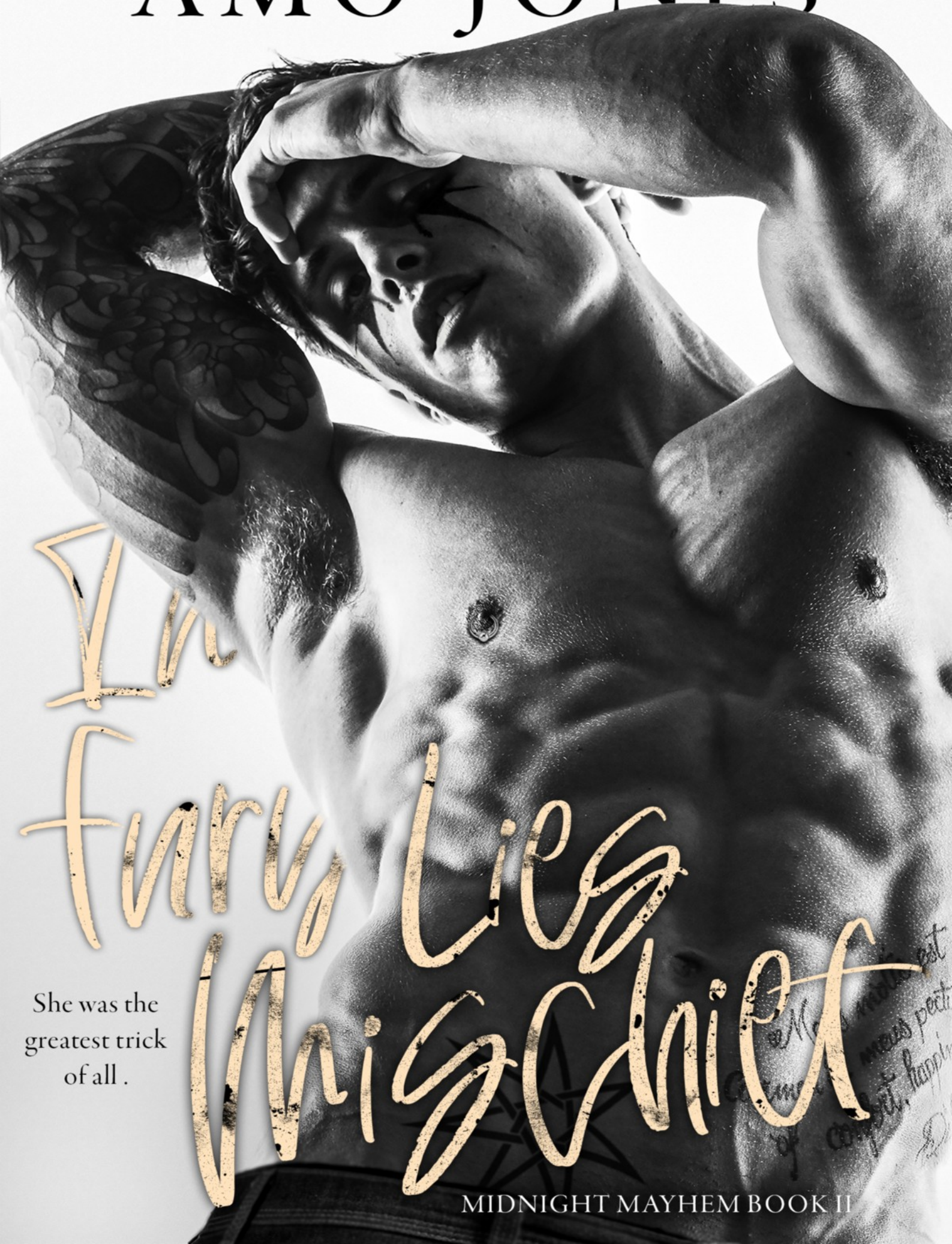


USA Today & Wall Street Journal Bestselling Author

AMO JONES



The
Fury Lies
Mischiefs

She was the
greatest trick
of all.

MIDNIGHT MAYHEM BOOK II

In fury
Lies
Mischief

USA Today & Wall Street Journal Bestselling Author

AMO JONES

In Fury Lies Mischief (Midnight Mayhem: Book II)

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Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Epigraph](#)

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Chapter Seven](#)

[Chapter Eight](#)

[Chapter Nine](#)

[Chapter Ten](#)

[Chapter Eleven](#)

[Chapter Twelve](#)

[Chapter Thirteen](#)

[Chapter Fourteen](#)

[Chapter Fifteen](#)

[Chapter Sixteen](#)

[Chapter Seventeen](#)

[Chapter Eighteen](#)

[Chapter Nineteen](#)

[Chapter Twenty](#)

[Chapter Twenty-One](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Two](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Three](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Four](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Five](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Six](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Seven](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Eight](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Nine](#)

[Chapter Thirty](#)

[Chapter Thirty-One](#)

[Chapter Thirty-Two](#)

[Chapter Thirty-Three](#)

[Chapter Thirty-Four](#)

[Chapter Thirty-Five](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[After Show](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

[Other Books](#)

This book is dedicated to my kids, because they had to live on cereal and toast until I finished it.

And to my husband, who made the cereal and toast because he can't cook anything else.

I'm joking. Please don't call child services on me.

“Welcome to Midnight Mayem. We are not a circus, we are not a carnival, and the only thing that you should be afraid of losing tonight, is your sanity...”



One

Killian

When I was ten years old, I told the world to go fuck themselves. I mean, I literally stood up in the center of the ring, made Ky hook up a video, flipped the camera the bird, and told every motherfucker while holding my junk, “Fuck you!” Now, I know what you’re thinking. How the fuck could you do this at the tender age of ten?

Well, I’ll tell you how. Ky is abnormally smart. I mean, textbooks couldn’t even figure out his shit—smart. We made the video, and then Ky hacked into some survey and uploaded the video.

It went live.

Spread through all news channels.

Across every single thing that was televising live during that very minute.

How’d I reach this point, you ask, well, a funny story... I mean, I could go back and tell you from the day I entered this

world, but let's be honest, no one, aside from my sex crazed best friends who like fucking her, wants a descriptive image of my mother's vagina, so whatever. Long story that doesn't have anything of importance short, I'm hard-wired to be this way. I was born human but crafted to be this.

Trickster.

The fucking Mayhem in Midnight. The motherfucker that would push all of your boundaries and make you feel good while doing it.

Speaking of Midnight Mayhem: Our family. Our unit. A bunch of fucked Romanians that are living the good life in America. I mean, shit, to be fair, we've all been living here since our parents moved over when we were young. Never found out why. Never asked.

"What are you doing?" King glares at me from across the booth.

I wave my hand up, grinning. "Listening to music. That cool with you?"

It was Christmas only a few weeks ago, and we all had a long enough break. Now we're kicking off our new year with our first international show in Australia. Delila always has her reasons, whether we see them or not. It can be frustrating when she starts being cryptic, which is exactly what she has been lately.

I lean forward, lowering my voice so P doesn't wake, but her mouth falls open slightly and a snore escapes. I smirk.

"Don't say it, motherfucker. Leave her alone."

My eyes fly up to King. "Fine, moody bastard. I was just going to—"

"—Killian, get to what you were going to ask me and leave her alone. She's probably still tired as fuck from New Year's Eve, which by the way... are we going to talk about that?" King's attention shifts over my shoulder. I don't have to look to know who he's talking about.

My smile drops. “No. We don’t. As I was about to say before your sweet little angel distracted me with her snoring, have you asked Delila why we’re doing an international tour this year?”

We do international shows, but we do them every five years because of the time and cost that comes into it. We take on more staff and are away for fourteen months each time. Since the last one we did was two years ago, the fact that we’re already all abroad doesn’t sit right with me. The floor rocks softly, the imbalance a dead giveaway that we’re on The Cap aka—my family’s huge ass fucking cruise ship. We always take the ship over to kick off an international flight to give us time to practice, train, wind down a bit. If we take the 747, we all end up grumpy, tired, and only needing to train as soon as we get on land anyway. This way, we can take the majority of our equipment over with us. The Cap, named after my great, great something grandfather, is painted in sleek black with the words Midnight Mayhem written over the sides in lilac. It can be a bitch when it comes to customs and transfers for the road registration, but that’s where connections come in and a lot of powerful people owe us a shit ton of favors.

King shakes his head, picking up his glass of whiskey and throwing it back. “No. She’s more on edge than ever.” We’re currently kicking back in Yaam. The bar located on level one. Obviously, this isn’t like your usual cruise ship. There are no souvenir shops or cute little bakeries. There are two bars, one on this level and the other on the top deck near the pool. On the second level is where all of our bedrooms and storage compartments for the lighter loads are, where the heavier items—such as bikes, equipment, and all the others are tucked inside the basement.

“Yeah.” I run my hand through the strands of my hair, tugging on the ends slightly. “I’ve noticed that too.” Since Christmas Day, Delila has been more reserved and tense. None of us have seen this shift in her before, and it has put a spin on the dynamic that we live through. Delila is the type of woman that brings funerals to life, not sleep with the dead.

Perse shuffles, swiping the sleep from her eyes. “Can we go to bed?”

King throws his arm around her neck. “Yeah.” He stands, glaring at me. “Don’t get up to too much mischief...”

I wink at him. “Oh you’re just jealous because you’re—”

Perse slices me with a cold stare.

“Never mind.” I roll my eyes. “Night, lovers.” They disappear through the bar and out the exit. Running my hand over my face, my focus falls on Callan.

Yeah, fuck it. She’ll do for tonight. Perse hates when I play with her girls, but I can’t help it if they’re offering themselves up as my toys. Well, Callan does. Sass is a different fucking story.

I tilt my head back and look down to my crotch, a smirk on my mouth.

Callan licks the rim of her margarita and shoots back the rest before her long legs swing out from beneath the bar and she walks toward me.



TWO

Killian

Remember when you could change your ringtone to some remixed Jay-Z and Linkin Park song? Well, fuck, wish I still had that option because “Reflection” (iPhone’s default ringtone) is banging on my rage this morning. I swipe it from the bedside table and hit answer.

“You better be dead, Maya.”

“Unfortunately, I’m not. But you might be, because you’re late and Delila isn’t in a good mood today.” Maya is my annoying as fuck best friend who doesn’t know any boundaries, lights a fire under my ass anytime that she can, and tests my patience every day. If you hadn’t figured it out, yeah, the bar I was at last night had been renamed after her. She wanted it to be called “MAYA,” but I had to hold on to some masculinity, so I called it “YAAM.” Safe to say, she’s not a fan.

I groan, swiping my eyes. “Fuck her. She doesn’t run my ship.”

“Kill? Get in here now.” Delila is also Maya’s mom, but their relationship is not like your average. Putting it lightly.

“Fine!” I hang up and make my way out of bed, growling at the onslaught of light that’s beaming through my windows. “Fuck.” I must have forgotten to close them last night after Callan left, or rather, I kicked her ass out.

After a quick shower, I throw on some grey sweats and Adidas sneakers, tossing a clean white Tommy Hilfiger shirt over my shoulder. I don’t know what Delila’s issue is, it’s not like we can train on the triple wheel of death, which is the stunt she’s always grinding our ass to train. I get it, it’s dangerous and requires practice, but we’ve all been riding on those wheels since we were old enough to ride.

I open the doors that lead to the first level auditorium, a smoke hanging from my mouth and a coffee in hand. “Sorry I’m late, didn’t realize I had to fucking be here,” I mutter, as everyone turns to face me.

I notice it’s just us. Midnight, the Six Demons and Seven Angels, and whatever it is that Perse called her little crew. And Delila, of course. None of the crew is here.

I mindlessly find Sass, who is looking right through me, as if I don’t exist. She’s fucking good at that. I blow her a kiss before sliding in beside Keaton. She flinches, turning away from me. Don’t know what the fuck is up with her or what her problem with me is. When I first saw her, naturally, I wanted her. The girl is a walking younger version of Adriana Lima—only hotter, because she has this whole Megan Fox thing going on too. But for some fucked up reason, she has withdrawn from me. She hasn’t spoken one word to me, yet she and Keaton seem to have some fucking twisted vibe going on.

Motherfucker. It’s weird for Keaton, and when I say vibe, I mean he doesn’t exactly mind her company. Usually, he hates everyone. He doesn’t like to be around anyone but us, but apparently, Saskia has slowly made her way into his books. I

ain't buying it and I still have money on the fact that Perse has made him soft.

I know he hasn't fucked her. In fact, I know that no one has touched Saskia Royal for the time that she has been here. She barely speaks, keeps to herself, and only cultivates in her circle, which is mainly Perse, Callan, and Kenan.

"So good of you to join us, Trickster." Delila glowers at me, before lighting up another smoke and inhaling. "Okay. So, we are set to dock in Brisbane in twenty-three days. As usual, or if you're new—" She looks over to Callan, Sass, Kenan, and Perse. "It takes twenty-three days to sail to Australia, where we do two shows in Brisbane, before setting off to Sydney and Perth. You'll find an itinerary underneath your seat, which is heavily outlined on not only our timetable and schedule, but the training that I will need you all to maintain while we're out at sea. If you're not working on your routine, you better be running on those treadmills."

I kick out my leg and inhale a cloud of toxic nicotine smoke.

"I need everyone to keep up their routines. Because we're at sea for a long time, that doesn't mean you slack off." Delila brushes her hand in the air. "That's all." I look around the auditorium, the seats line a stage with all of our training props to the back. Someone has even moved in the double wheel so we can work on it. I'm not in the fucking mood to do anything right now, so whoever did that wasted their time. I could ride that cage with my eyes closed.

"What time did you go to sleep last night?" Maya scowls, dropping down onto the chair beside mine.

"Damn, grinding my balls already? Not gonna warm them up a little before you rub up on them?" I watch as her eyes roll to the back of her head, only intensifying my smirk. I put her out of her misery. "Can't remember. Callan is a fucking Energizer Bunny."

"Gross," Maya snickers, leaning her head back against the top of the chair. "Have you spoken to my mother? Maybe ask

her why she decided to round us all onto this godforsaken ship and set us out of the US.”

Keaton clears his throat. “Nah, but I’m almost certain it has to do with Patience.”

“You think?” I ask, thinking over Christmas Day and New Year’s Eve.

I flinch when I think of New Years. It’s not something that I want to think about right now, especially with Maya sitting right beside me. It’s still a little tender between her and I after that—I don’t want to encourage the animosity.

Movement catches my eye in the corner when Perse and her crew start moving to the center stage.

“Killian.” My father pointed toward the double staircase that leads to the second floor of our mansion. “Go and make sure they have done their duty.”

I huffed. “Dad, they do it. Every single time. I don’t need to check.” I kicked out my leg and took another spoon of granola. I didn’t know why we had to fly back to Kiznitch this week. I hate visiting the old land. It’s depressing as fuck and besides, I have everything that I want right here.

“Killian,” Dad barks. “Go and make sure.”

I tossed my spoon down into the ceramic bowl and kicked off from the chair. Fucking slaves. Why the fuck do we have them anyway. They’re nothing but annoying.

“Killian!” Kyrin calls out from the center stage. I must have been lost in my own head because I was still sitting in the same chair I was in minutes earlier.

“Yo?”

I watch as Sass and Callan make their way on stage, with Callan throwing me side-eyes. Callan is hot. As hot as you’ll get if you like them blonde, where I’m known to prefer mine

on the darker side of the spectrum, which is what I always blame it on when I can't help but seek out Sass.

I jack-knife up from my chair, tossing my t-shirt onto the seat in the front row and spread my arms wide. "What?"

"We need to practice."

"Practice what?" I smirk. "I can make you lick my ass. Shall we practice that?" I wink at Kyrin, who flips me off.

Chuckling, I turn around quickly, just as Perse hits play on "All I Need" from Within Temptation. I'm shaking my head at her song choice when Saskia bumps right into my chest. My arms go out to steady her. "Wow."

She jumps back from me as if I've assaulted her with my presence. "Sorry." She attempts to step away and walk past me, only I counter her movement.

"What's your problem?"

"I don't have a problem," she snaps, agitated.

Fuck, her eyes are blue. I've never in my life seen eyes like hers. I thought mine were different, but they ain't got nothing on hers. With that olive skin, a jaw, sharp, yet delicate enough to cut through cold butter, rosy swollen lips and thick raven eyelashes, she's everything that you would picture perfection to look like. I'm not shallow, I like my women flawed, which is what brings me to the other side of my attraction to Saskia Royal: confusion. Perfection makes me uncomfortable. I've been hyped up all my life based on my looks alone, I would never think that I'd be interested in the girl version of me.

"Yeah." I narrow my eyes. "You do. Ever since you've been here, you've purposely made it obvious that you try to stay away from me."

She keeps her eyes trained on mine, her arms crossing in front of herself, only pushing up her tits and causing them to spill out of her little sports bra. Typical little dancer body on her, only this one has wide hips to grab onto and some jiggle to her round ass.

“So, which is it, Killian?” Her voice is gentle, but her words are jagged. “Am I ignoring you, or am I hostile toward you?”

“I don’t fucking know, baby, you tell me.”

She dismisses me, repeating her cute little sidestep, only I meet her again, and she slams into my chest *again*.

“What’d I fucking do?”

She scowls at me. “What’s the matter? Don’t like it when a girl doesn’t fall to her knees with your presence?”

I chuckle, allowing her through, but turning around to throw one more attack out. “I’ll have you on your knees soon enough.”

She stills and then continues to the stage.

“Do you have to antagonize her? Just put her in the basket of *Girls Killian Can’t Fuck*. I’m sure she’ll be happy being the only one in there.” Keaton nudges, handing me my bandana.

I tie it around my mouth, watching as she stretches and warms up her body. “Fuck that,” I answer. “It’s not even like that. Hell, she can hate me all she wants, but I want to fucking know why.”

“Maybe she doesn’t hate you?” Maya states, coming up behind Keaton. “Maybe she just doesn’t want you, Kill.”

I gape at her. “Everyone wants me.”

Maya snorts. “I don’t. Anymore.”

“Ouch!” I grasp my chest. “I’m hurt, boo. I’m hurt.”

“No one can hurt you...” Maya says. Her expression falls before she quickly recollects herself and squares her shoulders. I feel bad, and that’s saying something. I don’t feel anything—for anyone. I can’t help it, it’s who I am, how I was raised. My mom and dad only cared about one thing, and that was The Brotherhood. My mom didn’t care to raise me with giving a fuck about something so mundane and human like feelings, and my dad gave too much of a fuck about other shit. Civilian shit. As a result from the confusing parenting, I got my dick

wet—and I did it often—and I let them go. That’s how it was and how it always will be. But Maya, Maya was different. She and I have been inseparable since we were born. Our parents used to put us into the same crib to sleep beside each other when one didn’t settle, and we would go to sleep right away. I’m a couple years older than her, so Maya always said that I was probably low-key strangling her to sleep. She’s evil as fuck for thinking that low of me. Maya means more to me than my pride, or any of that.

