform so fucking well. Because I'm watching them so closely, I see the moment that their expressions turn from amused to violent. I follow their gaze down the hallway to Richard. As one, they all push away from their lockers, striding in Richard's direction. He's completely unaware of their approach as he carries on messing around with his friends. I change direction, wondering what the Kings are up to.

"I'll catch up with you guys later," I say distractedly to Waverly and Micha as I follow them down the hall.

Rip grabs Richard by his throat, dragging him down the hallway and into the stairwell. If that isn't poetic justice, I don't fucking know what is. I jog to catch up, quietly pushing through the doors and then leaning back against the wall to watch it all unfold.

"Hey, guys, what's up?" Richard asks, his eyes darting over all of them.

"We heard what you tried to do to Jynx," Mason growls, the muscles of his back tensing.

Richard, the absolute fucking idiot, breathes out a sigh of relief, "Oh that, you're welcome. I can try again if you want me ..."

He doesn't get further. Rip's arm snaps out, punching him in the jaw, and I hear something crack. I wince. Malachi growls, grabbing his arm as he tries to strike out at Rip and snapping it with an ease that surprises me.

"If you ever lay a finger on her again, I'm going to take all of your fucking fingers, one by one, and then I'm going to bury you somewhere no one can fucking find you." Ace growls.

Mason and Rome grab Richard, holding him upright as Ace grabs his hand. He slowly pushes his middle finger back until it snaps, and Richard screams in pain before passing out. The

dude has a really low pain tolerance. They unceremoniously drop him to the floor, making me smirk.

“That was hot.”

The guy’s heads snap towards me, and I realise that I said that out loud. Whoops. I push off the wall; they look at me worriedly.

“Don’t panic. You weren’t supposed to see that,” Ace starts, obviously thinking that what they’ve just done will scare me.

“Wait, what did you just say?” Malachi asks, eyes wide and sharing a look with his brother.

“I said that it was hot,” I mutter as I make my way back out the stairwell doors. The hallways are practically empty now, with everyone already in class.

The guys follow me out of the stairwell. Mason reaches me first and gently grabs my hand, making me stop.

“Jynx, please. Let us explain? Or at least tell us what the fuck is going on with you. You’re like an entirely different person.” He pleads, the others behind him, watching with arms crossed.

“I don’t owe you any explanation, Mason.”

His eyes widen, realising I got his name right, and he looks over his shoulder and shares a look with Malachi as both their eyes turn back to me, heat flaring in their green depths.

“No, you don’t.” Rome agrees, surprising me, “But I think that after everything that we’ve gone through, you could give us that much.”

Rip shakes his head, instantly recognising what a stupid thing that was to say, and Ace actually smacks his forehead with his hand.

“I’m not the one that fucking ruined that!” I exclaim, not bothering to lower my voice. “I admit that I fucking kept things from you, but you have no idea what my reasons were behind that. Shockingly, I was actually scared to lose all you fuckers. Of course, I did anyway, so maybe I shouldn’t have fucking bothered!” I yell.

My rant is abruptly cut off as Mason's lips land on mine. It doesn't even cross my mind to reject him as I push my tongue past his lips, my hands pulling on his dark curly hair as I mould my body against his. He groans, his tongue moving with mine in a way that makes my blood sing, my pussy clench and my underwear damp. His arms wrap around me, dragging me even closer.

This kiss slowly turns from heated to slow and sensual as he pulls back, kissing my swollen lips once more. He stares down at me like he's seeing me for the first time.

"Fuck," I mutter, glancing past him to see the others, an array of emotions on their faces, all of their postures tense. Malachi's eyes are heated, as are Ace's, Rome and Rip, both look shocked, like they don't know whether to be pissed or turned on.

Pulling out of Mason's arms is one of the most difficult things I think I've ever had to do. The second is not going to Malachi and Ace and exploring their heated looks. I just manage it, rushing down the hallway. It's not until I'm further away from them that I realise my lip has split back open slightly. I hadn't even fucking noticed.

I have this horrible feeling that I just made everything so much more complicated.

Mason

I stand there, frozen to the spot, as I watch her race down the hallway and away from us. I am so fucking sick of her running away from us.

"What the fuck was that?" Rome growls, the heat still in his eyes.

"I don't fucking know," I admit honestly, running a hand through my hair. I have never been that turned on by a fucking kiss in my life. "I only meant to give her a quick peck to get her to stop talking and fucking listen to us, but she fucking took over."

“She got our names right again.” My brother mutters, his eyes still on the hallway where she’s disappeared.

It would mean a lot that she could tell us apart if we’d had a typical background but being raised how we were, with our own mother not able to tell us apart from each other, the fact that she can, hits a little differently.

“What the fuck do you think you were playing at?” Rip growls, the anger in his voice shocking me. I study him.

“Jealous that you didn’t get to do it first?” I ask, smirking when his eyes darken with heat, “Or did you want to join in? It wouldn’t be the first time that we’ve shared a girl.”

His eyes flash, the manic gleam taking over, and I realise that I’ve pushed him a little too far. He slams me up against the locker, and I make no move to defend myself. That will only enrage him more. I share a look with the others; his reaction is very telling and equally as surprising.

“Jynx is not someone who we mess around with. She is not someone that we fuck, and we leave. She deserves fucking better than that, better than fucking all of us. She may be more capable than we thought of being around the violence that we surround ourselves with, but she still deserves fucking better.” He growls.

“I know, man. I wanted to see how you felt. You never tell us how you’re feeling anymore. Clearly, you care about her as much as I fucking do.” I reply, just as fiercely.

“As much as we all do,” Rome adds.

All of the fight drains out of him, and he drops his hands, letting me go.

“It doesn’t fucking matter.” He replies, pushing through the others and heading for the doors and out of the school.

“Fucking hell, she was affecting us before, but now she’s got us on our fucking knees for her, even Rip, and she doesn’t even fucking realise.” Ace groans.

“Do you think he’s going to be okay?” Malachi asks, his eyes worried.

“Yeah, he’ll go and beat the shit out of something and be good.” Rome answers him, “You know the shit he has to deal with. We can tell him until we’re blue in the fucking face that he’s wrong, but he’d never believe it, and besides, I kind of think he’s right this time. She deserves better than all of us.”

My stomach churns at his words, I agree with him, but I don’t fucking like it.

“She’s clearly got something going that puts her on the slightly darker side, but with our issues and triggers, there’s no fucking chance that she’ll really be able to understand, and we’ll just end up hurting her.” I reluctantly say.

“There’s a reason why we choose to surround ourselves with violence and death,” Mal adds, his tone bleak.

Each of us hates it. We all care for her more than we probably should, which is why we tried to push her away in the first place, but this is just the way it’s got to be.

“It doesn’t mean that we can’t be friends with her again, though, right?” Ace asks. “I mean if she decides to listen to us and forgive us.”

“Want to ditch? I could use a joint.” I say.

“Yeah, come on. There’s no point going to class anyway.” Rome replies, turning and striding towards the same doors the Rip disappeared through.

Instead of heading to the car, we walk into the surrounding woods. As soon as we’re all settled, and the joints are lit, I can’t help but ask.

“Did anyone else think it was stupidly fucking hot when she took that guy down at the party?”

“Are you kidding?” Ace asks, a grin on his face, “It’s been playing on fucking repeat in my mind ever since.”

I chuckle.

“Mine too, man. It’s bothering me more how Richie behaved.” Malachi says, taking a toke.

“He was fucking terrified of her, and I want to know fucking why.” Mason says with a deep frown, “I have a feeling that we’re only just scratching the surface of who Jynx fucking is.”

“You know what? I think you’re right, man, and I can’t fucking wait to find out more.” I reply.

They all hum in agreement, Jynx just got even more fucking intriguing, and I didn’t think that was fucking possible.

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Chapter Eleven

Jynx

I arrive to class late, of course, and the teacher gives me the stink eye, her gaze pausing on my bright blue hair as she wrinkles her nose in disgust. I ignore her and take my seat. My mind is too full of thoughts of Mason's kiss to focus much on judgy as fuck teacher.

"As I was saying, it appears we have a new student, who should be arriving any second now since she's not already here. So I want you all to give her the warmest welcome. She's a Luther."

I snort, and the teacher glares at me.

"I don't expect you to know," she sneers, "But the Luther's are an incredibly powerful family in this town, no one thought there was someone to inherit the fortune after Ms Luther died, and we're all very excited about it."

"Yeah, so keep your trashy mouth closed, Trash Whore." One of the students mutters.

"Better yet, make her sit at the back, so Miss Luther doesn't have to lay her eyes on such filth." One of Tegan's girls mutters.

I raise my eyebrow and look at the teacher. I guess it shouldn't surprise me, but she genuinely looks like she's considering it, and I can't help but snort again. This whole thing is fucking amusing and stopping my thoughts from returning to the guys and that hot as hell kiss that Mason just gave me. It also shows that I made the right decision when I first arrived by not going by my grandmother's last name. I have a feeling if I had, my wallflower personality would've been out of the fucking window on day two.

"Something funny, Jynx?" The teacher scowls at me, crossing her arms over her chest, "If you can not behave with a

level of decorum, I will ask you to leave.”

“Not a new student,” I reply cryptically, with a grin.

She frowns, “What?”

“I’m not a new student.”

“No one said you were, you stupid girl.”

I roll my eyes and then stand up, “You just did. Let me introduce myself. Hi, I’m Jynx Luther. It’s absolutely not a pleasure to meet you all.”

The teacher pales, and her eyes go wide. She pulls out her cell and dials as the class erupts into loud chatter.

“Fuck off. There’s no way you’re the Luther heir.” Tegan’s follower hisses at me, and I just smirk, sitting back down and crossing my arms over my chest as I lean back and wait.

“We’ve all seen where you live thanks to the King’s, and it definitely wasn’t on the Luther estate.”

Huh, she actually makes an interesting point that I hadn’t thought of, should I be worried that all of the kids know where the Luther estate is? I mean, I don’t want a bunch of random kids knowing where I live. Especially these fuckers. I do have pretty fucking good security, though, with cameras that I can access whenever I want and show all of the grounds. Which is no mean feat since the place is so big. Gerald showed me how to use them when I first arrived, and I even have an app on my phone that I can use to access them. It’s very high-tech and not something I’ve used, but it’s comforting to know it’s there. They shouldn’t be able to get close without me knowing, so although I hate the idea of them knowing where I live, I guess it doesn’t really matter.

The teacher hangs up the phone and looks genuinely shaken, and the class quiets, waiting for her to ream me out for lying to her, no doubt.

“My apologies Miss Luther,” she starts, and the class almost turn as one to stare at me in shock, a good deal of fear in their eyes. In the first few months here, I’d learnt that everyone wanted to get close to the Luther’s to secure business deals

and their financial future. But, thanks to the way they've treated me, not one fucker in this school will be securing anything to do with Luther's. Not that I understand any of that but still.

It's a hard pass.

"I had no idea who you were. Please forgive my behaviour." The teacher continues, her hands shaking.

"You should've treated me with respect regardless of who you think I am." I point out, and she nods enthusiastically in agreement.

This is weird as fuck.

I nod, and she shakily starts her lesson. I think I'm the only one that actually paid attention to what she was teaching in that class. Everyone else was on their phones, undoubtedly spreading the word that I am a Luther and the only heir to the Luther estate. By lunch or hell, probably by the second lesson, I'm going to be the talking point of the whole school. Then, of course, the guys will have even more questions when they hear my last name.

"What a fucking day." I groan, falling into the couch. The news of my last name had spread by the end of that first lesson, and suddenly all these kids that were calling me names and shoving shit in my locker before the summer break were suddenly being nice as fucking shit to me.

I nearly knocked several of them out.

One interaction stands out, though, I have been asked out a lot today, and one meek looking girl approached me when I escaped to the library and told me that they're more than likely all under orders from their families to woo me, as she put it so that they can marry into my fortune. She then backtracked and said not that you're not pretty. The rambling went on for a while, and although it was pretty amusing, I finally had to put her out of her misery and tell her it was okay, and I knew what

she meant. She ran away before I could thank her for warning me.

I'm not naive. I knew that was what they were doing, and it was pissing me the fuck off. One silver lining of the day, or at least that's what I'm telling myself, is that the guys never showed back up in lessons, so I've had no awkward questions from them about this whole situation. I'm sure I'll get plenty tomorrow, though.

"I had a great day." Waverly grins, "It was fun to mess with rich bitches."

"I knew you'd enjoy that." I chuckle.

"That kid, your men beat up, was taken to the hospital. I heard that he isn't talking. They obviously carry a lot of weight around here." Micha says, taking a sip of his beer.

"First, they aren't my men," I answer, and Waverly snorts. I ignore her as I continue. "Second, they were fucking awesome, no hesitation and no remorse."

"So your kind of men then?" Waverly smirks.

"Fuck you," I reply.

"Come on, I know you, they defended your honour as it were, and they did it brutally. I bet you're even more attracted to them now."

"Sometimes, I hate that you know me so well," I gripe as she just smirks smugly.

Mason's kiss is still playing on repeat in my mind. I found it difficult enough before stopping myself from kissing them, but now I want more. So much fucking more and not only with him, it's like I got the tiniest taste, and now I'm fucking addicted. Waverly opens her mouth no doubt to make another joke, but when she takes in my expression, she sees more than I want her to because her smirk turns into a soft smile, full of understanding, and she changes the subject.

"Have you heard anything from D about another job?" She asks.

“No, actually, other than the favour I did for him yesterday, which doesn’t count because no blood was spilled.” I shrug.

“I still can’t believe that the Kings are working for D,” Micha interrupts.

“Neither can I,” I mutter. I have no idea how that even fucking happened.

“Why don’t you call him and see if he’s got a job for us? I’m getting antsy.” Waverly suggests, just as my phone starts ringing.

“Looks like I won’t have to,” I state, answering the phone. “Hey D, you got a job for me?”

“Funny you should ask that I do. Can you put it on speaker so that the others can hear me?”

“Sure, one second, alright, go for it.”

“Waverly and Micha, I need you to go and check out Richie’s club for me tonight. I don’t like how he went against orders with the new team.”

They both look at me, and I shake my head. I don’t want to fill him in on the fact I know the team yet. I need to wrap my head around it first.

“What about me?” I ask.

He sighs heavily, “I thought long and fucking hard about letting you in on this. But you proved in New Orleans that you were back and better than ever, and I know you, and I know how much this means to you, I couldn’t deny you.”

My heart starts to pound in my chest, excitement thrumming through my veins, no fucking way.

“We’ve found one of the fuckers involved in your kidnapping, and he’s in your town. But, unfortunately, our intel says he’ll only be there tonight.” He pauses, “As you know, you weren’t the first Jynx. There were others before and after you. They’re a freelance team that Marvin just happened to employ. None of the other victims was as prepared as you were, and they definitely didn’t have the help you had from Ever.”

My expression becomes dark, those poor kids, the thing those men did and tried to do to me were things of fucking nightmares, and I had enough skills to protect myself to a certain degree.

“We need you to take him out.” D finishes. “I know you like to work alone on these jobs, which is why I’ve given Micha and Waverly another one, but they are only a few blocks away from where our intel says your target will be. If you need backup fucking call them. That is an order from your boss, not a suggestion from your uncle.”

A savage grin takes over my features, and Waverly and Micha share a look. This is precisely what I needed right now, “Got it.”

“I’ll send the location to you now; you only have a small window to get the job done. Welcome back.” He adds, his tone proud.

What can I say, we’re one fucked up family, but I wouldn’t have it any other way.

“You better go and get ready,” Waverly points out, a wide grin on her face, “It’s already dark out.”

“Fuck,” I jump up, and they follow me at a more leisurely pace to get ready themselves.

I read D’s text as I take the stairs two at a time. It’s just the address which is reasonably close to Richie’s club, and a warning that he’s going to be there in half an hour and only for half an hour.

Fuck, that is cutting it really fucking close and narrowing my window of opportunity to take him out. I throw off my uniform as soon as I get into my bedroom and pull out black jeans and a black top. It seems to be my go-to at the moment, but I usually wear dark clothes on my jobs. I will also add my bike jacket and boots since I’m on a time crunch, and it will be quicker to take my bike. Finally, I pull out my sniper rifle from under my bed. She’s beautiful and definitely needs to be taken out of retirement. Not that I haven’t been using her, I’ve been

practising and keeping my skills sharp, but she hasn't tasted blood for a while.

I open the case, double-checking that everything's as it should be and then grab a bag big enough to store it in and that I can easily carry on my bike. My phone buzzes again as I trot down the stairs and see that it's a message from D suggesting where the best and quickest advantage point is. The target has a meeting set up with a potential client happening in a large parking lot behind some buildings, the best place for me will be up on the fire escape of one of the buildings. From the photo he's sent, they all look rundown and unoccupied, or if they are occupied, no one is going to give a shit about me.

"See you later, guys!" I yell, not waiting for a reply as I let myself into the garage and hop on my bike.

I have the directions memorised, and it's not an unfamiliar part of town anyway. I keep to the speed limit as I drive, and my body thrums with excitement. I don't know which of the fuckers it is, but each one of them is responsible for scars on my body and the triggers that I now have. I knew I wasn't the only one, and knowing that they most likely succeeded in doing to the others what they tried to do with me makes my anger skyrocket and my bloodlust roar. I'm going to fucking enjoy taking him out.

I park down the street from the building, making sure that I'm in a darkened area since I don't want anyone to place my motorbike at the scene.

I walk towards the buildings, where I know from the photos that D sent that there is an alleyway and easy access to the fire escapes that I need. The alley is empty of anything but stinking dumpsters and rats. I quickly climb the fire escape that hugs the back of the building and overlooks the cracked tarmac of the parking lot behind, acutely aware that I'm on a tight schedule. Several of the lights are busted on this side of the building, and it should cast me in enough darkness that you wouldn't be able to see me unless you knew I was here.

I set up my baby, going through the familiar motions of assembling her brings me a sense of peace, and I finally feel

like I'm me again. Most people would probably find it fucked up that a sniper rifle gives me peace, but we are who we are, I guess. Some people find comfort in ice cream, and others find it in weapons. Once I've set her up and she's ready to go, I check the time on my phone. He should be here any second now. As I look through the scope, I ready myself, my finger on the trigger.

I glance up as a car pulls in before checking through the scope to ensure that there isn't anyone else in the car with him before focusing on the fuck that just got out of the otherwise empty vehicle. This one was responsible for the scar on the inside of my thigh and was particularly graphic in describing the things he was going to do to me. So I nicknamed him sick cunt or Sc for short.

Instead of being scared at seeing him again, I'm just fucking angry, I'm the predator now, and he's my fucking prey. I want to take him out now, but I know better. I need to bide my time, wait until he's made his deal and then strike.

Two long minutes later, another car pulls up, and Sc strides over, leaning so he can look in the car. He hands over a stack of papers and a wad of cash. That can't be good. They talk for a couple more minutes before the car pulls out of the lot, and Sc watches it disappear.

His body jolts as my first shot hits his shoulder, my second rapidly following and striking him in the knee. He falls to the floor and tries to drag himself along the ground before propping himself up on a car that isn't his, his eyes scanning the area and muted with pain. I let him think that's all that's coming for him; as I grab my gun and hastily make my way down the fire escape, I pull my other gun out of my holster, propping the sniper rifle on my shoulder.

D said to take him out, and I'm fucking going to, but I'm going to make sure he fucking suffers first and knows who took him out. I make no effort to hide my approach, and his eyes widen as he sees me; he starts to try to hobble away. I take aim; while still walking towards him, taking out his other knee, he crumples to the floor again, propping himself up with

his one good arm and trying to drag himself backwards. I don't even bother to speed up my pace.

When I finally reach him, I get really fucking close, bending over him and placing the muzzle of my gun in his shoulder wound. He cries out in pain.

“Remember me?” I ask, grinning savagely, recognition lights his eyes, and he renews his effort to get away from me. I lean closer, lowering my voice.

“I'm going to enjoy taking your miserable life. See you in hell.” I growl, standing up, aiming the gun at his forehead and pulling the trigger, splattering blood all over me, adding to the blood already on my clothes from when I bent over him. The light fades from his eyes, and I grin, with satisfaction, one less sick fuck for the world to worry about.

I glance around, making sure I haven't left any sign of my presence and holster my gun before quickly breaking down my sniper rifle and packing it away. I gather my bag, swing it on my back and look down at my bloody clothes; it's late enough that there shouldn't be too many people around, and I can stick to the shadows anyway, plus they're black, it should be fine. I swiftly make my way back to the alley and through to the street, ensuring that I'm not walking too fast. I usually take a kill shot from a distance, and then I'm on my way, but I couldn't resist making his death last just a little bit longer.

It doesn't take long until my bike comes into sight, and I breathe a sigh of relief.

“Jynx?” I hear behind me, and I cringe. How the fuck are they here right now? Of all the times and places we could run into each other outside of school, it just has to be now, when I'm covered in blood.

I paste on a smile and turn around. Sure enough, there are the Kings.

“Holy fuck, what happened to you? Are you bleeding?” Ace starts, listing questions, a thread of panic in his voice as the guy's eyes all start to take on the same tinge of panic.

“Fucking hell, chill out. It’s not mine.” I say, stopping their forward advance. They pause to really look at me.

“That’s a fuck load of blood, Hellcat.” Rip points out, his arms across his chest as he watches me, almost as if he knows.

“Yep, it is, and I’ve got to go. See you tomorrow.” I grin once again, throwing myself on my bike and tearing away from them.

I have really got to stop running from them. It’s even starting to piss me off now. I get home quickly, wanting to avoid being out anywhere I could easily be picked up by the cops. If that happens, we have contingencies in place, and D has connections, but it still needs to be avoided at all costs. As I pull up the drive, I notice something sitting on the front step. It’s not like anyone is supposed to be able to get up here, and I haven’t checked my phone to look at the cameras. Gerald mentioned that I should set the alarms to go off when there’s movement from the cameras. I’ll do it just as soon as I figure out what the hell is on my porch. I pull the bike to a stop and climb off, approaching it with caution despite the probability that it’s most likely something that Waverly or Micha has left out front.

Chapter Twelve

I become less confident of that theory as I get a better look at it. It's a brown box that doesn't seem threatening, but the dripping red letters scrawled across the top of it, definitely don't send the friendliest message.

"Your head next." I read out loud.

Fucking fantastic. There's no fucking way I'm bringing that into my house if it has what it suggests it does in it. I pull out my knife and cut the tape holding the box closed. Then, being careful not to touch it, I lift the sides with the edge of my knife and peer inside, and I instantly want to throw up at the contents.

The good news is it's not a human head; the bad news is it does contain about fifty severed raven heads, their dark eyes staring at me accusingly. It doesn't escape my notice that ravens are the bird of death. I leave the box on the stoop after taking a picture of the contents and shooting a text to Waverly to tell her not to look in it. She's a hell of a lot more squeamish than I am. I then make my way upstairs as I try to think about who would be sending me a death threat.

I mean, I've made a lot of enemies, that's a given in my line of work, but none of them should know where I live, especially now and after I've been on sabbatical for nearly a year. Stripping off as I get to my room, I turn the shower on and hop in.

Is it a coincidence that everyone at school just learned who I really am and what I've inherited, and now there are raven heads on my doorstep? I mean, it could be, maybe it's something to do with the Kings? I don't know what their motivation would be, especially since from all our interactions so far, it seems pretty evident that they want to talk to me so that we can sort it out, not so they can send me weird death threats. Not only that, but it just doesn't seem like something that they would do; however, how well do I really know them?

I had no idea that they were in the crime world, let alone so involved that they were on D's radar.

I suppose there's only one way to find out; I'll have to ask them. I could do it now, take the easy route and just text them, but if I did that, I wouldn't be able to watch their facial clues and see if they are lying to me, so I guess it's going to have to be in person tomorrow.

You're just using that as an excuse to talk to them, a small voice whispers through my mind, and I promptly give it the middle finger.

I filled Waverly and Micha in this morning, and as predicted, Waverly was entirely grossed out, I did manage to check the cameras, but apparently, the one on the front is on the fritz. Someone is coming to the house today while I'm at school to sort it, and Gerald is under strict instructions not to take his eyes off them. He also reminded me again to turn the alarm on in case we get any more unwanted deliveries and smirked as I did while he watched to prove I'd done it. The old guy is undoubtedly starting to grow on me.

"You guys coming with me to ask the guys about the raven heads?" I ask them as I spot the guys coming down the school hallway, their eyes already fixated on me.

Rip has one hell of a black eye, and my curiosity is thoroughly piqued along with a good dose of concern.

"Sure, I could use some early morning entertainment." Waverly shrugs, and I shoot her a warning look as we move away from my locker and start to make our way towards the guy's, "What? I'll behave."

"Uh-huh, sure you will," I reply.

The guys look slightly shocked as I approach them and don't run in the other direction, and I could honestly smack myself. I have never run from anything in my life, including death, but apparently, getting my feelings hurt and having stupid emotions get involved turns me into a fucking bitch ass coward. So I'm putting an end to that right fucking now.

“Hey guys, can I have a word?” I ask, feeling nervous for some reason.

“Sure, what’s up?” Rome asks, his eyes trailing the length of me.

“Miss Luther, boys and children, I don’t know,” the teacher mutters, looking over Waverly and Micha before she continues, “Need I remind you that lessons will be starting soon?” She asks, the mention of my last name making the guys look at me, shocked.

“Luther?” Rip questions, as the others all give me the same questioning look, and I ignore them.

“We’ll be right there,” I reply to the teacher, who nods and walks off.

I lower my voice and watch them closely for their reaction, “Did you guys send me a box of severed raven heads last night?”

“What the fuck?” Ace exclaims, true horror on his face.

I study the others, all of them looking equal parts shocked and disgusted.

“So no severed heads and no death threat?”

Rip growls, his expression becoming deadly and ten times hotter, “Death threat?”

“What the fuck do you mean death threat?” Malachi hisses, his body tense.

“No one here could’ve sent it, thinking you guys would want them to?” Micha asks.

My mind is going a mile a minute as I try to put the pieces together.

“No, what the fuck is going on?” Mason demands.

My eyes connect with his as the realisation sets in; his face turns from anger to soft concern as he takes in my expression, taking a step towards me. If it’s not them and it’s not someone at school then ...

“Fuck!” I exclaim, shooting a panicked look to Waverly and Micha, “They’ve fucking found me.”

“We need to leave now.” Waverly orders, her words rushed, as she grabs my arm, and we race down the hallway towards the parking lot.

The guys are all following closely behind, and I don’t have the mental capacity to tell them to back off right now. Not only that, but I feel safer having them at my back, and if it is who I think it is that sent those heads, I need all the safety I can get. It’s different when it’s on my terms, but I don’t ever want to feel hunted again.

“What the fuck is going on? Who found you?” Ace asks.

I ignore him. I parked my car in the back corner of the lot today. Getting out was hell yesterday, and no one bothers parking back here. As soon as my car is in view, I click the button on my keys to unlock it. The lights flash once before a massive explosion rocks the ground, debris from my car flying everywhere. I’m tackled to the floor, strong arms wrapping around me. Malachi places a hand under my head, protecting it from banging against the floor as he shields me from the blast.

Just as quick as the explosion happens, it’s over, and the only thing left in its wake is my smouldering car and the screeching of several cars alarms. Malachi rolls off me, lying on the floor next to me and breathing hard as his eyes run over me, ensuring I’m not hurt.

“Come on. We can take our car!” Rome orders, Ace picks me up, no shit, and runs with me to their car on the other side of the lot. One of the lucky few that the blast or the flying debris hasn’t damaged. I glance over my shoulder, making sure that Waverly and Micha are with us and that everyone is okay.