“Maya...” I whisper sadly. The last fucking thing I ever wanted to do was hurt her, but it was never something I felt toward her. I’d die for Maya in a heartbeat and kill anyone that crosses her, but those feelings ran through the same veins that the feelings I had toward my brothers did.

She shakes her head, her unruly curls falling over her shoulder and her green eyes coming up to meet mine. “It’s fine, Kill. Stop making a deal out of it.” She disappears, jumping onto the stage as if we didn’t just talk about the one thing she and I have basically been avoiding since the big blow up on New Year’s Eve...

New Year’s Eve

Two months ago

When I was sixteen, I lost my virginity to my best friend. Now, there are many reasons why you should never do this, one being the dynamic between you and said best friend will never be the same, but my main reason as to why this was a bad idea, is that when you’re friends with someone, you already have harnessed feelings for them. There are already seeds of friendship that are sowed inside of you, inside of them. You’re supposed to water those seeds with laughs and platonic banter, not with cum and sweat.

Anyway, I think you get my point.

When I was sixteen, I fucked Maya Patrova. It was a mutual decision, a mess really. We sort of decided, “Well, fuck

it. Let's get this over with so we can move on." Move on I did, move on she did not.

I love Maya, but at the risk of sounding like a complete fucking cliché, I was not in love with her.

I tipped back my whiskey, the fire burning angry enough to match the rage inside of me and the flames licking through the dark opaque sky like a weapon of mass destruction.

My eyes stay on Maya, hers on me.

I've known about this crush for a while. It was hard to not know when I knew all too well the puppy dog eyes she gave on a regular.

"What's the matter, May?" I hissed, my lips spreading around my teeth.

"Nothing, Kill. Why?" she snapped, mocking my tone.

I drag my focus away from her. If I had led her on, I would feel bad. But I hadn't. Sure, I always took her side in everything, and yeah, fuck, okay, so she was my fifth in the triple wheel, but as far as I was concerned, it was mutual and completely platonic.

Only deep down I knew it wasn't.

A laugh cackled out from over the music, a head tilting back. Callan was laughing with Sass, only Sass wasn't laughing, she was the one talking.

Fucking weird.

I hadn't spoken any words to Sass, but she comes off as a complete fucking recluse. Is she funny? I couldn't help but want to know what she had said to Callan to make her laugh. Though it wasn't hard to make Callan laugh. Or moan. Or anything, really.

"Can we talk?" Maya cut into my thoughts, and I dragged my greedy eyes away from Sass and back to the girl of the moment—Maya.

"Fine." I stood, snatching the bottle of whiskey on my way. The beach was loaded with people from all over,

celebrating New Year's Eve. Fucking twenty-twenty. This better be the year I get some answers.

I followed her until we hit a sand dune that was so high that I had to fight the urge to holler at Keats to go grab the boards to slide down it.

"So, here's the thing," Maya interrupts my thoughts again, her hands on her hips. She's wearing a neon green bikini with a little white skirt, a complete contrast against her beautiful brown skin.

Fuck, but she was beautiful.

I've always loved my girls a little fucking damaged, that way when I inflict more pain on them, they'd be used to it. They're the only ones who can handle me. I was built for war, not for love. I don't want to break people. I want them already broken. I don't want to feel that way, but I can't help it.

"I'm pretty sure you know how I feel about you, Kill..."

I flicked off the lid to my whiskey and brought it to my mouth. I take one hard gulp, relishing the smoothness of Teeling single malt whiskey, and how it slips down my throat easily. "I do, Maya."

"Okay, and?" Maya asked, and even though the dead midnight was hiding her green eyes, I'd still know the exact way she'd be looking up at me right now. The same way she looked up at me when I said we couldn't take a stray cat home when she was five years old.

I sighed, dropping down onto the sand. I gazed out to the ocean, momentarily fascinated, as I watched the angry waves crash against the sand. Florida was dope, but it wasn't my vibe. "What do you want me to say?"

There was a long stretch of silence before she scoffed. "That said it all." She started walking back to where the party was, the bonfire now in full blaze.

"Maya!" I reached for her slender arm. I didn't want her to be mad at me. There was a reason why I didn't bring this up with her before. Why I avoided it. I didn't want to hurt her. Somewhere, between us being born and now, she and I had a

bond. A fucking weird one that I wasn't willing to bet on had I told her that I didn't share those same feelings with her.

She pulled out of my grip. "Forget it, Kill. I get it." Her shoulders sagged around her long curly hair. I could hear the shame in her tone. It wasn't often that Maya bared a weakness, so the fact that she had right now made my heart, or my something, drop.

"I don't want to hurt you, Maya. You know that."

She sighed. "I know." She sniffed, and I reached for her, tucking her beneath my arms and pressing my lips to her head. She continued. "I should have known that if you really wanted me, Killian Corneli would have taken possession of me. Ever the starved wolf who is never satisfied."

My body shook as I laughed into her hair, wrapping one of her curls around my finger. "I love you, you know that, right?"

She nodded, her face pressing against my chest. I could feel the dampness from her tears soaking into my Phillip Plein shirt. "I know, just, not the kind of love that I need."

"Well." She stepped out of my grip. "If it makes you feel any better, I'm not capable of any other kind of love."

"I know," she whispers as if it made her feel just that much better. "Come on, let's get a drink."

I flashed her my bottle of whiskey, and she laughed, her head tipping back. "Okay, me a drink, since I don't drink that nasty stuff."

"No." I rolled my eyes, pulling her under my arm as we made our way back to the bonfire. "You just drink cheap vodka."

"Hey!" She elbowed me in the sides, laughing. "I mean it." Her laughter dies out. "Are we okay?"

I nodded, giving her one more squeeze. "Yeah, May, we will always be okay."

"Okay," she answers, tying her hair up into a messy knot. "Just give me some time, okay? To somehow get over my shit."

“You have all the time in the world.” Just as the words left my mouth, I find Saskia. She was studying me closely, as if fascinated, or just trying to work me out. The flames haunting the night do absolutely nothing to eradicate the fact that she is, by far, the sexiest girl I have ever seen. There’s sexy, beautiful, hot, banging, and then there’s Saskia, whose beauty trumps all the mundane adjectives that the Oxford Dictionary can generate.

“I’ll hold you to that.” Maya winked, hitting me with her hip and then turning for the ocean, where she was running in to catch some night waves, obviously skipping the drinks.

I laughed under my breath nervously, my eyes still on Sass’s and hers still on mine. Everything ceased to exist around us, as if all of the words that we had never vocalized were being spoken in the language of eye contact.

Finally, she broke away from me and looked down to the sand, wrapping her arms around herself. She always wore clothes that covered her body, as if she was trying to hide some crazy insecurity or using them as a defense mechanism to keep wolves like me at bay.

Only this wolf will huff, and he’ll puff, and he’ll blow her house down...

I shake myself out of the memory from a couple months ago. Okay, sure, two months isn’t all the time in the world like I promised Maya, but to be fair, these were the first words Sass and I had said to each other, and let’s be real, they weren’t exactly a declaration of fucking love. It’s no secret that I have lowkey pined after her a couple of times, and it’s no secret that she has shut me down *every single* one of those times. By not so much as saying a word. She just ignores me.



Later that night, we were all on the top deck of the ship. A few people were in the pool, but Keaton, Ky, and I were in the hot tub.

“Where the fuck are the lovebirds?” Keaton brings the rim of his beer to his mouth.

“Don’t know,” I answer, resting my head back against the top of the spa and gazing up at the sky. “Nonstop” by Drake is thumping around us loudly. “Pretty sure King is trying to get her pregnant.”

Keaton splashes me and I rear forward, laughing. “Not funny, asshole. I’m not ready to be an uncle.”

“Well, to be fair.” I swipe the water off my face. “I’m pretty sure her having a baby would make us all an uncle, not just you.”

Keaton pushes up from the edge of the spa and climbs out, flipping me off. “Fuck you.” He reaches for his phone that’s on the ground and reads through it.

“Who you texting and how do you have service way the fuck out here?”

He flips me off again and walks away, just as Callan, Sass, and Kenan start walking toward us, drinks in hand.

For a second, I’m almost certain Sass won’t get into the hot tub, but she does, her body sliding beneath the water. Damn shame to hide that body.

Callan slides over to me. “Hey.”

I cringe, and I must show it because I can hear Ky chuckling in the background. Motherfucker.

“Sup.” I purposely pull away from her. I don’t fucking know why. Can’t really pinpoint the exact reason why I don’t want her touching me right now, and I’m not willing to say it’s because of another girl’s presence.

Callan notices, but rests back against the spa. “I’m excited about Australia, I’ve never been.”

“It’s beautiful,” Kenan says, shaking his head. “When you get past all the things that can kill you.”

Kenan is someone I can’t quite put my finger on. With his boyish features and charming wit, I almost feel bad that he’s in Midnight Mayhem and surprised that he hasn’t been eaten alive yet. Early days.

Callan laughs. “I once watched a documentary—” and I drift off. I wonder if she purposely came into this spa just to piss me off.

My eyes go to Sass, only she’s already watching me. Music is playing in the background with people screaming and yelling in their drunken stupor, and then there’s just her and I, and this complicated web of tales that our eyes continue to tell.

I slightly raise my eyebrows in question, seeing if she’ll take the bait.

She diverts her gaze away from me and takes a sip of her drink. Ky bumps me beneath the water with his foot, throwing me a questioning look.

I don’t fucking know. I answer back with a shrug.

Saskia Royal is complicated as fuck, but the hurdles that she is throwing out at me is only training my stamina, and when I finally reach that finish line, she better fucking run.

Kenan lifts Callan over his big shoulders and takes her out of the spa. I watch as he tosses her into the swimming pool as he yells in whatever the fuck it is and smashes his chest with his fist King-fucking-Kong style. The kid is funny, I’ll give him that.

He has juice and balls. Maybe I underestimated him.

Ky climbs out of the spa next. “I’m all for threesomes, but this is one I’m not touching.”

Once he’s out of earshot, I whisper out playfully. “What’d I do?”

She doesn’t answer, only rests her head against the spa, her eyes up at the sky. “You think you’ve done something wrong when a girl doesn’t bat her lashes at you.”

“Quit the fucking games, Sass. I couldn’t care less about that. I don’t care if I’m not your type—though you’d be fucking wrong—but I do want to know why you hate me.”

She chuckles, her head tilting until she’s glaring right at me. “Mascara” by Niykee Heaton starts playing in the background. “It doesn’t matter.”

Fuck it. I push off the edge and walk closer to her, moving my arms through the water. The red neon lights beneath us generate shadows against her sharp features.

She freezes. “What are you doing?”

I bring my fingers to her chin and tilt her face up to mine. Only I didn’t consider how she would look gazing up at me all helpless-like. Her eyes are fucking hypnotic, and fuck me, I don’t even think my mind tricks could help anyone who comes toe-to-toe with this woman.

“What’d I do?” I repeat, pressing my thumb against her bottom lip.

She pulls away from my grasp as if I’ve stung her. “Leave it alone, Killian.” The way my name sounds leaving her lips, makes me want to do the fucking opposite.

Damn. What the fuck?

She pushes herself out of the water. “Leave it alone.”



Three

Saskia

The Collection

When I was eight years old, my mother died.

When I was eight years old, my father was murdered.

I don't know why or how this pattern came about. I don't know why unlike most children my age who had a loving and caring family, I didn't. Most people don't know much about Kiznitch, and the old tales that come with this sacred land. Most humans walk this earth thinking that what you see, is what you get. That's not the case if you have Kiznitch blood. Sometimes I wish I died with Papa that day. I wish that the same man who emptied that cartridge into Papa also emptied one into me.

I wasn't so lucky.

"Saski?" my godmother, Hope, called out from down the hall. Hope took me in once everything went down. The first

day I met her was when I was eight years old and the circumstances around that day are still a little hazy,

Our life was going fine, until it wasn't. Until today. But I was somewhat prepared. I knew. Kiznitch was powerful. I learned that at a young age. Eight, to be exact.

"Coming!" I called out, tightening the belt around my waist. I had been attending Florida State University and driving home whenever needed since I graduated Siesta High. But recently, I've been coming home less often, especially since Hope has found a husband.

I enter through to the sitting room, tucking my hair behind my ear with a smile on my face, when I freeze. There's a woman and another man sitting in the lounge, and I don't need them to address me to know who they are. People from Kiznitch have a way of commanding the room without speaking a single word.

"Hello, Saskia, I'm Delila Patrova..."

My eyes flew around the room, falling to the other man who is with her. "Yes?"

"Do you know who I am?" she asked, tilting her head. Her razor sharp hair skimmed her slim shoulder when she tilted it.

"No," I lied. "I don't know who you are."

She paused, her focus flicking up to the man who was with her before coming back to me. She leaned forward, resting her elbows on her knees. "I need you to come with me. Did your father tell you much about Kiznitch?"

Instantly, I looked to Hope. She nodded at me, her eyes falling somber. We knew this day would come. I only wished that I had finished college before it happened. I look back to Delila. "Yes. He did."

She smiled. "Good, I don't have to kidnap you." She wasn't kidding. "Pack a bag, only your essentials, and be ready in one hour."

My heart sank, though I should have been better prepared. I guessed over the years I had become somewhat numb to the

fact that they would be here, ready to collect me.

Ready for me to take on what my parents had failed.

“Okay.” I simply spun around and made my way back to my bedroom, pulling out a small suitcase and dumping it on my bed. As I was pulling down clothes from my closet, Hope walked into my room, taking a seat on my bed. “You can still run, Sass.”

My hand froze briefly before I unhooked some jeans off the hanger. “No.” I shook my head, sucking in a deep breath. “I won’t run like Papa did. I don’t mind paying their dues.”

Hope seemed to shuffle uncomfortably as I continued to toss items into my suitcase. “I don’t think that’s why they’re taking you, Sass. I think it’s for something else.” I never asked what Hope was to Kiznitch or how she knew so much. It was very strange for a civilian to know so much about Kiznitch and live to tell about it. I never asked, though.

“What do you mean?” I zipped up my bag.

Hope’s hand came to mine, pausing the movement. There was something in her fist, and when I opened my hand, a heavy ancient style pendant fell in it.

I lifted it up by the string to inspect it. “What’s this?”

She pushed my hand down and unzipped my bag. “Please don’t show anyone that, but Saskia, it is imperative that you hold on to this now, do you understand? You must guard it with your life.”

I examined it quickly. The blood red oval stone was held together by a metal dragon that was woven around it.

It was ugly.

I’d never wear it, let alone guard it.

I laughed, but Hope’s hand came to my face and she forced it toward her. “This is not a joke, Sass. We don’t have much time. Damn it,” she exhaled, shooting off the bed and rubbing the palm of her hand over her tummy. She seemed off. Weird. And not in a way that made me comfortable. “I thought I’d have more time.”

“Hope?” I asked, suddenly heavy with regret. I should have known better than to laugh. I know this life. This world. “What is it?” Our family, the Royals, were anything but royalty in Kiznitch. We were the mundane, never special enough to become Midnight Mayhem. My father watched security cameras and my mother was a nurse—that’s all we would have ever been and what I would have ever been.

My door opened and the man who was with Delila stepped inside. I squeezed the pendant in my hand instantly to hide it. “It’s time, Saskia. Let’s go.”

I nodded, my eyes going to Hope. I quickly shoved the pendant into my side pocket and made my way to her. “I love you. I will text you, okay?”

Hope turned to face me, her hands coming to my face. Hope was beautiful. She had long blonde hair that had a natural curl, and dark brown eyes. Her skin was so soft and flawless it made me envious at the best of times. At thirty-eight, she looked twenty-eight. Her eyes searched mine, pulling me in for a hug. Her lips came to the shell of my ear. “Do not trust anyone, Saskia, and when you must, you run.”

I never thought much on how this would happen. How I would come about as being a part of Kiznitch. A part of something that essentially ripped my family apart. Only, Hope was right. The reason to why they took me wasn’t at all what I was expecting.

Not even close.

There’s a knock on my door, pulling me out of my thoughts from the past. I swing it open and find Perse leaning against the frame. Perse is with King, and the story to how she got here is contrastingly different to mine.

“Hey! I was thinking since we are set to disembark tomorrow, we could swim some laps tonight?”

Perse and I have been swimming laps since we boarded this ship as a way to keep fit. There is a gym, but running on a

treadmill is almost impossible when the ground isn't stationary.

“Sure,” I say, clutching the door handle. “What time?”

My room is nicer than what I would expect from a cruise ship, but not entirely, because this is Midnight Mayhem. The whole crew is on the same level, too, which is convenient. I've been with Midnight Mayhem for almost three months now, which means it has been three months since I last saw Hope. We keep in contact through texts, but I haven't seen her in the flesh. I've somewhat noticed the distance that I've started to feel from her, and I don't know if that's because of my current predicament or something else. I'm hoping for the former.

“Now?” Perse answers, her eyebrows raised. I instantly felt a connection to Perse. I didn't know what it was at first, but I felt it, and I think she did too, only she looks at me more like a fragile doll who can't handle things. Oh, so much she has to learn. So much I want to share with her, only I have colossal sized trust issues.

“Sure! I'll grab my things and meet you down there.”

Perse closes the door and I move around my room, gathering what I need so I don't have to come back here until I'm ready for bed. I think I prefer doing shows in America as opposed to international, and for the first two weeks we were abroad, I was sick, popping ginger tablets as if they were candy.

Opening the bathroom door, I pull down a towel from the high cabinet and begin shoving things into my duffel bag before moving to the other side of my room to shut the sliding door that leads to the balcony. The balcony is probably my favorite part of my room, with the five-piece dining table which overlooks the infinite stretch of the Pacific Ocean. My bedroom is small but cozy, equipped with a bathroom and tub, and a walk-in closet. No kitchen, so that means we all eat together in the restaurant.

I make my way down to the elevators and once I'm in, I hit the button for the top deck. I can't wait to be on real soil. Any soil.

Just as the door is sliding closed, an arm comes in and stops it. I didn't have to think twice to know who it was, what with the shiny gold Rolex on his wrist strapped around his tattooed arm.

Killian steps inside, and when he notices me, he steps away, making sure he's on the other side of the elevator. The doors close, keeping us confined to a space that is small enough to feel him breathing down my back.

I tense.

"You know..." Killian smirks, and I can't help but seek him out. I try not to look at him as much as possible, because when I do, it's like a magnetic force is keeping me there and I have to use all of my strength to pull away. As though he's peering into my soul. Like he's looking beyond my overrated exterior and sees all of the ugly parts of my soul, but instead of being revolted by them, he wants to challenge them. He bathes in the presence of my demons, teasing them with his stupid grin.

He leans back against the wall, the sharp curves of his jaw accentuated by the dim lighting.

Killian is gorgeous. That is obvious. But I know gorgeous. I get told the same, and that doesn't stop the thoughts that go through my brain. Beauty only neutralizes the evil in a person. It blinds people with its surface to conceal the darkness that swims beneath it.

He smirks, probably assuming I was checking him out. I wasn't. I was more sizing him up. "You know I could have you spread eagle underneath me, screaming mercy within three seconds if I wanted..." He lifts a smoke from his pocket and brings it to his lips. My eyebrows raise in challenge. His eyes narrow slightly. "And before you blow the rape whistle on me, first of all, fuck you for thinking that, and second of all, fuck you again because guess what." He inhales from his cigarette, kicking off the wall and coming toe-to-toe with me. He blows smoke rings into my face, and it's the only thing that is distracting me from his mere proximity. His lips curve over his perfect white teeth. Wish I could say they were veneers,

but unfortunately not. The man is just genetically blessed. Blessed by Satan. “I’m not fucking interested in you anymore.”

The doors ping open and he steps out, winking at me in his retreat.

I exhale, my heart thundering in my chest.

This is a good thing.

This is what I wanted.

Blank. Black. Is it? Black walls cave in around me and my hands fly out to stop them from crushing me to death. I’m reaching but nothing touches my palm. I scream as the invisible walls continue their impending climb toward each other.

The invisible fist of the scene that unfolded in my head clamps around the connecting valves of my heart, forcefully tugging on them. *Goddamnit.* I quickly push the open button and step out onto the top deck, exhaling deeply through curved lips, and praying, fucking praying, that from now on, Killian stays away from me.



four

Saskia

I wish I could say that I didn't remember my childhood.

I wish I could say that what happened to Perse happened to me, but unfortunately, I was not lucky enough. Like a sick psychological thriller that keeps playing in my head on repeat, my father's murder plays on repeat. My mother dying not long before.

Chills break out over my flesh as I spin around to run back into the elevator and go back to my room, only Kenan bumps into me and I jump in shock, tossing my clothes at his face as I reach for something—anything—that I could use as a weapon. My muscles tense as tremors wrack my bones.

“Wow!” Kenan raises his hands in surrender. “It's me...”

I suck in copious amounts of air as my heartbeat slows. *Thud. Thud. Thud.*

“—Hey!” Kenan's hands come to both my cheeks, and he swipes away the sweat that's rolling down the side of my face.

“It’s me.”

I let out one last shaky breath, then smile, collecting myself. “Thanks. Sorry. I had a nightmare last night, so I’m a bit jumpy.”

Kenan holds my stare. Warm brown against pale lifeless blue. “What was it about?”

“Nothing,” I shake my head, leaning down to pick up my bag and throwing it over my shoulder. “Nothing at all.”

I make my way toward the pool, where Perse is already doing laps. After my shake up with Kenan, I don’t feel like being in a pool of water and vulnerable, so I zip up my Abercrombie hoodie and slide my sandals back onto my feet. I’m almost certain the LED neon lights from the pool are only intensifying the white of my linen short shorts too, making my skin appear darker.

“You not coming in?” Perse asks, brushing her wet long red hair away from her face.

I shake my head.

“Come on...” she teases. “Then we can go for a drink and chill out for the rest of the night.” Perse is tenacious with her friendships.

I groan. She’s right. I do need to release some stress, especially after that encounter with Killian.

I start undressing, tossing my clothes onto one of the sunbeds and kicking off my sandals.

“Atta girl.” Perse chuckles.

I slip into the water, flinching at the coldness. Tying my hair into a topknot, I keep my attention on Perse.

“What’s the matter?” she asks, obviously sensing something is off.

I lick my lips. “I’ve just, I guess been thinking about my parents a lot on this trip. It was something that we had spoken about doing one day.”

Perse nods. “I know that I don’t know much about you.” She swims closer and takes a seat beside me on the inside edge of the pool. “But I’m here if you ever need to talk. I know that you have Callan and Kenan—”

I snort. “I don’t know about Callan, but I know I can sort of trust Kenan.”

Perse ties her hair into a low messy bun. “Well, I’m glad you’re smart.”

The neon lights that line the inside of the pool light up our bodies underneath, and just as I open my mouth, Callan starts laughing loudly from the other side of the deck.

“I might put her on the hoops with Maya.”

My eyes pop open. “Really?” I’m shocked that Perse is wanting to put Callan with the others.

Perse gauges my reaction, kicking up onto the side of the pool. “Would you prefer that?”

I look at her, shocked. “She doesn’t bother me.”

“Oh, I know.” Perse glances out to Callan, where she’s sitting beside Killian, King, and Kyrin. Without trying, I find Killian, who is already watching me from beneath hooded eyelids. My chest flutters when I catch him staring. “I just know that she feels a certain way about you, and if that makes you uncomfortable being around her, I can move her. She’s a great dancer, but you’re better.”

I shrug, snatching my eyes away from Killian before he sucks me into the vortex of whatever it is that he’s trying to get me into. “I’m sure. All the shade that she throws my way doesn’t touch me.”

“Good.” Perse taps my leg. “Forget the laps. Let’s go eat.”

“Zaika, come down here, please. Stop climbing that tree!” my father bellowed from across the perfectly manicured grass. I liked climbing trees. At seven years old, I already knew that when I finally own my own house, without bossy parents, I will

be planting one gigantic tree that branches off purely for my pleasure. I love to climb.

I giggled, turning around to face Mama and Papa. Mama looked worse today. Worse than she did last week. My smile fell. I knew she was sick. Papa had said that she didn't have long to go. She got the cancer bug and apparently, that was a bad bug to catch because doctors didn't know how to cure it yet. I cried every night and prayed that it turned into a normal bug. One that made her cough and sniffle instead of wither.

I climbed down the tree and skipped to where Papa and Mama were standing.

"We made some lemonade, Zaika," Mama had said, gesturing into the house. I trolley'd through, passing the kitchen and going straight for the sitting room. I kicked off my shoes and started twirling my hair around my finger.

"Zaika," Papa said, kneeling down in front of me. His eyes were like mine. Bright blue. Papa said that we were descendants of mermaids, which is why our eyes were the color of the Atlantic ice. "After this lemonade, I am going to need you to pack a bag. You won't need it yet, but I need you to pack one for an emergency. Can you do that, Zai? For Papa? For Mama?"

My eyebrows creased in confusion, but I raised the glass to my lips and took a sip. Nodding my head. "Yes, I can. But why?"

Papa's wrinkles around his eyes crinkled. "That's not important right now, princess. Right now what is important is that you pack your bag."



five

Saskia

After docking and organizing our vehicles the next day, we settle into a parking spot close to the port. We're lucky our crew numbers are large, but we still need at least a day to unload the ship.

I'm making my way back to our RV when I pull open the door, finding Callan and Kenan playing cards at the table. They're both wearing no shirts—with Callan wearing a small camisole bra and leggings.

She gawks at me briefly before going back to the game at hand.

"Hey, Baby G." Kenan nods his head, eyeing me up and down. If it was done by anyone but Kenan, I would have had an issue with the way he openly gawked at me. "Tired?"

"Yeah." I move through the kitchen and begin heading for my bedroom. When Perse moved out and she and King got their own bus, I took what would have been her room, much to

Callan's disgust, I'm thinking. She and I used to be okay, but I feel like the more that time goes on, the issues she has with me intensify. I'm pretty sure that Kenan can pick up the tension too, but we can't change someone else's opinion of us. All we can do is let them brew over whatever they have stewing in their head, knowing that we won't be at the table when they decide to serve up their dish.

I open up the fridge and take out a cold water. "I'll see you both in the morning. 'Night!" I move past them both and head for the stairs, eager to get away from Callan.

"'Night!" Kenan calls out as I hit my bedroom door. I close it gently behind me and flop down onto the soft mattress. I'm relieved that we're off the ship and back in our own buses, and I'm really relieved that I didn't bump into Killian once.

Not. Once.

Dried leaves crunched beneath my feet, the aching only beginning to pulse through my veins further. "Sweet Dreams" by Marilyn Manson is playing softly in the background as trees line a dirt path that leads into the forest.

"Hello?" I called out, only my voice never came. My hand flew to my throat, where I clenched hard. "Hello?" I repeated, without success.

I peered down at the gown that I was wearing and flinched at the splatters of bright red blood. I tilted my head up, just as I felt something drip down the side of my throat, my hands swiping it away.

More blood.

"What?" I whispered, confused. The bright full moon sat angrily in the backdrop.

"Tell me more," a voice boomed from near the back of my neck.

I screamed, jumping away from the unfamiliar voice. "What do you want from me?"

A hand slammed over my mouth, shoving me backward until my back was against his chest. "Everything."

I shoot up from the bed, sweat sticking my pajamas to my flesh and my heartbeat thrashing around erratically.

"Nightmare?" I instantly recognize the voice as Kyrin's. We haven't spoken much, which apparently that isn't unheard of with Kyrin, but I recognize his voice. I turn toward the dark corner of my room, unable to see his body that's buried in the shadows.

"What are you doing in here?" My elbows sink into the mattress as I push myself up.

"Interesting question..." another voice mumbles, and I freeze. I usually feel his presence before I hear it, and that's saying something because Killian isn't exactly docile.

I swing my legs off my bed and run my fingers through my hair, swiping it out of my face. I begin to mentally prepare myself for the energy that I'm about to exude through this encounter.

"I've got a question too," Killian adds, and he must have stood from wherever he was in the room because now his boots are in my view.

They were in here while I was sleeping, and while that should be creepy—and is creepy—it's not the worst thing that they've ever done.

"What is it, Killian?" I tilt my head up to face him. From this angle, he looks feral. It's not even about the clothes that he's wearing, or the way his features hit every single angle at the right moment, but it's how he holds himself. How his shoulders are always back, his muscles tense and the expression on his face completely void from emotion. His personality shifts depending on who he is with, which means he may have bigger walls than mine. You can't treat everyone the same because not everyone deserves all of you.

"Why do I get the feeling that I know you?" he asks, cocking his head.

I divert my eyes. “I don’t know why this conversation couldn’t wait until tomorrow.”

“Answer the question.”

I chew on my bottom lip.

“Tell me more!”

I flinch at the hoarse voice that haunted my sleep just seconds ago. Sometimes, I don’t know if the nightmare is just that—a nightmare—or are memories. It gets confusing when you have to differentiate what is real and what is fake. What are the parts that are a product of my own subconscious? Attempting to either raise issues or bury them, and what parts are imaginary?

“You don’t,” I answer truthfully. “I mean, aside from our obvious connection with Kiznitch, you don’t.”

There’s a long pause.

“Lower her guard.” Kyrin brushes out from the same spot in the corner.

Before I can ask what *lower* means, Killian is leaning forward, his fists sinking into the mattress on either side of me, his nose almost touching mine. I fall onto my back, wanting some space between us. His scent is lethal. The sweet sting lingering over my skin before settling in the air between us. His cologne is strong, just like his personality, but it’s also mixed with the smell of his fading cigarette, which brings it to a whole new level.

“What are you doing?” I whisper, only I wish I didn’t speak because my lips rubbed against his softly. My palms sweat and itch, my stomach doing cartwheels.

“Lower,” Kyrin urges.

He grabs my wrists and pins them above my head, using his other to hike my leg up onto his hip.

“Killian,” I grind out. “Get off me.”

“Tad lower, then try again.”

Killian's hand squeezes my thigh as his lips fall on top of mine. Not enough for a kiss, but enough for a warning. "How do I know you?"

I suck in a breath, my heart thundering in my chest. *Thud. Thud. Thud.*

"You d—don't..." I answer.

He freezes.

I still. I'm confused, but mostly, I want his fucking muscular body off me and I need it off now.

His grin is untamed, and the only reason why I know that he's grinning is because his white teeth gleam against the darkness of the room. "That wasn't so hard, was it, *Little Villain.*"

"Stop playing with the food, Kill..." Kyrin snaps, but his voice is in the background now. "We got what we wanted."

Killian doesn't move and I'm still frozen beneath his body.

He leans down and suddenly I feel his tongue lick across my collarbone. My eyes shut as the tingles of his erotic touch sends electricity shooting all over my body.

I grind my teeth. "Get the fuck off me!" Just because he makes me feel some sort of way, doesn't mean I'm going to give my body the satisfaction of getting what she wants.

"One, you're a fucking liar, sweetheart, and I hate liars, and two?" He pauses, releasing my thigh. "Told you I'd be able to get you spread eagle in three seconds." He jackknives up from my bed, leaving me feeling exposed and vulnerable. Words can be a powerful weapon, lethal enough to strip anyone of their composure while leaving their confidence bleeding out over the floor.

I shiver, unmoving.

"I'll figure your shit out, Little Villain, and when I do..." Killian runs his tongue over his teeth and grins. "You're going to wish I was still trying to get you naked."



Six

Killian

I kick the door to our bus closed, heading straight for the fridge and pulling out a can of Coke. I know that if I have any alcohol right now, it won't help with the clarity that I need in order to decipher everything right now.

“Kill...” Kyrin says. “You need to think long and hard about what it is I know you're thinking.”

I take a swig of my drink just as Keaton comes down the stairs, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. It's been good having Dove out of the bus, but losing King in here was a loss I don't think any of us were really prepared for.

“The fuck is the slamming for?” Keaton growls, dropping down onto the chair at the table.

“There's something up with Saskia. There's more to her.” That's all I've got right now.

Keaton rolls his eyes, running his fingers through his hair. “Yeah, no shit, she's Kiznitch, what do you expect? And by

the way, this fascination you have with her is making you fucking grumpy.”

Ky looks back at me, bored. “If she isn’t who she says she is, we’ll just kill her. Now can I please go to bed? Fuck. We have a long ass trip tomorrow, and since Justice is all in love with Delila, we have to all do the driving ourselves.”

Kyrin threatening someone’s life should never be taken lightly. Because he will. Kyrin is a weapon and one of Kiznitch’s best-kept secrets because of the way he goes about his kills. Though that part isn’t really a secret. He leaves a brand on every single person he takes.

“We can’t fucking kill her,” I reply, bored with Kyrin’s lack of imagination. Kyrin is black and white. He doesn’t see grays or colors, or fucking lines or barriers. See where I, I look for opportunities. For games. That doesn’t mean that I have a problem putting someone down, it just means that I’m more histrionic about it.

“Why not?” Ky shrugs, opening a pack of potato chips and tossing some into his mouth.

“Because she’s close to Perse,” Keaton adds, as if that should simmer Kyrin.

It doesn’t.

“So? She ain’t my girl, so why should I give a fuck about upsetting her.”

“Yeah?” I raise an eyebrow at him. “And what about King?”

Kyrin rolls his eyes, knowing that I’m right.

“It’s settled. We won’t be killing Saskia. No flesh removal is needed...”

Kyrin glares up at me from thick lashes. “Yet.”



Seven

Saskia

Stepping outside the next morning, I'm heading straight for the tent after realizing that I woke up late. Twenty minutes late, to be exact, and I have no one else to blame but Kyrin and Killian. Bastards.

I push through the doors, dragging my hair into a high pony and tossing my bottle of water to the ground. I had no time to change into something that would get me into the vibe of dancing, so I settled for tight bike shorts and a sports bra, and by settle, I mean I literally had no other time to put anything else on. Brisbane is warm, and I heard on the radio that they're just coming out of summer. So fucking weird. They're literally the land down under.

"Saskia..." Delila stutters from the corner of the center ring. God, it's good to be back inside the tent. To smell the worn rubber, the damp grass, and the faint smell of gasoline.

“Yes?” I blink rapidly. “Sorry, I had a disrupted sleep.” My eyes cut to Killian briefly, who is bent over the stage with no shirt on and grease rubbed all over his chest. *You will not stare.* I try to ignore the way his tanned skin gleams against all of his tattoos. The new sleeve he got during the holidays, the Kiznitch over his chest, but it’s hard when the man hardly ever wears a shirt.

“Okay, well that’s alright then. You be late whenever you need to be...” Delila has been extra fucking cranky lately and her sarcasm was not lost on me. She was never like this before. She was smooth and collected and—dare I say it—sophisticated. Now she’s a mess. No longer wearing perfectly tailored suits and primed hair styled to the nines. Now her suits have wrinkles in them and her hair—though I should blame the Australian humidity—is frazzled.

“Sorry, Delila,” I murmur before slowly making my way onto the stage where Perse is glaring at me. I give her a small smile, ignoring Callan and winking at Kenan.

“Alright.” Delila claps, lighting a smoke and bringing it between her cracked lips. “Now that the showstopper is here, let’s continue, shall we?” She moves to the front of the stage. “Did you all decide what you’re doing for the tour? If you’re doing the same choreography and songs at every location?”

Perse nods. “Yes, we did. I have our group dance and show, my solo, the duet with Sass and Kenan, and—” She sucks in a breath, turning to face me. Her eyes say *I’m sorry*, but I get the feeling that she is not. “I would like Saskia to have her own solo act.”

Everyone silences.

“What?” Callan chokes. “Why?”

“Yeah! Why?” I glare at Perse.

Perse squeezes my hand before going back to Delila. “Listen, on New Year’s Eve, we were playing around with the fire batons and—well, the fire equipment in general and she”—Perse turns to face me—“can motherfucking dance with them! Drunk. On Jager bombs.”

“Ahhh...” I raise my finger. I’m in trouble already this morning, I don’t want to give Delila another reason to be angry at me. “I can explain.” Well, I actually can’t, but I’m hoping to think up something quick while everyone is silent.

Delila glares at me. “Saskia, you playing with toys is not going to get you in trouble. I don’t give a shit about your safety.” She blows out a cloud of smoke. “Is what Perse is saying true? Do you breathe it too? Correctly, because fire breathing is one of the most dangerous circus acts known to man...”

I gulp. “Yes. But, but I don’t know how I know.”

Killian snickers in the back.

I ignore him.

Delila is staring with newfound interest. That’s the thing with her, if you don’t bring something to the table that sets you apart from the rest, you are disposable. “Tell me, my Little Showstopper, are you a pyromaniac?”

“No.” I shake my head. “I just—well, I don’t know. I understand how they work and what to do, as if I’ve been doing it all my life.”

I watch as her face flashes with something, but before I can decipher it, it’s gone and replaced with her scowl. “Hmmm. Show me later. I would like you to work on that today.”

I nod, and after she has yelled the rest of her orders to everyone, me and Perse’s crew start warming up. I need to get my head into the game. Into music. Music can drown out even the loudest of screams.