Wave’s has a giant grin on her face at the fact that I’m being fucking carried, and I roll my eyes. She’s never going to let me live this down, and only she could find something to be amused about after a car has just been blown up. The guys all bundle into their vehicle, and it’s a fucking squeeze to fit us all in. Ace keeps me in his arms, and with no apparent effort at

all, as he climbs in, settling me on his lap, his arms like steel bands around me, his grip almost bruising—Rome peels out of the parking lot.

“Won’t anyone get suspicious that we’re leaving?” Micha asks, Waverly perched on his lap.

“No, the school will go into lockdown until the police arrive,” Mason answers tensely.

“Where are we going?” Rome demands.

“My house, I need to make a call,” I answer, panic renewing.

I don’t have time to worry about the shit that’s going on between us right now. That was a clear attempt on my life.

“Where is that?”

“The Luther estate.”

“Fuck me, that was true?” Malachi asks, shooting a concerned look at Ace, who hasn’t said a word.

“We don’t have time for this,” I reply, not wanting to get into my last name right now and following Malachi’s gaze, my head turning so I can study Ace.

He’s staring straight ahead, his eyes rapidly moving like he’s seeing something that’s not there. I recognise the beginnings of a panic attack when I see one, and he looks like he’s well on his way to being dragged under by one.

“Does he get panic attacks?” I ask urgently, my hand reaching up to cup his cheek. He barely notices.

Rome’s eyes look back at Ace in the rearview mirror.

“Fuck! Yes, he does.” He replies.

“Hey, Ace?” I ask gently, ignoring the curious looks the others send me. His eyes flicker when I talk directly to him, but he’s still lost in his mind. “Ace!” I growl, and his eyes snap to mine. “Whatever you are seeing, it’s not happening now.”

He starts to shake his head, his eyes beginning to cloud again; I'm losing him. I do the first thing that comes to mind and pull his face to mine, his mouth yields to mine, his tongue caressing mine, and his arms pull me impossibly closer. I groan as he nips my lip and hear it echoed by his growl, fuck me, the boy can kiss.

"What's the code?" Rip interrupts loudly, pulling us apart. Ace's eyes are completely clear if slightly shocked.

"I'll put it in," Waverly says, opening the door and hopping off of Micha's lap.

"What was that for?" Ace asks, his voice hoarse with desire as the car starts to pull up the long driveway.

"It was the only thing that I could think of to stop you from sinking again," I reply, opening the door and moving off of Ace's lap as he finally lets me go.

"Fucking hell, this is where you live!" Mason whistles.

As soon as his arms drop and I step away, my fear and the panic starts to come back. I storm towards the front of the house, aware that the guys are still following. They're about to get a fucking crash course in who I am.

"Miss, you're home early. Everything okay?"

"Gerald! I'm not sure, man. Keep the house on lockdown and make sure all the other staff are safe, please?"

"Gerald?" Mason mutters.

"That's Gerald?" Mal asks.

"Staff?" Ace adds, sounding perplexed.

Ignoring them, I wander into the large front room and pull out my phone, dialling a number.

"They've fucking found me," I growl, with no greeting, the guys all watching me curiously.

"What the fuck do you mean they've found you, were you careful last night? You know their crew is tight. If they've realised that you killed one of theirs, they're going to go be after you even more vigilantly than before."

“Yes, well, maybe I wasn’t as careful as I should’ve been when I took him out. I wanted him to see who drained the fucking life out of him. I owed him that much.”

“What the fuck did she just say?” Rip growls.

“Just shut the fuck up for a minute.” Waverly snaps.

Micha steps into my path, handing me a joint and lighting it for me. I take a deep toke.

“Holy shit, it’s like you’re an entirely different person,” Malachi mutters, and I ignore him as I listen to D.

“I don’t think that anyone saw me kill him, you know me, I’m fucking careful about that shit. I think that the guy he was meeting was the one that dropped the severed heads off at my door and rigged my car to explode. Sc handed him a load of papers at the meet.”

“He blew up your car?” D growls, “At the school?”

“Yeah.”

“That’s too fucking close, I came close to losing you once, and I’m not going to fucking do it again. So I need you to go into lockdown. Do not leave the fucking house.”

“Fine, I’ll sit tight, but I swear to fucking god, heads will roll as soon as I find out who the fuck is doing this. I mean that literally.”

“I’d expect nothing less. Listen, you know that new team I was telling you about?”

“Yeah,” I say cautiously, my eyes landing on the guys who are all watching me closely.

“I want them to watch over you as extra eyes. I was going to have you train them anyway since Richie has proven himself incapable of the task. They’re brutal and smart enough that I trust them to help keep you safe. This is non fucking negotiable, Jynx.”

“Fine,” I growl.

“I’ll call them now.” He says, hanging up.

I take a long drag on my joint and exhale.

“What’s going on?” Rome demands, just as his phone rings.

I sigh, “You’re going to want to get that. It’ll be Demon.”

He freezes his eyes wide, “How the fuck do you know that name?”

“Just answer. I’ll explain in a minute.”

“Hey, Demon.” Rome answers. He listens intently for a minute, grunts his agreement and then hangs up, crossing his arms over his chest and levelling me with a look.

The guys look between us curiously, and I flop down onto the couch and wait.

“How do you know Demon? Why did he just ask the guys and me to watch over you?”

“What!?” Ace exclaims.

“Demon or D, as I call him, is my uncle,” I say. I open my mouth to start to explain but then close it, “How do you do know Demon?”

“What the fuck.” Rip growls as he starts pacing.

“Come on, tit for fucking tat, you tell me, and I’ll tell you.” I try. I meant what I said earlier. I’m done running from them.

“Fine,” Rome growls as the others take seats. Malachi and Mason sit directly next to me, their thighs against mine.

“Let’s start at the beginning since apparently it’s connected,” Ace mutters, “We’ve been doing some questionably legal things for a while now,” he starts. Mason snorts; Ace ignores him and continues, “And some of us have gained a reputation for the various things we can do. Somehow we ended up on Demon’s radar, and he got in contact with us. The jobs we started doing gradually got more dangerous, and when someone we were sent to procure some stuff from threatened to find those we care about and harm them. We er,” he pauses.

“We fucking panicked.” Rip growls, still pacing.

“What he said,” Mason mutters.

“The only person that we truly care about other than each other is you, and we couldn’t agree on how to keep you safe and still have you in our lives.” Malachi starts to take over the explanation.

“Especially since we thought that you were sweet, innocent and completely naive of any violence,” Mason growls pointedly, and I just raise my eyebrow at him.

“Right,” Ace says with a frown, “So we thought that if you hated us, and we made your life difficult, you’d move, get as far away from here as possible and be safe.”

“So in your own little fucked up way, you caused me all that shit because you were trying to protect me?” I ask, somewhat incredulously.

They all nod, the twins and Ace nodding like bobbleheads while Rome and Rip just move their heads once in agreement, their eyes on me.

“Wait, could that be who sent her the raven heads?” Waverly asks, and I honestly completely forgot that she was even in the room.

“No, we took care of him.” Rip replies, his voice cold.

Damn, why is it hot that they killed a guy, sort of in a roundabout way for me? Yeah, I’m not going to look too closely at that one because damn, I feel like we’d be going so far down the fucking rabbit hole that we’d end up in wonderland.

“Despite that, we were still worried about what would happen if someone threatened you.” Ace adds, shooting Rip a look.

“You just heard her admit to watching the life drain out of someone’s eyes as she killed him, and you’re worried that me admitting that we killed some fucker who threatened her will scare her?” Rip scoffs, in probably the longest fucking sentence I have ever heard him speak.

“Fair point,” Mal says from beside me.

“Then you broke Tegan’s nose, cussed us all out, told the twins apart with ease and stormed the fuck out.” Rome growls, “And we realised that we fucked up big time, and you were more than we thought you were. So maybe we didn’t have to protect you.”

“Come on, Rome, be fair; that was the last-ditch attempt anyway. We were all crumbling and wanting to be close to her again.” Mason admits.

My stupid little heart soars, and I try to stomp on it.

“Your turn.” Rip orders, his eyes boring into me, the manic gleam prominent.

“Er, okay, so it starts off weird and doesn’t get any better,” I admit, making Wave’s and Micha chuckle.

“I think we’ll leave you to it, Jynx.” Waverly says, getting up, “I only stayed because I’m nosey as fuck and wanted to know why they treated you like shit when they all clearly care about you so much.” She smirks as she leaves that bombshell and walks out with Micha shaking his head and following behind.

The guys all share a look, and thanks to Waverly’s comment, there’s an awkward tension in the room now.

Deciding to move on swiftly, I start to explain.

“So anyway, I got a letter from a grandmother that I never knew existed when I inherited this place. One of the stipulations of inheriting this place and everything that goes along with it is that I attend your school. She went on about how she wants me to try my hardest and actually succeed at the place and not get kicked out like my previous schools. How she knew that I don’t know.” I frown. That’s always bothered me, “By this point, I hadn’t done any jobs for D for a while thanks to an incident that I won’t talk about, and I was bored, so I figured I’d go all out, make myself look normal and pretend to be the little wallflower she was asking me to be, at least for the first day. But then you guys took an interest in me, and surprisingly, I actually liked you. It snowballed from there, and then suddenly we were a few months in, and it

would've been stupidly weird to let my real personality out, and I knew, or I thought I knew that you guys wouldn't like the real me." I pause and look at the grimaces on their faces, "I didn't want to lose you, but then you guys became dicks, and I lost you anyway." I frown.

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Chapter Thirteen

“You wouldn’t have lost us,” Mason says from beside me.

“You say that, but the real me is bitchy, sarcastic and loves violence. I had no idea that you guys were as violent as I am. There were signs that there was something more to you, but I couldn’t point them out or ask about them without giving away that I am actually a lot more observant than I was pretending to be.”

“When was the first time you told Mason and me apart?” Mal asks.

Not a question that I was expecting to come out of that conversation, so I turn to look at him. Judging from the intense look on his face, my answer means a lot to him, and I decide to answer as honestly as possible.

“By the end of the first week,” I admit.

“Fucking hell.” He groans.

“Look, I think it’s safe to say that I shouldn’t have carried on the fake shit for so long, and you guys shouldn’t have been assholes, but I’m tired of fighting, and I really miss you all. Can we start over?” I ask, shooting my shot because really, at this point, what have I got to lose.

“We’d like that.” Ace answers for all of them.

“Thank fuck.” I mutter.

“In the spirit of being honest, you do jobs for Demon?” Rome asks curiously.

“Yeah, have done ever since I was a kid. I was brought up in that world, and I’ve got to be honest. I fucking love it.”

“When we saw you last night, you said that the blood wasn’t yours. Was it your target’s blood?” Mason asks.

“Yeah,” I reply cautiously.

“It sounded personal.” Rip states, his voice low and sending shivers down my spine.

I make the decision that although I won’t tell them the whole story, not yet, I will show them the aftermath. I stand up, and Rip narrows his eyes at me.

“Chill, I’m not going anywhere,” I reply, reaching under my school skirt.

“Whoa, what are you doing?” Ace says, his eyes glued to where my hands are.

“I’m showing you why it was personal,” I reply and get only confused looks in return.

I pull the stockings down, trying to pull them off my feet. The movies lie; there is no sexy way to pull off stockings. When I look back up, instead of the heated looks I was just getting from the guys, they all look like they’re about to burst into laughter. I can’t say I blame them, especially when I finally pull the stocking off my foot and smack myself in the face.

They all burst out laughing along with me.

“Fucking hell, that hurt.” I chuckle, rubbing my forehead.

“Are you okay, Hellcat?” Rip asks, amusement in his tone and making the others look at him with surprise at the nickname he’s just given me.

“I’m good,” I mutter.

“What were you going to show us?” Rome asks.

“Oh right,” I pull my skirt up, moving my leg to the side and using the material to stop me from flashing them my underwear.

“Fucking hell.” Ace hisses, looking at the ten-inch long scar on the inside of my thigh.

“He did that?” Mason growls, his eyes flashing dangerously.

“Amongst other things,” I mutter the fun from a few seconds ago, leaving me abruptly.

“What other things?” Mal asks, his expression clouded.

“Not ready to tell you about that.”

He nods in understanding.

“Why?”

I sigh. I guess I’m sharing more than I initially thought I would, but instead of it making me panic, it feels okay to tell them, which has never happened before. Even telling Waverly and Maria made me panic, and they’re family.

“Okay, I guess I can explain this bit, because of the kind of jobs I do, I’ve made a lot of fucking enemies, the kind that would take great enjoyment from seeing me slowly tortured and murdered,” I start and they all tense, sharing a look of realisation, so I ask, “What?”

“We separated ourselves from you so that you wouldn’t be in danger, and you’ve been in danger for the majority of your life, we’re in a position that we can protect you, or at least help to, since even from what I’ve seen so far you are perfectly capable. But if we had succeeded in driving you away, instead of keeping you safe, we could’ve lost you completely.” Ace explains, regret and dread at a future that hasn’t even happened, colouring his tone and expression.

“That may be true, but you were protecting a completely different person for all intents and purposes, and it would’ve worked for her. Along that same vein of regret, though, if I had been honest with you from the beginning, none of that would’ve happened,” I point out.

“Yeah,” Mason mutters, “I guess that’s true.”

“It’s in the past, though, right? A fresh start.”

“Fresh start,” Malachi echoes.

“Anyway, back to what I was saying, I’ve got a lot of enemies and last year, one of these enemies put a hit out on me, but he wanted me brought to him where his personal torture and assassin could do it. Actually, since you are more involved in this world than I realised, you might recognise the name Shadow?” I ask them, curious to see how deep into the

crime world they really are. There's no way I'm giving away Ever's identity, one, it wouldn't be safe for her, and she isn't safe as it is. Two, they'd judge her. They wouldn't understand that the alternative for her if she didn't do as her father asks is truly fucking horrific, and I say that coming from my background and having seen the worst of the fucking criminal underworld. I'm still fucking trying to get her out of it, but there's not much that we can fucking do. Everything will have a knock-on effect and one that would bring a criminal war, and no one wants that. A lot of innocent lives will be lost.

“Someone sent fucking Shadow for you?” Rip curses.

“That guy is fucking brutal,” Rome adds a worried frown, creasing his forehead and staring at me like he can't quite believe that I'm still alive.

I don't correct them on the gender of shadow, “Shadow doesn't get sent to you, I was brought to shadow, there's a mercenary group of three that do freelance work for anyone that will pay them the best price. They were sent after me. The condition I arrived to shadow in wasn't specified, so they thought they'd have some fun along the way.” I growl, red tinging my eyesight. The guys go deathly still, “So, yeah, it was fucking personal and yeah, I made sure that fucker knew who killed him.”

Rip stalks over to me, and I look at him questioningly. With no words, he effortlessly lifts me up, and my arms go around his neck and my legs around his waist; he backs up, sitting down on the large, thankfully sturdy coffee table and holding me tightly, with his face buried in my neck.

“I just need to hold you for a minute.” He mutters more emotion in his voice than I have ever heard from him before.

I hold him tighter and look at the guys, and they share their own raised eyebrow look as if they know something I don't. Ace and Mason both have tiny smirks on their faces.

Staring at them, my mind wanders to the fact that I have kissed them both, and each of them set me alight and had me begging for more like no one else has done before them. I want to kiss them again. Hell more than that, I want to strip

them naked and have my way with them, preferable at the same time. I wouldn't mind the others joining in too. Although I'm up for a little one and one too, I squirm in Rip's arms, the mere thought of having them all making my pussy clench. I inadvertently rub myself against Rip's dick in the process, and he bites down on my neck in retaliation, shocking the shit out of me in the most delicious way.

I squeal, at the suddenness of it, my eyes practically rolling back in my head in pleasure.

"Careful Hellcat, you keep moving like that, and I'll have you stripped naked and pinned beneath me in minutes," he mutters quietly enough that the guys can't hear him but are staring at me with wide eyes.

"What the fuck did you just do to her?" Rome asks, heated curiosity in his gaze.

"Whatever it was, she fucking loved it." Malachi points out, and I grin, not ashamed in the slightest. Why would I be?

At their words, Rip tenses. He picks me up and deposits me back on the couch with the twins, who look at him curiously before he goes back to sit in the only armchair in here and deliberately avoids looking at me. I frown. What is his deal?

Of course, I have kissed two of his best friends and then practically dry-humped him in front of them all. Yeah, that's most likely the problem, whoops.

I have no regrets. Maybe I should, a better person would, but I can't regret something that I'd be happy to repeat.

"So," Malachi says into the silence, shooting Rip a baffled look, "Where's your mom?"

I really want to say something snarky, but we promised to start over, so I bite my tongue, "I have no idea, she lives in the other wing of the house, we check in every few days, but I think I've only seen her once since I moved here."

"Only once?" Mason asks, his eyebrows hitting his hairline. I nod. "I'm sorry, that's gotta be hard."

“Not at all. It’s a relief, actually. I’ve been taking care of her for as long as I can remember. Cooking, cleaning, earning money, all that. She’s not abusive or anything. She’s just lazy as fuck and always has been.”

“Neglect is abuse.” Rip points out, his eyes finally landing on me.

I shrug, “True, but it could’ve been a lot worse. I’d rather have had it my way than be living how some people I know do. So, Richie put you into Hell then, how’d that go?” I grin, knowing that they must’ve done pretty fucking well since they’re all here.

“He only let us do one round. I guess he was worried about the repercussions it would cause with D. We each beat our opponents but Rip fucking dominated. He ended up going right to the fucking end and had minimal injuries compared to the fucking others.”

“Fucking hell, that’s damn impressive.” I whistle, knowing full well that the desire for him is evident in my eyes.

You have to be a fucking good fighter to make it through those rounds and not get seriously hurt or more than likely killed. I want to see him in action.

“Yeah, Richie said only one person had a better record and that they did it twice and won just for shits and giggles, can you fucking imagine.” Ace says.

“Hey! It wasn’t for shits and giggles, I had a lot of fucking anger in me that month, and the first round didn’t quite cut it.” I defend before realising I may have said too much.

“You?” Mason gasps.

“You fought in Hell twice because you had a lot of anger in you that month?” Ace asks incredulously.

“Well yeah,” I admit.

“Fucking hell, Koroleva, you’re something else,” Rome mutters, his eyes heated.

Well would you look at that? They find me fighting as hot as I find the thought of them fighting.

“You have no idea,” I reply with a smirk.

“Okay, so what’s the plan now?” Malachi asks.

“Well, Demon ordered us not to let you out of our sight, so I guess we’re staying here.” Rome grins, clearly expecting me to protest.

“Fine by me, I haven’t counted all the rooms in this place since last time I tried, and I got bored halfway through and gave up. I got up to twenty-five spare rooms, so take your pick.” I offer.

“This house is huge,” Mason states the obvious.

“Yep, and I haven’t even explored most of it.”

“Oh, can I come and explore with you?” Ace asks, excitement threading through his tone, “I love exploring old houses. You know there’s probably hidden rooms and shit in this one.”

“No way, that’s so fucking cool. You can definitely help me explore. I wonder if Gerald knows anything about any hidden rooms.”

“I can’t believe you’ve got a butler,” Rome says, shaking his head.

“I can’t believe we thought Gerald was her boyfriend,” Malachi mutters next to me, and I burst out laughing.

“That was pretty fucking amusing.” I smirk before continuing, “I can’t believe I have one either. I tried to fire all of them when I first got here, but he guilt-tripped me into letting them stay. It’s a good job the cook did too because I can’t cook for shit and would’ve probably burnt the place down by now.”

“How is that possible when you said you’ve been doing all the cooking and cleaning since you were a kid?” Mason asks, his hand moving to my thigh, his fingers drawing patterns, I’m not even sure he’s aware he’s doing it, but my skin feels like it’s on fucking fire.

“I didn’t say I was good at it. After the third fire, I stuck to sandwiches and cereal, things that are harder to burn.” I grin,

making them laugh. Even Rip lets a small smile free.

“Miss Jynx,” Gerald says as he walks into the lounge.

“Yes?” I ask.

“I’ve got the staff following the protocols for when this sort of thing happens. They all know them off by heart by now, so they’re all safe, I’ve also locked the house down, and all of the security cameras are working perfectly.”

There’s a twinkle in his eye as he spins on his heel before I can reply and disappears.

“The staff know the protocols off by heart? How many times have you had to go into lockdown because of a death threat since you’ve been here?” Rip demands.

“This is the first time,” I say with a frown. “I’d swear if I didn’t know any better I’d say that my grandmother was into some dodgy shit.”

“As far as I know, she had a few companies. I don’t know what they did, and I didn’t care enough to find out. I do know that no one fucking messed with her. It was like an unspoken rule that everyone just knew.”

“Huh, one of these days, I’ll corner him and get him to tell me, but I don’t think I want to deal with any more drama today,” I smirk, “So who wants to watch movies? Oh, and aren’t you guys going to have to go home to get spare clothes?”

“We keep ready bags with all the necessities in all of our cars just in case,” Rome starts, “And besides that, we wouldn’t be leaving you regardless of whether we have clothes or not.”

“You know I’m perfectly capable of taking care of myself,” I point out, slightly amused.

“I’m aware of that, but what harm does it do having more people watching your back?” He reasons.

“Fine, I concede. You make a good point.” I grumble, making his lips kick up into a grin.

“So movie?” Ace asks.

“Sure.”

I snuggle down in between Mason and Malachi, putting my head on Mason’s lap and my legs over Malachi’s. We used to lie like this all the time before, but now they know the real me, it feels different. More intimate, I’m more aware of every point that our bodies are touching.

“Should we see if Waverly and Micha want to come and watch too?” Ace asks. He’s always been the sweet one out of all of them despite being built like a fucking tank and covered in tattoos.

“How do you know them, anyway?” Mase asks, his fingers playing with my hair and making me sleepy.

“Waverly is my best friend. We all grew up together, and I don’t remember a time when we weren’t friends.”

“That makes sense. Is D your uncle on your mom’s side or your dad’s?” Rome asks curiously.

“My Mom’s, how they’re related, I have no fucking idea because they honestly couldn’t be more different. He hasn’t had anything to do with her for years,” I explain.

“Where does your grandmother fit in?” Malachi asks.

“She’s my dad’s mom. I had no idea she existed, though. I can’t even get a name out of my mom. Even now, she won’t tell me what he was called. She won’t tell me anything about who my dad was. So how my grandmother fucking found me, I have no idea. I tried talking about it with my mom, but she just outright ignored me, so I gave up. It’s not fucking worth it.”

“So you really have no idea who your grandmother was or anything about your history on your dad’s side?” Mal asks.

“Nope, and since I’ve been here, I got a bit distracted with you guys, so I didn’t bother looking into it. From what Gerald just said, though, I think it might be a good idea to start to find out more about that side of my family. Something isn’t sitting quite right.”

“Definitely, I always thought there was something odd going on with your grandmother, I mean, the woman was in her fifties but looked like she could take the best of them down, plus no one knows how she died,” Ace says, a curious gleam in his eye.

The guys give him a look, and I raise my eyebrow in question.

“What?” He shrugs, “You guys know I love a good mystery. I got curious.”

I grin, “Well, you can help me figure out the mystery of this side of my family then.”

“Thanks, Jynx.” He grins, “So should we invite Waverly and Micha down then?”

“Oh, there’s no point, those two fuck like bunnies, we won’t see them until the morning.” I grin at their shocked faces.

“You know it still fucking shocks me every time a curse word comes out of your mouth,” Rome mutters.

“Just think, that’s not the most impressive thing I can do with my mouth by far.” I grin.

Rip, who was taking a sip of soda, chokes on his drink, his eyes bugging out, and I burst out laughing.

“You okay?” I smirk.

“No fair, Blue,” Ace smirks, giving me a new nickname. “You can’t say shit like that. You might end up killing one of us off.” Mason smirks.

“Oh, but it’s so fun?” I pout.

“Don’t pout.” Rip mutters his words hoarse thanks to him choking.

“Why not?”

“Because it makes all of us want to kiss the fuck out of you,” Rome growls.

I damn near swallow my fucking tongue. Nothing I could say to that would be remotely innocent, and since I’m not sure

if they're serious, I decide to let it drop a smirk on my lips instead.

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Chapter Fourteen

Rip

The others fell asleep hours ago, but all of them have gravitated towards Jynx and are touching her in some way. They all look peaceful, more peaceful than I think I have ever seen any of them look, but I just can't seem to force myself to sleep. With all the information that she revealed earlier and the threat to her life, sleep isn't going to happen any time soon. Of course, it doesn't help that my demons come out to play at night. So instead, I'm sitting watching them like a fucking weirdo or, more specifically, I'm watching her.

She's fucking dangerous and in more than just the obvious way.

From the very first moment that we saw her, we were all drawn to her, but now that it appears that she's just as fucking deadly as we are, she's drawing us to her like a moth to a fucking flame. We all agreed to keep our distance to keep it platonic, and we all decided after my minor freakout with Mason that she deserved more than us, especially now. Still, I can see it happening, none of them can keep their distance from her for very long, and I'm no fucking different. We all have feelings for her, and if the guys don't let jealousy get involved, then they'd all love her and protect her with their lives but me?

She deserves someone a thousand times better than fucking me. Love doesn't come easily to me. When you've never known love in any form, it's hard to recognise what it is and even if it's real. The guys and I have been friends since we were kids. I've seen them show it to each other, in the family kind of way. We've never had families that show us love or any kind of affection, really. Let's just say they aren't the type. Still, they each had someone who showed them how it was supposed to be, and the twins had each other; they have an instinctual bond. That's all I know; what I've learned from the

guys, I love them like they're my brothers. They are, after all, my family.

Despite all of that, I still feel the pull to her, even stronger now, I can see the demons in her eyes, and it's like they're calling to my own, wanting to consume us both.

More than that, I have a curiosity, no that's not quite right, I have a need to know what gave her those demons, and for the first time in my life, I want to share what gave me mine with someone other than the guys, and that scares the fuck out of me.

I'd say that I need to keep my distance from her from now on, keep her at arm's length, but it's already too late for that she's become a drug that I couldn't quit even if I fucking wanted to and that, right there, is the crux of the fucking matter. Deep down, I don't want to fucking quit her. I should've known that there was something different about her when we first met her. I held her far too easily, wanted to feel her smooth, soft skin under my fingertips as I pounded into her far too much. I used any excuse to touch her.

She quieted my demons with a simple touch, the weight and torment were gone, and I craved fucking more.

I told myself it was okay because it was temporary. After all, once a sweet little thing like we thought she was, found out how dark and deadly we were, there was no way that she would stick around for long. She wouldn't be capable of understanding why we do what we do.

Now though, she could very much be a permanent thing. She can not only understand our darkness but fucking rival it, and it's the hottest damn thing that I never thought I would fucking find. Because of that, I will do anything to protect her from myself.

My eyes watch her, and as she curls up closer to Rome, her head on his chest, Ace curled up against her back, I realise that she's probably cold, getting up I search the room trying to find something to cover her with.

She brings out a softer side in me that I didn't even know existed, and the thought makes me frown. I finally find a wooden box with several blankets inside and pull one out. I gently drape it over her, making sure that she's fully covered, and her eyes pop open, scaring the shit out of me, not that I'll admit that to anyone. I swear she was dead asleep a second ago. She smiles sleepily and raises her eyebrow. I open my mouth, not entirely sure what's going to come out when an alarm starts blaring from somewhere and saves my ass.

Jynx

I instantly go from sleepily watching Rip to wide awake as soon as the phone starts blaring the alarm. As Gerald suggested earlier, I set it up so that if anyone tries to break in, I get notified immediately. I move out from between Rome and Ace; I have no idea how I ended up between them, but I'm not complaining; it was the best sleep I've had in a long time. The alarm wakes everyone up, and I rush across the room to get my phone.

"What's going on?" Rip demands, a deep frown on his face like usual.

"Five more minutes," Malachi mumbles, making me smile, and Mason kicks him, so he wakes up.

"Ow dude, what the fuck was that for?" Mal groans.