Three hours later and we’re done for the day. The routine that Perse has me and Kenan doing is probably one of my favorites. I recognize the song from a movie, but never would have thought that Perse would have us dance to such a hypnotic and entrancing *slow* tune. Kenan uses my body as his own personal tool, and I him. It’s intimate and heart crushing and takes a lot of stamina to keep up with.

I'm taking a sip of water when we hear the bikes fire up in the back. The Brothers ride in, in a loud rumble of smoke.

Maya bumps me with her hip. "I need to see your fire routine."

I swipe my mouth. I never know how to take Maya since I know she and Killian are so close. "Sure."

"You know..." she begins to say, and my eyes follow hers to Killian. But before she can say any more, I interfere.

"Oh, he is that bad..."

"What?" she asks, confused, but with a smile on her face.

"You were going to say that Killian is not that bad of a person?"

Maya pauses, her eyebrows shooting up, and then a loud laugh breaks out of her. "Oh no, he is definitely bad. In fact, he's the worst. He thinks that flashing that pretty smile will deter the fact that he's evil." She turns around as she walks away, but not before saying, "Don't mistake those sinfully good looks for a good man, *Showstopper*. The glistening teeth that sit behind that grin are the very same that rips flesh from bone..."

I massage my temples and watch as she bounces toward Killian, stepping up into his wheel. "STARGAZING" by Travis Scott is playing loudly over the bikes, and once again, Killian is watching me. Even as Maya passes him and hops onto her swing, his eyes are on me. Finally, he revs his engine and rides it up the plank and onto the wheel. I exhale and scurry out of the tent through the main entrance. Usually we enter and exit through the back because the main entrance is basically another tent, only half the size of the main one. In this one, there's a bar, a food stall where you can buy candied corn, hot food and such, and then a small alleyway that leads to the bathrooms. I continue through to the main entrance, passing a couple of the Six Demons. We're set up in some secluded area behind suburbia, trees line the paddock, which lead to our buses that are hidden behind the tents. I guess we are granted with some sort of road access while we travel,

allowing our vehicles and trailers into whatever country we're in.

I make my way to our bus and push open the door, needing a quick shower before I go back to the tent and figure out what the hell I'm going to do about this fire routine.

Once I'm out of the shower, I open up my camera, clutching the towel in my hand and open Instagram. I flip it onto selfie mode and snap a photo of me purposely rolling my eyes. Moving it to my stories, I write the words *PLAYING WITH FIRE* over top of it and throw on a filter. Scrolling through my newsfeed, I click on a photo of Perse and King that she took. He's grumpy as shit and she's smiling with her teeth on full display. Her arm is hooked around his neck and her hands are around his cheeks, trying to get him to smile like you would a kid.

It's so cute. I double click it and then click on her profile.

I laugh when I see the photos she has. Some of me, a lot of her and King, and some of her and The Brothers. I click on one with her and Kill. I don't know why, but before I could analyze why I did it, I was already there and distracted. Killian is on his bike, wearing ripped designer jeans, a white shirt that has the words MOTHER FUCKER on it. And then in smaller writing, it says *read that again*. I snicker. Killian is terrifyingly confident, and probably rightly so. When I read through the comments, his username sticks out.

@killiancornelii My thumb hovers over his username.

I toss my phone onto my bed and get dressed instead, not wanting to go onto his page. I'm not touching that right now, and anyway, why the hell should I care.

Changing into a tight leather crop top and tight little booty shorts that show my ass hanging out the bottom, I continue to rifle through my suitcase.

I need something else edgy.

Tearing off the leather crop top but leaving on the shorts, I find the perfect top. It's actually copper gold and is made from metal. The front fans out over my breasts like wings. There's a

dip in the middle that is lined with diamonds before it cuts off as a crop. The back is simple, clipping around my body. It's revealing, and not something you could wear anywhere else except here, or maybe at a festival. Clipping it up, I find my black snake cuff that curls around my lower leg and comes up to my knee. I've always wanted to wear it since I bought it when Perse and I went shopping after Christmas, and now I can. Throwing on some ankle boots, I tie my hair back in a bun and leave my face free of makeup. No point getting show ready for practice, but I do need to practice in the outfit I will be wearing during the first show in a couple of days.

I push through the tent just as Sam, our sound man, is passing by.

“Hey! The batons, rope darts, hoops, gasoline, and everything else you'll need for fire bending is right there. The case also has your name on it now, so when we move, it will be in your staff cubby for set-ups.”

I glance over the range of equipment. “Okay, but Sam? I've not done the rope darts, and—” I pause, blowing out a breath. “Wow, is that a fire staff?” I gulp. Shit. What has Perse got me into?

“Sure is!” A voice interrupts my panic, and I turn to face her. “My name's Ashley,” she says, and that's when I recognize her.

“Oh shit!”

“Yes, also known as Persephone's mother.” She drops a duffle bag beside her, and it's the first time I take in what she's wearing. Yoga pants and a tight tank. Her hair is down, displaying her long blonde locks and it's also the first time that I notice the resemblance to Perse.

“Nice to meet you.” I nod at her.

She smiles. “You too. Now, can you tell me what you're familiar with when it comes to fire bending?” She's pulling on black gloves, but her focus remains on me.

“Ah, well, nothing. I would watch some of the performers at a small bar in Siesta Key, but other than that, I have no

idea.”

Ashley pauses her movements, regarding me carefully. “Interesting. But you know what you’re doing?”

“I do,” I answer, shuffling on my feet. “Is it normal for someone to pick up on it easily?”

She snorts, shoving her other glove on her hand. “Absolutely not. But,” she sighs, but doesn’t bring her eyes back to me. “Let’s get this underway.”

“Hang on.” I pause. “Are you a fire bender?”

Ashley chuckles, leaning down to unzip her bag, but again, not looking at me. As if she’s thinking too hard about something and is afraid that I might read the words over her face. “Not me personally, I did have a good friend who was the queen of fire bending. No one has done it in Midnight Mayhem since her retirement.”

I exhale. “Jesus. I’m really doing this.”

“But do you love it?” she asks, glaring at me with a smirk.

I lick my lips and match her grin. “I do.”

Four hours later, I’m crawling back into bed with sore limbs and a bad stench of kerosene.



“You smell like gas...” Callan snarls, taking a bite out of her toast the next morning.

Kenan is grinning from ear to ear. “How’s our little spitfire?”

“Kenan,” I groan. “Are we really going to try all the pet names?”

Kenan laughs, clutching his tummy. He takes a gulp of his protein shake. “Yes, until I find one. I like spitfire.”

“Well, if it helps.” I turn the blender on for my shake. A shake I need for fuel today because while everyone else gets to chill before the first show tonight, I have practice one more time. I think out of all of the tools, the rope darts and dragon staff are my favorite and what I really excel in, so we’ve decided to stick to those both for this show. I will get two scenes, one for the rope darts, which is only around four minutes long, and the other will be me dancing with the dragon staff, basically rolling fire off my body. “As part of my costume, I wear devil horns.”

Kenan’s mouth drops open.

“And I’m in leather and steel.”

Wider.

“Kenan...”

“Sorry,” he moans. “Fuck that’d look... hot.”

I ignore him. “I’m a little terrified.”

“Why?” he asks, kicking out the chair opposite him so I can take a seat. I sip on my shake.

“Well, Ash is training me. She knew the last fire dancer that they had in Mayhem, so I guess I don’t want to let her, or anyone down.”

Kenan sighs, leans forward and touches my cheek. I flinch away, and he rolls his eyes, well acquainted with my issues when it comes to intimacy any time outside of the show. I form friendships organically, yes, but it does take a lot to push me through to that phase. “Baby G, you were born for this...”

Callan sits down, biting on her toast. “I’m so hungry this morning. Killian is tiring me out.”

I don’t bat an eye.

“Are you coming to the beach today, Saskia?” Callan asks.

Kenan studies both of us.

I shake my head at her. “Nope. I need to practice once more before tonight.”

“Hmmm,” She smirks. “What a shame.”

I push up from the chair and kiss Kenan goodbye, who is already scolding Callan as I walk out of the bus. I don't know what her problem with me is, or if it even is a me thing or a Killian thing, though I don't know why. Killian and I haven't so much as given any impression that we are anything *but* enemies.

I clutch the items that I'll need for all of my outfit changes in my hand, taking them to my cubicle in the tent behind the stage. It's where most of the makeup, hair, and outfit changes happen. I need them there for tonight, not for right now, and I'm excited for the addition of the horns. A touch that Ashley gave to me after our session last night. They're not big ugly horns, they're cute ones that clip onto my hair and stay.

We practice. I choose my song.

And the day is almost over with the sun setting by the time I make my way back to my bus.

“Sass!” Ash comes running over to me, a smile on her face. “Hey, I just want you to know that you're going to be amazing tonight. I'll be right there if you need me, but I got to say...” She pauses. “You're a natural. What did you say your last name was again?”

“Thanks, Ash, and it's Royal. Nothing of importance.”

“Oh,” Ash says, her smile faltering. “I've not known a Kiznitch family with that last name.” She tilts her head, her focus drifting off, and then she comes back to me. “Anyway, good luck!”

The show has started, with the Angels and Demons opening. Delila agreed to shuffle around the acts and have me fire bending with the dragon staff first since it does take a bit out of me and I still need to do my duet dance with Kenan and our crew performance, not to mention the final act, which I don't completely partake in, but do enough to be considered something... so she has put my biggest scene first, and then that gives me enough of a break between acts.

“Great,” Callan snaps from beside me. Her mirror cubicle is right beside mine. Everyone rushing around behind me filters into white noise as I glare at her.

“What, Callan?”

She runs the bright red lipstick over her lips. “So now the whole show moves for you.”

“Callan,” Kenan warns, his tone forceful.

“That wasn’t my idea,” I tell her, fluffing my hair up farther and fixing my horns. My eyes are smudged in black, my makeup heavy. I’m wearing the same outfit with the snake on my leg too. I pet-named him Cal. I guess you can think where I got that from.

“So what!” she snaps. “It’s not fair.”

“Saskia, you’re up,” Kyrin says from behind me, opening the back curtain.

I drag my attention away from her and stand, turning to face him.

He stills, his eyes dropping down my body. He doesn’t say a word, but he doesn’t have to. The way his gaze drags up and down my body is loud enough for me to feel violated.

The curtain opens wider and Keaton steps through, but when he notices me, he falters. “What—wh?”

“Wipe your mouth, brother. You’ve got some drool coming out of your mouth,” Kyrin growls.

“Oh I’m going out to watch this.” Keaton smirks just as Perse slides in from behind him and pulls me into a hug, kissing me on the cheek. “You’re going to do amazing. Go light some fires.”

I step onto the stage, the curtain still closed. The dragon staff I know awaits on the other side and I clutch the fire sword in my hand.

“Tonight, we’re excited to showcase one of our newest girls who has an obsession with fire... ladies and gentlemen...

meet, our very own *Hellhound...*” I flick open my Zippo and light the tip of the sword just as the curtains open.

The entry music starts playing as I swing the sword around through the dark, creating a loop of fire in the air. I lean down and light up each ball on the dragon staff. The crowd silences as I turn to find Killian perched on a chair on the stage, a spotlight on him. I’m thrown off. *What the fuck is he doing there?*

He leans forward, his clown made-up face coming into view and his abs tensing with the movement. Motherfucker. He curls his finger with a smirk, pointing to the sword.

I make my way toward him and hand him the sword as the crowd—me included—gasps when he opens his mouth and slowly swallows the sword down his throat, cutting off the flame and the spotlight at the same time. The audience screams in shock—along with me internally—as I make my way back and pick up the dragon staff. “Toxicity” from System of a Down starts playing as I roll the staff over my back, arching forward and grabbing it again, swirling it around my body with the tune of the guitar. As the verse comes back in and the song slows back down, I flick it around my body again, rolling it over my arms and across my neck. Flicking it forward, I run it over one arm and pick it up again. The crowd loses their minds, adding fuel to my adrenaline. The flames lick over my skin as I get lost in the song and performance. Coming to the end, I arch backward in bridge from standing position while twirling the staff with my right hand and reaching backward with my left hand until I’m completely arched with one hand on the ground and the other twirling the staff.

The audience goes crazy again and I use that as fuel. When the beat speeds up, so does my spinning of the staff. Slowly, I lift one leg off the ground and flick it into the air as I place the staff onto my bare belly, rolling it backward over my face and I quickly press my other hand to the ground and flip backward, back to standing, with the staff now safely secured back in my hand. The song cuts. My breathing deepens. Everything is silent and I stand nervously, thinking I had done something

wrong. Just as I'm about to dart off the stage, people roar off their seats, clapping and shouting, and whistling. My breathing is manic, my smile wide. I fucking did it! The curtain closes and I turn around, crashing right into Killian's chest.

My smile drops. "Sorry."

He grabs the staff off me and kicks out what's left of the flames. "What are you sorry for?"

"Bumping into you," I say, dragging my attention away from his slick bare chest and coming face-to-face with his clown makeup painted face and wolf contacts.

He brings his fingers to my chin and tilts my head up to his.

I hold my breath.

His hand drops as a slow smirk crawls onto his face. "Hmmm."

Hmmm?

"What does that mean?" I ask as he steps away from me.

"It means get out of my way, Little Hellhound."

I start making my way toward the backstage, but not before he turns to look over his shoulder. "Oh and Sass?"

"Yeah?" I pause my step. "Your rope dart act? I'm going to need you to swing it low to the ground."

Before I can ask what it is that he's talking about, he disappears through the curtain.

"Sass!" Perse yells, poking her head around the curtain. "Change!"

Shit.

I quickly dash into the cubicle and slip into some short jean shorts and a little crop top, wrapping a chain around my belly for extra sorcery. As I'm putting on my finishing touches, Kenan comes up behind me, his arm wrapping around my belly. He leans down into my neck. "You ready to knock the stadium down?"

My lips curl against my teeth as I giggle. “So confident.” Running a brush through my hair and cleaning up my makeup, swiping away the dark charcoal around my eye, I exhale. “I’m ready. Just... don’t drop me.”

The curtains are open, but the room is dark. Darker than usual. My feet are bare, and it’s the first time I thought how odd it feels to have the sand from the center ring pressed between my toes. All I can hear is the deep thundering in my chest and the shuffling of the audience. “Unsteady” by X Ambassadors and Erich Lee starts playing softly just as Kenan hooks his hand in mine, swinging me out and pulling me back in. The start of any dance is always a bit rusty, but it doesn’t take long before I find my groove. He picks me up by my waist and throws me around his neck and back until I’m standing on my feet. The audience loses their minds, but I’m too wrapped up in the zone to pay any attention. The song is heartbreaking, the dance intimate. Way too intimate. It’s a song and dance about losing the love of your life, but not through death, but through adversity that, at times, people can’t endure. Love is not guaranteed, and the hardest thing the human heart will withstand is dealing with the loss of someone who is still alive. With every movement, every toss, every embrace, it has me trying to reach inside my brain for anything. An anchor that will help me with the emotions of the song, but I come up with nothing. Kenan swings me up and I flip, landing with my legs hooked around his neck before he flips me backward and I land back onto my feet.

The song ends and the curtains close, but not before you hear the roar of praise.

I’m huffing still, my breath struggling to catch up. It was by far one of the hardest routines I’ve ever done.

Kenan pulls me into his damp chest, heaving. “Damn! Did you see that?” The adrenaline you feel after successfully performing is hard to explain. It’s as though your entire body is set on fire from the inside, but you have no desire to put the flames out.

“I did!” I laugh, swiping the sweat from my face. Kenan disappears back behind the curtain, just as Maya winks at me

as she makes her way onto the stage with Val and Mischa. Val and Mischa have been on the aerials and hoops since they were kids, Perse said, and you can tell. Their petite bodies and slim frames that bend and twist and spin. Maya isn't someone that you would picture doing such feminine routines, but apparently Delila bribed her.

I whip the curtain aside and make my way back to my cubicle when a bike roars to life outside. I pause in my footsteps, wondering why the bikes are back on right now. The triple wheel of death has already been on, and the stunts are at the end of the show, so I tiptoe to the back, sliding the plastic out of the way to see Killian perched on his bike.

He catches me staring, slowly pulling his cigarette out of his mouth.

“What are you doing?” I ask, knowing that my rope scene is on after the aerial.

He glares at me. “You’re up next, right?”

My eyes narrow in suspicion. “Yes.”

He kicks the stand down on his bike and swings off, walking toward me. I make a conscious effort to try not to look too hard, but it's hard not to notice when Killian is in the room. Any room. He could be in a crowd of models and still stand out.

He rubs his hand over his sharp jaw before bringing the cigarette back between his lips. Inhaling. He stops in front of me, flicking the barely smoked cigarette out to the side. I'm suddenly aware of his proximity, my throat closing and making it hard for me to swallow.

“Look at me.” His voice is low, a note above a whisper, and my stomach does a backflip. *Why the fuck does it do that?*

I clench my jaw, refusing.

He chuckles. “So fucking stubborn.” Before lifting my head up to face him with his finger beneath my chin. He searches my eyes. I bite down on my inner lip in an attempt to numb the feelings that are rushing through me right now.

He opens his mouth—

“—Hey!” Maya comes up from behind me, and I flinch. I’m such a fucking idiot. I know the type of guy Killian is, only he’s much worse than any of the boys from the Keys. Far worse than the rich entitled brats that liked to flash their boats and parents’ money. Killian and this world are so much worse than any of that, yet here I was, ready to let Killian work whatever mindfuck game he wanted to play with me.

“Sorry, was I interrupting something?” Maya asks, looking between Killian and me. I notice her somber expression.

“No—” I assure, turning around and leaving them to it. Killian comes with drama, I know this. For one, he’s sleeping with a girl in my act. Two, he sleeps around, period. With a lot of girls. He’s actually the worst out of all of The Brothers, and three, his best friend is in love with him.

He is everything that is wrong with the men in this generation and I need to stay away. I needed to stay away from him before all of that, and even more so because of that.

I step into my cubicle, ignoring Perse, Kenan, and Callan who were talking when I rushed back inside, desperate for something, anything, to take my mind off the fact that I almost let the enemy kiss me. I flip on my hair straightener and pull out the clothes that I’m going to wear for the rope act. A button-up crop top that cuts low and leather shorts. I yank off my shorts and toss them to the corner, just as the curtain tears open from behind me.

I turn my head to look over my shoulder, my hair falling over my back. Killian glares at me, before he breathes in my almost naked body. “What do you want, Killian?”

“The fuck was that?”

I bend over—yeah, a little bit on purpose—and pick up my new leather shorts, standing back straight and slipping them over my legs and ass. I turn around while doing up the button. “That was nothing.”

He steps closer. Suddenly, my skin prickles with his presence.

“Kill!” Perse scolds, coming between us. “Leave her alone.”

“It’s fine, Perse, I can handle him.” I glower at Killian as the words slip from my mouth.

“Oh, Baby G...” Kenan whisper-chuckles from behind me.

Killian laughs, his head tilting back as his teeth flash. He brings his eyes back to mine and bares his teeth. “Yeah, we’ll see about that.” Then he turns and leaves, taking my breath with him.

I sag forward, pressing my palms on my thighs.

“Jesus,” Perse whispers, whacking me with the back of her hand. “That is a fire that you cannot bend, baby girl. He will not only burn you down, but the rest of us with you. That is where he and King are different. Killian is reckless and malicious. He vibes at a different frequency than all of us.”

“He’ll be fine.” Even as I say the words, I don’t believe them. I know that there is a lot of substance to what she is saying, but the second I admit it, I allow fear into me, and that’s something that I’m not willing to give him access to. Besides that, Killian is the trickster of them all. He plays with people’s minds for shits and giggles, without any care of what that would do to the person’s life.

Turning back around, I blow out a deep breath and continue to get ready for my final fire act. Slipping on the horns, I smoke up my eyelids and ruffle my hair. Finally, I slip to the back, clutching the rope in my hand and a Zippo in the other.

The curtains open and “Play with Fire” by Sam Tinnesz starts playing as I spark the ball up and start swinging it slowly in circles. I keep an eye on the gas that drips to the ground, making sure there’s enough there to ignite when the time comes. “*Drop it low.*” I’m bent sideways, the ball flinging in circles. I swing it lower as I hear Killian’s bike rev from the other side of the tent. I glance up and smirk at the audience.

I have no idea what Killian is about to do, but I get the feeling that if I just go with it and act as though I trust him, no

one will end up in the hospital tonight. He hasn't driven up the ramp and onto the stage yet, but every now and then, he revs the loud Harley dirt bike, and the audience doesn't know where to look. I begin swinging the rope in full circles around my neck, using my head as its harness. I flick it open and throw the ball out, bringing my leg up as I curl the rope around my ankle and flick it out to the back of me.

The audience shouts in excitement, once again feeding my confidence. Confidence that you need to get through shows like these. The song slowly remixes into "STARGAZING" by Travis Scott and I slow the swing again just as Killian drives the bike up onto the ramp and next to me. He revs the engine until it redlines, before his ass end starts spinning in circles around me. *Holy. Holy shit.* The smoke is thick, so thick that the audience probably can't see inside and can only make out the circle of fire from the ball being spun around fast. I swing the ball lower when I see the trail of gas is still fresh. Just as the song slides into "You'll Float Too" by Scosa and Quadra, the circle where Killian just ripped around lights up with me right in the middle. I can hear Killian's bike outside of the ring as I continue to flick the ball around. The fire is dying out, so I know it's about to stop, and then what?

Sure enough, the fire stops burning on the sponge and I drop it to the ground. The ring of fire drops to a simmer and the audience pauses. A few people take a seat. My confusion is something that they probably think is part of my act.

Only they're wrong. I have no idea what Killian is playing at and suddenly Perse's words seem more serious. "*He's the trickster. He's malicious.*"

Kyrin and Keaton drift out from behind the stage. They're all made up in the clown makeup, loose jeans, and wearing no shirts. Realization slams into me instantly.

I'm their next act.

"Alone—Unplugged" by Sayk—404 starts playing. They're notorious for using this tune for their scene.

Shit.

Killian turns his head over his shoulder once he's in front of me, smirking at the audience. Everyone starts clapping and cheering him on as he pushes me down. I freak out, my arms flying out until I land on a chair.

Removing a bandana from around his neck, he drops down to face me. His eyes search mine, a smirk still so powerful it feels as though he's punched me right in the stomach. "Ready?"

No? I want to say, because I'm not. Only my mind isn't like the usual. I won't allow him free access without a fight.

He ties it around my mouth so only my eyes are in view before flipping the scarf up so it's finally covering my eyes. I can smell his cologne in the material, combined with gasoline and nicotine. My breathing thickens as colorful dots dance behind my eyes. *What would happen if I let go?* Music pirouettes around me, urging my mind to come out and play. Just a little. If only, out of sheer intrigue. Half of me is afraid what Killian and the boys could do, but the other half is enthralled.

Dark red lighting saturates my mind. Fishnet tights. My devil horns. A red lollipop being pulled from between my glossy red lips before being delicately slid back between them. *Red.* I suck on it as the lights begin to flicker, and Killian stalks toward me. He's wearing no shirt, light blue denim jeans that are destroyed for vanity, and his trademark smirk. His body presses against mine as his hand comes to the front of my throat. He squeezes, cutting off air.

His lips move to the curve of my ear. "*Are you who you say you are?*"

My stomach drops and panic seizes my muscles as I tear off the blindfold.

I'm back in the show. Back in real time. *This is real. That wasn't smart.*

Killian stares at me from the other side of the room as Delila explains to the audience what Killian can do, and asks for a volunteer from the crowd, to which she finds one. How

long was I out? He wasn't supposed to do that, yet he did, without even touching me. He's not playing fair, using his trickery to conjure something out of me that doesn't exist.

A girl.

Around my age.

I stand from the chair and she takes my place, my throat clenching as panic refuses to release its grip from around me.

I start to stalk off the stage when Kyrin intercepts me, his hand coming to the back of my neck.

He looks down, a sneer on his mouth. "You don't move, Hellhound. Stay here."

Spinning me around, I watch as Killian does the same thing to the girl as he did me. Bet he isn't trying to tamper with her brain though, not how he did mine. I wonder what he does do to the volunteers—what he gives them. How he plays it. I can feel Ky's hard body behind me, his arm wrapped around my belly to keep me anchored.

"King" from Niykee Heaton starts playing and my eyes close, the beat pulling at my natural instinct to dance.

"Shit," I whisper as I feel my mind drifting toward my urges. *I need to fucking dance.*

Kyrin's mouth curves against the back of my neck. "Let go."

I exhale a slow, shaky breath, and tilt my head around, my hand coming to his. Kyrin freezes as I turn in his grip. I'm well aware that this is a performance for the crowd, but I bet Delila is absolutely spewing right now, wondering what the hell is going on. Why Killian and I's "push and pull" is now being performed during her show.

This is a pull for power between Killian and me. He took over my acts, so I'll take over his. Realistically, I didn't *have* to dance, but God did I want to. So I'll do what I do, and dance.

I swing my head, my hair whipping around in a circle. I'm certain I saw Kill falter as he was putting a white bandana over

the girl's face.

He didn't use his bandana.

Interesting.

Hooking my hand into Kyrin's, I pull him into my body, rolling with the beat. A few people catcall in the audience, only intensifying my need to take over Killian's act the way he did mine. I lean forward, touching my toes while grinding my ass into Kyrin's crotch. Kyrin is pretty vacant with me. He doesn't talk to me unless he has to and stays far away from displaying who he is as a person. These boys may be vicious and cruel, and heartless with no emotion, but there's one thing absolute that I know. I can tap at the walls they keep up while performing because above everything, they're entertainers. This is who they are. So as long as we're on the stage, I can torment the tormenters.

Kyrin's hands land on my hips, his fingers trailing over my bare belly. I spin back around and hook my arm around the back of his neck. When the chorus kicks in again, I jump up and wrap my legs around his waist, grinding, rolling, and rubbing myself over his body. Using it as my own personal stripper pole. When the song thuds out to a slow, menacing beat, I slowly curve backward until I'm upside down, my hands on the floor and my legs now locked around Ky's waist.

The music throbs like a trance.

Killian's cold eyes bore into mine as the lighting flicks on and off in the same red that I saw in my head not long ago. I continue to ride Kyrin. Dry humping to the beat.

Kyrin squeezes my thighs, a warning, I think. Warnings don't scare me, and Killian is about to learn that I'm a loaded weapon and have no problem at all utilizing it. My body alone could match what his mind tricks could do. I flick my leg up and slide into standing splits, my inner leg pressing against Kyrin's face. The music stops and I eloquently kick my other leg down to the floor and stand.

This time the screams from the crowd are drowned out by my heart rate drumming loudly in my ears. People stand,

whistle, cheer.

Only Killian is mad.

I keep my cocky grin pointed right at him as I slowly bend to a bow.

Quickly spinning around to run back to my cubicle, I'm lifted off the ground when an arm latches around my belly and pulls me into a hard chest.

"Nah, uh! You're not going anywhere!"

I kick to get him off me, only it doesn't help. He's too strong, way too strong.

"I'm not involved," Ky mutters, going back to the cubicle.

Keaton follows closely behind him. "If you want to pop your Kiznitch cherry, Sass, I'm down!" He disappears behind Kyrin and it's only Killian and me. There's an intermission now, so we get a thirty minute break. Which I had planned to stretch and redo my makeup for my final act. I'm tired, drained, and in desperate need of food.

"Let me go, Killian!"

He doesn't. He continues to walk us outside, toward the back where the bikes are parked. King seems to be having an argument with Perse beside his. When they see us exit, Perse storms off and disappears back inside.

King looks between us, smirking. "Well, fuck, don't stop on my account..."

Killian flips him off while placing my feet back on the ground. Before I can run off and back into the tent, he picks me up from the back of my thighs, lifting me around his waist. I wrap them around him to gain balance. As he begins walking backward, he starts pushing me up against the tent. The full moon hangs behind him, offering me the perfect light to shadow his features. Only they're mostly hidden by the clown makeup.

"Who are you?" he asks, tilting his head and searching my face.

“What? Saskia Royal, now put me down.”

He presses his crotch into me farther, and my mouth slams closed. This is not really where I want to be with Killian right now, it’s a danger zone for me. I don’t think I’m weak on any account, but my restraint is being tested.

Shit fuck. I’m in the deep end.

His hand comes to the front of my throat, squeezing slightly before releasing. His lips fall over mine. “Kiss me.”

I shove his shoulder, shocked. “No!”

“Are you saying that you don’t want to?” His head cocks even more. “Pretty sure if I slip your panties to the side, your pussy would be drippin’.” He leans down to the side of my neck and sucks my flesh between his teeth. “And I bet the bitch is fucking screaming my name...” *Did he just call my pussy a bitch?*

I suck in a breath, counting to ten to compose myself. “Maybe.” Then I push off him just as he releases me, and my feet are finally safely back on the ground. I square my shoulders. “But I guess that’s a sound you will never hear. Maybe I’ll keep it to myself.” I shove away from him and quickly run into the dressing room. What the hell is his problem? I know that he wants to fuck me. Actually, he said that he didn’t want to anymore, but he has never outwardly been this obvious about it.

I take a seat and remove the items I wear for fire bending and dress in the clothes I need for our final dance and the final act. Slipping into fishnet tights, black shorts, thigh-high boots, a black lace bralette and a loose crop to go over it, I tidy up my makeup and ruffle my hair even more. My skin is on fire, recklessness taking hold of my body. I feel animalistic, like havoc is what needs to be caused.

“Are you okay?” Perse asks, walking up behind Val and Kenan. Val gives me a strange look before removing her clothes and putting on what she wears for the final act. Which is next to nothing. She doesn’t even make the crowd or boys work for her sex show, she just exists with it. It’s good to drop

breadcrumbs when you're being sexual, because it offers people a taste of what could come. Only I leave them starving, with the taste of me lingering on their lips. Midnight Mayhem is a great offering to adults who not only enjoy an excellent, mind-altering and hallucinatory show, but also those who live in the shadows of their sexual desires. We have security placed everywhere and don't allow the audience to have sex while watching, but from what I've heard, there have been many cases where couples have tried.

"Yeah," I grumble, running a brush through my long hair. "It's just Killian."

"Huh," Perse mutters, almost to herself. She comes closer toward me, her hands clenched around the back of my chair. "Please remember, Sass," she whispers, looking over her shoulder briefly. "These boys are not to be taken lightly." She turns farther, taking a seat on Kenan's chair.

She exhales. "I need you to sleep with Killian."

"What!" I snap, rather loudly, because everyone within our distance all turn to see what the problem is. I lower my voice. "Why would you say that?"

Perse watches me nervously. "You both, and so much more him, seem to have this draw to each other. Which is fine, but it's distracting him, and I can't have it distracting you."

I think over her words, and before I can form anything that is even worth replying, I laugh. Full clutch my belly laugh. "No. I'm not doing that." I turn back around and wipe the lipstick off my lips. You can't have lipstick on for the final act.

"Saskia..." Perse exhales. I bring my eyes to hers in the mirror. "I know that you think you can handle Killian, but you can't."

I ignore her by this point. I love Perse. She's my closest friend here apart from Kenan, but she really needs to stop talking. Her logic doesn't make sense to me.

"Can we not do this right now? Can we talk later?" I plead softly.

She finally closes her mouth and nods. "Okay."

We all make our way to the center, waiting for the curtain to drop. It's different now. Standing here with all of them. With Perse, Kenan, and Callan. Callan who is still not talking to me.

The curtain opens and Tinashe's "Throw a Fit" starts playing as we move into our positions. Where the entrance and exit is, I notice all four of The Brothers standing, watching. King leans into Killian, whose eyes have not strayed from mine.

It's intense. I miss a step, my cheeks flaring to life. I continue through the movements of the song. Slowly, lifting my shirt over my head and flicking it out to the stands. Now I'm in my bra and little shorts. When the song remixes into "Just a Dream" by Nelly, I let loose, rolling against the beat with a smile on my face. With every soft tune, I rub myself against the notes, with a hair flick every now and then. Kenan picks me up from the waist and my legs wrap around him as I slowly lean backward until my hands are placed on the floor. Kenan slowly sinks down, his face right near my crotch. He bites down on my inner thigh and I chuckle with laughter, kicking off him until I'm back on the ground. The song moves even slower into "I Wanna Fuck You" by Akon and Uncle Snoop. We ride the song out with me sticking next to Kenan. This choreography is all about how bad a man wants a woman but can't have her, so anytime Kenan tries to grab at me, I swat his hand away and taunt him with the weapon all women have—their existence.

We all have one thing in common—we're born with power, but the world doesn't like a confident woman, so they try to crush them with tabloids of what "perfection" should look like. It's all a hoax to deceive us into thinking we're lesser of a woman if we don't look or act a certain way. We, as a sisterhood, must rise above that and harness the power our ancestors fought so hard for and destroy the patriarchy. This won't happen quickly. In order for this to happen, we have to stop slut shaming, skinny shaming, fat shaming, fit shaming, or any shaming. There is no shame in what someone looks like, period—what is truly shameful is how easy it is for some of us to attack the other all because it's not something we

would wear or how we would talk. Individuality is a gift. I love this dance and routine. It has nurtured my need for recklessness in the form of female dominance.

As the song ends, the audience stands and claps, and the cage slowly drops from the ceiling. I bend my head backward to watch as it falls around us. The pastel lilac and vivid white that's on the ceiling of the tent begins spinning into a spiral.

I gulp.

I'm always nervous about this part. It takes a bit for me to get into it, but as soon as the cage is on the ground, the music shifts and the lights flick to red. This is the part that the audience is the most silent. Shrouding themselves in the erotic atmosphere that we provide. The vibe always shifts when the cage begins descending, even though every act is sexual one way or another.

"Say Yeah" by Nikye Heaton fades in loudly, everyone liquefying into the cage. I find a spot in the corner, where I usually am, dancing against whoever is there. Usually, I stick by Kenan and his shenanigans, knowing that he won't press me, but I already feel that tonight is going to be different. I can feel the tension floating between Killian and I and I've come to learn that Killian isn't someone who just lets things be. He likes to antagonize any situation he can and right now, that situation is me.

I'm making my way for the corner where Kenan is when fingers hook into mine. The music is thumping so loudly it feels as though the vibrations are sending tremors through my bones.

Fingers flex with mine. I pause. I don't have to turn around to know that it's Killian. His thumb presses against the palm of my hand before he's tugging me into his chest.

His hard chest that smells of every bad thing that we were told to stay away from. He's potent, a delicacy that you can't afford to indulge in. He's top shelf alcohol that if taken in large doses, you could die from.

Neither of us say a word, and I know what this is. I know the rules. Whatever happens in the cage, stays in the cage. It's like Fight Club. Even when you're coupled with someone, you still have to partake in the cage. King and Dove tried to get out of it, but it didn't work. Now they stick to each other and have mastered how to conceal as much as possible.

He drops down onto a chair, bringing me with him.

Can I swallow everything just for this? Can I offer myself the forgiveness that I will need to have after tonight?

I'm Kiznitch. I have to. We're bred stronger, raised smarter, and groomed to sharp precision. With that thought hyping me, I swing my legs over his waist until I'm straddling him.

He looks up at me from his position, his head tilting back and his hands on my ass. *I can do this*. Only he would be the first Brother or Kiznitch to sleep with me. I've kept my seals pretty tight.

Hooking my arm around the back of his neck, I grind against his crotch to the beat before leaning down to his mouth, sucking his bottom lip into mine and tugging it between my teeth.

He groans, and I shit you not, that sound alone was enough to rouse every single sensation the human body has and have it roaring to life. He wraps his arm around my back, pulling me in closer, as if I wasn't close enough.

Sucking in a deep breath, I bring my lips to his and kiss him. He opens, allowing me access and my tongue dives inside, licking every curve that I can. His tongue is soft, his lips weak. He raises his hips to meet mine, his swollen cock pressing exactly where I need it to be.

Holy shit. Sweat and heat surges from me, and I no longer care. No longer care that he and I are beefing right now. No longer care that I'm probably going to be mad at myself when all is done. I. No. Longer. Care. Willing to throw everything out the window, I need to fuck this man and I need to fuck him now. Maybe Perse was right, or maybe I'll just use that as an

excuse to get me through the guilt. The chorus to the song couldn't be more appropriate, as his thumbs hook around the band of my shorts. Goosebumps swell over my flesh as he slowly slides his fingers against my hips, then to my back. The gesture is simple, but with the music, the lighting, the tension between Killian and I, and the inflamed sexual tension that seems to persistently masticate between us, it's enough to have me wet and ready.

I reach down, unbuttoning his jeans with one hand. I know the final show isn't for us, it's for the audience. If you have sex, it has to be in a manner that is pleasing for the crowd.

No missionary.

No—whatever this is. It has to be out and open for people to see. He knows this, I know this, and yet, neither of us are willing to change position. My movements become a little frantic as sweat drips down my temple, desperate for a release. His hips tilt up, allowing my hand to slip beneath his jeans.

I moan at the connection of my palm wrapped around him. My forehead falls against his hard shoulder as I pump him softly. His other hand comes to the front of my shorts.

“Take these off. Now,” he growls into my ear, the warmth of his demand ingraining into my skin.