"Someone's broken in, and they're on the property. I'm just finding out where the breach is." I explain, checking my phone.

Their demeanor instantly changes from sleepy to alert and deadly, and I have to try really fucking hard not to get distracted by how hot it is. I flick through the cameras, finding someone just finishing climbing over the fence in the back of the property. As soon as he lands, he pulls out a gun. I quickly calculate which of the many rooms in the house has the best advantage point and then take off running up the stairs.

I thrust my phone behind me, knowing that they're all following me, "Keep an eye on him."

"Got it," Rome says, taking the phone off me.

"What's the plan, Hellcat?" Rip asks.

"You'll see," I say, rushing all the way up to my room.

Fortunately, the guy is moving slowly, or at least from what I saw when I looked at the cameras he was. I dive under my bed, pulling out my case and then pushing past the guys and back down the stairs. I pause at the bottom.

"Is that what I think it is?" Ace asks, and I ignore him.

"Let me see?" I ask Rome, and he turns the phone to face me.

I quickly recalculate where would be the best place to take him out from, my mind going a mile a minute as I race through the halls—finally arriving at my destination and pushing into one of the spare bedrooms that I never go into. I lay my case on the bed and start to assemble my weapon, ignoring the guy's wide-eyed looks.

"Can someone open the window, please?" I ask, and Mason quickly does as I've asked him.

"That is a nice fucking weapon you've got there," Malachi says.

I grin, "Thank you. She's my baby."

"Did she just refer to her gun as her baby?" Ace asks.

"Yeah." Rip replies cautiously, his eyes watching me intently.

"She's like you," Malachi mutters, "Your weapons are the only thing I've ever heard you talk sweet to. Well, they used to be," he finishes looking at me pointedly.

My heart skips a beat, but I can't allow myself to focus on what Mal's words could mean right now and focus back on my weapon. Once I have it built, I take it over to the window, setting it up and looking through the scope, it takes me a second, but I finally find him, moving slowly from tree to tree.

“What are you doing?” Mason asks.

“Shh,” I reply harshly.

I take a deep breath, wait for him to appear again, and then take the shot. Making the hit with the first shot as he drops to the floor.

“He’s down.” I grin.

“There is no way that you made the shot from there,” Rome says, and I raise my eyebrow.

Before I get mad, I look at it from his point of view; I’m only seventeen, and most people who can make that shot have to be in training for years before they can even come close.

“Alright, let’s go and find out,” I smirk, placing my gun on the bed and then reaching into the side table and pulling out a pistol. I may not go into the rooms very often, but once I knew Gerald was okay and loyal to a fucking fault, I had him help me hide weapons in as many rooms as we could; he took this half of the house.

“If you’re so sure that you made the hit, why do you need the pistol?” Rome smirks.

“You can never be too careful; I will never be caught without a weapon again.”

Rip watches me closely, seeing more than I’m sure I want to show him right now. I turn on my heel and walk out of the room. The guys all follow behind me, surprisingly quiet, considering they just saw me kill someone.

As we get to the bottom of the stairs, Gerald appears with a broad and proud grin on his face out of nowhere.

“Nice shot, Miss Jynx. I watched it on the cameras. Your grandmother would be proud.”

“Not the response I was expecting, Gerald.” I grin, “But thanks, you and me need to have a conversation about who exactly my grandmother was because I’m starting to think that she wasn’t the normal grandmother I’ve been picturing.”

His eyes twinkle, “Your grandmother was many things, but normal was definitely not one of them. Whenever you’re ready, I’ll tell you everything, but I do believe that you have something you need to take care of. You can’t really be leaving dead bodies around the grounds. They start to smell after a while.”

I chuckle, not even surprised at his knowledge anymore. There’s clearly a lot more going on here than I could have ever suspected, and I’m looking forward to getting to the bottom of it.

“Actually, first, I need to prove to these doubting fuckers that he is, in fact, dead,” I grin. “Erm, actually, while I’ve got you here, have you seen my mother? I haven’t had a reply from her for a couple of weeks.”

He smiles at the guys standing behind me, “They’ll soon learn the Luther women don’t do anything by halves. If they’re going to do something, then they become a master of it, regardless of what it is.”

“It’s nice to know that I had that in common with my grandmother,” I reply, a foreign pang of sadness spearing me at the thought that I will never get to meet the woman that, from the sounds of it, I have much more in common with than my own mother.

It’s the first time I’ve really felt sad about her death, which may sound callous, but I didn’t know the woman, and death surrounds me daily. So it’s nothing new to me. The more I get to know about her, though, the more I start to feel sad that I won’t get to meet her. She sounds like one hell of a woman.

“You have more than you could ever imagine in common with her. As for your mother,” his nose turns up in disgust, and I grin. Yeah, she doesn’t do herself any favors and is not an easy woman to like, “She went to Cabo, I think, with some guy she picked up at the club. She left when you were in New Orleans and didn’t say anything about when she would be back.”

“Well, at least that’s one less person we have to worry about getting caught in the crosshairs while we get this shit sorted,” I

reply.

He nods in agreement, then turns on his heel and walks off to do what I have no idea. I probably should know more about the sorts of things he does around this house, but I guess I was pretty fucking overwhelmed when we first got here, and then I got distracted by the guys. I need to fix that, though.

I'm getting the ridiculous urge to make my grandmother proud.

"You don't seem surprised that your mom's disappeared on you," Rome mutters.

"That's because I'm not," I reply simply, pushing out of the back door, "Are you guys armed?" I ask somewhat skeptically.

"Yes, Hellcat." Rip replies, moving his jacket and showing me his weapon.

"Nice. What about the rest of you?"

"I think mine is somewhere in the front room," Mason replies, Malachi nodding that his is as well.

"I've got a knife," Rome replies.

"I took mine off to sleep." Ace adds.

"Alright, in that case, stay close and keep your eyes peeled. I've had no more notifications to say that someone else is on the grounds, but it may have been a distraction or some shit so just be alert." I mutter, not really used to giving these sorts of orders to other people. I prefer to work alone, and having them with me, even if it is to prove I made the shot is a weird experience, and I'm not sure how it makes me feel.

They're all alert but calm, and it's easy to tell that they've been in situations of this nature before. I know that they've only just started working for D, but I also know that before that, the kids and even the teachers at school were terrified of them. Besides that, D doesn't recruit novices. They have to have made quite a name for themselves in order to catch his interest, and I'm surprised that I haven't heard about them before now.

Maybe I have, and I just didn't realise. It's unlikely they go by their real names. Hell, they may even have a team name that they use. I'll have to ask them about it or maybe D if they're reluctant to tell me.

It doesn't take us long to find the guy. As we get closer, I realise I recognise him, and I sort of wish I had taken him down slower, like his friend in the parking lot.

"My apologies, kill shot straight through the head," Rome mutters, sounding impressed.

"What's wrong?" Malachi asks his eyes on me.

"You remember I told you about that mercenary group?" I ask and then nod, "He was one of them."

"Are you okay?" Ace asks me, coming to stand beside me and wrapping his arm around my shoulders, pulling me close to his chest.

"Yeah, I'm good. I'm glad there's only one fucker left out there, but I wish I could've taken my time with this one." I reply.

"Not what I thought you were going to say, but I'm glad you're okay," Mason mutters, with amusement in his eyes.

It's a good job that he finds my brutal nature amusing.

"Are you going to call D for a clean-up, or do you want me to call our guy?" Rome asks casually, and I feel my eyebrows hit my hairline.

"You have your own clean-up guy?" I ask, and they share a look.

"Yeah, it was needed. He hasn't failed us yet." Mason replies, looking slightly uncomfortable, and I get the feeling that he's not used to talking to people outside of his group about this, and not only that, but I think he's still slightly hung up on the old me and is worried that something they say is going to scare me off.

"Exactly who are you?" I ask with a grin.

“We’re not quite ready to share that, as in order to explain it properly, we’d have to tell you all about our pasts, and none of us is ready for that. Just like I’m sure you’re not ready to tell us everything about your past,” Ace replies, straightforward and to the point.

I take note of their tense postures.

“Alright, fair enough,” I reply easily, hiding my grin at their questioning looks. Clearly, they thought I was going to argue. But what would be the point? They don’t want to tell me, and they’re right; there are things I don’t want to tell them.

“Huh, well okay then,” Ace mutters, the tension draining from him in such a rush it’s like he’s a popped balloon.

“I’ll just use D, I’ll have to tell him about it anyway, and at the moment, I’d rather use the cleaners I know,” I explain.

“Fair enough,” Rip answers for all of them.

“Can we go inside and do it, though? It’s not like he’s going to go anywhere, and I’m starting to get cold.” Mal asks. The sun is only just starting to peek over the horizon turning the black night sky into an inky blue.

“Sure, Mal, let’s go.”

His eyes become soft as he strides towards me and threads our fingers together, “I love that you get our names right and can tell us apart so easily.”

“I don’t understand how anyone that knows you two couldn’t tell you apart,” I reply.

“You’d be surprised who can’t tell the difference between us, and they’ve known us a lot longer than you have.” He replies.

I’m about to ask what he means but the sadness in his eyes that he doesn’t entirely hide quick enough stops me in my tracks. Not a subject up for discussion then and clearly one that still causes him pain.

“You know we’re going to test it as often as possible, though?” Mason grins, coming up on my other side and opening the door for us all to move into the kitchen.

“Bring it. I bet I can tell you two apart under any circumstances.” I challenge.

“Why do I feel like we’re going to be missing out on something fun?” Ace asks, and Rip shoots him a sharp look that I don’t understand.

“Help yourself to whatever,” I say as we get back into the warm kitchen, and I pull out my phone.

“Hey, D,” I say as he picks up on the first ring.

No matter what time of night I call him, he always answers, I don’t know when he sleeps or anything, but it’s pretty fucking handy.

“Hey, Kid. Everything alright?”

“Yeah, I need a clean up at mine. Francis Under from the Mercenary team tried to get into my property. I took him out before I realised who he was.”

“Everyone okay?”

“Yep, we’re all good.”

“Good, I’ll have the clean up there in ten minutes. I haven’t been able to find any more intel on those raven heads that got left on your doorstep, but I do know that the last member of their team, Demetri, is in California at the moment. I have people watching his moves in case he heads back this way. I think it’s probably safe to say that Francis is the one who left you the heads. I am looking into another avenue that came up in our search, but it’s improbable that it has anything to do with them. I don’t know how you would’ve gained their attention, and we’re on fairly good terms with them.”

Chapter Fifteen

“Okay,” I say, elongating the word, “I assume that’s all the information that you’re going to give me on the other lead?”

“You guessed right, Kid. I’ll tell you something more when I can.”

“Thought so. Well, keep me updated, and I’ll have Gerald lookout for the cleanup team. Listen, did you know that my mom is in Cabo with someone she picked up at a bar?”

“No, but then again, I stopped keeping track of your mother as soon as I realised what a pointless endeavour it was. Stay safe, and as soon as the last member makes a move, I’ll let you know.”

“Thanks, D.”

“Everything alright?” Rip asks.

“Yeah,” I reply, going on to explain everything that he told me and then looking at my phone, “We better get ready if we want to be at school on time.”

“You’re still going?” Mal asks, surprise lacing his tone.

“Of course I am.”

“D okayed it?” Rome double checks, despite me telling him that D said that Francis was more than likely the person who left the raven heads on my doorstep.

“Yeah, he did. I’d suggest we all go armed, though if you don’t already.”

“Got it, come on then. Let’s get ready.” Malachi grins, sharing a look with his twin that I know means trouble.

I start to question them when Waverly and Micha walk into the kitchen.

“Hey, guys, what’s going on?”

“Francis broke in last night, and I took him out. D’s sending a cleanup crew. They should be here in a few minutes.” I explain quickly.

“Got it, eventful night then,” Micha replies, zombie shuffling over to the coffee pot and pouring himself and Wave’s a cup.

“Shouldn’t you guys be more concerned?” Ace asks, “I mean, someone just broke into the grounds with the intention of killing Jynx, not to mention the bomb at the school yesterday.”

“Oh fuck I forgot about that, is the school even open today?” I ask.

“Yeah, it is. An announcement was sent to our phones that said everything is running as usual, and it was an isolated incident.” Waverly answers me. “And to answer you, Ace, no, this sort of shit happens to Jynx all the time.”

“It does?” Mason asks, his eyes wide.

I chuckle, “Oh yeah. The quietest months I’ve ever had were when I was hanging out with you guys when I first got here.”

“No shit?” Rome asks, and I nod.

“Yeah, if you were hoping for a quiet life, staying around Jynx is definitely not the way to go about it.” Micha chuckles.

“It didn’t scare you off,” I retort, sticking my tongue out.

“And it’s not going to scare us off. None of us really do well with boring.” Rip replies, the others voicing their own agreement.

“Great,” I reply, not really sure what to do with the emotions that are churning in my gut like month old chocolate pudding, ew gross. Why does my mind always go to the disgusting metaphors? “I’m going to get dressed now because otherwise, we really are going to be late.”

I take the stairs two at a time. I really am starting to find it easier, so the silver lining to having so many stairs is definitely that my endurance is going up. Once I’m in my room, I

quickly throw on my uniform, put my hair up into a messy bun, and apply minimal makeup because I can't be fucking bothered to do anything more elaborate.

"Hey, Jynx," Mason calls from the bottom of the stairs.

"Come on up. I'm just getting the last of my stuff together." I call back.

When Mason and Malachi reach the top of my stairs, my mouth drops open in shock as all rational thought disappears from my mind. They are completely naked except for matching tight black boxers that leave nothing to the imagination.

Thank you, god.

"So, who's who?" Mason asks.

I am, however, not keeping my cool in this situation very well at all. There is absolutely nothing subtle about the way that I'm checking them out as my eyes roam their washboard abs, covered in stunning tattoos, arms built like fucking tree trunks and thighs that look like they could crush, well me, I can't seem to make myself stop staring. I'm not exactly trying hard to stop, though. Why would I? They are fucking gorgeous. My panties become damp, my pulse skyrocketing, and I have the undeniable urge to take off all of my clothes.

However, I manage to tightly clamp down on that fucking urge.

"What?" I ask, only just realising that he asked me a question.

Disappointment flashes in Malachi's eyes, "I told you it was too good to be true, and she couldn't tell us apart. We have a different enough style of clothes that it makes it easy." There's a bitter disappointment in his tone that hurts my heart.

"Oh, quit it, Malachi, you can't come in here looking fucking lickable and then expect me to focus on anything other than licking you," I reply with a huff.

"Lickable?" Mason says, his eyebrow raised and a smug smile playing around the edge of his lips.

“You got it right?” Mal says, his voice hushed.

The fact that I can tell them apart clearly means a lot to Mal, more than it does to Mason, although I don't think that he's completely unaffected.

Risking my panties completely fucking disintegrating, and trust me, it is a legitimate fear of mine right now; I move towards Mal placing my hand on his bare chest. He shudders at my touch, his eyes becoming hooded and grasps my hand holding it to his chest.

Fuck me, that look is not helping.

I resist the urge to shake my head to get my thoughts back on track. I can feel how important it is to him to hear these words.

“Malachi, you can test me as many times, in as many ways as you can possibly think of, and I won't get bored or upset or even mad. I will tell you each time that you are you, until you know one hundred percent, in here,” I tap his chest over his heart, “That I know who you are, I know you are a separate and different person from your twin and that you are both equally worthy.”

Malachi's eyes flood with emotion as he pulls me into his chest, crushing me against him, his heart pounding beneath my head. Mason comes up behind me and wraps us both in his arms.

“You're fucking amazing, Jynx.” Mason whispers into my hair, “I don't know how you knew the right words to tell him but thank you.”

Mal shifts slightly, and a soft kiss lands on my cheek, his silent thank you.

“Guy's, what the fuck are you doing up here? We've got to go.” Rip growls, stomping up the stairs.

He freezes when he sees us, and I have to admit that it looks fairly compromising.

I'm sandwiched between the twins, and they've only got boxers on. A wide grin covers my face. I can't fucking help it.

“Well, guys, as much as I’d like to explore this twin sandwich we’ve got going on, according to Rip, we have no time,” I tease and surprisingly, all three of them inhale sharply.

“Is school really that important, though?” Malachi asks, amusement dripping from his tone and making my smile widen even further. God, it is too fucking tempting to take his suggestion and make it a reality.

Mason’s hand starts to slowly run up the side of my thigh, pushing my school skirt further up my leg. What the fuck is happening right now. Malachi buries his head in my neck, and I can feel his lips tilt into a smirk before he slowly kisses up my neck. My whole body shudders.

Suddenly, they’re pulled away from me, and I pout before shooting Rip a disgruntled look.

“That’s enough you two. Go and get dressed.” He orders harshly.

The twins stay exactly where they are, their gazes absolutely ravenous as they take me in. My gaze, however, doesn’t stay on their eyes for very long as they travel down their bodies to their dicks, standing to attention and begging me to release them from their boxer prison. I take a step towards them.

“Now!” Rip orders again, and the boys share a look before sighing heavily and making their way down the stairs, Rip hot on their heels.

“To be continued!” I yell after them, making the twins chuckle and Rip shoot me a warning look that I just shrug in response. He can order them around, and he can try to do the same with me, but he won’t get very far.

Once they’ve gone, I take a deep breath. Holy hell, that was hot. My eyes catch on the clock on the wall, and I curse, fuck, we really are going to be late now thanks to the twin’s distraction. It was abso-fucking-lutely worth it, though. I rush over to my closet rooting through the drawers until I find a clean pair of panties since my current pair are destroyed. I shimmy out of those and pull the new pair on, settling them on

my hips before making sure my skirt falls right over the top and isn't tucked into them. I'm not used to wearing fucking skirts, and that's happened to me more times than I care to admit since I've been here, and they've become a part of my wardrobe. Grabbing my bag off my bed, I rush down my stairs, through the halls and then down the main staircase, meeting the guys at the front door, where they appear to be having a heated debate that stops the second that they see me.

I don't know what the fuck I'm doing when it comes to them. I've kissed Ace and Mason, I don't even know what that was upstairs between the twins, but there's no denying that I found it hot as fuck. I do know that I am attracted to all of them. I think I'd have to be fucking blind not to be.

It's more than that, though, isn't it? A quiet voice whispers through my mind, and I instantly push it away. That annoying fucking voice can stay buried until I am ready to listen to it.

I'm guessing that since the conversation stopped when I came down the stairs, that it was about me and the aforementioned twin sandwich.

"Alright, let's go," Rome says.

"Actually, I was going to take one of my cars," I reply.

"One of? How many do you have?" Ace asks curiously.

"Ten, I think. My grandmother loved fast cars." I grin.

"I think it might be better that we all go in one car. Even Wave's and Micha, if the threat didn't come from Francis, there's still someone out there who wants you dead," Rome interrupts, crossing his arms over his chest.

"There's always someone who wants me dead," I retort.

"And that's supposed to convince us that we should take separate cars. How?" Rip mutters, raising one of his eyebrows.

"Okay, fine. I guess it can't hurt, but can we take the giant SUV in the garage, it still doesn't have enough seats for all of us, but it will be a hell of a lot more comfortable than trying to fit in your car." I concede.

"Fine, lead the way."

I grin triumphantly, and Rome rolls his eyes at me, a tiny grin playing around the edge of his mouth before he manages to squash it. I lead them back through the house, aware that we really are pushing it for time now. Rip whistles in appreciation once we get to the garage, and his eyes light up as he sees all the cars. Note to self; Rip likes cars. I chuck the keys to Rome, not bothered about driving the SUV in the slightest and then climb in the front. They may have made a good point about me not being able to drive by myself, but that doesn't mean I'm not going to be petty and make the big fucker's squish into the back.

The evil grin is wiped off my face as my door is pulled open. Rip picks me up out of the car, holding me in his arms as he climbs back in and settles me on his lap. His lips tilt up ever so slightly at my shocked look, and his eyes shimmer with amusement.

"Smart move, dude," Malachi mutters from the back seat, and I look over, unable to stop the giggle from escaping me when I see Ace, Malachi and Mason hunching over or sitting with their torsos slightly turned so that they can fit on the back seat better.

"Okay, that's mean," Ace grins, a fake glare aimed in my direction.

I shrug at Ace, "Well, you guys insisted that we all travel together."

"Yeah, there is no way we're even going to attempt to squeeze in there." Waverly grins, "We'll take one of the other cars."

"You sure?" I ask, and they both nod enthusiastically, making me chuckle, "Okay, don't crash. You're both armed, right?"

"Always." Micha grins.

"See you at school then," I call after them as they both start towards the keys hanging on the wall, arguing about which car to take.

Rome shakes his head, a grin on his face as he listens to them and pulls out of the garage and down the drive, heading towards the school.

“You know they argue like an old married couple,” he comments.

“They’ve been together as long as most married couples.”

“That’s pretty amazing,” he mutters.

“Yeah, it is. They love each other, truly love each other. I don’t think that often happens these days.” I reply, looking out the front window and the car lapses into silence.

I have to admit that I don’t really want to go to school today, but I also need a bit of normality. It can’t be fighting and go, go, go all the fucking time, or we’ll go insane. Having said that, I am hoping that the last fucker that kidnapped me does decide to make his way here. Demetri was the worst one out of them all and got closer than the others to taking something I didn’t want to fucking give him. While we travelled across the country, one of the stops we made was in a warehouse. It was full of underaged girls and women, some of them drugged, most of them too terrified to do anything, it was a sex trafficking operation, and I was genuinely terrified that I’d end up the same. The only thing that reassured me was that Shadow wanted me, and no one was stupid enough to go against Shadow.

Memories of a blonde-haired, blue-eyed girl who still had such fucking fire in her tries to push their way into my memories, and I force it back. I told D where it was as soon as I fucking got back. She’s been rescued and is back with her dad. I have to fucking believe that. I can’t quite bring myself to ask D, just in case.

“Are you okay?” Rip asks quietly, but since we’re in such close confines in the car, they all hear him, and their attention is instantly on me.

“Yeah, memories just pop up out of nowhere sometimes,” I reply honestly, shocking myself.

Understanding softens all of their features, and it occurs to me that I don't really know much about them. I've never met any of their parents, I've only ever been to Rome's house, but his parents were never there. I'm going to have to fix that. I do realise that if I start to pry into their lives, they are going to want to pry into mine, and it's only fair that I share too. The thought doesn't make me panic as much as I thought it would —Yay for progress.

We get to school after the first bell has already gone; the halls are already empty. The spot where my beautiful car was parked is a charred mess.

“Shouldn't someone have called me about my car blowing up?” I ask as we walk through the front doors.

“The school prides itself on the protection of the students. The Principal probably wants to talk to you today to see how you want to proceed. Usually, the parents get called in. They could've been trying to get hold of your mom.” Ace explains.

I snort before admitting, “She wouldn't fucking answer. I don't know what to say to the Principal.”

“You seem pretty tight with Gerald. You could call him and see if he can deal with it for you. He's used to this world, so he will know what to do.” Malachi suggests.

“Good idea. I'll text him now.” I reply, pulling out my phone. It only takes seconds before I get a reply back.

Gerald: It's already taken care of, Miss Jynx. You won't have to deal with the Principal or the police.

“Huh, he's said he's already dealt with it all. How the fuck did he manage it that quickly?”

“Welcome to the world of the rich and well connected.” Ace grins.

“I've lived with Rome for fucking years now, and I still don't fucking understand everything,” Rip admits.

The guys stare at him in surprise clearly, it's not something that he tells most people.

“I didn’t know you live with Rome,” I say, trying to sound like I’m not burning with curiosity.

“No one does. I still have my house, but I hate it and haven’t been there for years,” he pauses, his eyes meeting mine, death and sadness warring in their depths, “I can’t bring myself to sell it, though.”

I reach out my hand, not really sure what I could say at this moment, so instead, I thread my fingers through his and offer him comfort.

“If you ever want to talk about it, I’m here. I’ve realised that I don’t really know much about you all, and you don’t really know much about me. I want to change that. When everyone is ready.”

“I’d like that,” Ace replies with a soft smile.

“Us too.” The twins say together, and I grin. I love it when they do that.

“I have to warn you, none of our stories are particularly happy ones,” Rome adds.

“Neither is mine,” I reply simply, walking ahead and turning so that I can face them, bringing them all to a stop. “It doesn’t take a genius to realise that your stories are probably fucked up, but so is mine, and I think we might find that we have more in common than we thought. Besides, it looks like you guys are planning to stick around, right?” I ask, somewhat nervous about their answer.

“We’re not going anywhere,” Rome replies seriously, “That week when we distanced ourselves from you ...”

I interrupt, with a grin, “Is that what we’re calling it now?”

He silences me with a look, making my grin widen into a full smile as he continues, ignoring my statement, “That week was fucking hell, and the following weeks where we had no idea where you were or if you were coming back were even worse.”

“We’re not going anywhere, and I don’t think we could if we tried,” Mason mutters, seriously, crossing his arms over his

chest.

“You’re stuck with us,” Malachi adds.

“Good,” I reply, at a loss with what else to say and how happy that fucking makes me.

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Chapter Sixteen

I'm about to tell them how much it means to me that although I've had people around me my whole life, I've never really felt like I truly fit, not like I do when I'm with them. Mushy for me, I know, but they just seem to bring it out in me. Before I can say any of that and more than likely embarrass myself, I'm suddenly yanked back into the empty classroom I was standing next to, an arm around my neck and something sharp held to the other side of my neck.

Rage consumes the guys as they quickly follow me in.

"Mr Rights?" Ace asks in shock.

"This doesn't concern you, boys. Go back out!" The teacher snarls.

"Not a fucking chance," Rip growls, his voice deadly.

I don't think I just react as I swing my leg back between his legs, kicking him in the dick and then yanking myself out of his grip. I turn on my heel, ready to take him down but what he has in his hand has me freezing to the spot. Dark memories from when I was kidnapped try to pull me into their depths, as panic claws its way up my throat and I freeze in fear. There's only one thing that can make me panic like this, and that's the needle in his hand. He charges towards me, and my feet stay glued to the floor, my chest tight, not able to get enough air into my lungs as I start to feel dizzy, black spots dancing across my vision.

Fuck.

Rip tackles him to the floor before he gets to me, making the needle skitter across the tile and towards me. My eyes dart back up to Rip as he effortlessly snaps the teacher's neck, and the guy falls limply at his feet, his neck twisted at an unnatural angle. His gaze snaps to me, worry clouding them, but words won't come, and my eyes move back to the needle as it hits

my boot. The last thing I remember is a whimper escaping me as my mind gives out and I tumble into unconsciousness.

Ace

I barely catch her in time as her eyes roll back into her head and her body goes limp.

“What the fuck just happened? Is she okay?” Rome asks, panic in his voice that betrays how much he truly cares about her.

“I don’t know. I think she’s just passed out. She’s breathing.” I reply, double checking her pulse and trying to stop myself from panicking. That’s not going to help her now.

“It’s my fault. I shouldn’t have killed the fucker.” Rip mutters, hatred directed solely at himself coating his tone.

“Don’t be a fucking idiot,” Mason snaps, shocking the shit out of Rip enough that he doesn’t reply straight away, “She killed that fucker the other day. She grew up with fucking D, who is a legend in the fucking crime world. Her whole life has been surrounded by death. You killing someone in front of her wouldn’t have made her bat a fucking eyelid. This is something more.”

“You’re right,” Rip replies, shocking the shit out of the rest of us. He never admits someone else is right that fucking quickly.

“What do we do?” Malachi asks, coming over to Jynx and gently sweeping the hair out of her face, his eyes darkening with concern.

I scoop Jynx up in my arms, “Well, we need to call the body in, and if we call it into D, then we can ask what might have happened to Jynx. Maybe she has some sort of medical condition.”

“Okay, I’ll call him. Why don’t you set her down over there,” Rome suggests pointing to the couch set off to the side of the classroom. It sounds odd, but this is an art room for the

upper years, and they do life models at some point. Plus, the art teacher is quite eccentric and believes that art should be done where you are most comfortable. So the whole room has things like bean bags and massive floor cushions covering it, all splattered with paint.

He sounds a lot more relaxed than he was a second ago, now that he has something productive to focus on, that's Rome for you, though, so long as he has a task to focus on, he can keep his mind clear and do what needs to be done. He usually doesn't have a problem staying on task but seeing Jynx possibly hurt has shaken him more than he's likely to admit.

"Put it on speaker. It will save time," Mason suggests, and Rome nods, pulling the phone away from his ear and tapping the screen.

"Rome," D answers, his voice a lot chillier than whenever he speaks to Jynx.

D's a scary mother fucker, and I can't believe that he's her uncle, although the more we learn about her, the more it makes sense.

"Jynx got attacked by one of the teachers at school, Rip took care of it, and we need a clean up ASAP, but Jynx froze and then passed out, she's still not woken up yet, but she's breathing fine," Rome explains quickly, looking to me for reassurance when he says she's still breathing and I nod.

"Did the guy have a needle?"

"Erm, yeah, why?" Rome replies, looking slightly confused.

"Okay, she's had a panic attack. When she comes out of it, she will come out fucking swinging, so I suggest you all keep way back and disarm her. Whatever you fucking do, do not pin her or restrain her in any way, or she will kill you. She should become aware fairly quickly but stay back until she is."

"What the fuck happened to make her scared of fucking needles and being restrained?" Rip asks, his voice cold.

"I don't know what she's shared with you already. Waverly filled me in on your shared history. Well, she told her mother, and I overheard. She clearly cares about you; if she didn't kill

you for the shit you pulled, Jynx will tell you when she's ready but do not pressure her for the love of Hades. She needs good and fucking capable people at her back, and I have a feeling you might just be it." He pauses, and I hear voices in the background, "The clean up will be there in two minutes. Remember, stand back and have her call me when she wakes up. Go straight fucking home. You're all on lockdown until we get to the bottom of this. I think it might be Demetri, the last kidnapper left alive, that's employing some people to do his dirty work, but I'll get back in contact when I have more information. For now, stay at the house. I'll message Waverly and tell her and Micha to get their ass back there."

"Got it, thanks, D," Rome replies, receiving a grunt in response before the line goes dead.

"I really don't fucking like the sound of that," Mason growls.

"None of us fucking do, that's a pretty fucking severe panic attack, and D immediately knew what caused it," Malachi answers him.

"Do you think it's something to do with her kidnapping?" I ask.

"Definitely, and if I didn't know that she needed to take the fuckers out herself, I would fucking gut the last one alive and make him fucking watch as I pulled out his insides." Rip threatens graphically.

I actually agree with him, and I think we all have our own methods that would make dealing with him hell for him but fucking fun for us.

What can I say? We're dark, deadly and exceptionally well trained fuckers. Only Jynx seems to bring out our softer side, speaking of, "Erm guys do you want to help me quickly disarm her?"

"Sure," Malachi answers, striding towards us as Rome, who had taken up position guarding the door, opens it to let the cleanup crew inside.

We pay them no mind as they grab the body, wrap it in a body bag before radioing someone to double check that the cameras at the side of the school are turned off and then pop the window open. They chuck the bag out and then follow after out the window after it. Thankfully we're on the ground floor, and no one is going to see a body bag or two men go flying past their classroom window. They're done and gone in less than five minutes, considering this was a clean kill. The last guy carefully picks the syringe up off the floor with a gloved hand and places it into a bag before following the others out of the window, and I'm guessing D wants to know what's in it.

"I don't like disarming her," Malachi says as we take Jynx's gun and a couple of knives off her, putting them on the desk closest to the classroom door and hopefully far enough out of her reach.

"Me neither, but it's what D told us to do, and it's not like we're keeping them." I try to reassure him, even though I'm not too fond of doing it myself.

"We really need to get back to the house," Rip mutters, his eyes never leaving Jynx, "I feel like we're too exposed here."

"I agree, but if Jynx wakes up swinging as D said she would, I'm not sure it's a good idea to take her in the car." Rome points out.

"And one of us would have to be holding her, and D said not to restrain her in any way. I know we've disarmed her, but I'm still fairly fucking certain that she could kill us regardless," Mason adds. "Especially if she thought that she was in danger."

Rip's eyes light up with pride at the suggestion, and I hide my smirk. He's fucking determined that he's not good enough for her, and he may be right, but not for the reason that he thinks. None of us is good enough for her. Our pasts and the threats that it still poses to this day mean that she deserves better than us. I think that we are all too selfish to let her go now; we all care too much about her. We will need to give her all the sordid details, though, so that she can make her own

decision on whether she wants to stick around or not. I really fucking hope she does.

“She should,” I start before pain spears through my cheek, “Ow fuck!”

I move away from Jynx as fast as I fucking can, she caught me damn good, and it’s going to bruise like a motherfucker. The guys all stare at me with amusement, barely holding in their laughter.

“Fuck you,” I grumble.

Suddenly all our attention is on Jynx as she springs off the couch, eyes rapidly searching the room as she drops down into a defensive crouch, ready for a fight and looking deadly as hell.

“Jynx, it’s us. You’re safe.” I mutter, and the guys scoff but shut up pretty fucking quickly when it works, and her eyes start to clear. She straightens out of her defensive crouch and looks around the room, confused.

“Ah fuck, I had a panic attack, didn’t I?” She asks knowingly, and pretty fucking calm considering, she pats herself down, “Where are my weapons?”

“Erm, D said it would be best to disarm you for when you woke up,” Malachi explains, a slight nervous lilt to his voice that amuses the shit out of me.

This is the guy that has no problem breaking a fuckers arm just for looking at him wrong or taking out a high profile target that, for all intents and purposes, should be more qualified for the job he was pretending he knew how to do. He’s infiltrated top companies around the country to get the information we need, and yet Jynx, this five-foot fucking two woman, brings him to his knees.

She does it to me, too; I’m not pretending she doesn’t. It’s just amusing and somewhat reassuring to see my brothers experiencing it as well. I know better than most how fucking lethal they all are.

“Good call,” she replies, spotting her weapons on the table and moving over to them, “I would really hate it if I killed one

of you.”

“Erm, thanks, I think?” Rome mutters, and she snorts.

She glances at me as she moves past to get her weapons back. Then, she screeches to a halt and gently places her hand on my unbruised cheek.

“What the fuck happened to you?” She asks anger in her tone and the guys all burst out laughing. “This isn’t funny.”

I gently grab her wrist, “I didn’t move out of the way of you quick enough.”

She groans, “Aw, I did this?” I nod. “I’m really sorry. I come out fighting.”

“We know, D told us, the idiot just didn’t get out of the way.” Mason grins.

“Okay, that was rude!” I reply, amusement in my tone until I look down at her worried face, “Honestly, I am fine. I’ve had a lot worse from people who actually wanted to punch me. We’re good.”

“Are you sure?”

“Absolutely, now grab your shit. We’ve been ordered back into lockdown while D chases a lead,” I reply.

She grabs her stuff, holstering it all quickly before she starts towards the door, and we all follow. The twins reach out and take hold of a hand each, and although they’ve done it before, I get the feeling that this time it’s because no one can snatch her if they’ve got a hold of her.

“D said to call him as soon as you were awake. We need to get out of here fast, though, so do it in the car. I’m not risking anyone else coming for you right now.” Rome orders.

She salutes him cheekily before blowing him a kiss, and Rome’s face falls into an array of emotions. I’m not sure whether he’s amused or trying to remain strict. Either way, it’s hilarious.

She slows down when the car comes into view, “Erm, maybe it’s a good idea to unlock it from back here. You know,

just in case it goes, boom,” she suggests making an explosion with her hands, and I grin.

For someone who is so kickass, she sure can be cute as hell.

“Good point.” Rome agrees, and we all move further away from the car. He double-checks that we’re out of the blast zone before he presses the button, nothing goes boom, and I breathe a sigh of relief.

“I’m not used to it being someone unknown trying to take one of us out,” I mutter, and Jynx’s head snaps to me while the guys shoot me a look.

“What does that mean?”

“Well, she said she wanted to know more about us, the least we could do is explain the basics,” I shrug.

“Do you think that’s a good idea?” Malachi asks nervously.

He’s right to be nervous. It’s one hell of a tale and not one that we have shared with anyone, but if anyone can understand it and handle it, it will be Jynx.

Rip scoffs as he pulls open the door to the car and climbs in the rest of us doing the same, “You think she’s going to let it go now that you’ve dangled it in front of her like a fucking carrot?”

“Alright, fine, just the basics, though. I’m sorry, but some of it, none of us are ready to share yet.” Rome says reluctantly, starting the car and pulling out of the lot, his eyes constantly switching between the mirrors to ensure we aren’t being followed.

“That’s understandable,” she replies, her eyes practically on fire with curiosity, “You know you don’t have to tell me, though.”

“Fuck off, Blue,” I grin, “You’re practically burning with curiosity.”

She shoots me a sheepish grin while flipping me the bird, and I chuckle.

“No, Ace is right. You said you wanted to know more about us, and the place to start so that you can really understand is here.” Rome replies.

“Plus, we’re about due for an attempt in a couple of weeks. They’re like fucking clockwork.” Mason adds, rolling his eyes and looking far too amused for the situation. “You need to know about it in case you get caught in the crosshairs.”

“That won’t fucking happen.” Rip growls.

Jynx studies them both curiously as we pull up to the house, the gates slamming closed behind us, “Before we get into it, how long have you been dealing with this?”

“Since we were about fourteen, I guess,” I reply.

“Fucking hell, they can’t have been trying that hard then,” she mutters.

“No, Jynx, we’re just that good,” Malachi grins as matching dark smiles cross all our faces.

I watch as her own eyes become heated. Well, I’ll be damned. She fucking liked the thought of that.

“Alright, let’s get inside, and I’ll give you a bit of our history,” Rome sighs, but there’s a tightness around his eyes that gives away how nervous this conversation is making him.

“Alright,” Jynx says, taking out her phone and tapping away. “I’ll just shoot D a quick text letting him know I’m awake.”

“Miss, is everything alright?” Gerald asks as we walk through the front door, having left the SUV parked outside.

“Everything’s fine. One of the teachers tried to kill me. Rip took care of it,” she replies easily, shooting a grateful look at Rip, who just looks shocked. Her phone buzzes in her hand, and she glances down at it, “D’s put us into full lockdown until he can precisely locate the last fucker. We’re not to leave the house.”

“Yeah, he said something like that to us.” I interrupt.

“Very well, miss, I’ll make sure that the house is well stocked and don’t forget that we have a games room and indoor pool, as well as the atrium. There are also plenty of grounds that you haven’t explored yet and your grandmother set up some practice targets out there that I’ll let you find,” Gerald replies before moving past us and walking further into the house.

“Hey Gerald, when Waves and Micha get back, can you tell them I’ll fill them in later?” Jynx calls after him, and he smiles with a nod, “Anything you guys tell me will stay between us. I feel like that’s important to say.”

“Thank you. It is extremely important that no one else knows. You will be the first person we have ever told. The first outsider that knows this history and the only outsider that will know some things,” Mason says seriously. “The things we tell you could put you in a lot of danger if anyone knew that we’d told you. Are you sure you want to know?”

“Wow, okay. I’ve got it. If you want to tell me, then I want to know, besides, what’s a little more danger?” She replies with a grin. “Do you want to talk upstairs? We’re less like to be interrupted up there.”

“Yeah, that sounds good,” Rome replies.

“This is going to be an intense conversation. I’m going to need to get out of this fucking uniform for it.” Rip groans, tugging at the collar of his shirt. He’s never been comfortable in the uniform.

“Good call. I’ll meet you all in my room in like ten minutes?” Jynx says as we all start walking up the stairs, we never actually chose rooms last night since we all fell asleep in the front room, but we did dump our bags this morning to get changed. “Completely off subject, but I had no idea I had all that stuff Gerald mentioned.”

“It’s not surprising the house is huge, and you did say that you hadn’t explored all of the rooms,” I point out.

“True. What kind of grandmother has practice targets set up, though?”

“One that isn’t as sweet and innocent as she first appears,” Malachi mutters.

“The more I learn about her, the more I’m starting to believe that.” She agrees, “Alright, I’ll meet you in my room in ten.”

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Chapter Seventeen

Jynx

I take the stairs two at a time in a rush to get up to my room and change clothes as quickly as possible. Curiosity is burning through me, just from the little bits of information the guys have given me, and I'm finally going to get some real answers about who they are.

What I can't quite understand, though, is that they've had someone that they know consistently trying to kill them since they were fourteen, and they seem pretty fucking laid back about it. It makes me incredibly curious to find out more and explains why D employed them in the first place. They have to have some pretty good fucking skills to have avoided attempts on their lives since they were fourteen.

I quickly throw on some sweats and a loose-fitting t-shirt, and since I'm buzzing with excess energy right now, I move over to the mini kitchen that I have up here and start to make everyone coffees. I probably don't need coffee since I'm already buzzing with excitement, but it gives me something to do while waiting for them to be ready.

"Are you okay?" Mason asks, coming up behind me and wrapping his arms around my waist as he ducks so he can rest his head on my shoulder.

"Yeah, I'm good. Here help me hand out the drinks," I say, pointing out which drink belongs to which person.

"Yes, ma'am," he smirks.

Once everyone's sitting on the oversized couch with their drinks in hand, I look expectantly at Rome. He smiles slightly at my impatience and then shares a look with the others. I know I'm not going to get the whole story, and that's fine. After all, I haven't given them all of my stories. I'm just happy that I get to know more about them, we've known each other for months, and I don't really know anything substantial about

their pasts, apart from the fact that they all grew up together. It also means that they are starting to trust me like I'm starting to trust them, and that means a hell of a lot to me.

Rome takes a deep breath, "Okay, so like Ace said, we have dealt with some pretty sketchy shit over the years, but we haven't had any hits from unknown people trying to take us out. Every so often, like clockwork, our parents send out a hit on us."

I inhale sharply. Of all the things I expected him to say, his parents being behind the hits was not one of them.

"None of them like the idea of us taking over their legacies. I've never really understood the change that happened in them all, up until we were fourteen or so, they didn't try to kill us, but something happened that year, and suddenly we could no longer trust that our parents weren't going to try to kill us. They all belong to the same; I guess you could call it a crime syndicate in the tiny town that we grew up in, and collectively, our parents own the entire town and everyone in it. Our families founded the town some two hundred years ago, and we've owned it ever since and run it like the well-oiled machine it is, but nothing about it is legal. I'm not sure how they've escaped detection all this time, but they have. Then, around twenty years ago, there was a big falling out between the families, and it got really fucking bloody, all of the family's lost members."

"We have never really gotten to the bottom of what it was about, though. Everyone is very tight-lipped about it. The only thing we do know is that there used to be five founding families, and now there are only four, so we're assuming that the fifth got wiped out in the feud." Ace adds.

"Anyway, there are many tensions between the families because of that. You have to understand that this isn't a typical town. Everything that happens they know about, the police force is run by one of my uncles, and the judge is Rip's grandfather. Any other important role is filled by a member from one of the founding families. They divided up the responsibilities when they first founded the town, and each family has stuck to the same roles ever since. Most of the town

is made up of descendants from the first people that came with our families when they founded the town. Occasionally, they'll let an outsider move to town, but they have a strict screening process, and they will only allow someone to move to town if they can offer the town and its people something that we don't already have."

Wow, that sounds crazy if I'm honest, but I feel like that's not the end of it.

"Each of our families has an area of expertise that all of the members have to be an expert in. Ours is espionage, and our parents were over the fucking moon when we were identical twins." Mason starts, and my mouth drops open.

"My family deals with hacking, tech, and because of our history, we also deal in locking picking, breaking into safes, that sort of thing." Ace says next, and I just stare.

"Weapons and the disposal of bodies." Rip says shortly.

"My family are experts at infiltration." Rome finishes. "As I said, we're all trained from an extremely young age in our respective fields, some go on to do normal jobs in the town, but most of us work directly for the families, doing jobs and making money for the town."

"When we were fourteen, we all realised our parents were acting odd. By this point, any resemblance to a childhood had long gone, and we were already strides above everyone else in our training. Ironically thanks to the training that they'd given us, we saw the signs, and we stayed alert. Rip's parents were the first to try to take him out," Rome looks at Rip, whose gaze stays stony.

"I killed my father."

"You had no choice; it was either you or him."

Rip just shrugs in response; he clearly thinks he should've chosen differently.

"I would've done the same," I say, and his sharp gaze pierces me, "If it came down to it and I was in the same position as you were, I'd kill him to save myself."

He doesn't reply or acknowledge my words but just stares at me, studying me. I let him study me, I don't have anything to hide when it comes to that, and I think it's important he knows that someone outside of their group would've done the same in his situation.

"From that point forward, they've tried to take us out every couple of months. They stopped trying themselves, after Rip so easily took out his father and instead used people from the extended family or the town." Rome says, steering the topic back on track. "None of the people in that town are normal citizens."

"Okay, one, that's fucking crazy, I thought I was brought up in a crazy situation, but fuck, that's just nuts. And I fucking knew there was more to you guys. Right off the bat, you had this aura that surrounds you that is just more than any other typical teenager. I guess that's why I was drawn to you. It makes a hell of a lot more sense why D hired you. He doesn't hire newbies very often and certainly not ones as young as you guys. Two, I just don't understand why your parents want you dead. I mean, is it just because of the wealth and power that you'll inherit? Or what?"

"The only reason I can think of is that it's because we're all best friends. We're taught to hate each other from a really young age. I don't think it always used to be that way. The way they spoke to each other sometimes made me think that they all had a shared past where they were once friends but whatever happened twenty years ago changed that. Twenty years ago seems a long time to us, but whatever happened back then is still fresh in their minds, and they have a clear memory of what happened." Ace suggests.

"At the end of the day, we don't know because they won't tell us. Even before they turned on us, they wouldn't tell us." Mason adds.

"Wait, so none of you lives with your parents?" I ask the obvious question, and they look at me like I'm dumb, which is fair, "So how do you afford to go to the school? And Rome, I've seen your house; it's fucking monumental. It could rival this one."

“Yeah, well, there’s an archaic law that has been around since they founded the town. Every new child born to the founding families gets a bank account opened for them, and a set amount of funds put into it, as like a start-up. You’re not supposed to get access until you’re eighteen. However, the hackers being who they are, get theirs as soon as they can hack in and secure it. Ace hacked into his when he was eleven and then hacked into ours as well, releasing the funds to us.” Malachi explains.

I look towards a slightly blushing Ace, “Wow, that is seriously fucking impressive.”

“Thanks, Blue.” He smiles, “That’s just the basics. When we’re ready, we’ll tell you more.”

“I understand. Thank you so much for sharing what you have. I won’t breathe a word to anyone else.” I tell them seriously.

“Never thought you would,” Rip replies.

I smile and then gather my courage, “Is there anything you want to ask me?”

They all share a look, and I know what’s coming. They’ve given me a lot of information, though, so the least I can do is answer their questions in return. Up to a point, I’m not ready to share everything.

“Why did seeing the needle give you a panic attack?” Rome asks, his voice gentler than I have ever heard it before.

“They drugged me at first to make me compliant. The next time they tried, I stabbed one of them using their own knife. It turns out that my body burned through the drug quicker than most, and they hadn’t anticipated that. I don’t know why but they didn’t try to drug me again. I’ve seen the effect it can have on someone, and it fucking terrifies me, having my choice and my control taken away from me like that,” I tell them honestly.

Their postures are tense and their features twisted with anger, their eyes promising painful retribution, and now I know that they are more than capable of following through.

Mason clears his throat, dark emotion clouding his green eyes, “Do you have any other triggers that could set off a panic attack?”

“So we know what to avoid?” Malachi finishes.

“Erm, well, I’ve never been normal, so things like seeing them again don’t trigger me. Especially since if I see them, it’s their last moments on earth,” my grin is sharp, and they return it with grins just as lethal. “As for any other triggers, I haven’t found any yet. Panic attacks creep up on me sometimes out of nowhere, which is frustrating as hell, but I don’t get those as often anymore, and most of the time, I’m not sure what could’ve triggered them.”

“I know what that’s like. The ones that come from nowhere are the fucking worst.” Ace mutters.

“What about you?” I ask, “Do you guys have any triggers I should know about?”

“Explosions,” Ace replies simply.

“Small spaces,” Rip mutters, his blue eyes distant.

“Deepwater,” Malachi says next, his eyes haunted.

“Mines a smell, cigar smoke a particular brand,” Rome says, somewhat reluctantly.

“Being alone in the woods at night,” Mason says, and his brother looks at him with understanding and sympathy.

“Okay, well, all of those we can avoid fairly easily. Can I ask why? You don’t have to tell me,” I add.

“Most of ours are thanks to the training that we were put through as kids,” Rome explains, and my eyes widen.

“Fucking hell, that’s messed up.”

“And that’s only the things that gave us triggers,” Mason points out, “My trigger was because of a part training, but it went wrong. Even though we deal with espionage, there’s no telling where that could be. Sometimes you’re going undercover at a prestigious company, and sometimes you’re watching a high profile target from afar. It’s a broad spectrum,

and we're all taught the basics along with our particular families' areas of expertise. I was six, and it was my turn. They put me in this bunker we had in the middle of the woods surrounding our property, and I had to get out and find my way home in the dark. The woods were booby-trapped, and there was a very real possibility that I wouldn't make it back. My big sister knew how scared I was. I mean, I was six, for fuck sake. She also knew how worried I was about being away from Mal; it was the first time we'd truly been apart. Despite the way that we were brought up, our sister was kind and loving and the only one that could tell us apart. She'd done the bunker before everyone had to do it. It was some kind of right of passage, and after they put me in, she came snuck out to the woods. She didn't help me escape, but she sat there with me, and I wasn't alone." He swallows thickly.

I don't like how he keeps saying was when referring to his sister.

"I finally got out of the bunker, and she hugged me tightly and told me how proud she was of me. All I had to do was find my way back to the house. Then we heard a noise that shouldn't have been there. Someone was moving through the woods, she drew her weapon, her eyes wide, I'd never seen my sister scared before, but there was no mistaking it at that moment, and it made me terrified. She shoved a gun into my hands, keeping only a knife for herself and told me to run. I was so scared that my feet were rooted to the ground, and she had to shove me and order me to run again. I did as I was told just as I heard the noise getting closer. I ran and ran, stumbling through the undergrowth and completely losing my sense of direction in my panic. I heard yelling and the sound of gunfire; I should've gone back, but instead, I just kept running. By the time I finally got back to the house, the sun had been up for a while; they had the local doctor there. My sister was laid on the kitchen table, nobody paid me any mind, Mal was crying in the corner, and I went straight to him. She was unconscious but alive, she had a bullet wound straight through one of her knees, and I wanted to scream. If you aren't at peak physical fitness in our family, you aren't worth keeping around. I never saw her again after that. I'd really like to think that she's still

alive but with my family,” he spits the word, “It’s unlikely. She’d still be around if she hadn’t come after me because I was so scared or given me her gun instead of keeping it for herself. She saved my life and most likely lost hers in forfeit.”

Malachi scoots as close as possible to Mason, wrapping his arm around his shoulders, I get up and sit on the other side doing the same, and he looks at me with his inner turmoil churning in his eyes, clear to see.

“Your sister sounds fucking amazing, and I bet that if she could do it over again, she’d do the same fucking thing. I know I would. You were six; you were a child. You did the best you fucking could, and you listened to her when she told you to run. If you’d gone back, you would both be dead for sure, and you don’t know for certain she is,” I try to reassure him, knowing that my words won’t take the burden off of him, but I have to try.

He pulls me onto his lap, hugging me tightly, “Thanks, Jynx. Maybe one day I’ll believe you.”

“Now that we’re older and more capable of dealing with their shit, we can’t even go back; we’d be shot of fucking sight. So even if our sister is still alive and they’ve hidden her away somewhere, we can’t rescue her.” Malachi adds, and I reach out, threading my fingers through his.

“I used to get shut in small spaces, usually for days at a time, as part of my training,” Rip sneers, “Places like our smaller family safe that was only big enough to fit a small child in. Then, the well in the woods, they’d drop me down and put the cover back on, been buried alive a couple of times, the sound of dirt hitting wood will trigger me, screamed myself fucking hoarse and got told I was worthless for it. Then, they’d play things that sound scary to a child, monsters growling, gunfire, screaming, so I never knew what I’d come up to or even when. The entire time I was down there, I’d imagine getting out and finding all of the guys dead and bloodied on the floor surrounding me.”

I look at Rip in horror, and I swear to fucking god, if I ever get the chance, I’m taking all of these fucking cunts out. I may

have known how to shoot a gun when I was six, how to sneak into a place I shouldn't by the time I was eight, be able to pickpocket any fucker that walked past me by the same age and a whole slew of other talents that no other child or adult will have. Still, I didn't have to go through the fucking 'training' that they had to, and I am a fucking master of my field. It was un-fucking-necessary, and they will die for it.

"What's that look for?" Rip asks me, the ever-present manic gleam in his blue eyes brighter than ever.

"I'm going to kill them," I say simply, and his eyebrows dip in confusion, "Maybe not soon, but I am going to kill them one day."

"You'd kill for me?" Rip says, his voice sounding slightly strangled.

"Of course, I fucking would you killed for me," I point out, "I'd kill for all of you, and I will."

Rip looks like he's having a hard time processing what I just said, so I look to the others. Ace and Mal are smirking at him with a knowing glint in their eyes that he's completely unaware of as he continues to stare at me.

"You can't kill them," Rome starts, and I frown, "Without them, that town would fall into complete and utter chaos. It would be a bloodbath and continue until every last fucker is dead. So as much as I fucking hate them, they need to be there. That's how it's always been, and that's how most of those people have always known it to be. They wouldn't be able to survive without them."

He makes a valid point as much as I hate to admit it. "Fine, but just so you know, you're the only thing stopping me from burying them all six feet fucking under."

He grins, his eyes heated and glued to me.

Chapter Eighteen

“I hear you.” He replies simply before his expression darkens into something more serious, “And since we’re apparently sharing, mines sort of similar to Mason’s, in that it doesn’t have a direct link to the training. We were all trained to be prepared for anything, that included torture,” he starts.

My heart falls to my feet. Oh, fuck no. I’ve been on the receiving end of torture, and I’ve been the one giving it out. I do not like where this is going.

“I can withstand most torture methods, but my dad always smoked cigars when he did it, and that triggers me. You’d think it would be knives, restrains, or any of the other things he used, but the one constant was that cigar smoke. So I guess my brain associates with coming torture now.”

“That’s fucked up,” I reply, “No child should have to go through that.”

“No, they fucking shouldn’t.” He agrees with a growl.

“Mine is to do with training. I was submerged in the deepest point in our lake, either by something tied around me that I’d have to escape from, or they’d hold me under in order to train me to breathe for longer underwater. That wasn’t the worst, though, they used to drop me off in the middle of the lake, and I’d have to swim back to shore, it wouldn’t have been a problem, but they’d have people in scuba gear underneath me that would grab my legs and pull me underneath the surface. The water was so murky that I’d never know where they were. Almost died a few times.” Malachi explains.

“Why would you need to be trained in that for fucking espionage?” I growl.

He shrugs, “To cover any eventuality.”

“Fucking hell,” I curse. I know what I said to the guys, but if I can find a way around killing the parents without the whole town losing their shit, then you can bet your fucking ass

that's what's going to happen. Of course, I won't do anything without them knowing about it. That's not how I want us to work. I look to Ace. He's the only one who hasn't told me his story, and the pain in his eyes has me fearing the worst, "You don't have to tell me now, or ever if you don't want to."