I obey, sliding off his lap.

He looks up at me, reaching for the cigarette that was tucked behind his ear, and brings it to his mouth. He flicks his Zippo—*my damn Zippo*—open and lights the end. Blowing out a cloud of smoke, he spreads his knees wide. “And make it sexy.”

“Dark Times” by The Weeknd starts playing, and I slide off his lap, ignoring everyone else around me.

Unzipping my shorts, I shuffle out of them, making sure to bend right over for the crowd as they slide down my slender legs and fishnet tights. I look over my shoulder just as Maya catches my eye. She looks a little traumatized in the corner, sitting in the dark alone. I block her out before I overthink something, kicking the shorts to the side before dropping to

the ground, spreading my legs wide. A spotlight comes onto Killian, and I start crawling across the ground, unbuttoning my crop top and tearing it off, leaving me in nothing but my bra, panties, and fishnet tights with thigh-high boots. I grip onto his knees, ignoring the smirk on his mouth and the way his jeans are unbuttoned. He looks unreal from here. My mouth waters. When the chorus plays, I stand, stealing the smoke from his fingers and placing it in my mouth. I inhale, exhale, before flicking it away and rolling my body over him, his cock rubbing my slit perfectly. Leaning forward, I drag my tongue along his jawline, the makeup sticking to my taste buds. Untying his bandana from the back, I slowly hook it around my neck, and knot it.

Killian leans forward, gripping me from my waist and spinning me around to face the crowd. Only not only am I facing them, I'm also facing Kyrin.

Killian's hand slides beneath my panties. He flicks his finger over my clit, leaning closer to my ear. "Do you fuck like you dance, Little Hellhound?"

His finger teasingly dives into my pussy and my walls clench around his invasion, unwilling to let him go. My eyes roll to the back of my head.

"Open your eyes," he demands. "Watch Kenan try to fuck Kyrin as I fuck you."

My eyes open. He bends me over once I'm standing, tearing my tights down from my inner thighs and sliding my panties to the side. He wraps my hair around his fist with his left hand and pulls me back onto his lap while using his right to direct his cock against my entrance.

His fingers come to my hip and he flexes, just as I swallow him inside of me. He fills me to the brim. I have to pause, because I don't think I could take him all at once. He's big. Too big. I feel as though I'm suffocating around his size.

Tugging on my hair, he further pulls me against him while slowly continuing to drive inside of me. I can't hear anything unless he yells or he's right near my ear, but he's not talking right now. He draws out, taking part of my soul with him,

before pushing back in. Just when I think he's going to go slow, he picks up force, slamming into me harder. Not faster, just harder. He fucks with a brutality that makes me want to whimper, pray, and plead to the gods to give me more. *I need more.* I need to feel his skin against mine and his lips all over my body.

His hand comes to the front of my throat and he clenches, leaning up to run his lips over my ear. "Let go."

I do, releasing myself all over him. He spins me back around roughly until I'm straddling his waist. He pushes me back down over his dick and I'm seeing stars all over again. If you're in Mayhem, you're on the pill, so when he leans forward and sucks my lace covered nipple between his teeth, groaning while emptying himself inside of me, I don't think twice. Our bodies descend, my heart rate pounding as we play out the remaining minutes before the curtains draw closed.

The lights cut out when the curtains have dropped. I brush my hair into a high pony, the slick sweat clinging to my skin. Spinning around to face Killian, my face burns when I see that he's already gone.

Bring on the guilt.



Eight

Killian

The door swings open and Keaton steps inside, laughing like a fucking maniac. “Oh you just couldn’t help yourself, eh, fucker? You had to piss on her.”

I toss my shirt across the couch and smirk. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“So you fucked her.” He raises a brow. “Now what? On to the next?”

I falter slightly, reaching for the milk carton in the fridge. Slamming the door closed, I pop the carton open and wrap my lips around it. I can still smell her pussy on the tips of my fingers, and I have to fight the urge to lick every single bit of her hellish little stench off me. “You’re awfully interested.”

Keaton flips me off, climbing the stairs. “I mean, now that you’ve popped that cherry, maybe you’ve started a fetish with her. I saw the way she responded to you, Kill. That’s a woman hungry for cock now, and not just any dick—Kiznitch dick.”

He disappears up the stairs just as the door opens again, but instead of it being Kyrin or King, it's Delila.

Shit. I'm probably in trouble for the act I pulled during Saskia's skit and she's probably in trouble for challenging me during mine.

The fucking menace.

I underestimated her completely.

"Killian." Delila climbs the stairs, and it's then that I realize she's in sweats and her hair is up in a small bun. She's wearing no makeup, and it looks like she hasn't had her monthly Botox juice because the bags under her eyes are worsening.

"Everything okay?" I ask warily. I know the answer, though. Delila wouldn't look like this unless it was bad. She prides herself on her appearance.

"No. I don't think so."

I wave her into the kitchen, taking a seat on the table.

"We're going to need that bottle of whiskey your father passed down to you for this conversation." She's talking about the three-hundred-thousand-dollar bottle of scotch that has been passed down through the Corneli generations. I got it when it was half full, and plan to drink the whole fucking lot of it before I die. My son can have the empty bottle because the shit is lethal.

Making my way to where I keep it, I take down the bottle of aged poison and two glasses, pouring us both a decent amount.

She shoots it back and nods for another.

So I do.

"What's going on, D?"

She clears her throat, rotating the liquid around in her glass. "We have to cut our Australian tour short and go back to Kiznitch."

I shuffle in my chair. “What? Why?” I haven’t been back to Kiznitch since I was a kid, and that was for family vacations and such. Every holiday, our families would go back to Kiznitch to celebrate. It apparently appeased our parents and made them feel closer to their parents and so on, since they were the first generation to actually transfer to the US.

She takes a smaller sip this time. “Patience is heading back.”

I lean back in my chair. “Why?”

Another sip. “To do their recruit.”

“Why Kiznitch? Why not go back to Patience?” I ask, finally shooting mine back. She was right. I would need it.

Her eyes meet mine. “Because they want to ruin it. We have to go back, put on our shows, and protect our home turf.”

I pause, thinking over the drama that happened before Christmas with Perse. I knew that it wasn’t resolved with Patience, but I thought it was mainly brushed under the mat until we had finished with the tour.

“You sure this is what you want to do?” I ask skeptically. “It’s going to ruffle some feathers with the crew. A lot of them wait five years to do an international tour.”

She tips her head back, swallowing the rest of her drink. “Yes. I didn’t plan to do a full tour, I just needed us out of the US to see what Patience did. What their next move was. The Fathers are prepared, and they’ll still get their international tour when they were supposed to. I didn’t want to cause panic within. But we have an issue.”

“And what’s that?” I ask, leaning forward.

She drifts in and out of focus. “Someone is feeding information back to Patience. There’s no way they would have known that we were out of the country unless they heard through a rat.”

“Okay.” I lean forward. “Well, this is a big crew, but I’m sure we will find who it is.” I exhale, running my hand over my face. “Going back to Kiznitch isn’t going to be easy...”

Delila sobers. “I know, Kill.” Her hands reach for mine. “I know.” She pats them, but I pull away from her, swallowing the rest of my drink. “It’s why I came to tell you in person. You could maybe minimize the blow.”

I don’t answer. I pop the cork off the bottle and swirl it around. “And then what? What happens after Kiznitch?”

She leans back in her chair. “Then we fly back to the US.”

I groan, leaning forward and resting my head on my hands. “Yeah. Alright.”

“Are you sure?” She has the audacity to ask.

I laugh, shuffling back and standing off my chair. “I don’t have a fucking option.” Delila stands, offering me an apologetic smile. “I’m sorry, Kill. I really am.”

Yeah, sure she fucking is.

Just as Delila leaves, Maya moves around her mother, entering the kitchen. “Wow! What’s going on? Looks serious.”

Delila ignores her and disappears off into the distance.

“Maya, if you’ve come to grind on my balls about Saskia, you can save it.”

Maya pauses, leaning against the threshold of the entry. “It’s not a good idea, Killian. You’re playing with fire. *Literally.*”

I lick my lips and tuck my bottom one into my mouth. “How so?” I ask, eyebrows raised.

“She’s just—I don’t know. Weird.”

I shake my head. “You’re sounding a lot like a jealous ex-girlfriend, Maya. Please return back to your allocated seating. It’s in the *friends*’ section.”

Maya sighs. “You’re such a fucking asshole. Can I come in? I promise I’m not grinding your balls, since they probably still smell like Sass.”

I chuckle, filling up Delila’s empty glass and then mine. “Are you telling me that you wouldn’t fuck Sass?”

Maya ponders over my words, picking up the glass and taking Delila's seat. "I mean..." She shrugs, smiling.

I laugh, swallowing the rest of my drink and putting the glass back on the table. "We're going back, May."

She pauses with a mouthful of whiskey. Swallowing, she tilts her head. "Back? Back where?"

I wet my bottom lip. "Back to Kiznitch."

Her face pales.

Maya was a pain in my ass. She always had me chasing her through forests and into the mazes that were scattered around Kiznitch, Romania.

"Maya!" I called out, swiping the sweat from my forehead. "I'm too fucking tired for this!" I swore, and it felt good. Maya hated when I cussed at her because her father was loose lipped when it came to her and Delila.

"Nah uh!" Maya laughed, her hyena giggle lighting up the dark forest. I stepped forward, the broken branches crunching beneath the soles of my shoes.

"My mom is going to flip her shit if we're not back soon..." I warned her, moving branches of trees out of my face. I stepped out into a clearing where there was a cabin. It was made from wood with minimal windows and a thick, cobble chimney.

"Should we go in?" Maya whispered, her frantic movements unwilling to still.

I grinned, nudging her. "Knew you were good for something." I stepped forward just as a scream rang out.

I tug on my hair, the memory too raw to touch, like an open wound that threatened to slice back open if I got too close to it.

Maya is standing by the table, pacing back and forth. "Shit." She pulls out a joint from behind her ear and puts it in

her mouth. “This isn’t good.”



After Maya left, I tossed and turned for the better part of the night, which is exactly why I’m not switched on this morning. We have one more show tonight in Brisbane before we’re heading back to the land of the dead. Literally what it should be called.

I haven’t seen Sass since the show last night either, which is my bad, I left pretty quickly after. My knee jiggles as King relays the plans of us heading back to Kiznitch. Luce is beside King, the leader of the Six Demons. His real name is Jessie, but we still call him Luce.

“Why would she cut the tour short, though? Why not wait until we’ve done Australia? Since we go from here to Sydney, it seems a little extreme to leave right now and not come and do what we came here to do, and then there’s the money and how much that would set us back.” Lucifer hits all of the points that I knew people would hit.

I snort. “I think money is void when it comes to this issue.”

Luce sighs. “True, but I’m just saying from a business perspective, it still doesn’t make sense.” He stares at me quizzically. “And your father will have a lot to say about that, since he’s the treasurer of Kiznitch.” Dad is the treasurer, which means that he overlooks all of Midnight Mayhem’s expenditures. His knowledge and power of numbers is irrefutable—just like my pops and the ones before him.

I clear my throat, leaning back in my chair. Money has never been something that I gave a fuck about, in fact, I bathed in fucking liquid gold growing up, but he’s right. The reason why Kiznitch is wealthy and all of the Fathers and founding families never struggle is because we’re smart with our money. This isn’t smart, regardless of how much we have.

“You’re right,” I agree with Luce.

“Did he just say that?” Keaton taps my leg with his, where he is on the other side of me.

I flip him off without looking at him.

King’s attention wavers when the girls walk through, or rather, Perse walks through.

I roll my eyes. “Pussy whipped motherfucker.”

“Keep talking that shit, Kill, only a matter of time...” King teases.

“Matter of time for what?” Luce laughs, looking between King and I. “Oh no way, not Kill...” He glares at me just as Sass steps through the door, laughing with Kenan. I swear to fuck everything slows as her hair blows around her face when she laughs. She is fucking crippling. The beauty of Saskia was placed on this earth specifically from God to taunt me for all my wrongdoings. Only Saskia isn’t from heaven.

I can’t even fight the pull when I find her watching me. As if our allurements feed one another. No, Saskia isn’t sent from God. That kind of beauty is crafted from evil.

“Fuck off,” I grunt, tilting my head back to focus on the ceiling. Anywhere but where she is.

“Thank fuck,” Luce answers, seeming to believe me, just as he finds Sass. “That brunette is on some next level shit. Where’d they pick her up from, fucking Victoria’s Secret?”

I don’t flinch.

King starts bursting out laughing and I have to fight all that is inside of me not to elbow him in the face. Wouldn’t be the first time.

Music starts playing, and it’s not until I’ve counted to what feels like one-hundred and calmed my wayward temper that I finally bring my head back down.

Sass and Kenan run through their duet before they work on their group dance. The duet is hot as fuck, even with the

cheesy music, but everything Sass does is dripped in sex, power, and utter fucking rebellion.

Fuck.



Nine

Saskia

I have no problem performing in front of hundreds of people. Every week when we're on tour. But with The Brothers sitting in front of me, and Lucifer from the Demons all watching us, suddenly it's too much. Too heavy. Too tense.

"Throw a Fit" starts playing again. We stick to the same songs for the same city, sometimes for two cities, before changing them. I'm wearing a sports bra and ripped boyfriend jeans, with the waistband of my Calvins showing around my hips. I work through the movements, laughing when Kenan rips off his shirt and mirrors my movements in the chorus. The song cuts out and Perse swipes the sweat from her forehead.

"Sam? Can you play 'Sally Walker' by Iggy?"

I laugh, my head tipping back while shoving Kenan. "You're an idiot."

The song plays, and I step forward, twerking and dancing around the place, finally ignoring whoever else is in here.

When the verse starts again, we all fuck around, and eventually manage to merge the choreography into the song. When the chorus comes back on again, I start flossing, and Kenan dives toward me, swinging my body over his shoulder.

“Okay you two!” Callan crosses her arms in front of herself. We continue through twice more and then I tell Perse that I need to practice my fires.

Slipping in and out of the cubicle, I’m now wearing workout shorts, mid-top Nike sneakers and a sports bra. Everyone else is finished rehearsing, with the Angels, Val and Mischa playing with the aerials to the side, giving me the bigger part of the stage. Killian, King and Keaton are still in their seats, but Kyrin and Lucifer have gone.

“Ignore him,” I whisper to myself before realizing I don’t have my damn Zippo.

“Fuck!” I mouth, and just as I’m about to turn around to find a lighter, the gold Zippo lands near my feet in a thud. I look down at it, and then up at Killian, who is smirking his smug fucking face from his chair.

“Asshole,” I grumble, picking it up, along with the remote control to the sound system. I flick through it and find a song to train with, pushing play.

Lighting up the wicks, I begin rolling it over my arm, warming my body up to not just the staff, but the song too.

I find I like the song and push repeat.

“Devil” by Niykee Heaton plays and I roll the staff over my body, flicking it around and up against my neck, while using my body in all the ways that I know how, incorporating my flexibility into it more as I become more familiar. I land in the splits, picking up the staff and flipping it through my legs as I slide up. Slowly, I tilt backward with both hands still securely on the staff, dropping into bridge. I flick my legs up to a handstand. I can’t stay up long, unless I want to set fire to the floor.

The song finishes and the next one comes on. Another fitting song. “Horns” from Bryce Fox. I giggle smugly as I

become more confident with it. Stomping out the fire, I pick up the rope and start on that. Kicking it around, wrapping it around my neck, and using it as a weapon against my body.

Val comes over to me, smirking. “You work as hard as me.”

I turn the music down, swiping the sweat off my face. I catch the time and freeze. “Holy shit!”

Val nods, sipping her water. “Yup. You trained for four hours straight.” It’s three pm, and I need to eat and rest before tonight, get myself back into my zen.

“You’re the same?”

Val’s cheeks flushed. “Well, I don’t usually, but with you right beside me I found I lost track of time too.”

I start cleaning up my mess, before making my way to the back to put it away.

I come back out and Val is still there.

“You okay?” I ask, eyebrow raised. I haven’t talked to Val much, and because of her old beef with Perse, we naturally just didn’t hang out together.

“Yeah,” she exhales. “Listen, I never see you drinking or partying, but would you want to come over to our bus tonight after the final show? It’s sort of a ritual and it’ll be weird without you there. Again. You know, people start wondering why you don’t hang.” She’s not lying. It’s not really my scene. I’m not a heavy drinker because I make enough mistakes sober. Though that doesn’t mean I don’t drink. I do. When I need to.

“Sure,” I say, shrugging.

What’s the worst that could happen?

I slip in and out of the shower, drying off just in time for my phone to ping with a notification. Thinking it’s Hope, I dive onto my bed, towel wrapped around my body, hair dripping down my back. It’s a notification from Instagram.

@killiancornelii started following you on Instagram.

I freeze.

My heartbeat thunders through my ears. He started following me?

My finger hovers over his name. I click on his profile, not wanting to follow him straight back. When I get there, I wish I didn't click on it.

21.2M Followers: Following 87

“Who the fuck has twenty million followers?”

“Me,” a voice says from my doorway and I yelp, tossing my phone onto the bed. Spinning around, I glare at him.

“What are you doing here?”

“Stand up.”

I gape at him. “What?”

He grins, and it's then that I realize he's not wearing a shirt and his jeans are sitting sinfully low.

Shit.

“Killian...” I warn, squeezing the towel around my body.

“I know,” he slurs slightly, walking farther into the room. “We shouldn't do this, right? Because it's fucking bad.”

“Yes...” I answer, slowly standing up from the bed while still clutching my towel.

“There's only one thing wrong with that.” He comes toe-toe with me, his breath tainted with potent whiskey. His fingers flex around the top of my towel as my eyes come up to his. “I *am* bad. How the fuck are you so fucking beautiful?”

Everything inside of me turns cold.

He continues, his fingers sliding back and forth over my swollen breasts while still being tucked into the towel. “It's a mindfuck.”

“Killian, you're—”

He flicks the edge of my towel and I let it fall to pool at my feet. I'm standing in front of him. Naked. With nothing to hide my insecurity or his scrutiny. Some assume that an attractive woman is a confident woman, but that's just not true. Self-esteem issues hide behind a range of faces, it doesn't just appear on one particular type of person. I thought I was better at hiding my inner feelings, but obviously Killian has picked up on it. Watch the girls who smile too often and have no problem flashing skin. Insecurity doesn't always come dressed in sweats, sometimes it walks in with its shoulders back and a smile on its face. Some are better at hiding it than others.

Sucking in a breath, I remember that I'm standing naked in front of him. It's not so much the size of my body that I'm stressing about, it's everything. Are my boobs too big? Too small? I know they're not symmetrical. Bet his holy hands have only ever touched bodies that are Instagram worthy. At that thought, I squirm away.