"Everyone else shared, and I think it's only fair, you know, I mean who knows when someone else is going to try to blow you up," he jokes, dark humour seeming to be his coping mechanism.

"Probably sooner than any of us would like," I reply, rolling my eyes.

"Mines similar to Mason's, training gone wrong, but it wasn't my training session. I was just observing because I was next. My brother, only a few years older than me, got blown up when he was training to open a rigged safe. Our parents never went easy on us, and the danger was real every single time we trained. I watched it happen, and I saw the aftermath. They made me search for his pieces, thought it would teach me to be less careless than my brother. The thing is, I've played that day over and over in my mind, and I know for a fact that he cut the right fucking wire, I saw him do it on the monitors. So the only way that it could have happened is that someone sabotaged it, but that should be impossible," he trails off, his eyes distant as he thinks about it. I seriously hope that I'm not overstepping my bounds, as a thought occurs to me.

"Do the rest of you have older siblings, or was it just the twins and Ace?"

"Just them, the rest of us are only children," Rome replies, a curious glint in his steel-blue eyes.

"You said that your parents don't want you taking over and have tried to kill you to stop that from happening, so wouldn't it stand to reason that they did the same to Ace's big brother and the twin's older sister?"

They all stare at me with wide eyes.

"Well fuck me, I hadn't thought about it like that," Ace growls, "That's definitely something that they'd do."

“Yeah, they would.”

“How old were you guys when they died or went missing?” I ask, trying to fit the puzzle pieces together.

“Thirteen ish, it happened pretty close together. I remember that because we all got pretty fucking dark at the same time.” Mason replies.

“Which was just before they started making attempts on your lives, right?”

“Yeah, and they would’ve had to leave a bit of a gap between getting rid of them and getting rid of us, or our grandparents would’ve gotten wind of it, and they’re just as fucking lethal if not more so because they have more experience.”

“Wait, you don’t think your grandparents are involved?” I ask, confused.

“No, none of them ever approved of our parent’s methods, but there wasn’t much they could do about it since they’d passed their titles on to them already. I’m not sure why they did it earlier than traditionally.” Rome explains.

“I highly doubt that they know what’s going on. Because if they did, even without the power that the titles give them, they’d still do something about it.”

“And they can still all kick fucking ass. I used to spar with my grandad right up until we left, and he was fucking awesome, taught me everything I know.” Ace smiles fondly.

“Okay, so what I’m getting is that your families are one whole bunch of fucked up?” I question, and they grin wearily, nodding, “So your parents are trying to kill you all, so they don’t have to pass on the legacies to you, but your grandparents have no idea and don’t agree with the methods that they used to raise you?”

“Yeah, that about sums it up. I know it doesn’t make much sense, but what family fucking does?” Rip asks, his eyebrow raised and a smile tugging up one side of his mouth, ever so slightly.

“Okay good point.” I grin.

“We’ll have to go back one day, and we can find the answers then, but I highly doubt that we will be going back for at least a few years. If we went back now, we’d be dead, plain and simple, even we can’t go up against them all.” Rome replies.

It’s silent for a moment as I absorb all the information they’ve told me. I feel like I can understand them a hell of a lot better now. I’m also more intrigued than ever about the mysteries that they’ve given me. I guess I’m just going to have to put it to the back of my mind for now and hope I’m still a part of their lives when they go back. I’m far too curious.

“I think that’s enough of the serious. I’m fucking tired now,” Ace grins.

“Well shit, that would be because it’s nearly midnight. We were talking for a hell of a lot longer than I realised,” I mutter, checking the time on my phone.

“No wonder I’m so fucking hungry. Did Micha and Waverly get back okay?”

“I’m not sure. Why don’t one of you order pizza, and I’ll go check and see if I can find them.” I say, standing up and stretching.

“It might be easier just to call them. You could be looking for hours in the house,” Ace points out, picking up the remote and turning the TV on, looking for something to watch.

“Hey, Waves, you okay?”

“Yeah, we’re all good. We haven’t run into any trouble. It would seem that all the focus is on you,” she says, “Just be careful, okay, even when D does give us the go-ahead that it’s safe to leave. I couldn’t stand it if anything happened to you.”

“Ditto!” I hear Micha yell in the background, and I grin.

“Don’t worry, I’ll be careful,” my eyes land on the guys, all of them already watching me for some unknown reason, “Besides, it looks like for the first time in a really fucking long

time, I'm not going into this alone and I have some pretty lethal backup."

The guys all grin at me, and Rome gets up, coming to sit next to me and slinging an arm over my shoulder as Ace lays down, his head in my lap, finally having settled on a comedy TV show. I run my fingers through Ace's bright blue hair, a lighter shade than mine, as his mismatched, green and blue eyes stare up at me. It's hard to look away; I love how unique his eyes are, one a dark mossy green and the other such a light blue that it's almost white.

"Good, you fucking need back up. I've been telling you for fucking years, you can't keep going on jobs by yourself," Waverly starts to rant, "The guys seem like a good choice. They clearly know their stuff if D's allowed them to work for him, and they obviously fucking care about you a lot."

"What do you mean?" I ask, hoping like hell the guys can't hear her. Their eyes are all trained on the TV, so I don't think so, but then again, they're all well trained. I can appear to watch the TV and even laugh along when really I'm listening to a conversation.

"Oh fuck off, Jynx, like you don't know that they all have a fucking thing for you. You always said you wanted to try the multiple partner's thing. Imagine the sex, dude!"

"Oh my fuck," I mutter at the image she's just planted in my mind. "Yes fucking please."

Out of the corner of my eye, I see Rome's lip tilt up slightly into a smirk, and if I didn't know any better, I'd think he heard what Wave's said and liked my response. I look down at Ace, and he's not hiding the fact that he's staring at me. His eyes heated. When he sees that he's got my attention, he reaches up, one of his giant palms hooking it behind my neck and pulling my lips down to meet his. The angle isn't great but fuck me, the kiss is explosive, it sets every nerve ending on fire, makes me squirm in my seat, and as his tongue tangles with mine, it makes me desperate to go further. When he pulls back, his expression is soft as he gently swipes his thumb against my cheek and then turns back to the TV. I stare at him in shock

and then panic and look up at the others to check their reaction. That's the first time one of them has kissed me when it hasn't been to shut me up, or I've been trying to stop a panic attack.

I am curious to see their reactions. None of them seems to be bothered at all, even Rip doesn't seem to mind, and I'm not sure if that's a good thing or not. The heat in all of their gazes makes me think that they're not unaffected, but I'm not sure what that means? Does it really matter what it means? At the end of the day, so long as none of them are mad at Ace or me, then I don't really care. I'm not going to start over analysing it and end up working myself into a frenzy. It sounds like far too much fucking effort, thank you very much. When my eyes land on the twins, not only is there heat in their matching green eyes, but their dimples have come out to play as well. Man, I fucking love their dimples. I don't know why but I really, really, fucking do. They pull a twin thing and wink at me at the same time. Their matching gazes promise so fucking much that I want to explore, right fucking now. Seeing my expression no doubt full of fucking heat, their smiles broaden before they turn back towards the TV.

I settle my head on Rome's shoulder, and he shocks the shit out of me by kissing the top of my head before handing me the phone that I must've dropped when Ace kissed me. I have multiple messages from Waverly, and I grin, clicking on them and replying, reassuring her that I didn't hang up on her although I should've and that since we're in lockdown tomorrow does she want to explore the house, she's quick to reply and makes me promise not to go anywhere without her. I let my phone slide down my legs to the floor, my hand going back to play with Ace's hair as my mind drifts.

I have always loved sex, and I haven't been shy about it, but something about the way that the guys make me feel is different, and I can't pinpoint why. It's an odd feeling, and I'm not sure whether I like it. It's unlike anything I have felt before.

The pizza is delivered relatively quickly, and after the heaviness of the afternoon, the mood is light, and I spend most

of it laughing. We all end up crashing in my room, the guys not bothering to go downstairs to their rooms. I wake up partway through the night to the twins getting into bed with me and smile as I fall back to sleep wrapped up in their arms, more content and less restless than I was when my bed was empty.

We all sleep in the following day until my door bangs open; I'm so used to Waverly doing it now that I just peek my head over the top of the covers and glare. However, the glare falls off my face when I see the guys. They all have their guns drawn and pointed at Waverly, who has her arms raised, in the universal don't shoot me gesture. It literally took them seconds to go from dead asleep to alert. It's hot as hell, of course; it helps that they're all shirtless, and the twins are only in their tight boxers again. Where the hell did they get their weapons from so quickly?

It's actually probably a good thing that Waverly came bounding in like she did. If I'd woken up next to the mostly naked twins, I would absolutely have not been able to help myself from touching or, better yet, licking.

"Erm, Jynx, instead of checking out your men like the horny bitch you are could you call them off please? I'm not a fan of having so many guns pointed at me," Waverly says sassily.

"Huh, your men, I kind of like that," Rome mutters quietly enough that he probably thinks I can't hear him.

I catch Rip's nod, and my heart starts to pound an irregular rhythm in my chest. What does that mean? Because I'm not being funny, but my men, sounds fucking amazing.

"Sorry, Waverly, we didn't know it was you," Rome says louder, lowering his gun as the others do the same.

The twins yawn and shuffle their way back to the bed. Considering they were so alert a minute ago, they're now yawning and looking like they're ready to go back to sleep. I sit up as they crash down either side of me, both of them falling onto their stomachs on top of the covers and burying their heads back into the pillows, swinging their arms over the top of me.

I feel my eyebrows hit my hairline; I thought they wouldn't be as affectionate in front of other people. I'm not sure why—I kind of like it. I haven't ever had what you'd call a traditional relationship. I've had people I sleep with regularly, but no one that I would consider an actual partner. Once I'm done, they're gone. That's how it's always been and what I've loved. It's simple, stress and drama free, perfect. However, the guys giving me affection for these last few months, either by walking with their arms around my shoulders, little kisses on the forehead and cheek, and cuddles. I have never had so many cuddles in my life, and I think I've become slightly addicted to them now.

I like it, and I'm not sure what that means for them or for me.

Well shit.

"I have to say. You picked some good ones, Jynxie. They were up quicker than most would've been. It's pretty impressive." Waverly comments an impressed edge to her tone and an amused glint in her eyes as she eyes the twins next to me. She knows that I usually never let anyone sleep in the same room as me and never in the bed.

She also knows that I've fallen asleep at Rome's house before, actually now that I think about it after what they said last night, it's highly possible that they all live there, and I just assumed it was Rome's because he took the lead and we went to his room. It's certainly big enough to be home to all of them. I'll have to ask them once Wave's is gone.

"I know," I reply, and the guys look at me like they didn't expect me to admit it out loud, "Now, why did you barge in here like you normally do and nearly get yourself shot?"

"Oh, right yeah!" She exclaims, bouncing over to me, jumping over the twins and landing directly on top of me.

Mason and Malachi grunt as they look at me questioningly. I shrug; it's Waverly. She's going to do what she wants, and there's no point trying to stop her.

“You said we can explore today, and I’m excited. But, you’ve got to get up. I waited for as long as I could; you’re lucky Micha stopped me from coming up here any earlier. I made breakfast,” she grins.

I narrow my eyes at her, “Bacon?”

“Duh,” she smirks.

“Alright, get off. You’ve convinced me.” I grin, and she scrambles off me and stands there tapping her foot.

“She’s not going to leave until we’re following her. She’s been wanting to explore since I moved in.” I point out moving out from between the twins and stretching. My head snaps up as I hear I groan and find all of the guys staring at me with heat darkened gazes. It’s then that I remember that I kicked my sweats off in the middle of the night, so I’m standing in front of them in my loose t-shirt and a thong.

I grin and make my way to the bathroom. I never cleaned the make-up off my tattoos the first night that they stayed and ended up just adding more quickly yesterday morning. It’s starting to itch, and I desperately need a shower to get rid of it. It’s going to be interesting to see the guy’s reaction to my tattoos. I look pretty different with them all covered. I’m sort of hoping that revealing my tattoos will lead to a show and tell of theirs, and I smirk to myself as that thought leads to much dirtier ones.

Chapter Nineteen

Their gaze follows me to the bathroom, and I share an amused look with Waverly.

“Alright enough, staring at my best friend’s ass. Go get dressed. As much as I’m sure she loves staring at your abs, I would prefer not to eat my breakfast with them,” she snaps, making them jump.

The last thing I see is all of them quickly getting dressed and hot-footing down the stairs under Warley’s watchful eye, as she makes sure they all go down the stairs and don’t follow me into the bathroom, considering the twins suggested it, and I opened the door wider for them it was a good call on her part.

“Jynx, I will come in there and drag you out if you are not downstairs in ten minutes!”

“It takes me ten minutes just to get from here to the damn stairs!” I call back, “And it’s going to take me longer than that to wash this shit off.”

“What shit?” I hear Mason question.

“You’ll see,” Waverly replies, “And you Jynx, you better fucking hurry up!”

“Yes, Mom!” I yell back as I start scrubbing at the layers of cover-up over my tattoos.

“Smartass,” she calls back, and I grin.

By the time that I’ve managed to scrub everything off, my skin is pink, and I vow never again to add cover-up on top of more cover-up, my skin feels so damn sensitive now, and I look like I’ve been out in the fucking sun too long. I wrap myself in a towel and make my way into my room, catching a glimpse of the weather through my window as I walk to my closet. Despite the reasonably warm temperatures outside recently, it looks cold, and the rain is falling in sheets. Nope, I am not venturing outside today, thank you very much. So

Waverly is going to have to settle for only exploring the inside of the house. It should keep her busy, it's big enough. As I said, I started exploring before I got distracted by the guys. I'm relatively sure I didn't even get a quarter of the way through it before I gave up and spent more time with the guys. I also started with the first floor, so I haven't explored anything downstairs other than the kitchen, front room, gym and garage.

I pull on some sweats, and a black tank top, whacking my hair up into a messy bun and calling it good. As I walk towards my stairs, I catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror, and I grin. That's more fucking like it. I finally look like me, tattoos and all. Actually, something's missing. I do a u-turn and fish my nose ring out of my jewellery box, putting it in and then grabbing my silver tongue bar and swapping out the retainer with a flat top. While I'm here, I figure I may as well put all my earrings back in, happiness floods through me, and I look back at the mirror. That's better.

I finally recognise the person staring back at me.

The guys might not, though. They're used to seeing me with no piercings, and as a blank canvas, my skin is a canvas that's for fucking sure, but it's not blank. I have primarily black tattoos covering the majority of my body, including my hands, fingers, throat, back, arms, and sternum. I even have a couple on my legs that the cover-up did an excellent job of hiding from the guys when I showed them my scar.

Feeling more like myself than I have for months, even when I was in New Orleans with Waverly and Micha, which is odd now I think about it, I finally leave my room and make my way down to the kitchen. I don't smell the bacon until I get to the bottom of the stairs, but my steps quicken as soon as I do. I'm not usually a breakfast person, preferring just to have a giant cup of coffee instead, but I always make an exception for bacon.

"That's better," Wave's says as she sees me enter the kitchen and the guys look up from their breakfasts.

Malachi spits out a mouthful of juice all over the table when he sees me. Mason's mouth drops open as he stares, and Ace's lips are moving like he's trying to say something, but nothing is coming out, and I grin.

"What are you idiots staring at?" Rome asks, turning around in his chair to look at me and then breathing out a soft, "Whoa."

"I didn't think it was possible for you to get more beautiful," Rip starts his heated eyes taking in every one of my exposed tattoos, "But there you go, proving wrong again."

"Again?" I ask as I take my seat and pile my plate with bacon, avoiding the juice soaked dishes, courtesy of Mal.

Instead of answering me, he just smiles softly, the best expression I've gotten out of him yet.

"I'm not sure I understand how you can go from no tattoos to that many in the short amount of time that it took you to get dressed?" Ace questions, a cute confused furrow between his eyebrows as he just stares at me.

"Make-up," Mal answers for me, and I raise my eyebrow in question. "We've used it before to cover our tattoos that don't match when we're playing a role," he explains, and I remember that he and Mason work in espionage.

"I'm surprised we didn't realise. What make-up do you use? We might have to invest." Mason asks, clearly getting over his shock.

I tell them the brand and then stuff my face with more bacon as Wave's and Micha do the same, enjoying the breakfast entertainment they're getting courtesy of me.

"Wait hold up, what's in your mouth?" Rome suddenly asks.

"Bacon," I reply with a smirk, my mouth full.

"No, it was silver," he answers.

"Oh, my tongue bar."

"Now, I've had my tongue in your mouth Blue, and I didn't feel a tongue bar," Ace smirks.

I clear my mouth of the bacon, quickly chewing and then stick my tongue out, “See, I had a flat retainer in before.”

“So, where else have you got piercings?” Rip asks, a curious glint in his eye as he sips his coffee.

“Ears, nose, tongue, both my nipples and belly button.”

They all stare, their gaze dipping down my chest and I roll my eyes.

“Alright, before this becomes a show and tell situation, why don’t we go and explore?” Waverly suggests, a smirk on her face.

“Fine, but the weather’s shit, so we’re only exploring inside now. I haven’t even explored the downstairs.” I grumble, getting up and making my way further into the kitchen.

“Deal, I want to explore inside more anyway. There can’t be anything of much interest out there, apart from plants,” Waverly agrees easily.

“Just let me put the rest of my coffee in a travel mug. I need the whole thing if I’m going to function today, but I’m not risking spilling it while we explore and ruining a rug worth thousands.”

“Tens of thousands,” Rome mutters, and I slowly turn back around.

“What?”

“I haven’t seen a rug worth less than twenty-five-thousand yet,” he shrugs.

“Well fuck,” I mutter, “Probably shouldn’t have walked all over them in my boots then.”

“Probably not,” Rome smirks.

After I’ve gotten over my shock and drunk even more coffee, we start to explore. Rome slips his hand into mine as we walk, and I look at him in question. He doesn’t look at me, just squeezes my fingers as the corner of his lip ticks up. Well, okay then, I guess we’re holding hands now. I look around at the others to see if they’ve noticed, the only one who has is

Rip, and he's looking at our hands with a contemplative look on his face, not mad or anything, just looking like he's thinking really hard about something.

"Behind door number one, we have," Mason announces like a game show host, "A big empty room."

"And a whole lot of dust," I mutter, placing my mug down on a small table outside of the room and walking inside. "She clearly didn't use this room that often."

"Nope, come on. Let's find something interesting," Micha grins.

The next few doors we open down this hallway lead to either empty or sparsely furnished rooms, nothing exciting at all.

"Oh wow, this room is huge." I gasp as we enter a room with double doors. The ceilings are high, with four colossal sash windows along the furthest wall and a giant fireplace, big enough that we could probably all stand within it, side by side. The floor is that fancy, wooden angled stuff; I think it's called parquet, maybe. There are two large, ornate and entirely over the top crystal chandeliers that hang from the ceiling and wall sconces with the remnants of candles from the past still left in them.

"This was where she held the balls, I never went to one, but I can remember the kids at school talking about their parents going," Mason says quietly.

"Dance with me, Blue," Ace says with a grin, and he grips my hand, pulling my other one out of Rome's grip and effortlessly starts moving me around the room to music only he can hear.

My heart squeezes with happiness as a giant smile crosses my face.

"Well, I can't be outdone. Come on, Wave's. Let's show them how it's done." Micha teases, and I hear a squeal of delight from Waverly as he starts to dance with her.

I chuckle as they start dancing in an entirely different way from the way Ace is dancing with me.

“Alright, come on, I want to find the games room that Gerald mentioned yesterday,” Mason interrupts, laughter in his tone.

Ace holds me in his arms just a bit longer after we stop moving and pulls me closer, kissing the corner of my mouth, “Thank you for the dance, Blue.”

“Anytime,” I reply, feeling slightly flustered for maybe the first time in my life.

Why is it that a kiss on the corner of my mouth somehow feels more intimate than having a tongue in my mouth? That’s probably a me thing.

He grins as if he knows what I’m thinking, but he doesn’t call me on it and instead threads his fingers through mine and pulls me out of the room behind the others. I think it will be hard for any of the other rooms to beat this one now. I’ve never danced like that before, and surprisingly I love it. They seem to be a bit more touchy-feely today. Even before they were more subtle in their affection, it’s like they’ve realised I’m not made of glass, or maybe, that they’ve let down some sort of wall that they previously had up between us. Whatever the reason behind the change, I don’t hate it. None of them seem to be annoyed with the others showing me affection, and no one is getting pissed, so I’m just going to go with the flow, as it were.

“Oh cool, it’s the games room that Gerald mentioned,” Mason comments as we push our way into yet another room.

Mal comes up on my other side, his fingers threading through mine and tugs me inside. He shares a loaded look with Ace. I’ve spent most of my life studying people closely, so I can tell when they’re lying to me, so I know when they’re going to make a move, when they’re guilty, that sort of thing because of that I’d guess that they just came to some kind of agreement, whatever that was I have no idea but I am curious.

I’ll let them keep their secrets for now. Hell knows I’ve got enough of my own, but something about that look is practically begging me to unravel it.

“Whoa, look at this room,” I mutter, “Why did my grandmother have a game room tripped out perfectly for teenagers when she didn’t have any?”

“I don’t know. It could’ve come with the house?” Rip suggests as he walks up to one of the pool tables and checks it out.

“Or she anticipated your arrival without being dead first,” Ace adds, then grins, “I have to say, I am a fan of the bar.”

“Well, that shouldn’t be in the room supposedly for kids, but it’s a nice addition,” Waverly replies with a smile.

“There are loads of games consoles set up here,” Rome says, moving to the back of the room, where there’s a large alcove. I let go of the guy’s hands and follow him to see what he’s found. There’s a giant couch pushed against the far side of the wall and a Tv the size of the wall opposite, underneath it and all sorts of games consoles and games all of it looks brand new.

“I think I like your theory more, Ace. It’s all brand new.” I call over my shoulder to him.

“Well, at least we have somewhere other than the main lounge to hang out in now. It’s definitely cosier in here,” Waverly says.

“And there’s a bar,” Micha grins.

“That’s always a bonus,” Rip agrees.

“Is he being sarcastic?” Micha asks, genuinely curious. “I can never tell.”

“No one really can, and that time he wasn’t being sarcastic,” Rome replies with a grin.

“Come on. I want to see if we can find my grandmother’s office. She must have had one, right? I mean, she was a big businesswoman or something?” I ask. I still don’t really know what she did, just that she was essential to this town and made her wealthy as fuck.

“Yeah, she was. She owned Luther enterprises,” Mason replies, “I guess you own it now.”

“Yeah, I’m just going to breeze straight past that for a minute because I absolutely don’t know what to do with that information,” I reply, and they all grin as we move deeper into the house. “What did the company do?”

“Pretty much everything that you can think of,” Mason replies.

“Whoa, I guess that’s why she was so important to the town then,” I mutter, pushing open a door at the same time. The room is nearly the same size as the ballroom, but the walls are lined with rows and rows of books, some old and some newer novels too. It kind of reminds me of the library in beauty and the beast, just on a smaller scale. There are huge comfy armchairs dotted around with side tables and lamps sitting on top of them and a massive fireplace right in the middle of the room, armchairs set up close to it. Something to the right of the vast fireplace catches my eye, and I wander over to it, leaving the others to explore the rest of the room.

Any part of the wall not covered by books is covered in dark wood panelling that goes right up to the ceiling. There’s something off about this section next to the fireplace, though.

“Holy shit, she’s got some first editions here. She’s also got an interesting choice in the more recent things. For example, there’s a whole book dedicated to the different kinds of guns, all of them ever made,” Ace whistles through his teeth.

“And some interesting erm romance novels,” Rome mutters, an amused glint in his eyes.

“Book porn,” Rip grunts, and I burst out laughing at the shocked look on the faces of the others.

As usual, he does his tiny little smile, and I roll my eyes and go back to looking like a crazy person, inspecting a blank wall.

“What are you doing?” Malachi asks as he comes over to me, leaving the others studying the romance novels my grandmother liked to read.

“There’s something odd about this section of wall,” I mutter.

He looks at me like I’m crazy, “Okay, crazy. What’s wrong with the wall? Did you hit your head?”

“No, smartass, and I’m not sure ...” I trail off as my fingertips brush along the panelling, trying to find something I’m not even sure what. My fingers press against something that seems to dip slightly, ruining the line of the wood. I frown, and I push harder. There’s a whooshing sound like pressure being released, and part of the wall pops out slightly. It’s around the same size as a door, and I grin triumphantly at Ace over my shoulder, “I fucking told you.”

“Alright, Blue, I’ll give you that. I will never again think you’ve lost it when you say crazy shit,” he smirks.

I stick my tongue out at him and roll my eyes before pulling the door open. I really fucking hope that it’s my grandmother’s office because mysteries are piling up around her, and I would really love to know more about the woman who not only changed my life at just the right time. Her lawyer found me just as I was starting to go out of my mind, not going on jobs and just pretending I was fucking normal while dealing with the trauma leftover from the kidnapping. Not just that, but who I had a hell of a lot more in common with from the sounds of it than my own mother.

I pry the door open and then sigh with frustration, “Damn it, behind the door is another door,” I groan.

“She was a paranoid woman then,” Rip says behind me, and I glance over my shoulder to see them all gathered behind me now, the books abandoned.

“Definitely, the chances of finding this door in the first place are slim, but whatever is behind the door is clearly important enough that she wanted to make doubly sure that no one could get in. Also, this is a new door; it’s not in keeping with the rest of the house, so she had it installed,” I point out.

“Good eye, Jynx,” Rome says, surprise in his tone.

“Seriously, don’t sound so surprised. This isn’t my first rodeo,” I sass back.

“I keep forgetting that you aren’t the person we thought you were for all those months,” his eyes meet mine, and regret

sears me. I know we've all said we'll move on and everything, but clearly, there is still a tiny amount of tension.

It's understandable. We both lied to each other. Rome closes his eyes for a second; as the conversation starts up around us about what could be behind the door. He strides towards me, his hands cupping my cheeks as he stares into my eyes and then rests his forehead against mine. My breath catches in my chest, and my hands move towards his wrists, holding them in place.

“Jynx, I know that you are capable of a lot of amazing things, but I have to warn you if you want me to step aside every time danger barrels towards you, you've got another thing fucking coming, I care about you, we care about you, and we will protect you. We won't stop you, I think we know you well enough to know not to try that, but we will protect you, Koroleva.” He vows.

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Chapter Twenty

“I hear you. I just don’t understand what that has to do with anything that just happened.” I admit, at a loss with where this has come from; it’s obviously been playing on his mind for a while, though.

“It doesn’t really have anything to do with it. I just thought that you should know.”

“Okay, well, I get that, but just so you know, I can take care of myself, and I will fucking fight for you and the others too,” I vow fiercely. “This doesn’t only go one way. I wasn’t just saying that I’d kill for you last night, just like Rip killed to protect me. I meant it.”

His eyes light up and become an inferno of desire, and before I really have time to understand what it means, he pulls me towards him, one of his hands dropping to my waist and pulling me tightly against him as the other moves from my cheek and weaves through my hair, his grip firm. His lips gently, almost hesitantly, meet mine, with barely any pressure but driving me mad at the same time. He pulls back his eyes, searching mine for any sign of rejection. He won’t find any. Although, he doesn’t get to kiss me like that and then back off. I want a proper fucking taste. My hands clench into his shirt, and his eyebrow raises. I smirk in response and pull him closer, my lips crashing against his and my tongue pushing past them. He lets me keep control for merely a second before he growls, deep in his chest, moving me back until I’m pressed against the wall by the door. His tongue slides against mine, teasing as he explores my mouth. My leg lifts, wrapping around his hips and aligning us up perfectly, so perfectly that I can feel his hard length pressing against his jeans. The whole world feels like it falls away like it’s only him and me at this moment.