"If you tell me that you're insecure because of another man, Saskia, I'll kill him."

I lick my lips. I was expecting to see a smirk, or anything playful that he usually flashes, but his face is void of anything but solemnity.

"Killian, you're drunk."

"I'm not."

"You are."

He steps forward.

I step back. "You are."

"I need to taste you, and then I'll leave you alone."

"What?" I almost yell, confused.

"Say yes." The glint in his eyes alights with mischief. Killian is the kind of wild you want to run away with, not cage. He's an untamed animal, turbulent and vicious.

Before I can register what I'm doing, I say, "yes."

He drops to his knees and buries his face between my thighs. I grab onto his hair as he hitches one of my legs over his shoulder.

“Oh fuck...” My head rolls to the side, my bottom lip catching between my teeth. His tongue flicks over my clit in perfectly pressured licks before he presses his tongue against me and slowly shakes his head. This man knows entirely too much about this.

He groans, the sound vibrating over my clit as his finger dips inside of me.

“Killian.” The words fall from my lips fluently. He leans back, gripping onto my ass as he lays me back on the floor, my knees on either side of his face.

“Ride my face, baby.” He looks up at me from beneath his thick lashes, his bright blue eyes urging me silently to use him however I want. For as long as I want.

“I need you inside of me.”

“Not tonight.” He pushes me up, flips me around so I’m reverse cowgirl, and spreads my ass cheeks wide.

Before he puts his lips back on me, he calls out, “If any of you nosey fuckers wanna close the door, that’d be great, but you’ll be flashed with Saskia’s beautiful fucking ass.”

There’s chuckling down the hall. “Asshole.”

“Killian!” I scold, slapping his leg. “Stop be—” His mouth covers my pussy.

“Shut the fuck up and come on my face.”

My hips buck and I reach beneath his pants, grabbing onto his cock. Pulling it out, I gasp slightly when I’m finally met face-to-face with his heavy girth. Veins ripple beneath the skin, his head thick and glossy. I lick my lips and bend forward, sucking him into my mouth and curving my tongue around his base.

“Fuck,” he rumbles against my pussy. I lean forward, pulling him deeper into my mouth until he’s sliding down my throat. I gag, spit, and twist as I continue to devour him. The

moans, groans, and occasional “Fuck!” only hyping me up even more. My nails dig into his inner thighs, I feel my body tense.

“Not yet,” he growls, squeezing my ass cheek tightly. His left hand slips beneath as he dips his index finger inside of me, circling.

“Killian...” I warn, attempting to ride his finger. “I need you inside me.”

“Not tonight.” His finger extracts and my mouth finds him again. He’s thicker than he was before, his cock pulsing slightly beneath my palm. His mouth comes back to my clit and he licks me down until his tongue is flicking inside of my pussy. His hand slides over the crack of my ass as his tongue presses against my clit.

I squeeze his cock in my hand, pumping him harder. I’m so close. So close. I could come undone just by thinking of the image that we’re displaying.

His finger slips into my ass as his tongue thrashes my clit and I’m done. I scream out my release loudly while making sure I’m still pumping his cock in my hand. Hot cum shoots up and hits me in the face, dripping into my mouth. I fall forward, ass in the air, as we both come down from the most intense oral I have ever received. Not that I’ve had it many times before.

Rolling onto my back, my hair sticking to my face from his cum, I turn to face him. “By the way, that was a one-off.”

Killian laughs loudly, and the sound itself sets off something deep inside of me that I’m not willing to explore yet. “Yeah, says the girl with my jizz all over her face and hair.”

“Hey!” I jolt up, covering my tits and glaring at him while scrubbing the cum off my face.

He rolls his eyes, grabbing my arms and stretching them wide, while pulling me back on top of him. I feel his chest rise and fall beneath me, my breathing matching his. “I swear to fuck I’ll kill whoever made you this insecure.” His voice is

like a blanket being thrown over me when I didn't know I was cold.

“Hmm, wish I knew the answer.” I push off from his chest and crawl off him, needing to put some distance between us because being in his arms feels way too good. *Way, way, way too good.* “I'm serious. A one-off. Unless you like claw marks on your thighs.”

Killian chuckles, pulling up his pants and standing to his feet. “Actually, I fucking do. Might keep them.” He looks down at me, tilting his head as he slowly takes in my body. As if he's inhaling every curve, every bump, every flaw, and exhaling it back out through bared teeth. “One-off? I'd say challenge accepted, Little Hellhound.” He snatches up his shirt and swings it over his shoulder. I lean up, grabbing my towel and wrapping it back around my body, while knowing that I'm going to need to take another shower.

Taking a smoke from his jean pocket, he places it into his mouth and blazes it up. “After this show tonight, we're heading back to Kiznitch.”

“Wait—what?” I'm shocked, momentarily distracted by the fact that he's getting comfortable on my bed.

“Yeah.” He blows out a cloud of smoke.

“I haven't been there in so long,” I whisper. It was meant to be to myself, but the words catch his attention.

“Really?” He tilts his head. Distracting myself from the intensity of his energy, I scan over his hair. Ruffled nests standing all over his head. He has sex hair. From me. *Us.*

Nope, not helping. “Yep. I was a child, I think, the last time I was there.”

Killian stares at me. “And what else?”

I shrug him off. “And not much.”

“Hmmm...” he murmurs, leaning back against the headboard on my bed.

“Can you leave?” I say, pointing to the door. “I need a shower.”

“Nope,” he answers, flicking the ash of his smoke onto my floor. “Maya has had an accident and can’t be in my wheel anymore, and well, it was either you or Callan.”

I pause, my heart thundering in my chest. “Well then choose Callan.”

He stands, makes his way toward me and hooks his finger under my chin, tilting my head up to face his. “I’ll never choose Callan.”

I lick my lips. “What are you doing?”

He grins, flashing his pearly white teeth and smug smirk. “What I always do.”

My heart crashes and my face falls. I’m such a fucking idiot. I recollect myself before he notices my change of attitude.

His hand falls beside his body as he nudges toward the door. “Don’t bother showering. I like smelling *me* all over you. Get changed.” Then he disappears out of my room, allowing me to release a long, pent up breath.

Killian is intense and dramatic all at once, and I vowed to myself that I wouldn’t—couldn’t allow myself to be another one of the girls he sleeps with and moves on from, but I already failed that, so may as well fill in for Maya until she’s feeling better.

Changing in record time, I slip into yoga pants and a sports bra, throwing on a loose white shirt and tying a knot in the front to show my belly button. I make my way downstairs where Callan is hanging off his arm in the kitchen.

Killian tosses his head back and laughs at something she says. My face falls, just as they both turn to face me.

“You ready?” Killian eyes me up and down.

I sneer at Callan with obvious superiority. “Yup.”

She huffs, her smile faltering. I push past both of them and head for the door. I don’t want it to look like I feel a certain way about them, because I don’t. I know that they’ve been

sleeping together on the regular, and besides that, I don't, and won't be sleeping with Killian again for more than one reason.

Killian catches up to me as I'm almost reaching the tent.

"Hey!" He grabs onto my arm, pausing my footing.

Breathe in and out. I don't care. I shouldn't care.

So why does it feel as though someone has punched me in my stomach? Why do I feel sick? *Maybe I am sick.*

I turn to face him, smiling. "Can we just get this over with? I haven't been on a bike, let alone been on a wheel with one."

His eyes narrow. "What's wrong?"

"What do you mean?" I ask, slowly pulling my arm out of his grip and turning back to the tent. You can't give a man like Killian ammunition; he'll only use it to shoot you straight through the heart.

"You went weird..." he mutters, just as we're passing the seating and heading straight for the center ring.

"Hey!" I ignore Killian and call out to Keaton, who is standing with Lucifer, one of the Six Demons.

Lucifer is hot for an old guy. With dark hair and a thick, dark beard, he's everything that I pictured from a *Game of Thrones* set.

Lucifer regards me up and down until it gets weird, and he disappears into the crowd after saying he'll catch Keaton later.

Keaton stares at me blankly. "What's up? I thought you trained already?"

"She did," Killian declares, wrapping his arm around my belly and tugging me into his chest. I try to wriggle my way out of his grip when Keaton notices the foreign movement.

"Is this a thing?" he asks, gesturing down to my belly. "And I'm not talking about the dried cum."

I slip out of Killian's hold. "Nope. It's not." Turning toward the wheel. "Okay, so what do I do?"

This show went as smooth as the one yesterday, only when it was time for me to hop into the wheel with Killian, I almost froze. Wearing the outfit I wore during my fire scene, I waltzed into the wheel, and pulled myself onto the swing. The Wheel of Death was dangerous without the swings, but with them it was even worse. Though the swings never moved, every time I went upside down, while Killian burned around me, was terrifying. You couldn't see it from the audience, but I was locked to a harness that was connected to the metal swing. Aside from my success in ignoring him during the scene, I've made it my mission to skip out on Killian all night.

I'm ashamed for what I've done, but I can't help it. I'm impulsive as a person, I only wish that I could have better prepared myself for how easily I would trip and fall on top of Killian Cornelii's dick. Suddenly, I see why he has no problem getting girls.

I'm mad that I've slapped a number on my head.

The show ends and I head back to the RV, quickly washing up and slipping into a dress style suit jacket with white cuffs and Nike mid-tops. It's a blend between classy and tomboy, which I've always found the style I head toward when I'm not performing.

I'm pulling open my bedroom door when Killian is standing there, freshly showered and looking extra fuckable with black jeans that have tears in the knees and the word **VALENTINO** printed in white large letters that cross from one leg to the other. He matched it with a white Calvin Klein shirt and white Nike sneakers.

"Killian," I sigh, pulling the door closed behind me. Why does he make this so hard?

"You're coming with me." He reaches for my hand, but I flinch away from him.

"Why? Can't you take Callan?" I say, shaking my head. "And it's only a few steps away."

His brows rise. "You want me to take Callan?"

I look to the ground, catching sight of his bandana tied around his wrist. I have heard about the significance of these bandanas and what they mean, though I've yet to know if it's myth or true, because if it's true, that would mean that I live with serial killers.

I lick my lips. *No*. "Yes."

His jaw flexes a few times, and I watch as his cold, distant eyes lose focus. He pushes off the wall and heads back downstairs.

Shit.

Why'd I have to say that? Maybe I was still sulking about this morning. Or maybe it's because I can't trust him and will never be able to trust him, so it's better this way. I settle for the latter and head downstairs, then outside when I see no one is there. Few minutes later, I'm at Midnight's RV where they have a fire pit burning and chairs laid out everywhere. People from the show and the workers and crew, all here drinking, laughing, chatting. Everyone but Delila, from what I can see.

I know Killian's here. I felt him before I even tried to seek him out. We're like magnetic forces whenever we're in the same vicinity, which would explain why I'm struggling so hard to stay away from him.

"Sass!" Val waves me over to where her and Maya are seated near the fire. I head over, snatching a glass of wine on the way. I take a sip, sitting down on the chair.

"So, me and Maya were just saying how tired you must be from doing so many skits..." She's right, I do have more scenes than the rest of them, but I've always liked to stay busy. I worked since I was at high school—not because I needed the money, but because I didn't like to sit still for long. Hope was more than willing to pay for my tuition and did.

"I guess I like to keep busy."

Maya chuckles. She stares off to the side of her, a drink dangling from between her fingers. I'd always found Maya beautiful. The kind that is effortless. She rolls out of bed this way.

“How’s your injury?” I ask Maya, taking a small sip of my wine. I can already feel the effects of it seeping into my brain and taking hold.

“Oh, is that what he told you?” Maya glares at me, tilting her head back to drink the rest of her cup and then stands, walking away from us.

“Ignore her.” Val rolls her eyes, waving her off. “She’s just mad that you’ve gained the attention of Trickster.”

“What?” I scoff. “I haven’t. Not any more than anyone else, anyway.”

Val doesn’t answer, so I look back at her, only to find her studying me closely. Val has long blonde hair, a small heart-shaped face and a small dimple indented into her chin.

“What?” I ask when the silence becomes too much.

“Oh, nothing.” She leans forward, pouring more wine into her cup. “Just that you have no idea—”

“Val,” Lucifer interrupts us, taking a seat on the chair where Maya was. “Don’t you have someone else to torment?”

I lean back in my chair, momentarily distracted by her words. I drink more.

When the music switches to “Love is a Bitch” by Two Feet, my eyes flutter closed and I lean back in my chair, gazing up at the bright stars twinkling in the sky. I think I preferred being alone in my room.

“Not much of a talker, huh?” Lucifer breaks through my inner thoughts.

“Hmmm.” I smile without looking at him. I know men. I know boys. They see me, and they want to fuck me. It’s why I was so immune to Killian. I’ve never had a boyfriend, though I had plenty of options. I’ve never seen the point of it. Killian, though, he snuck up on me silently, like a black mamba. “Not really.”

Lucifer must stand, because more alcohol is being poured into the glass that’s hanging between my fingers. I sit up slightly to gaze up at him. He’s wearing a ripped t-shirt, fitted

jeans, and military style boots. His beard is overgrown, but groomed, but his features are not old. I'd say he'd be mid-thirties.

He takes a seat beside me, and just as he moves, I see Callan sitting on Killian's lap near the fire.

I freeze slightly. This is why I don't lower my guard. Why I shouldn't have given him the power or satisfaction of sleeping with me, because now, he gets to talk about it. He gets to know that he has seen me naked while having every other girl that he pleases too.

I tilt my head back, swallowing my wine and relishing in the tangy dry bite that coats my throat.

"Sass?" Lucifer mutters.

Callan laughs, tilting her head back and turning in Kill's grip, wrapping her legs around him. Rage simmers deep in my belly.

"Sorry," I whisper, bringing my attention back to him. "Yeah, I'm not much of a talker. I guess being an only child will do that."

"Ah." He rests his head back against his seat. "So you're an only child? Parents?"

I shake my head, sipping more wine. "Dead."

"Sorry about that." He shuffles.

I shrug, ignoring the laughter coming from Callan across the way. I have to fight the urge to not make a scene. Then he wins. Killian is all about games, and I have no doubt that this is one of them. He told me himself that he would never choose her, so maybe I need to just remind him what he's missing by having her on his lap.

I swallow the rest of my drink, pouring another, and downing it. Liquid courage.

Lucifer is talking to another girl beside him, I recognize her as one of the Angels, I'm not really sure, and when Perse comes stumbling toward me, my hand goes out to catch her.

“Sassy!” Perse giggles, pulling me up to my feet. She looks me up and down. “I am digging that dress, girl! What you got under there?”

I laugh, the alcohol possessing me in a whole new way. I’ve been drunk a lot, but never while I’ve been in Mayhem. It was more a self-preservation reason why I didn’t, but I guess with a wounded ego, I’m feeling like the cure might be held inside a bottle of Cristal. “Pour Some Sugar On Me” by Def Leppard starts playing and I turn her in my grip, dancing. I run my fingers through my hair and pop a couple buttons off the middle of my jacket.

The laughing stops.

The chorus drops and I move my body to the beat with Perse not far behind me. I wriggle the jacket around my shoulders, not caring about everyone around, though I’m well aware all eyes are on us. I pop the last button off and flick it open as the chorus drops and swing my head back.

Perse giggles, running the palm of her hand down my belly and wriggling to the ground until she’s between my legs. I grab onto her hair as I find Killian. We’re like damn heat seekers.

He’s already watching me, with his gaze narrowed in challenge. Callan is still on his lap, her smirk mocking me.

I wink at her. And him. The trick is to never display what affects you. There are too many people who would rather torment you with your weakness, than acknowledge you for your triumphs.

The chorus comes back again, and I flick my hair around and drop to the ground just as Perse grabs the bottle of Cristal and pours it all over her belly.

I laugh, shaking my head and reaching for her. King will kill her, and me, if he comes out and sees her like this.

“Get up!” I yell into her ear, but she shakes her head. “No!”

I roll my eyes.

“Sassskiiiiiaaaaa, dance with me! You’re the only one who can beat me in a dance.”

She’s lying, but I dance with her anyway because well, because I love her, and if she’s going down, she may as well go down beside a friend. The black lace bra and boy shorts I’m wearing underneath aren’t underwear, they’re a little more modest than that, but still, a good choice for tonight since I decided to half strip. I know how it is here. How relationships will never really work because we all, for a lack of a better word, have most likely fucked each other. Perse and King are the exception and will only ever be the exception.

I drink more, as “Big Poppa” starts playing, and I swerve around, zoning in on Kyrin, who is minding his business near the fire. I usually stay far away from Kyrin. Kyrin is the type of male that you just don’t approach. It’s not that he thinks he’s too good for you—though that is part of it—it’s more that his darkness comes off as unattainable.

Tonight, though, he will have to do because he’s seated right beside Killian and Callan. I’ll make it hard for Killian to ignore me if I have to, so I move toward Kyrin. I don’t *want* to be that girl, but the noticeable dig at me by having Callan on top of him, mixed with the expensive champagne, I’m feeling a little manic.

He notices what I’m doing, his body language shifting. As I get closer and closer to their group, his obvious satisfaction flashes over his face in supreme confidence. “Hellhound,” he grins, leaning back on his chair with his arms stretching over the top of the chairs beside him.

My lips curve in a slow and sexy smirk before I turn my back on him and grind my ass into Kyrin’s crotch. I know that if Killian goes to bed with Callan tonight, in the heavily intoxicated state that I’m in right now, I will end up going to bed with another man. Or woman. Who even knows at this point.

“Magic Stick” by Lil Kim starts playing and I turn to face Killian, who is watching me dance up on a seated Kyrin, while Callan is still on his lap. He has a red lollipop in his mouth and

a slight smirk on his lips. He's challenging me. I know this. Only he doesn't know that I don't enter into contests that I don't think I'll win.

I push off Kyrin's knees and lean forward, pulling it out of his mouth while popping it into my own. Sliding back against Kyrin, I continue grinding to the beat with his hands running up my inner thigh. He squeezes around my hips, yanking me closer to him, my back to his chest.

His lips graze over my ear, my focus going straight to Killian again. The flame from the fire manages to reflect all of the sharp angles of his face. "If you don't get off my lap in three seconds, I'm going to drag you back to our RV with Kenan in tow, and we'll both fuck you until your fingernails are embedded into my wall. Trust me, baby girl, there are plenty there to show you..."

My eyes stay on Killian. His smirk gone and his hands unlatched from Callan. He obviously knows that Kyrin doesn't fuck around, and since he would have been expecting me to use Keaton or Kenan to get to him, he's probably thrown off.

I smirk. "One."

Killian holds my stare defiantly.

"Two."

I turn to Kyrin, leaning into his lips. His tattooed hands drag up my back as he leans forward.