I move my hips against him, making us both moan at the friction it causes as he continues to devour me before he slows

the kiss, pulling back and searching my eyes again before resting his forehead against mine.

The ringing of a phone pulls me out of the kiss daze that Rome had put me under, and I tense, for fuck sake. That's the third time I've kissed one of them in front of the others. The weird part, though? If you made me pick one like held a gun to my head, made me choose, I wouldn't be able to, and that's just as fucking confusing as when I look around at them, and instead of the emotions I'd expect to see like anger or jealousy there's just curiosity and a fair amount of heat.

"Fuck, it's Lewis," Micha curses as he presses the accept button and then turns, walking away from us slightly. I share a look with Waverly; that can't be good.

"Everything okay?" Mason asks as Rome, and I detangle ourselves and turn to face the others.

"Yeah, well, I hope so," I reply, "Lewis is his little brother, he got emancipated, but his younger siblings didn't. It's never a good sign when one of them calls."

"That's got to be rough, not being able to get your siblings out of a situation that you know they can't be in," Ace says, concern creasing his handsome features.

"Is there any way we can help?" Rip asks.

"I'm not sure. He turns eighteen in a month, and then he can apply for guardianship and get them out. I've got him the best lawyer possible, but their hands are tied until he's eighteen."

"Wow, that's a massive thing to do. Take care of your siblings like that." Malachi mutters, "I really admire that."

"Thanks, man," Micha replies, walking back over to us, his eyes worried, "I hated leaving my brothers behind, but I couldn't risk them ending me and there being no one to look after the little ones."

"Is everything okay?" Waverly asks as she wraps an arm around his waist and looks up at him.

"No, it's not. I'm sorry, Jynx, but I need to get back and sort this out before it escalates." He apologises.

“Don’t be silly. Of course, you do. I’ll be fine anyway. I’ve got these fuckers who are apparently quite capable. You guys go back and get it all sorted.” I reply immediately.

Family first.

“I love how you just know that I’m going with him,” Waverly smiles softly.

“Well, you are, aren’t you? Those kids love you just as much as they love Micha, and he might need the backup.”

“Listen, man,” Mason starts, “If you need any help whatsoever, just let us know.”

“Thanks, I appreciate that.”

“Oh shit, we’re on lockdown. Let me just call D and make sure that it’s okay for you guys to leave. I know you’re going to go anyway, but it’ll give us a good idea of how on guard you need to be.” I say, pulling out my phone.

“Hey, D,” I greet him when he picks up.

“Hey, Kid. I haven’t got an update for you yet,” he replies, a hint of amusement in his tone.

“That’s not why I’m calling. Micha just got a call from Lewis, he and Waverly need to head back to New Orleans, and we were just wondering if that’s possible at the moment?” I ask and then add, “Obviously, I’ll be sending them back on the jet.”

“It should be okay. The only person targeted so far is you. You know those papers that you saw being handed off after you shot the first fucker?”

“Yeah?”

“Well, I’m starting to think that it was information on you. I think they might’ve hired outside help to scare and threaten you until they were all in the same place and could take over,” he explains.

“Yeah, that makes sense, actually. What about that other lead you were following, the raven heads?”

“That’s got a little bit more complicated. There is a small chance that you have two different sets of fuckers coming after you. I don’t have enough information yet, so I’m hoping I’m wrong, and I still don’t understand how you could’ve ended up on this other team’s radar. Just stay vigilant, okay, neither the fuckers that kidnapped you nor this new group are people that you should take lightly,” he warns.

“Got it. We’re at home anyway, and we’ll stay put until we’ve got more news, but Waverly and Micha are safe to go?”

“Yeah, just remind them to stay on their guard too. Maria wants Waverly home anyway.”

“Everything okay?”

“Everything’s fine. I think Maria just misses her.”

“Alright, thanks, D. Talk soon.” I say, hanging up and then turning to Micha and Waverly, “He said it’s fine for you guys to go, but you need to stay alert just in case. I’ll call the airline and get them to get one of the planes ready. You should be able to stay armed. They didn’t check me when I got on.”

“Alright, we’ll go and pack. I expect you to call me if you get into that door,” Waverly orders.

I grin, “Of course.”

After they’ve gone, I make a quick call to the airline and then turn back to the guys.

“So, do you want to try the door?” Rip asks, the manic gleam in his blue eyes giving way to curiosity.

“You didn’t try already?”

“Nope, we were waiting for you to finish with Rome,” Mason grins, and I stick my tongue out at him.

Of course, they all burst out laughing except for Rip, who just tilts his lips in the barest hint of a smile. I ignore them and try the door, which is locked. I should have known that it wouldn’t be that easy.

“Do you think it’s her office?” I ask.

“Most likely, it’s pretty well hidden, and people usually have offices in libraries, right?” Mal asks.

“I don’t know. This is the first house that I’ve lived in where I’ve had my own room, let alone a freaking office.” I point out.

“Fair enough,” he replies.

“It’s where I’d put my office,” Rip shrugs.

“Well, I guess there’s only one way to find out. I bet Gerald has a key.”

“He probably does, but he has that whole when you’re ready, he’ll tell you about it thing going on, so he might not give it to you,” Rome reminds me.

“You could just let Ace pick the lock. It’s his speciality, after all.” Mason points out, and Ace grins.

“I have my kit. Just say the word, and I’ll have it opened in seconds,” he offers.

Before I can answer him and give him the go-ahead, the door to the library opens, and Wave’s and Micha walk in.

“We’re all packed, just came to say goodbye,” she says, hugging me tightly.

“Call me if you need me, and I’ll be there as soon as I can,” I promise her.

Once we’ve said goodbye to them, I feel a tinge of sadness. I really loved having them here, helping to fill the house up and make it feel not as empty. With the guys here, though, at least for the time being, it won’t feel as empty even with Waverly and Micha gone. The problem is that I don’t know when they’re going to go home, and then I’m once again left rattling around in this giant house all by myself. Well, I’ll have Gerald, I suppose and Cook.

“Okay, well, let’s get this door open. I am more than ready to find out more about my elusive grandmother.”

“Alright, give me a second,” Ace says, walking out of the room. I’m guessing to get his kit. Whatever that is.

“Anyone else hungry?” Mason asks into the silence.

“I could eat,” Mal replies.

“You could always eat,” Mason teases.

“Well, you’re not wrong,” he shrugs, and I grin.

“Got it!” Ace triumphantly grins as he comes back into the room, looking all dishevelled.

“Why do you look like you’ve gone three rounds with Mike Tyson?” Rome asks, his eyebrow raised in question.

“Erm, I had a slight fight with some stuff in my bag and then tripped over the damn cat,” he explains sheepishly.

“Wait, what? I don’t have a cat.”

“Well, I didn’t imagine the damn thing, it’s a giant fluffy thing, and I mean, I thought it was a small dog at first, and it’s got one of those squished noses, I swear he tripped me up on purpose.”

“I have lived here for months and never seen a damn cat,” I reply, confused. “I’m going to go and find Gerald.”

“What about the door?” Rip asks.

“We can come back to that. I’m more curious about the damn cat,” I reply.

Ace shrugs as he gets up from where he’s just kneeled by the door, and I grin, “I’m good for proving I’m not crazy and finding food. I haven’t eaten in months.”

“We ate earlier. You know breakfast?” As I make my way out of the room, I point out, then call out, “Gerald!”

“Yeah exactly, months ago,” he replies like it’s a no brainer.

I just shake my head as my grin widens.

“You hollered, Miss. Jynx?” Gerald says as I walk around the corner and practically run straight into him.

“Do we have a cat?”

“Murphy,” he replies.

“I fucking told you, little hellion tried to trip me up.” Ace says with triumph.

“I have never even seen a hint of a fucking cat in this house,” I retort.

“Yes, he’ll do that, and I’m not really surprised you haven’t run into him before. He likes to hide in the house and steers clear of everyone unless he’s terrorising them.” Gerald grins.

“Right, well now I want to find the fluffy asshole,” I say.

“I should warn you, he’s a biter, and you rightly named him an asshole,” Gerald chuckles.

“Okay, I will take that under advisement,” I smirk and then turn to Ace, “Where did you trip over him?”

“He tripped me,” Ace says, outraged. “In my room, where I stored my bag.”

“I’m sure he did cupcake,” I reply sassily with a grin as I take the stairs two at a time.

“Did she just call me cupcake?”

“Yes, she did. I think it suits you,” Malachi chuckles.

“Fuck off,” Ace shoots back, flipping him the finger as he stops by the door. “This one’s mine. I doubt the little fucker is still in there, though. He’s probably lording over his minions somewhere and boasting that he managed to trip the human.”

We all pause and turn to stare at him, “Okay, that took a weird turn towards the end, dude,” Rome points, and I chuckle.

I push open the door and can’t help the ‘aww’, which escapes my mouth when I spot the huge grey and white fluff ball in the middle of his bed. I slowly approach him, and he starts a low growl in his throat as his eyes narrow at me. Guess I’m not going to get a kitty friend to keep me company.

“I told you, he’s a little demon,” Ace smirks, coming to stand next to me at the edge of the bed.

As soon as he’s close enough, the cat stops growling at me and makes his way towards Ace, purring and rubbing against

him. Ace's wide eyes meet mine as he holds his hands up to avoid touching him.

I shrug my shoulders, "He must've decided that you guys have bonded."

Ace slowly lowers his hand, and the cat butts up against it rubbing his face on it and purring loudly. I slowly reach out, and as soon as I get even vaguely close, he hisses, swipes a paw out at me and starts growling.

"Little demon," I frown, "Well, looks like you've gained a cat, Ace."

"What? I don't want a cat," he replies, still stroking said demon cat.

"Sure, you don't," Mason chuckles.

"I guess he can stay in here while we're staying here." Ace concedes.

"Dude, I think he was going to stay regardless of what you said," Rome points out with a grin.

"Probably, you can't make a cat do anything it doesn't want to do," Ace grins and then crouches down so that he's at eye level with the cat, "Now, if you're going to stay in here with me, there's going to be some rules," he starts.

I open my mouth to point out that the cat can't understand him, but I'm interrupted by Murphy's meow as he regards Ace seriously, "Well, okay then," I mutter.

Ace's grin widens at Murphy's meow, "No more tripping me up, or sneaking up on me and scaring the shit out of me, got it?"

Murphy meows again, and I chuckle.

"Weirdest cat I've ever met," Rip mutters, his eyebrow raised, and I nod in agreement.

"Weirdest conversation I've ever witnessed," I reply, ignoring the disgruntled look Ace shoots me.

"I don't know. I've seen him have conversations with his computers before." Mason shrugs, and I look at him

questioningly. “All the damn time, you can walk in his room and think he’s got someone else in there when really he’s just having a full-on conversation with all of his equipment.”

“That sounded dirty,” I tease with a giggle.

“It helps the computers work better if I talk to them,” Ace argues.

“I’m sure it does, no judgement,” I reply with a smirk.

He gets a mischievous glint in his eye at my teasing and slowly stands before running at me full pelt and tackling me down onto the bed. I let out a peal of laughter as his fingers start to tickle my sides.

“It’s not nice to tease, Blue,” he chuckles, still tickling me.

I wrap my legs around him, still giggling and making him pause as it pulls our bodies closer together. Then, I flip him so that I’m on top, and while he stares up at me, shocked, I turn the tables on him and start tickling, making him screech and the guys all chuckle.

My phone ringing interrupts us, and I hold my hand out to Ace, still sitting on top of him as I check who’s calling, “It’s D. I’ll put it on speaker, save me having to explain it to you.”

“Hey, D,” I answer, sounding slightly out of breath thanks to the tickle fight.

“Hey kid, I’ve just had my guy check-in. He saw when Demetri got the call that his buddies were dead, safe to say he lost his fucking shit, and he’s now on the warpath, he’s about an hour away,” he pauses.

“Okay, that’s pretty much what we were expecting,” I reply, sharing a look with the others.

“Now you have a choice. We can take Demetri out before he gets to you ...”

I interrupt him, “No, I need to be the one to take him out. To know that he’s really gone, that they all are.”

“I figured you were going to say that. I do have a favour to ask though, as you know you weren’t the first, there has been

an increase in reports of missing people, kids as well, while they've been in town and I'm starting to think that they have a location near you," he explains.

"So you want me to figure out where it is before I take him out?" I ask.

"Actually, I know that it might be triggering for you, so I was hoping that the guys could do that and then you could just focus on taking him out?" He asks.

"No way," I reply.

"Jynx," D starts with a hard edge to his voice.

"No, D, you know full well that they keep those places heavily guarded. You know I'm one of the best in those situations, and I know how they run the last one. I owe it to those people to fucking save them and take some fuckers out at the same time."

"What if you have a panic attack, you won't be able to help anyone if that happens," he replies, harsh but true.

"I'm not working alone anymore, D, I have back up, and you know how fucking good they are."

"I don't like this, Kid, but I know better than to try and stop you. Just be safe and let the guys know how to help you if you have a panic attack," he orders.

"Got it, thanks, D. I know it doesn't make much sense, but I have to do this."

"I get it, probably better than anyone. Now I assume the guys can hear me?"

"Yes, sir," Rome replies.

"These fuckers will be well-armed and well fucking trained. Stay alert and prove to me that you're as good as the rumours claim, boys. Bring her home safe and watch for triggers!"

"Yes, sir," they all reply at the same time.

"Good, I'll keep you updated on his location. You have around an hour. I suggest you get ready," he replies, hanging up.

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Chapter Twenty-One

“Right, we’ve got a lot to do,” I say, leaning forward and kissing Ace quickly before I jump off him. I freeze as soon as my feet hit the floor.

I honestly have no idea why I just did that. It was just natural. I slowly turn to face the guys; Ace is still lying on the bed, a broad grin on his face and his different coloured eyes are glowing with happiness. The others are all looking at me curiously, but none of them seem angry or jealous, so I shrugged.

“Didn’t even do that consciously,” I admit, and Rip’s eyes soften a slight smile teasing the edge of lips, a reaction that makes me curious. However, I chose to ignore it for now. “We need to get ready.”

I start to make my way to the door, but Mason catches my wrist on the way past and pulls me back into his chest, my back to his front as he rests his chin on the top of my head and wraps his arms around my waist, “Not so fast, we need to know how to help you if you get triggered.”

I gulp, aware that I’m looking at them slightly nervously.

“Hellcat, don’t look at us like that,” Rip frowns, striding towards me and threading his fingers through mine as Mason stays where he is, his arms still wrapped around me.

The others share a confused look, and I instantly become curious.

Rip is either completely oblivious or most likely just ignoring them as he continues, “Are you sure you want to go? You said yourself; we’re more than capable.”

“I know that,” I reply, squeezing his hands and not liking the worry that I find in his eyes, “But I have to do this; I need to help save them.”

Guilt swirls in my stomach. I know I sent D back to the place where they kept me to save the others there, but I don't know if they saved the blonde-haired tough as fucking nails little girl before it was too late, and I'm too much of a coward to fucking ask. She was my friend, and I should've tried harder to save her. But, hell, I didn't even know her name. We took a leaf out of D's book and used our first initials only. I don't know why. I guess we thought that if one of us didn't make it, it would make it easier not to know proper names.

It fucking didn't.

"Hey?" Rip asks, his harsh voice as soft as it can get as his finger taps me under the chin, bringing my eyes to meet his. His eyes run rapidly over my face before understanding lights in their icy blue depths. "Oh, Hellcat," he mutters, pulling me out of Mason's arms and crushing me against his chest.

It's nice. It feels like he's holding all the broken pieces of me together, even if it's just for a moment.

"You can't save them all," he mutters.

"Oh Blue," I hear Ace say, sympathy and understanding in his tone, how the fuck did they all know what I was thinking about, where my mind went.

"He's right, Koroleva," Rome starts, speaking in what I think is Russian. I really do need to look up what it means, "You can't save everyone, no matter how hard you fucking try."

"I should've tried harder," I mutter.

"I should've as well," Malachi replies, his eyes locked on me in Rip's arms.

"We all wish we tried harder to save someone, Jynx," Mason says into my ear, coming up behind me and pressing against my back, offering me comfort. I glance up to Rip, expecting to see him get annoyed at our hug being joined, but he's just watching me with concern.

"We've got to get ready," I mutter, this conversation making me feel too raw.

They all study me, the same broken look in their eyes that's in mine. Finally, Rip ducks his head and leaves a lingering kiss on my forehead that, for some strange reason, makes me want to cry.

“Okay, you're right,” Rip says, “But we still need to know how to help you if you get triggered.”

“Right,” I agree, pulling myself together and moving out from between Mason and Rip so I can see them all, “As you know, if I pass out, disarm me and stay back. Hopefully, that won't happen, but I really don't want to hurt you if it does, so I need to remind you. Since it all happened, I've been in various situations, and I haven't been triggered, so hopefully, it will be fine.”

“Okay, that's fairly straightforward. Let's get this done then,” Rome says, striding out of the room. “Get ready. We've got less than an hour to prepare, so we're ready when D calls with the location.”

“On it,” I reply.

We split off to our various rooms, and I open the safe that holds my favourite weapons, I say safe, but really it's an extra room that's at the back of my closet. It also doubles as a safe room. The company that installed it for me recommended it. Each one is bespoke, and the plans are destroyed after you've had it installed. That was the main appeal for me. I need something strong and impenetrable that has no chance of the schematics being found online.

As I choose my weapons and strap them on, my mind starts to wonder. It feels weird that just over a week ago, I was mad as hell with the guys, and now they're all living under my roof, entwined in my life in ways that I never expected and strangely, it makes sense. I don't know how to explain it, but it just feels like this is how it's meant to be.

And now I sound like a fucking dick and mushy as fucking hell. So that's enough of that. I grab my case with my sniper rifle. There's probably not going to be a chance to use her, but she's my favourite, and I feel better when I have her with me. I do have a couple of my favourite pistols on me, though, so

that's better than nothing. I take the stairs down from my room two at a time, and my phone starts ringing at the bottom.

"Hey D, got a location?" I ask.

"Yeah, he dumped his stuff at a house on the edge of town, Orchard street. He was there less than a minute, though, and now he's headed across town. I've got eyes on him, but you need to be on the move and following him, now." D replies urgently.

"Got it. Send me through the location, and we'll follow."

"One car, Jynx, don't take the bikes, there's too many of you, and it will cause a scene."

"I may have been out of the game for a while, but I'm not rusty," I retort.

"I'm aware of that, Kid. I know the amount of extra training you've been putting in and not just with combat, but this is an entirely new area for you. You have never worked with a team, and I need you to be aware of that and be careful," he replies logically.

The guys all look at me curiously, and I motion for them to follow me through the house to the kitchen and then out to the garage.

"Yeah, I know that D, I am more than aware how out of my comfort zone I am to be working with a team, but this isn't just any team, I trust them, D," I reply fiercely, and the guy's heads turn to look at me, wonder in their gazes.

"You trust them?" D asks a good amount of shock in his tone.

"I do," I reply as we all load up into the large SUV that we used to take to school.

"Coming from you, Kid, that's quite a statement."

"I know."

"Right, I'll send the location now. We've got one of our nerds following him," he says fondly.

If it was anyone else saying that I'd call them out for being a douche, but it's become a badge of honour for the people working with D to be called a nerd by him. I've actually heard them brag about it to each other, they are the brightest minds that this country has to offer, working outside of the lines of the law and damn good at it. They are one of D's greatest assets, and they live a life of luxury.

"Got it, thanks, D," I reply, hanging up the phone.

Seconds later, my phone vibrates with a message, and I read the location out to Rome, who, of course, is driving.

"Got it." He says, his whole demeanour severe and entirely focused on the task.

I look back at the others, and they all look the same. There's no tension, not one of them is vibrating their legs with nervousness, there's no tension in their bodies no frown lines are around their eyes, if anything they look relaxed, at ease, like this is where they feel most at home, I guess with their pasts and the way that they were brought up this is what they're used to, like me.

We match, and that's a pretty incredible thing to find.

"Is everyone ready? Armed?" Rome asks.

"Always, brother," Mason and Malachi say together, and I grin.

"Yep," Ace replies with an easy-going grin.

"Of course," Rip grunts, like it's a stupid question.

"We need to park a few blocks away. D just messaged and said that he's stopped at a warehouse down by the docks, the furthest one away from the main road," I explain, reading the text D just sent. "He said that it's heavily guarded outside, so it's probably where the sex trafficking ring is. He's also warned us that if it's that heavily guarded on the outside, it's going to be rammed full of guards on the inside. He's gotten word that there's an auction coming up soon. It's high profile enough that people are coming from all over the world to attend. It's going to be well guarded in order to protect the product," I sneer, "So we've got to be at our best."

“I’ve heard about that auction; they hold it once every five years. Some sick fucker decided to call it the Angel auctions since they boast that the majority of the people being auctioned are pure.” Rip mutters, playing with one of his knives.

“Well, let’s see if we can do some fucking damage to it and the people that attend,” I suggest.

Rome looks at me sharply, “If you want to take the buyers down too, that’s going to take far more planning than we’ve done so far.”

“But we could completely disband the auction site, kill the fuckers and save the people. Of course, it wouldn’t stop them from building back up and doing it again, but it would slow them down at least.” Ace points out.

“I don’t like it, but you make a good point. It’s not just about killing the last fucker who kidnapped me and then saving the people they’ve stowed there. It’s become bigger than that, and it’s become more dangerous,” I say with a frown as we start to pull down the winding road that threads its way through the docks.

“We’ve got this, Blue,” Ace grins, “We’ll kill every fucker we can, put a pause on the auction for a while, since it will take them a long time to rebuild and to gain the trust of the buyers again after a fuck up this monumental and we will rescue everyone we can.”

“How are we going to do that, by the way?” Rip asks as we slowly creep forward. This port is fucking huge, with multiple offshoots leading to even more warehouses.

“What do you mean?” Mason asks.

“This is a big operation, which means there are going to be a lot of people who need rescuing. This car doesn’t even fit us in it, and we can’t exactly involve the cops,” Rip replies.

“We could probably get out of the area before the cops, or the EMTs arrived, but that would mean leaving them vulnerable and unprotected.” Malachi points out.

“It’s fine. D knows someone. As soon as the area is secured, I’ll call D, and he will call his contact, who will get someone out to deal with it. We will probably have to leave them, but they’ll only be alone for ten minutes or so,” I explain.

“Okay, that’s better than leaving them for longer, I suppose and definitely better than getting our asses thrown into jail. That would require us asking a favour from our families to get out of and considering they want to kill us, that wouldn’t be a good idea,” Rome replies as we pull up to a stop at the side of a warehouse, night fell while we were driving and he parks in the shadows, helping to hide our presence.

“They have that much pull, even outside of your town limits?” I ask, momentarily distracted.

“Money opens a lot of doors, and they are some of the richest people in the country.” Ace replies.

“They’ve also sent family members out over the years and into high ranking positions. The power they have is somewhat frightening and made more so by the fact that very few people actually know they exist.” Mason adds.

“Fucking hell,” I mutter before getting us back on track. We can talk more about this later, “From here on out, stay alert and keep your voices as low as possible. When we near the warehouse, I want Ace, Rome and Rip to go around the back and see if there’s another entrance. We don’t want anyone to escape or for them to call in backup, and we get overwhelmed.” I order taking charge.

The guys are extremely well trained, or so they’ve said. I believe them; they have no reason to lie to me, but I have always been somewhat of a sceptic, and until I see it for myself, I’m treating them like newbies. I mean, really, despite all their experience, they are newbies in the way that they have never worked for D before and don’t know how he likes things done. I find it interesting that instead of taking the opportunity to move away from crime and the dark side of life when they escaped their parents, they instead immersed themselves in it even more to such an extent that they gained the attention of

D. The person that everyone in the criminal underworld wants to work for, that's pretty fucking impressive.

There's a level of protection that comes with working for D. Every now and then, he gets calls from the feds to help out with things that they can't deal with because of their own red tape and restrictions or their lack of people with the right expertise and connections. That's actually how he met Alaric, or I should say re-met him. Alaric is the brother of Liam, one of the most lethal and feared crime bosses in America. Alaric and D ran in the same circles for a long time but drifted apart when Alaric joined the academy and then went into the force; he rose up the ranks pretty fucking quickly and is now a part of a section of the government that's super hush, hush. Still, it's meant that he can start to bring down his brother's organisation, although as far as I'm aware, he's currently trying to get Liam's son, Atlas, out of his clutches. I've taught Atlas as much as I can to help keep him safe. The last time I did a job for his father, getting rid of an employee who had taken matters into his own hands, I stayed around a little longer to train him. He was already lethal and fucking brutal as far as a fourteen-year-old can go. In fact, he's more brutal than most grown men.

Over the years, I've given him even more training than he's been forced to take by his father and his sick in the head brother. I've helped to equip him with even more skills, I know that he wants in on what Alaric's got going on in taking his father down and his father's multiple businesses only time will tell if he actually manages to convince Alaric to let him in on it.

"Jynx?" Malachi asks, "You alright?"

"Yeah, shit, sorry, my mind wondered for a second," I smile, pulling my gun out of the holster and holding it in my hand, ready to get this over.

The others start to organise their own weapons and scout the area around where we're parked just in case. We don't need any witnesses right now. This is the biggest job I've done for a long time and has become much more complicated than I first thought. You'd think I'd be nervous, but in actuality, I'm

practically buzzing with excitement. My heartbeat is steady, and my palms dry. I live for this shit; it's in my blood. I revel in this kind of thing.

Malachi moves closer to me, his hand gently stroking my cheek. He smirks as I look at him questioningly, he leans in his lips, hesitantly meeting mine, and my lips instantly yield to his as my hands move to his chest. When I don't pull away, he pulls me closer, his lips becoming firmer and his tongue running along the seam of my lips. I open for him immediately. His kiss lights a fire inside me that wars with logic and makes me want to strip him right here and now.

For months I have wanted all of them. It didn't really matter that I liked them all and couldn't choose one of them because they only saw me as someone sweet and innocent, someone to protect. They never saw me as anything more, and they didn't know the real me. There were moments when I thought that they saw me as more than that, but they never made a move, despite how desperately I wanted them to do so. Instead, they showed me a softer side to themselves, one that they didn't show anyone else; they held hands with me, used any excuse to brush my hair out of my face, wrapped their arms around me, and fell asleep together on more than one occasion.

It almost feels like we've been in the first stages of dating and taking it slow for fucking months, and now they've each kissed me; apart from Rip, something is holding him back. Maybe it's common sense. After all, I'm pretty sure I've lost all of mine; this can't end well. I like all of them, and I want all of them. They seem to all like me too, and a group of friends liking the same girl never ends fucking well, and I am more than aware of that.

I won't be responsible for tearing them apart. The Kings are no ordinary group of friends; they're so much more than that; they're family.

Once again, I've got myself into a whole heap of shit. I'm sure I'll figure it out, one step at a time. I've never really been one for thinking ahead, and I can't afford to; any single job that I do could be my last. That doesn't leave much room for planning for the future.

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Chapter Twenty-Two

“Alright, as fun as this is to watch, I think we should probably get going before the fucker decides to move on, and we’ve got to find him again.” Mason interrupts, and I reluctantly disengage myself from Mal; he smirks and then steps back.

“Spoilsport,” he grins.

“Alright, let’s get going,” I interrupt before they can devolve into one of their arguments.

“Jynx is right, head in the game, guys, you two are with Jynx,” Rome repeats my orders, and everyone becomes serious.

We make our way through the damp and dark walkways weaving between the various warehouses. Rain is starting to fall, the light soaking kind that slowly makes you numb, and the smell of rotting fish and other rancid scents fill the air and make my nose wrinkle in disgust.

“Well, it’s certainly pleasant down here,” Rip grumbles quietly as we continue our now soggy trek.

“Hmm, the smell is divine,” Ace retorts.

“Heads up,” Rip mutters, nodding towards the guards that pass the end of the alley we’re walking down.

We all quickly duck to either side of the alley, crouching down behind large dumpsters and staying silent.

“The boss is in tonight to check the merchandise and make sure everything is ready for the auction,” one of them says.

“Have we got time to play before he arrives?” The other grins darkly.

“Don’t be a fucking idiot. He should be there any second,” the other retorts. These guards clearly aren’t in the loop because our intel says that Demetri is already here.

Mason and Malachi slowly stand moving towards the end of the alleyway, and I barely manage to hold myself back from telling them that it's dangerous and they need to be careful.

I watch them effortlessly sneak up behind the two and slit their throats, silently and deadly. No hesitation, no noise, and they work together in perfect harmony, neither of the guards realising what was happening until it was too late to sound the alarm.

Yeah, I definitely didn't need to worry about them.

"That was hot," I mutter, and Rip's eyebrows raise.

"Watching them kill two people was hot?" Ace asks, mild amusement in his gaze.

"Hey, I never once claimed to be normal," I retort with a smirk, standing up from my crouch.

"Well, actually," Mason starts as we meet them at the end of the alley and help to store the bodies out of sight.

"You did, all sweet and innocent," Malachi finishes for him with a grin.

"Touché. Fine from this point forward, I'm not claiming to be normal and find the normal things hot." I reply.

"It's a good fucking thing that you're not normal," Rome admits as we walk out of the alley and head in the direction the two douches were heading, "We tried to distance ourselves from you when we thought you were normal."

"Normal doesn't last in our world, Hellcat, but I sure as fuck hope that you will," Rip mutters, storming past me.

The others look after him with confusion colouring their features.

"What is going on with him?" I ask quietly as we pick our way through the quiet streets.

"His family, like all of our families, have left him with issues because of the nature of their work. I think he's fighting himself, what he wants and what he thinks is right," Rome replies quietly.

“Just be patient with him,” Ace adds.

“I can do that,” I reply quickly.

I’m not going to play naive here. I know that they’re talking about Rip liking me and being patient with him in that regard. At least, I think that’s what they’re talking about, but knowing my luck, I’m probably completely wrong.

I pull myself out of my thoughts. I can deal with all of this later; I need to get my head in the game. D was right to warn me. It’s a hell of a lot harder working with a team. Maybe harder is the wrong word; it’s not necessarily harder so much as I’m not used to it, and it’s going to take a while before it comes naturally to me. Obviously, I’ve done a few jobs with Waverly, and I’ve worked with Ever, but that’s different. That’s one extra person, not five. I also know how they work; I know how capable they are and their weaknesses. Working with the guys is a whole new ballgame. Unlike when I usually do jobs, I’m nervous, not because of the job itself but because I don’t want any of them to get hurt. I know they’re capable, but as I said before, I’m going to worry until I see it with my own eyes.

The area is eerily calm, and there’s none of the usual hustle and bustle that you’d expect to find at working docks. My guess is that Demetri has paid off all the surrounding businesses to take the night off. He certainly has the money behind him to do so. I don’t know if the auction is held here as well, or if it’s just where they are storing the people they plan to auction off. I don’t imagine it would be. As Ace said, there are a lot of high profile clients, and I doubt they’d be willing to sit in a dirty warehouse that smells like fish and urine.

“Do you know where the auction is taking place?” I ask quietly, we parked further away than I initially thought, and the target warehouse is only just coming into view now.

We all automatically slow down, alert and scan the area.

“I don’t know, but I can find out if you want?” Ace replies in a hushed tone.

“Thanks,” I mutter, “Alright, Rome, Ace and Rip circle around the back, stay alert and take out anyone you find. I’ve got D waiting with clean-up. Although we might just have to leave it, so they get rescued quicker.”

“Won’t that cause issues?” Ace asks.

“No, he’ll call in a favour,” I reply vaguely.

I’m sure they’ll all know every detail about D and his business soon, most likely because I have a feeling they’re going to be around for a long time, but I really don’t have the time to get into it right now.

“Try and take the outside guards down as quietly as possible. We want the biggest advantage we can,” I warn them.

Rome just nods, not bothering to ask any questions as he gestures to Rip and Ace, and they follow him down the walkway that leads to the back of the building. I share a look with the twins as we start to approach the front of the building.

Parked directly outside the building is a car that I am more than familiar with, well, the trunk anyway. My eyes narrow, and anger starts to pump through my veins, Malachi raises his eyebrow at me in question, and I shake my head, mouthing that I’m fine. I pull out my knife as we duck behind another vehicle. Seven guards are milling around the front entrance to the warehouse, they all seem to be on high alert, and I’m assuming that has something to do with the fact the big boss is in town.

I take out two of my knives, Mason and Malachi drawing theirs too. Knives aren’t my favourite weapon, but they definitely work best for the silent kill. We have six knives between the three of us that will leave one guard that could raise the alarm. I share a look with the guys, and then as one we stand, rapidly launching our knives, I know my two land on target and take down the two guards I was aiming for, making them crumple to the floor. As soon as the second knife leaves my hand, I draw a third and launch it at the last guard, who’s raising his weapon to shoot at us, and the sound of gunfire will definitely bring unwanted attention to us if he

manages to get a shot off. My knife lands straight in the middle of his forehead, and I grin.

It looks like all the extra practice I put in has paid off.

“Nice shot,” Mason grins, and my smile widens.

“Thanks, help me move these fuckers out of the way. We don’t want to end up tripping over them when we inevitably have to leave in a hurry,” I point out, grabbing one of the guys by the feet and tugging him off to the side.

The twins quickly help me to move the rest of the bodies out of the way with an ease that makes me envious, I work out a lot, but they have a strength to them that is really impressive. Although I have to admit that I get slightly distracted watching the guys move them, it’s hot how easily they do it.

“Are you seriously checking us out right now?” Malachi asks with his eyebrow raised.

“Shut up,” I retort but can’t stop my lips kicking up into a smirk, amusement dances in their eyes, but they stay quiet, and we all approach the door leading into the warehouse.

This is weird, I haven’t had this much fun on a job before, and I know that seems slightly insensitive, we are killing people after all, but these people aren’t people at all. They’re monsters. Worse than the ones in the storybooks that can’t fight their instincts and who they are, these monsters have chosen to become what they are, to prey on the innocent and those weaker than themselves. They do horrific things to men, women and children. No one is off-limits to the fuckers, and if we didn’t stop them, they’d carry on hurting innocent people and ending their lives.

I may be no better than they are by ending them, but at least they don’t get the opportunity to end anyone else.

We don’t bother with opening the door slowly. In a warehouse this old, the chances are it’s going to fucking make a racket anyway. Mason yanks open the door, and Malachi and I charge in weapons drawn and bullets flying. I can hear gunfire coming from the other side of the building, and I assume the others have also made their entry.

They better be fucking okay. I'm not sure how I would handle their deaths, but I know it probably won't be something I can get over quickly, not my usual sad for a couple of days and then get on with it, way of dealing with death.

I duck down behind a stack of large metal trunks; I don't think I want to know what they're used for; I highly doubt that it's something as innocuous as clothing. But, despite the hail of bullets and yelling, I'm calm; this is what I do, this is what I'm good at doing. What I'm not used to is keeping an eye on the others. It's driving me slightly crazy and dividing my focus, which is dangerous.

D believes in them, and they've told me their stories. I am just going to have to trust them and trust in their skills. With that decided, I make a concerted effort to push aside my concern for them and focus on just getting the job done. I peer around the edge of the trunks and scan the remaining men for any sign of Demetri.

There's a lot of blood and guts sprayed everywhere, and some of the men will be extremely hard to identify with bullets riddling their faces, but I am relatively confident that none of them are Demetri. The men start to fall back, all slowly backing up towards a door in the back corner. There's a larger rolling door on the wall to the left that I'm guessing leads to outside, but since there's no sign of the others, I'm also assuming that there's another entrance, and it's behind the door that the guards are all trying to get through. The offices and, most likely, the victims are stored behind that door as well.

I dart out from behind the trunks, dodging and weaving the bullets that fly in my direction and taking aim at as many guards as I can before diving behind a giant oil drum. Not the best cover, I'll admit, but it's better than nothing. Bullets strike the other side, and I know I can't stay here for much longer. I need to get through the door, and I'd bet money that's where the weasel is fucking hiding. After all, he came to check on his product, didn't he? So it would stand to reason that he's back there.

Staying low to the ground, I peek out from behind the drum and aim at the two remaining guards standing outside as three more flee through the door and down the hallway. My eyes lock with the evil depths of Demetri's, and I immediately spring to my feet, the door slams shut between us, cutting off my view of the monster, but it barely slows me down as I yank it back open. I briefly glance over my shoulder, checking that the warehouse is clear, and breathe a sigh of relief when I see that Mason and Malachi are fine and following after me.

As I step foot in the hallway, a knife flies past, slicing my cheek and embedding itself in the wall beside my head. Before I can retaliate, the guy is shot in the head twice at precisely the same time. The twins grin viciously at me, and I can't help but return it briefly before rushing down the hallway. It's long enough that I can still see Demetri's fading figure running down it as he pushes past a couple more guards. The others appear at the end, and I frantically point at Demetri, Rome takes a shot, and it glances off of Demetri's shoulder. He doesn't slow down, knowing that if he does, he's dead.

When they all finally dropped me off to Shadow, I warned them as they dragged me into a windowless room in a warehouse not dissimilar to this one that I would find them all and kill them. They laughed, slamming and locking the door behind them. Not one of them thought that I'd make it out of that room alive.

They didn't count on Shadow, though. If I'm honest, even I thought that it was an empty threat at the time, I hadn't counted on Shadow either.

Demetri opens fire on the guys, and they all dive out of the way to take cover. He takes the opportunity to race past them, Rip rolls at the last second and takes the shot shooting him in the leg and making him falter; he carries on going though pushing out of the door and into the dark and damp night beyond. I growl in frustration as the door from the warehouse behind us opens, and five more guards come through.

"Go, we've got this!" I yell, "Save the kill for me!"

Rome nods, and he, Rip and Ace all turn on their heel and chase after Demetri. One of the doors opens, and several more guards stream out chasing after them. The problem with being in the hallway is that there is nowhere to take cover. The room the guards just came out of is an option, but that's all the way at the end of the hallway, and we don't have enough time to get there.

I tell you one thing for fucking certain, if it's my fate to die here, then I'm going down in a fucking hail of bullets. I draw my extra gun and take aim, killing one as the twins take out two more. I rush forward, dodging and narrowly missing the bullets being shot in no particular direction. Fortunately for us, they're panicking and not aiming.

Finally, the hallway falls silent; the contrast from the loud gunfire makes the silence deafening.

"You alright?" Mason asks Mal and me.

"I'm good, brother. That was the most fun I've had in ages." Mal replies with a grin, and I chuckle.

"I'm fine," I add, turning on my heel and picking my way over the bodies strewn across the floor.

The clang of metal on metal behind one of the doors makes me pause before I can make it to the end of the hallway and the door to escape, where hopefully the others have caught Demetri. I briefly fight with myself, I want to follow Demetri, but the victims behind these doors are more important right now. Demetri can wait.

"Hello?" I call out, "Don't worry, we're here to save you. We'll have you out in no time."

"Are you cops?" A weak voice calls out from behind the door.

"Something like that," I reply vaguely, "Stand back."

I hear shuffling on the other side, and then she calls out again, "We're out of the way."

"Good, do you know how many of these rooms have people in them?" I ask as Mason crouches down next to the door,

pulling out a lock picking kit from his pocket, “I thought Ace was the one that was good with picking locks?”

“He is, but we’re not always together and our families, although they specialised in certain areas, still gave basic training in the others,” Mason explains as he works.

“And then Ace taught us some things too,” Mal adds. “I’m going to go and knock on the other doors and see if there are any more people in those since she’s not replying.”

“Hang on, let me. Chances are they’re all going to shut down if you talk to them.” I reply, and he looks at me curiously, “You’re male. They’ve had unspeakable things done to them by males. So they won’t trust you.”

“Ah, I’ve got you. I fucking hate it, but I understand. I’ll stand guard instead just in case anyone called in for backup.”

I nod and make my way down the hallway of doors. There are ten doors in total, five down each side. Each door looks to have been reinforced so that none of the occupants could attempt to escape. Other than two, the one that Mason is working on and the one that the guards came out of, all of the rooms have people in. Some of the doors have tiny viewing windows in them, and I’m able to get a rough count on how many are in the rooms. I make sure to keep my voice calm and steady as I talk to them, trying to reassure them that everything is going to be okay now and we’re here to help.

They may be free soon, but I know from experience that this will affect them for the rest of their lives, and some of them won’t be able to handle it. I got off lightly compared to what these people have been through, and my blood boils with rage, making it harder to keep my tone steady.

After I’ve got a rough headcount and reassured everyone, I walk back to the twins and pull out my phone, dialling D.

Chapter Twenty-Three

“Hey D, about one hundred and twenty-odd people are locked in the warehouse. Mason is trying to unlock the doors now, but it’s going to take forever to get them out, and most of them need medical attention.”

“Alright, kid, don’t worry. I’ve got Alaric on standby anyway. He’s got a team waiting to move in, but you guys need to be clear first. He’ll play it as a deal gone bad, probably between rival gangs. He’s gained even more sway with his boss now. Are there any guards left alive?”

“No,” I reply, drawing my gun as the door to the exit opens. I lower it when Rip, Rome and Ace walk inside.

“Good, I’ll alert Alaric. You guys have ten minutes to get as far away from there as possible.”

“Got it,” I reply, hanging up.

“We’ve got to go. D has Alaric coming with a team to clear up and help out the victims,” I say, striding towards the back exit. “He’ll set it up as a deal gone bad.”

There’s no time for talking as we all run back to where we stored the SUV. We climb inside, me ending up on Malachi’s lap in the middle seat, and stay alert as we exit the docks and turn onto the main road. We’ve been on the road for ten minutes when we see several large black SUVs, a few cop cars and ambulances drive past. I breathe a sigh of relief.

“Okay, so what happened with Demetri?” I ask them, “Did you catch him?”

“No, he had a car waiting and took off before we could get to him.”

“Fuck,” I groan, “He was already on guard since the other two in his team were taken out. So he’s going to be practically impossible to fucking find now.”

“Not necessarily, Blue. I got his number plate,” Ace grins distractedly as he looks at something on his phone.

“What are you doing?” Rip asks me curiously.

“Calling D to see if he can get the nerds to trace the plate, we might be able to catch up. What was it?” I ask Ace.

“No need, I’m already on it. I’m following Demetri’s car using the cameras in the city and other things. So we should be able to follow him even if he leaves city limits,” Ace explains, still looking at his phone. My mouth drops open in shock as he continues, “Rome, take the next left.”

“Got it. Did you get close enough to clone his phone?”

“Yeah, I’m running the program on that. As soon as it’s up, I’ll use that to get his location; instead, it’ll work a lot better, but we will still have the backup of the cameras if we need them.”

“Hold on a second. You’re doing all of that from your freaking phone?” I ask, truly impressed.

D has the best nerds possible working for him, and I know that none of them would be able to do what Ace is doing.

“He’s that fucking good, Koroleva,” Rome smiles, a proud glint in his icy blue eyes.

Ace’s lips just tilt up slightly at the corner in response as his gaze stays glued to his phone, his fingers tapping rapidly against the screen.

“It’s fucking impressive,” I reply.

“Thanks, Blue,” he mutters. “Next, right.”

Rome follows his directions without question, trusting that Ace knows what he’s doing and wouldn’t lead them astray and showing that they’ve worked together like this for a long time.

“Is everyone okay?” Mason asks, “No injuries that need dealing with before we catch up to Demetri?”

“Nothing that needs stitches,” Malachi replies.

“Same, just a few bruises, nothing broken,” Rome responds.

“I’m alright,” Ace adds.

“Rip?” Mason asks.

“I’m fine,” he responds shortly, his eyes catching mine as he twists in the front seat and looks back at me. “She isn’t.”

“What?” I reply, slightly confused, “I’m fine.”

He taps his cheek, “You have a slice on your cheek.”

I reach my fingers up and brush them along the cut, “Well fuck, I hadn’t even realised.”

Mason frowns as he hands me an antibacterial wipe to clean the dried blood off. “How did you not notice?”

“Thanks,” I reply, taking it off him and starting to clean my cheek, “Well, obviously, I felt it when it was done, but I forgot about it.”

“You’re going to make it bleed again, scrubbing it like that,” Rip points out, reaching back and taking the wipe out of my hand. He motions me forward, and I move to the edge of Malachi’s knees, glad that I sat in the middle, or this would be really awkward.

I’m not really sure what Rip’s intentions are, but it’s not like I don’t trust him, so I just do as he asks and move closer. He grasps my chin in his fingers and turns my face to the side so he can see my cheek. I stay statue-still as he starts to wipe the blood off my cheek gently. His eyes remain glued to the cut as he cleans it with laser focus, and I dart my eyes to the side, noting Mason’s dropped mouthed and shocked look. His eyes flicker over my head, no doubt sharing a look with Malachi.

Ace carries on giving Rome directions, completely oblivious to the silence in the car. Rip has been cleaning the blood off for a while, and it can’t have bled that much, but I don’t dare to interrupt him and break whatever magic is happening right now. Finally, he stops, switching to gently caress my cheek with his thumb, his manic blue eyes meeting mine as something else swims in their depths.

“There,” he mutters, his voice hoarse.

I smile softly, my own emotions trying to push forward, “Thanks.”

He starts to lean closer before he freezes, clearing his throat, as a shutter comes down over his eyes and eclipses any emotion that was there previously. He leans back, gives me a tiny tense smile and then turns around, facing the front again. What the hell was that all about?

I scoot back on Malachi’s lap, and his arms pull me closer. I glance over to Mason since I can’t really look back at him, and there’s no point looking at Ace since he is totally in the zone and missed the whole thing. It’s a side of him that I haven’t seen yet, and it’s pretty damn cute. Mason looks just as confused as I do, but a satisfied smirk teases around the edge of his lips, making me think that he knows something that I don’t.

“We’re getting pretty close to the edge of town. Have you got the program for the phone sorted?” Rome asks, drawing me from my thoughts.

“Two seconds,” Ace mutters, his fingers flying across his phone screen. “Got it, just keep heading straight. He’s quite far ahead of us.”

“I’m surprised he’s got as far as he has. You guys shot him twice.” I point out.

“The car was running, and he got into the passenger side. He wasn’t driving,” Rome replies.

“So, there’s at least one person with him, but there could be four more based on the make and model of the car,” Ace explains.

“We need to be prepared then. But, at least we outnumber them if there are four more of them,” Mason grins.

“By one,” Malachi retorts.

“Demetri is mine,” I interrupt, as the twins can devolve into an argument.

“We know, Koroleva,” Rome replies, his eyes crinkling as he smiles.

I nod and return his smile, looking out the window to see where we are. There's nothing but large expanses of empty land on either side of us and the long winding road ahead.

"I've been thinking," Malachi starts, their argument coming to a close with neither one of them the victor as far as I can tell. His arms tighten around me.

"Careful," Ace mutters as if it's an automatic response, as he finally looks up from the phone, "Rome, you just have to follow this road for a few miles. He's still on it, and I'll let you know when he turns off."

"Thanks, man," Rome replies easily. We can't risk going over the speed limit and catching the attention of the cops, even out here but since Ace has managed to clone his phone and considering he's injured pretty severely, he's going to have to stop soon, and we can catch up to him then. Hopefully, he will have also let down his guard a little bit since he got such a big head start and won't be expecting us to have followed him.

"Anyway, you said you'd been thinking?" Ace grins, looking at Malachi.

"Fucker," Mal growls, with no real heat before he continues, "Yeah, so, these guys aren't from around here, right? I mean, they work all over, but these three mercenaries don't have their base of operations here?"

"No, last I heard, they were based somewhere in Texas, I think," I reply, wondering where he's going with this train of thought.

"Right, so what were all three doing in town, a town where you just happen to be. You gave them hell and then somehow escaped from what you've told us. Maybe they got blamed for that, and now they want revenge on you?"

"You know that's not a bad theory," I reply, mulling it over.

"It is a pretty big coincidence that they all turned up here. They took a while to find you, though. You've been living here for months now." Rip adds.

"Yeah, but that might've been my fault. I haven't been active since it all happened. D made me take a break, and to be

honest; I needed one. Stupid things were making me have panic attacks, and I needed to heal from my injuries anyway.”

Dark frowns cover the guy’s faces at my words, and I swear one of them growls.

“It wasn’t until summer break when I went to see Waverly that I managed to convince D to let me get back to work. I didn’t do anything like I used to, not until the end of the trip anyway, but it was probably enough that word started to circulate that I was back.” I explain, “Pay the right person enough, and anyone could be bought to tell them my location.”

“Guy’s,” Ace interrupts, his focus once again on his phone, “He’s been stationary for the last five minutes. So either he ditched the phone, or he’s at some sort of safe house.”

“Only one way to find out,” Rip replies, his leg bouncing agitatedly.

“Right. Three miles up, take the next left.” Ace orders.

The car lapses into silence as we all mentally prepare for the upcoming fight. Knowing Demetri, he will have surrounded himself by as many men as he possibly could. Out of the three of them, he was a coward, and because of that, he was the most dangerous of them all. That may not make sense, but cowards often prey on those they perceive as weaker than them, and they do horrendous things. He hid behind the other two until they had weakened me enough and taken many of my own hits, and then he’d take his turn. He enjoyed sick threats and words as he beat me unconscious.

I will make him suffer as much as he made me suffer. I don’t have it in me to threaten him as he threatened me. I refuse to lower myself to repeat the things that he said, but I am more than happy to cause him as much pain as I possibly can. I hope I get to play for a little bit.

The road that we turn up starts off as a dirt track that’s seen better days but is easily passable with an SUV. What makes me worry, though, is that surrounding either side of the track and as far as I can see ahead are trees, lots and lots of trees. Mason’s words from the other night echo in my mind, ‘My

trigger is being alone in the woods at night.' I reach out my hand and thread my fingers through his as we travel further down the rough road. The night is still wrapping around us like a dark cloak, drizzle falling in soaking sheets and making the track slick with mud. I glance out the back window seeing that we've now travelled far enough down the road that it looks like we are entirely surrounded by trees.

Mason's hand tightens around mine, and I clench it tightly, trying to reassure him.

"How much further?" Rome asks as the SUV starts to throw us around, "The road is getting worse, and we won't be able to go much further."

"There's about a mile left to go," Ace frowns, looking down at his phone.

"I don't think the SUV is going to make it any further. So we're going to have to walk."

"Well, that's going to be fun in this weather," Malachi mutters a definite whine in his voice.

I tap his hands that are wrapped around my waist, "I promise to make hot chocolate as soon as we get home."

"Deal." He replies.

"Alright, everyone armed?" Rome asks as he pulls the SUV over to the side of the track. Of course, it won't make any difference if anyone wants to get past it, but I guess it's a habit.

We all confirm that we're armed, and Rip hands out some more bullets since we're all running pretty fucking light thanks to the fight in the warehouse. Once we're all loaded up, we exit the SUV and out into the soaking rain. My boots splash down into the sludge-like mud, and I wince. If it turns out that Demetri isn't in some sort of safe house up ahead, then it's going to be difficult to track him through all this rain and muck.

"Are you okay, brother?" Malachi asks Mason.

"I think so," he tries to smile.

“Mason, I promise you, you will not be left alone in these woods.” Rome vows, “I completely understand if you need to stay back at the SUV.”

Mason’s head turns to me, his eyes searching mine.

“We’ve got this, Mason. Malachi can stay with you, so you’re not alone. I understand completely. The last thing any of us want is for you to be triggered,” I try to reassure him.

He continues to stare at me for a moment longer before steely determination darkens his forest green eyes, “No, I’ve got this. This is too important, and I won’t let you be two men down. I’m not risking any of you being hurt.”

“Are you sure?” I ask.

“Just don’t let me be alone. I am not too proud to admit that I will have a panic attack if I find myself alone in these woods. Especially if anyone escapes through the woods,” Mason pleads. His voice has a thread of steel in it that I admire.

“Alright, let’s fucking do this then,” Rip replies, the manic gleam in his eye almost making them glow.

I can’t help the grin that takes over my face as we all start walking, following Rome, who turns on his phone light and keeps it tilted towards the ground. It’s a risk, but stumbling around in the dark in an entirely unfamiliar place is even more of a risk.

“Has the signal moved?” Rome asks, looking over his shoulder at Ace and winking at me in the process.

It seems like these guys get as excited and amped up as I do at the prospect of a good fight and taking out someone who deserves it.

“Yeah, the signal is still strong, and it hasn’t moved. We’re almost directly on top of him; wherever he is should be just up ahead. We need to go off the path here and through these trees.”

“Great, silence from here on out and stay alert. Malachi, you stick to Mason like fucking glue,” Rome orders, and Mal nods firmly once.

We all draw our weapons, and I scan the surrounding area. Just as we push our way through the thick undergrowth, the tree by my head explodes, and I duck down, avoiding the other bullets heading in our direction.

“Shit, they must’ve had some sort of alarm system that let them know that we were here,” Ace curses.

“Four men have just headed into the woods behind the cabin, one of them limping, so my guess would be that’s Demetri.” Rip mutters quietly.

“Malachi and Mason, you clear the cabin and make sure no one is still inside,” Rome orders, and they nod, “Everyone else with me.”

Mal and Mason head for the cabin as we all rush past, chasing after the escaped four. We stay silent, keeping our steps light as we enter the forest behind the run-down cabin. These men know the area hell of a lot better than we do, and they currently have the home ground advantage, they could easily be right on top of us, and we wouldn’t fucking realise until it was too late. So we creep forward, our footsteps muffled by the damp leaves and debris below our feet. Rain trickles down my face, starting to get heavier now, which is all we fucking need. Finding them is going to be hard enough; add in the sound of the rain, and although it doesn’t seem like it would make a difference, it really does.

Rome suddenly stops, holding his hand up and closing his fist, I have no idea what it means, but the others both stop and start scanning the area, so I figure I should do the same. As I listen closely, stretching my hearing as far as it will go, I hear the snap of a branch to my left. We all move as one instantly darting in that direction and suddenly find ourselves surrounded by four heavily armed and fucking angry men.

There’s no time to think as the guys all engage in combat with three of the guards. These men are a hell of a lot better trained than the ones at the warehouse, and it seems almost predictable that Demetri would hire the better guards for himself and not to protect his merchandise. If he had, we

might not have gotten out of the warehouse as unscathed as we are, and we wouldn't have been able to follow him.

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Chapter Twenty-Four

The world falls away as I lock eyes with Demetri. I see the fear flash in them ever so briefly before he turns on his heel and flees like the coward I know him to be. Don't get me wrong; he's still a formidable opponent despite being someone who liked to hide behind his friends. I know the guys will be fine taking care of the guards that are left, they aren't outnumbered, and they wouldn't have gotten as excited as they were before the fight if they didn't know they could win or at least had a good chance.

Luckily for me, Demetri is injured and, therefore, easy to follow as he stumbles and crashes through the forest. He points his gun behind him, aiming randomly as he shoots, and I dive behind a tree to avoid the sporadic fire before taking off after him again. I could shoot him; God knows I have the skills to take the shot from here and take him down, but I think that a quick death is far too easy for him. He made sure I suffered when he and his buddies kidnapped me, and he's done worse to the countless other men, women and children that he's had a hand in kidnapping and selling. Because of that, I will make him hurt.

He starts to slow, and I increase my speed so I can take him down before he starts shooting again. He spins surprisingly agile for a man with a bullet wound in his leg, but then again, he's also managed to run through the forest reasonably well. I guess if my choice was a bit of pain or death by someone who has wanted me dead for a long time, I suppose I'd be able to run with a bullet wound too. As he turns, he raises his gun, his face pale and sweaty despite the coolness of the evening and the rain still misting down. Almost as if in slow motion, I see him put his finger on the trigger and instead of shooting him like I really want to, I instead take aim and shoot his gun out of his hand. It took me a long time to learn to make that shot, and even now, there's no guarantee that I'll make it every time.

The irony in it is that if I hadn't had that year off after they kidnapped me, I never would've had enough time to perfect it.

Fortunately, luck is on my side, and the gun ricochets out of his hand. Unfortunately, the shock at the shot lasts mere moments before he charges and tackles me to the wet floor, making me curse as my own gun flies out of my hand. I guess we're doing this the old fashion way. I jab my hand against the wound in his leg, and he bellows in pain, landing a hit against my cheek as he rolls off me and stumbles to his feet. His hit was hard enough to daze me and gave him the time he needed to pull himself up to standing, but fortunately, it didn't give him enough time to retrieve his gun.

I jump to my feet and charge him, I strike with a quick one-two combination and try to sweep his legs out from underneath him, but he sees the move coming and attacks me with his own quick succession of hits. I manage to block three of them, but the last two make it through my guard, one snapping my head to the side as my cheek once again bursts with pain, and the other hits me in the stomach, making me double over.

Fuck.

I wheeze as I try to get my breath back. The rain is starting to get heavy again and making the floor of the forest slippery and hard to get traction on. However, the upside is that it's washing the blood off of my face. Demetri grins as he sees me struggling to breathe and pulls out a giant hunting knife. I quickly pull out my own smaller blade, and his grin widens.

"You know, I'm going to enjoy making you beg for mercy before I drain the life out of you," he sneers. "That's always the best part watching them beg for their lives. Mistakenly thinking that I have any sort of humanity left in me."

My anger sizzles just beneath the surface, giving me a burst of energy. I lunge forward with a flurry of speed that he wasn't expecting me to have, and my knife plunges into his gut. I cry out in pain as the tip of his knife embeds in my thigh at the same moment, as I fail to move out of the way fast enough. He pulls it out with a vicious grin on his face; despite the pain, he

must be in with my knife still protruding from his gut. I smash my elbow into his face before he can get any idea about stabbing me again, and in his weakened state, he falls to the floor, his backwards momentum yanking the knife from his stomach.

I stand over him as he grips the wound, his breathing harsh and his eyes full of pain. Blood starts to pool around him rapidly, mixing with the rain and mud beneath him as he bleeds out. I thought of what I could say to him in his final moments, but now the reality is here, I think my silence will infuriate him more. The harsher his breathing becomes, the more the look in his eyes changes from pain to abject terror.

I can feel the blood from my thigh making a hot path down my leg, a steep contrast to the biting cold rain. My whole body shakes with pain and fatigue, my legs threatening to give way beneath me, but I stubbornly lock my knees, refusing to rest until I've watched him take his final breath.

Finally, his eyes shutter closed, he takes a large wobbly inhale, blood coating his lips, before his chest falls still and he doesn't take another breath.

I collapse to the floor, my legs finally giving way, now that he's gone. It feels like a massive weight has been lifted, and my whole body sags with relief. My legs stretch out in front of me, my clothes getting covered in mud and soaking wet, but I don't care. I barely even notice as I stare at the body. It's finally over. These men will never be able to hurt me again, and more importantly, they won't be able to hurt anyone else again. I wish I could let all of his previous victims know that they don't have to panic about him coming for them again. I wish I could tell them that they will never be hurt by him again, that they're safe.

I know I should get up and go and find the guys, but I just can't seem to make my body move. I'm starting to feel the pain in my leg now that I should've been feeling this whole time, a sure sign that I need to move, but I just want to make sure he's really dead, so I continue to stare.

I don't know how long passes before I hear someone calling for me. I know it's one of my guys, but beyond that, I can't tell who it is over the sound of the rain and my own empty thoughts.

I jump as Mason's frantic eyes appear in front of mine, causing me to frown as my thoughts start to come back online.

"Jynx, Baby, are you okay?" He asks, his voice frantic and full of fear.

I slowly lift my hand, noticing for the first time that it's shaking. I ignore it, for now, my mind slowly coming back online, as I place my palm against Mason's cheek.

"Jynx, you're scaring me. Say something, please?" He pleads.

"Where are the others?" I croak.

He breathes a sigh of relief as I finally reply, "They fell behind. Ironically, I'm the one that has the best tracking skills."

I tilt my head, my brain finally clearing, and I realise what was bothering me about his solitary experience before, "You came after by yourself?"

He nods.

"Through the woods, at night?"

His eyes collide with mine as he holds my hand to his face, "It turns out that my need to find you and make sure you were safe overrode everything else."

My heart melts as emotions swarm inside me. Slowly he leans forward, his eyes searching mine for any hesitation. When he finds none, his lips gently brush against mine. Our lips move together. This kiss is soft and full of emotions that I'm not sure I'm ready to deal with yet.

"Jynx!" I hear someone yell.

"Mason!"

I sigh as we pull apart, Mason's forehead resting against mine.

“Thank you for coming for me, Mason. You can’t understand how much that means to me.”

“Always, Little Warrior.” He replies earnestly.

“There you are. Are you both okay?” Malachi asks, carefully crouching down in the mud next to us both.

He studies his brother, making sure that he’s not panicking and then turns to me. His eyes widen before he winces.

“Oh, Jynx. Are you hurt anywhere else?” He asks, just as the others come into view.

Rip growls, when he sees me, his eye’s entirely overtaken by the manic gleam. He crashes to his knees next to me, uncaring of the mud and rain that now coats him too. Mason and Malachi seem only to need to glance at Rip to know that they need to move back out of the way, and Rip doesn’t even spare them a glance when they do, his entire focus on me. His intense gaze studies my face as his hands move towards me before hesitating, unsure where he can touch me. My face must look like an absolute mess right now. I reach out and grab his hand; seeing his whole body relax at the contact does something entirely unexpected to me, and once again, I’m left with feelings that I’m not sure how to process.

“Come on, let’s get you home. You’re soaking wet, and I need to look you over properly and see if anything needs stitches.” Rip growls.

Rome comes to stand behind his shoulder, and his eyes fill with a mixture of relief and concern.

“Whoa, Rip, she’s going to need more help than that to get up,” Rome warns as he crouches down by my leg and shines the torch on it.

“Fuck,” Rip growls as he sees the still bleeding leg wound. It’s slowed considerably, and although the wound is relatively deep, I don’t think it will require a hospital visit, just stitches and rest. I managed to move out of the way before he got the whole knife in.

“Ace,” I say, my eyes landing on him.

He's stayed in the background, his eyes worried and starting to go distant. This is the second time he's reacted this way when I've almost been hurt or, in this case, actually hurt. I think he may have a trigger that he's not aware that he has. Although his reaction now isn't as severe as it was when my car exploded. My eyes connect with Rome's, and I nod towards Ace. He looks back, and understanding crosses features.

"Alright, let's get out of here. We need to get Jynx seen to, and I am fed up of being fucking wet. Ace, come and help Rip carry Jynx back to the car," Rome orders.

Rip starts to protest, not understanding why Rome is getting Ace to help when he is perfectly capable of carrying me back to the car himself. I squeeze his hand before he can say anything, and when he looks at me, I subtly shake my head, and he snaps his mouth closed.

"Yeah, okay. I can do that," Ace replies, coming over to me.

With Ace on one side and Rip on the other, they both sling my arms over their shoulders and then slowly stand. I grit my teeth against the pain that immediately rockets through my body.

"Fuck," I groan.

They all look at me, concerned, before we start walking. "Are you okay?" Ace asks. "I mean, I know you're not okay, sorry that was a stupid question."

"Hey," I interrupt his rant. "I'm okay. Unsurprisingly it's not the first time that I've been stabbed, and I don't think it's too deep. What about you, are you okay?"

"Erm, yeah. I think I have an adverse reaction to seeing you hurt." He admits quietly.

"Honestly, I'd be the same if any of you got seriously hurt," I admit. I glance over my shoulder at the body of Demetri, "I'm sorry, but could someone please double-check that he's dead?"

"Sure thing," Malachi answers, not seeming at all phased that I've just asked him to make sure that someone is dead.

I watch as he crouches down next to the body and places his fingers on Demetri's wrist, checking for his pulse.

"He's very definitely dead." He confirms, and I breathe a sigh of relief as we carry on our forward trek back through the woods, Mason taking the lead, with Malachi close to his side.

"Thank you," I reply. "What about the guards that came with him?"

"Dead," Rip grunts.

"We'll need to call D when we get back to the car and get a cleanup. I want to know what happened at the warehouse, too," I reply, trying to keep my mind on anything but the pain in my leg.

There's also something else I want to ask. It's time I'm brave. I want to know what happened to the blonde-haired girl I was briefly imprisoned with when I was kidnapped.

The trek through the woods is long, made longer because I'm slowing everyone down. Finally, the car comes into sight, and I feel a small amount of tension leave Ace and Rip.

"Mason, I need you to do what you can for Jynx before we get home. It's quite a drive, and I want it sorted now." Rome orders as we get to the car, and he pops open the back.

Ace and Rip gently settle me in the trunk as Mason rummages next to me, coming back with a massive first aid kit. While he looks through it, pulling out the things he thinks he'll need, I start to stand.

"Whoa, what do you think you're doing?" Ace asks firmly.

"Taking my pants off. It needs stitches, and Mason won't be able to do that through my pants."

"Fair point. Do you need a hand?" He asks.

"Actually, yes."

As I sway on my feet, Rome steps forward, his arms wrapping around me, "Careful. Ace, you help to get her pants off. I've got her."

I'd be embarrassed that they're having to help me do something as simple as taking my pants off, but I really do need it. Ace's fingers brush against my stomach as he undoes the button on my pants and try my hardest not to get turned on by the simple touch, but it's impossible, so instead, I work on hiding my reaction to it.

I have never been so glad that I'm not a guy. I'd give myself away all the fucking time.

"What are you smiling at?" Rome asks me, his own lips tilting up in response.

"Oh nothing," I reply, and he raises his eyebrow but doesn't comment further.

My eyes drift over his shoulder and collide with Rip and Malachi's; both of them have a knowing glint in their eyes, and I stick my tongue out in response. Ace starts to work my pants down my legs, and all my lustful thoughts disappear as the pain comes to the forefront of my mind.

"I'm sorry, Blue. I know it hurts. I'm going as carefully as I can," Ace apologise as he gently works them over my stab wound.

"Fuck, that hurts like a mother fucker."

"That's it, Little Warrior, get all of the curse words you want out. He's nearly done." Mason encourages from beside me.

I grin through gritted teeth, making it look more like a grimace than a smile, "Well, in that case," I pause as Ace carries on tugging my tight pants down as carefully as he can, "Cock sucking mother fucking donkey assed douche canoe cuntface balls."

The guys burst out laughing at my little tirade. Even Rip has a bigger smile than usual on his face, it's still tiny, but It's there. I can't help but swear as I finish my tirade just as Ace pulls them past my wound and quickly down the rest of my legs, waiting for me to lift my feet so he can pull them off.

"Here you go, Koroleva. Sit back down in the trunk, and Ace can pull them off." Rome says amusement still in his tone

as he lifts me into the trunk of the SUV with absolutely no effort.

The move makes the lust flare back to life. If he can lift you that effortlessly, just imagine what other situations he can lift you? A dirty voice whispers, and I smirk.

I manage to school my features this time before any of the guys see my reaction. Ace makes quick work of pulling my pants all the way off, and then they all stay gathered around me as they get a good look at my leg.

“I think you were right, Little Warrior, I don’t think you need to go to the hospital, but I do need to clean it up now. You’ve got debris and all sorts stuck to it.” He grimaces.

“You may as well stitch it up while we’re here,” I say.

“Are you sure? There’s no numbing stuff in this kit. We had to use it all on Mal a couple of months ago, and I never replaced it.”

“Do I want to know?” I ask, and they share a look before shaking their heads, “Well, okay then, go ahead and stitch me up, Doc.”

He grins and shakes his head before he gets to work cleaning my leg.

“Why don’t you guys get back in the SUV and out of the rain. Can someone ring D too and call for clean up?”

“Sure,” Rome replies, and they all reluctantly get back into the car and out of the rain.

Rome’s call with D is reasonably short, and I know he’s going to want a proper update later, but for now, he’s happy to leave it. Mason is surprisingly efficient at stitching me up, and he’s soon done.

“Thank you,” I smile.

“Come on, let’s get going. I need a hot shower and a bed. I’m exhausted,” he replies.

“God, me too,” I reply as he helps me down, and instead of letting me walk to my side of the car and get in, he picks me

up, pressing a button on the trunk so it shuts automatically and then settling us both in the car with me on his lap.

“All good?” Rome asks.

“Yep, let’s get out of here,” I reply, and he nods, reversing back down the road. I sure as hell hope that we don’t meet D’s guys coming up the road. There’s nowhere for us to go.

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Chapter Twenty-Five

“Erguh, I think I’m car sick.” Ace groans, looking a bit pale.

“You don’t get car sick?” Rip points out, sounding slightly amused.

“I don’t when we go forward but apparently backwards is another story,” he mutters, “Was the road that long going up it?”

“Yeah, but we were focused on other things and going faster, so it seemed shorter,” I point out, wrapping my arms around myself. I thought getting in the car would warm me up, but I still feel as cold as I did when I was sat in the trunk of the car. It’s weird, though, because I didn’t feel cold at all when I was sat on the forest floor.

“Are you okay?” Mason asks as he wraps his arms tighter around me, being careful of my injuries.

“I’m so freaking cold,” I reply, my teeth starting to chatter.

“Here,” Rip replies, shrugging off his jacket and taking off his dry hoodie underneath. He hands it back to me with a worried look in his icy blue eyes.

“Th-th-thanks,” I reply, through my teeth chattering.

“We need to get her home and warmed up. I have no idea how long she was sitting in the rain for before I found her. Hopefully, she’s just cold, and it doesn’t develop into anything else,” Mason says, a worried note in his voice.

Rome doesn’t reply, but the speed of the car increases. I struggle to pull Rip’s hoodie on, smacking Mason in the face with my elbow in the process.

“Shit, sorry,” I apologise as I pull it down. It’s big enough that it comes to my knees, and I instantly feel warmer as I breathe in the woody scent of Rip.

“Did you just sniff my hoodie?” He asks, a slight tilt to his lips.

I shrug, “What? You smell nice,” I admit.

His smile grows a tiny bit wider, and once again, I can’t help but stare. It changes his whole face making him look almost entirely different.

“Better?” He asks.

“Yeah, thank you. My teeth have stopped chattering.”

“We’re nearly home,” Rome says from the front as we turn down our street.

It occurs to me that really, they don’t need to stay anymore. D told them to stay while I was still under threat, but now that the mercenaries have been dealt with, there’s no real reason for them to stay with me. I open my mouth to point it out to them but quickly snap it closed. I don’t want them to go home. I like having the company, and it is late. Maybe I’ll just mention it tomorrow instead.

“The gate is open.” Rip mutters all traces of the relaxed tone he once had gone entirely.

“That shouldn’t be able to happen,” I start, “The gates automatically close when we leave. Someone give me a gun; I left mine in the trunk.”

They share a look as we slowly creep up the drive, and I sigh.

“Look, you all know that I’m going to follow you regardless, this is my house, and I have people inside that I care about; wouldn’t you rather I was armed?”

Rome sighs heavily, “Alright, you have a point, but you are injured, Jynx, so you stay behind us, okay?”

“Ooo, I love it when you get all firm with me,” I tease, and he raises his eyebrow, waiting for my confirmation. I roll my eyes, “Fine. I will stay behind you.”

“Good girl,” he grins, teasing me back, and an unexpected spear of heat floods me.

We pull up outside the front of the house, and anger floods me as I see the door left wide open. I definitely didn't leave it that way, and even if I had, Gerald wouldn't have.

"Clear the house before you look for anything out of place." Rome orders and the others nod, severe looks on their faces.

We all get out of the car, and pain spears through my leg as I place it on the floor. I need to go in with them, though. I need to make sure that everyone is okay. I don't really care about the house; it's only stuff, and it can be replaced, but the people can't. I've become really fucking fond of them. At least my mother isn't even in the country, so I need to worry about her.

I take a deep breath pushing the pain into the back of my mind and blocking it off. It still hurts, but I refuse to stay behind, and I refuse to be a liability. I worked out a long time ago that mind over matter works pretty fucking well in these situations if you have enough practice and I have more than enough practice.

We slowly make our way forward, and I keep my eyes on the surrounding area just in case this is some kind of ambush. However, everything seems normal and quiet, if someone wanted to take us out, they would've done it by now, so at least we can rule out people being outside.

"Fucking hell," I mutter under my breath as I survey the damage.

Before we can move any further into the house, the cocking of a shotgun makes us all pause and turn to see a completely unruffled Gerald, the weapon held naturally in his hands. As soon as he realises it's us, he lowers it immediately.

"Good evening, Miss," he says casually, like this is a usual occurrence, "The house is clear, all invaders have fled."

"Are you okay?" I ask.

"Fine, it's nothing we haven't dealt with before."

"We'll get back to that in a minute," I reply with my eyebrow raised, and he nods.

“Are you okay, miss? You appear to be injured?” He asks, nodding to my leg. The old guy is far too observant.

“I’m fine. We dealt with the issue. I thought it was dealt with. But, clearly, I was wrong,” I mutter as I look around. “Can you check on the other staff and make sure that they are all okay?”

“Absolutely, miss. I’ll do it now.” Gerald replies, turning on his heel and striding off down the hallway, the shotgun slung on his shoulder.

We’ve only made it as far as the front entryway, but everything is trashed. Anything that was on the side tables has been thrown off onto the floor and smashed, many of things I’m sure are rare and worth a fucking fortune. The curtains are slashed, the walls burned but not enough to actually cause any real damage. Fortunately, it’s just superficial burns. The most worrying thing, though, is that scrawled across the wall in something that suspiciously looks like blood is the words, ‘If you do not return it within forty-eight hours, there will be hell to pay’.

“Well, that’s cheery,” I mutter.

“What do they want?” Malachi asks me.

“I have no fucking idea. I haven’t stolen anything off of anyone. Not recently anyway.” I reply thoughtfully trying to wrack my brain to think of what it could mean.

“Alright, you need to sit down. Let’s go and see whether there’s any damage in the kitchen.” Rip orders this time as he walks over to me and picks me up bridal style before striding towards the kitchen.

I stare up at him, and when he finally looks down at me, a genuine breath-taking smile overtakes his features for the first time. His eyes light up with amusement, probably at the confused look on my face and his whole face softens.

“Fucking hell,” I mutter quietly so the guys can’t hear me, “I love your smile.”

His eyes turn from amused to heated as his smile softens; they scan my features as if trying to make sure that I’m really

here. I think I worried him more than he let on when I got separated from them in the woods. Finally, he pauses, the others walking past us and out of the corner of my eye, I see them looking at us curiously, Ace starts to open his mouth, but Rome grabs him by the arm and pulls him forward, shooting a look at the twins that makes them follow as well.

I don't notice anything else as Rip's soft lips land against mine, in a feather-light touch as if he's unsure of himself. He's finally kissing me. My whole body ignites, and my hand weaves into the hair at the back of his head as my back arches trying to get closer to him. His hands clench against me, pulling me closer. His tongue runs across the seam of my lips and I happily open them for him. Our tongues moving together in an erotic dance.

"Erm, guys. You really need to see this," Rome interrupts us, and we pull apart.

When my gaze turns to him to give him some sort of snarky reply, my words immediately die on my lips at the sight of his expression. It's stony and severe.

What the fuck has happened now?

Rip sighs almost inaudibly and then continues carrying me through to the kitchen. At first, I fail to see what the issue is. Compared to the rest of the house, it's completely spotless and doesn't look like anything has been touched but then my eyes land on the others. All of them are gathered around the table and looking at the box in the middle.

It's a black rectangular box about the same size as a book, with the emblem of a raven on the side and my name in silver script on the lid. My heart drops.

"Well, that can't be a coincidence," I mutter as Rip places me down next to the table.

"What?" Malachi asks curiously.

"Well, you remember when I asked if you'd threatened my life?" I ask, and they nod.

"Oh, that was a box of raven heads, wasn't it?" Rome asks.

“Yep, and now there’s a box on my kitchen table with a picture of a raven on the side.”

“The first box can’t have been from the mercenaries like you thought then,” Ace points out.

“No. I just automatically assumed it was them. Although it is still a pretty big coincidence that they turned up at the same time.” I reply.

“I don’t like coincidences,” Rip growls.

“Me neither,” I reply, still staring at the box.

“Are you going to open it?” Mason asks curiously with a raised eyebrow.

I sigh heavily before reaching up underneath Rip’s hoodie and producing a knife.

“Whoa, hang on, where the fuck did you get that from?” Ace asks with an amused and heated look.

“My bra,” I shrug as I open the flick knife and slice clear tape holding the lid of the box down.

I slowly lift the lid, hoping that there aren’t more raven heads in here or, even worse, the half-rotted bodies they left behind. Wow, thanks mind, for that lovely image.

“Why are you already grimacing?” Malachi asks.

“I just really don’t want there to be anything rotting in here,” I reply.

“Do you want one of us to open it?” Rome asks.

“No, I’ve got it. It’s addressed to me after all,” I grin.

Everyone leans a bit closer as I lift up the lid, which probably isn’t the smartest thing to do since we don’t know what’s inside, but it’s too late to mention it now. Laying on top of a layer of dark red tissue paper folded neatly to cover whatever is inside is a piece of paper. I pick it up and read it out loud.

“We know that Demelza has it, and we know that there is no way that she wouldn’t have told her granddaughter where it is.

We will start sending your mother back in pieces if you do not get it to us within the next forty-eight hours. Consider this gift proof of our threat.”

I throw the note to the side as fear rages through me and tear open the paper. “Fuck!” I growl as I uncover what lays beneath and turn to punch the wall behind me in pure anger.

Nestled macabrely on a red velvet pillow is a severed finger, and I’d bet my considerable fortune that it belongs to my mother.

“What the fuck?” Rip growls.

“I think I’m going to be sick,” Malachi mutters.

“Alright, let’s think,” Rome says, staying calm. “Okay, first, who the fuck are these people?”

“I have no idea. I thought they were something to do with the mercenaries, so I didn’t look into it.”

“I think I might know,” Rip interrupts, and we look at him curiously, “You guys do too. It’s the Raven crime family. They run a lot of stuff around here, and D has been slowly getting us to take over or take the businesses out. We spent most of the summer doing it.”

“I don’t remember him telling us that we were taking the Raven’s out,” Mason frowns.

“That’s because they’re more commonly known as the Voron family.” Rome mutters, “I can’t believe I didn’t put it together.”

“They are fucking dangerous, our level dangerous, and there are more of them.” Ace points out.

“That’s all well and good, great that we’ve identified them and everything, but what the hell would my grandmother have to do with them? What the hell could she have that belongs to them?”

“Well, you’ve been saying that there’s something strange about her,” Mason points out.

“Yeah, but working with a known crime family, one that is willing to chop parts off of people, is an entirely different fucking ballgame,” I grimace.

“Before we get any further into this, I’m going to play devil’s advocate. Are we sure that the finger belongs to your mother?” Ace asks, making me pause.

“Well, no, how do we figure that out, though?” I ask.

“Are your mother’s prints in the system?”

“Oh yeah, of course, they are,” I reply curiously.

“I’ve modified my laptop so that the touchpad also works as a fingerprint scanner, using that I can scan the print on the finger and run through some databases to see if we get a match. At least then we will know for sure if it’s your mom or not.”

“I think that’s probably the best place to start.” Rome agrees.

“How quickly can you get it done?” I ask.

“It should take ten minutes or so,” Ace replies.

“Sounds great. Let’s do that first. I won’t be able to think properly until we know for sure whether it belongs to my mother or not,” I reply.

Ace nods in understanding and leaves the room to get his laptop. I watch him, grateful that he’s in my life and then pull my phone out of my bra, earning a look from the guys in the process. I find my mom’s number and hit dial, but it goes straight to voicemail.

“No answer?” Mason asks.

“Nope, but then again, that’s not really anything new. Gerald said that she’d taken off somewhere with some guy, so it would be normal for her to cut all contact with me. For as long as the relationship lasts, she likes to pretend that she’s never had a kid.”

“That’s pretty fucked up,” Mal points out, and I grin warily.

“Yep, but I’m used to it now. It doesn’t help in this situation, though.”

“Got it,” Ace says as he rushes back into the room and places his laptop on the table. “Do you have any surgical gloves?”

“Erm, we probably do in a medical kit, one second,” I mutter, limping into the other side of the kitchen and rummaging around under the sink.

I finally find it and pull out some gloves, walking back to Ace and handing them to him. He quickly pulls them on and then carefully takes the finger out of the box, he presses the tip to the pad, and a copy of the print appears on the screen.

“It’ll be quicker if you know exactly what database to search, right?” I ask.

“Yeah,” Ace replies, placing the finger back into the box.

“Try the Remunsand county police department,” I reply.

He nods and then types in a load of stuff that I really don’t understand as we all gather behind him, watching him work. But, I have to admit that even though I don’t understand anything that he’s doing, it’s really interesting watching him, and he gets the cutest look of concentration on his face while he does it.

“Done, that should take a few minutes if that, now that you’ve narrowed it down for me.” Ace smiles before he gets a frown on his face, his eyes moving back towards the finger. He motions to it, “Do you mind?”

“No, go for it,” I reply, my butt falling onto the chair that Mason’s just pulled out.

“You okay?” He asks me.

“Yeah, my leg is starting to hurt.”

“I’ll grab you some painkillers,” he replies, ducking so he can kiss the top of my head and then walking over to the sink to pull the medical kit back out.

“And I’ll make some coffee. I think we’re all going to need it, and you still need to warm up properly.” Rome says to me, and I smile softly in response.

“I definitely won’t say no to coffee,” I reply before turning my attention back to Ace. I watch him curiously as he studies the finger with a perplexed frown on his face. He moves it around before turning it to look at the end; his eyes widen, and his frown deepens as he realises something and his eyes meet mine.

“I don’t like the look you’re giving me, Ace,” I tell him, gaining the attention of the others, “What’s wrong?”

“Okay, you know how we all have training in the basics as well as our main field?”

I nod.

“Right, well, I studied body decomposition and everything that goes along with it.”

“Get to the point, Ace. You’re making me nervous.”

He pauses and shares a look with the others.

“That’s my speciality. Let me see?” Rip asks, and Ace lifts it up, showing him the end of the finger. Rip’s expression turns dark, and I start to feel sick.

“I was really hoping I was wrong.” Ace mutters, seeing his expression.

“Will one of you please tell me what’s going on?” I demand, my voice harsh.

The laptop pings before either of them can reply, and I glance at the screen to see that the finger is a definite match to my mother.

“I was really hoping that it wasn’t hers,” Ace winces, repeating himself.

“For fuck sake, please tell me what is going on.”

“Judging from the point where the finger was severed, the person was already dead when it was taken,” Rip finally tells me.

“No,” I breathe out as realisation hits me like a ton of fucking bricks.

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About The Author

Nikita Parmenter lives in England, with her amazing partner and beautiful children and two puppies. Coffee and cinnamon buns are what keep her going. Her characters all have a special place in her heart and quite often, enjoy throwing her curve balls that send the plot line in a completely different direction than she had originally planned, and she loves it! Not as crazy as it sounds, she promises. She writes Paranormal Reverse Harem, Contemporary Reverse Harem, and has a Reverse Harem Bully Romance in the works too. She loves writing strong, take no sh*t female characters, that have become that way through fighting tooth and nail to survive. She also loves writing damaged alpha males with hearts of gold buried underneath all their jagged edges. Connect with Nikita via her Facebook page Nikita Parmenter - Author or Instagram nikitaparmenterauthor.

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