"Th—" A hand grips around my wrist, yanking me off Kyrin. I crash into Killian's chest. Tilting my head up to face him, I raise my eyebrows. "What are you doing?"

Killian's jaw clenches, a smirk touching the corner of his mouth. He leans down to my ear. "You want Kyrin?"

I freeze. What is he doing?

I don't answer.

"You think I want Callan?" he further adds, inhaling deeply into the crook of my neck. Cold shivers break out over my flesh at his touch. "Then let's go, Hellhound. Let's play a

game.” He unleashes me, grabbing a sulking Callan off the chair.

Killian nudges his head at Kyrin. “Time to go, fucker.”

Kyrin claps his hands. “Finally. Some fun up in this bitch.”

I want to ask what I missed, but when Kyrin picks me and my discarded clothes up off the ground while flinging me over his shoulder, I’m almost certain he’s answered the question for me. He’s drunk, or has been drinking, so his attitude has shifted to one that I can handle.

The RV door swings open and Maya, Kenan, and Val are inside, with Kyrin, Callan, and Killian stepping in.

I know that whatever the fuck happens once I set foot into the bus will change something.

Probably for the worst.

But how can I claim that this is who I am and what I am if I don’t show that this is what I am?

I take the first step.

The bus is hotboxed with weed, smoke thick as sin. I can see Maya and Kenan on the sofa, sucking on a blunt between them, with Val kissing Maya’s neck.

I challenged Killian, and he’s about to end the fucking game and use my ass as a victory flag.

Killian takes a seat on the kitchen counter with his legs dangling off, lighting the end of his cigarette. I ball my fist as Callan stands in between his spread legs.

He opens them wider for her, his eyes landing on mine. “Trippin” by Khalid and Buddy starts playing, and he slowly lowers his mouth to hers, blowing smoke into her mouth. My stomach rolls. I feel sick.

I watch as his hand, the hand that I’m so acquainted with, massages the front of her throat.

Someone brushes against my back as lips come to the crook of my neck. “Use me, baby girl. Harness your power and bring him down.”

I lick my lips and reach backward, tilting my head for Kyrin to bite down on the flesh of my neck. I don't wince. Kyrin's hand comes up to my shoulder, brushing my jacket off until it's pooled at my feet.

Turning around to face Kyrin, I search his corpse-like expression. "Do you prefer girls or guys?"

His lips curve. "They're all the same when they're dead."

I stand on my tippy toes, my lips brushing his. "Answer the question."

He pulls my bottom lip between his teeth. "Girls."

I lick him across his lips, leaning back. "You're so tormented."

He glares at me. "All the best kinds are."

I flick my tongue under his sharp jaw, and then slowly start trailing my tongue down his chest, my hand tucking beneath his pants. His finger comes up and trails down my breast, my nipple hardening under his touch. This is easy. Kyrin is just like how it feels to sleep with every other guy. Bleak. Dead.

Killian was different. *Why is he different?*

With that thought, I squeeze my eyes closed. *I can't do this.*

Kyrin leans into my lips, his words moving over mine as his tongue works my lips. "You should run now, or I won't let you out of here, but know this..." He pauses, and my eyes open onto his. Pain flashes over me when I realize how stupid I was coming here. I let myself feel something for someone who could never reciprocate it. I felt something for someone who sees women as disposable. Kyrin shakes his head. "I'm only telling you this because I'm drunk as fuck and you're looking lost. You're wasting your time. Build a wall, but this time use your secrets and pain as the foundation on where you build it, that way, it won't crumble. Never underestimate the power of pain." He pauses, leaning in until his nose touches mine. "Run."

I swipe my dress up from the floor and shrug it on, bolting for the door. I don't want to see whatever else is happening, especially with Killian and Callan. The Brothers, Fathers, and Kiznitch in general aren't like civilians. They see things through jaded glass. What doesn't make sense to most, does to them.

Tearing open the door to our RV, I jog upstairs to my bedroom and flick the lock closed. My body shakes as I drop to the ground. I bring my knees up to my chest and rest my forehead. *In and out. In and out.* Attempting to slow down my erratic breathing, the walls start closing in around me.

"I don't want to be here, Mama..." I whispered, running a rag over the pristine glass table.

Mama turned to face me, her hands coming to her slender waist. Mama was looking frail—more than I had ever seen her before.

"I know you don't want to, Zaika, but it's part of your father and I's job to be here. Go and fix yourself up a bit so we can take you to Mayhem when we finish up. How does that sound?"

It sounded fun. I always wanted to go to Mayhem. I saw photos of it from my ma and pa, but never would have thought I'd ever be able to see it for myself. With my own eyes.

I ran up the stairs and into the guest room, rummaging through my suitcase until I found a little red dress. It had long sleeves and came down to my knees. It was my favorite. Papa didn't really like it. He would say that red and black were grown up colors, but Mama always fought him on that.

I slipped the dress on and tied a matching red ribbon around my head.

Tonight, I got to play with destiny, and I couldn't wait.

I broke myself out of my memory lapse and reach for the covers from my bed, pulling them down until they're wrapped around my body. Curling into a ball on the floor, I squeeze my eyes shut.



Ten

Killian

My door slams against the wall in my room, and I jump up from my bed, my gun cocked and pointed on Delila. “Jesus, Kill.”

“Sorry.” I lower it, tucking it inside the waistband of my briefs and running my hands through my hair. “What do you want?”

“I need you all out front now so I can brief everyone on what is happening from here. And Killian?” She glares, gesturing to my body. “Come dressed this time, please.”

I drop back onto my bed, my hands on my face.

A slender arm snakes around my waist. “Mmm, come back to bed.”

I push her away. “Get out.”

Callan flinches away from me. “Wow, Kill. No problem.” She picks up her clothes off the floor and I don’t know she’s

gone until my door slams shut.

“You know...” Maya murmurs from the other side of the bed, shuffling up onto her elbows. I turn over my shoulder to face her. “You don’t have to be that awful to her.”

“Yeah.” I glare at Maya. “I do.”

She reaches to the bedside table and grabs one of my smokes, resting it between her lips.

“What time is it?” Val mutters, rubbing the sleep from her eyes on the other side of Maya.

“Early, but Delila has called a meeting. She’s going to brief us on what’s happening today.” I stand, reaching for my jeans. I slide them on, leaving the button undone. I point to the door. “Both of you, get out.”

They look up at me with puppy eyes. I cringe, my jaw tensing. “Now.”

Val grumbles in obvious amusement as she slowly crawls out of my bed, but Maya remains, smoking her cigarette. I get it. Maya has always thought that she was on a pedestal with me. Mainly because I put her there, but the way she acted last night pissed me off, and then bringing the party to my bed irked me even more.

“Get out, May.”

She flinches. “What?”

I roll my eyes, snatching my phone from the bedside table, before making my way downstairs. I’m running my hand through my hair when I spot King at the door, ready to leave.

“You know, I watched them all slowly climb out from your room this morning, and they reminded me of stray cats.”

Biting a cigarette between my teeth, I snatch my Ray-Bans off the table. “What? Don’t act like you’re surprised.” A smirk is on my mouth before I can fight it.

King pushes the door open and we slowly make our way to the tent. “Nah, not at all, but I was waiting for Sass to come down.”

I freeze, my fingers flexing around my cigarette. I drag it out slowly, puffing out a cloud of smoke.

“What?” I know he’s tormenting me. “She didn’t come? Don’t tell me... she’s not like the rest of the easy girls who go to bed with you no matter who is already there? I’m shocked. Really. A girl who looks like that but has morals?” he mocks, pressing a hand to his chest.

“Shut up, motherfucker.”

King lets out a loud laugh just as we enter the tent. Everyone is already here, waiting. Delila stands in the center of the ring, glaring at me.

“Well, nice of you to finally join us, Trickster. Tell me, are any of the other three girls I saw in your bed this morning joining us? Including my daughter?”

My jaw clenches. *Bitch*. Turning toward the movement I catch in the corner of my eye, I find Saskia sitting beside Kenan and Perse, her knees drawn up to her chest. Slowly she looks up at me, her eyes rimmed red and face clear of makeup. Fuck. How can she look even more beautiful without makeup on?

I wince again when I notice she looks upset.

Flipping Delila off, I bring my attention back to her. I have to force myself to not whip out a smart-ass reply. Usually I would. But something deep inside of me doesn’t want to.

Fuck knows why.

I drop down on a chair in the front row for the direct purpose that it’s directly opposite Sass.

“So,” Delila says. “I’m not waiting on anyone else. The plan for this morning is that we will be taking the 747 and flying straight to Kiznitch. The cruise ship will be traveling back to the US to ensure that our equipment is there by the time, or around the time, that we fly back.”

“Wait!” Lain, one of the Seven Angels raises her fingers. “Are we not doing the international tour?”

Delila shakes her head. “No. I will be honest with you all and say that my planning this was to get you all out of the United States while The Four Fathers and rest of Kiznitch put plans into action, but now something has changed and we are needed back at Kiznitch.”

“As in Romania? As in our motherland?” Lain further asks. My brain tunes out shit that I already know. Without even realizing it, I find Saskia. My stomach clenches when I find her already staring, her snowstorm eyes disarming me. Her skin is flawless, her cheeks pinched red. Her lips are soft and swollen, but not in a way that makes you think she’s filled them with synthetic bullshit, but more in a way that makes you realize she’s just some crazy perfected witch created from the wicked. If Saskia was the spawn of Satan, she was obviously his favorite.

I stay focused on her, kicking my leg out and slowly raising my cigarette to my mouth. She quickly turns away from me, whispering something to Kenan. Kenan leans forward slightly, glaring at me, before leaning back in his chair. Sass stands at that moment, ambling out of the tent. Delila doesn’t flinch as she continues to yap on about whatever the fuck it is we’re doing, but I’ve long since drowned her out.

Kenan’s eyes come to mine.

I mouth, “*What?*”

He flips me off before going back to Delila. Smart ass motherfucker. I should beat his ass. But I won’t. Instead, I stand from my chair. This time Delila does stop talking.

“Killian, I swear to all things that are holy, if you don’t sit the fuck down.”

“Well good thing nothing near us is holy, Delila. King will fill me in.”

I jog out of the tent in search of Sass. Workers are shuffling around outside, packing up loose items and folding them away. Their RV comes into view and before I can stop myself, I’m heading straight for it.



Eleven

Saskia

Water from the faucet pours into the tub, layering the room with thick condensation. Emptying almost an entire bag of bath salts, I toss the packet onto the counter and grab the lavender oil, drizzling in a few drops. Swiping my eyes, I snuffle, attempting to calm myself down. When I was a kid, my mom would make me a bath with lavender and rose oil in an attempt to relax me. She said that I carried a lot of rage, but that I carried it well.

“If you’re carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders, then you better use that weight as the material in which you build your life with.”

My mother was wise, but I’ve come to think of death like this. When people are too precious for earth, God takes them early. The world can be so broken that those who are too precious to walk it, are taken.

I screw the lid back onto the oil, clutching my towel in my hand.

“You really should lock your door.” My heartbeat quickens at Killian’s voice, but I refuse to turn around. Leaning forward, I place the little bottle onto the edge of the bath.

“You really should have a shower, Killian, I can smell your last meal from here.” I clamp my mouth shut as the final word flies out. Annoyed with myself for showing my hand.

He must make his way farther into the bathroom, because his hand flexes around the front of my throat. My skin prickles at his proximity. At his touch. It soothes that pain that I have rooted deep inside of me. But what if the same hands that soothe me are the very ones that harm me?

His thumb massages the line of my throat as he tilts my head backward so I’m looking up at him upside down. “What’s wrong?” He’s not wearing a shirt, as per usual. K I Z N I T C H is tattooed over his chest in small Old English script.

I turn away from him. “Nothing.” Standing in the tub, I turn to face him, the level of the bath giving me more height, even though Kill is a couple inches above six-foot and I’m barely five-foot-three. I grip onto the towel and unwrap myself, but I keep my eyes on his.

Tossing the towel onto the floor, I sink into the bath and sigh as the hot water pinches my skin.

“You’re mad.” He sits on the edge of the tub. “You gonna tell me why, or are you gonna be a girl and dance around the fact until I figure it out myself?”

“I’m not mad,” I answer honestly. Because I’m not. “It’s nothing.” It’s not nothing, but I can’t tell him any more than I have. I have to conceal my hand. Sometimes protecting ourselves means hurting ourselves in the process.

His hand comes to my chin as he squeezes roughly, casing me out. I scan his face. His jawline is cut impeccably flawless, with a blade as sharp as a razor. His cheekbones stride classically across his face in perfect symmetry. His eyebrows

are expressive, curving and dipping whenever he's deep in thought. His lips, well. His lips are something else entirely. The edges soft, dipping into a cupid bow. Everything about Killian is powerful and addictive.

His tongue sneaks out, dampening his bottom lip, the piercing on his tongue catching my eye.

"Did you have fun last night?" I need to distract myself from wanting to pull him into the bath and hate fuck him into tonight.

He leans down, his lips grazing over mine. I melt, slipping under the water a little more. "No," he mumbles before leaning back. His hand drops from around my face. "You know that I've fucked all of those girls, right? And have multiple times. It's what this lifestyle is all about and I was raised in this here, so I don't know any other way."

"Why are you telling me this?" I don't look at him, reaching for the soap and squeezing the bottle into the palm of my hand.

"Because I feel like what happened last night is playing a part in why you're pissed."

I leer up at him innocently, as I rub the soap over my breasts. "I'm not mad."

His eyes fall to the movement. He smirks. "Sure about that?"

I shrug. "I'm sure."

He pauses, pinching his lips between his teeth. "We'll see." Just when I think he's going to do or say something. Anything. Maybe tell me what happened last night, he turns and leaves.

"Lock your fucking door."



Twelve

Saskia

The flight was long. Longer than I wanted it to be. I slept for the better part of the trip, but it still felt long. I still can't get over the fact that the founding families own a damn 747.

I'm gathering up all of my crap after landing when P hooks her arm in mine. "We all have to get our tattoos while we're here."

I freeze, one hand on the strap of my backpack and the other clutching my phone.

"Why?"

We start walking toward the exit. "Well, because you can only get the tattoo here. Something about the ink, and then there's this whole ceremony thing that we all have to go through—" We make our way down the stairs. I shiver as the cool air whips around me. I am well aware of the ceremony and what it entails, but I didn't think we would do it right now.

Amongst everything else that seems to be going on, getting marked seems diminutive.

Four jacked out black Range Rovers are parked in front of us. Men dressed in dark suits and dark glasses standing guard at each one.

“So, you’re in?” Perse asks, nudging me.

“Sure,” I say, just to get her off my ass about it. Truthfully, I don’t want to be here, and I don’t know why. I think I’m ready to be back in the US and back to usual touring. Usual shows. I don’t want to be here, in Kiznitch. I just wish I knew why my stomach and heart ached being on what’s supposed to be my homeland.

“Tell me more. More. More. More.”

The walls are tightening around me, the closer they get, the less I can breathe.

“More.”

“I don’t know!” I scream so loud my eardrums pop.

“Sass! In here...” Killian calls out. Our tension swallows everyone and everything around us whole. “Now.”

“Just go.” Perse pushes me toward him. “He’s not going to let up.”

I slide my glasses over my eyes and follow his orders. This once. Mainly because I don’t want to cause a scene in the middle of an airstrip. As soon as I’m in front of him, he grabs at my fingers and leads us around the Range Rover that I thought we were getting into.

“Where are you taking me?”

He pulls out a set of keys from his pocket and points.

I pause. I know the extent of their money, but wealth is hard to digest when you’ve been fed poverty all your life.

The matte black Lambo lights up as he points. “Get in.”

“Why?” I ask skeptically, making my way to the passenger side. “Why not ask someone else?”

He pauses, reaching for his smokes in the back of his jeans. He puts one in his mouth. “Why do you always analyze everything?”

“Like you don’t?” I throw back at him.

He stills, then slowly flicks open *my* Zippo and lights the tip of his cigarette. “Get in the car, Hellhound.”

I sigh, taking in my environment. The other cars have all started to pull away, displaying an airport in the distance.

“Fine.” I pull the handle until the door slides up. Sinking into lavish leather, I try really hard to ignore the way it buries my skin with its velvet touch. He slips into the driver’s seat, his cigarette polluting the prominent scent of freshly stitched leather.

He pushes the car to start and the deep rumble of the engine vibrates beneath us. Pushing the gear into first, he drives us out of the airstrip, whizzing behind the line of affluent and exclusive cars.

“I don’t know shit about you, but you said you’ve been here before?” I don’t know if that was a question or a statement.

“Hmmm,” I answer. “Yeah, I have. When I was little.” I turn to look at him, but he simply puffs on his smoke and hits the stereo. “Why am I here?”

He tilts his head to stare at me. “I’m curious.”

“About what?” I ask, though he’s still watching me closely. I shift my attention to the road ahead of us. “You might want to watch where you’re driving...”

He smirks. “Ever seen *Fast and Furious*?”

I shuffle uncomfortably. “Yes, and you’re not Dominic Toretto.”

He winds his window down and flicks his smoke out just as the car swerves into the other lane and he drops the gear

back down to second, flying past the line of cars.

“Oh my god, Killian!” I grab onto the handle of the door as he continues to gain speed, along with my heart rate. A semi-truck is coming closer and closer, in direct line of us, but there’s nowhere that Killian can swerve into because the line of cars are driving too close together.

“Killian...” I warn, my palms sweating and heart thumping.

“What are you hiding from me?”

“What?” I glare at him sideways.

He stares back at me through narrowed slits. “Answer the question because I know that you heard me.”

“Nothing!” I yell. The truck is flashing his high beams at us now, signaling us to move.

“Why do I not fucking trust you?” Killian’s jaw clenches and he cuts in front of the SUV at the front of the line, just in time for the truck to pass us, honking.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?” I scream. I want to hit him.

“Fear acts as a truth serum for humans.” He looks over at me briefly and then back to the road as he finally drops to a more acceptable speed. “Why do you think people are tortured? The fact that they’re going to die, instills fear inside of them.”

“What has that got to do with me?”

He shakes his head. “It has everything to do with you.”

I ignore him for the rest of the trip, somewhat annoyed with his cryptic messages and questions. Around an hour and a half later, I watch as the trees that lined the road slowly start shifting into long gold pillars with light bulbs at the top. The grass looks greener, bushes groomed. As we get closer and closer to the city, the region begins to look medieval, only more opulent. I shuffle up, leaning back against the leather. I have been here before, but I was so young that I don’t remember much of the trip itself. The pillars start to become

more frequent, when a large statue with the letters KIZNITCH embedded into the stone comes into view. The statue is of four suited men, standing proudly as they guard the city. The street that leads you into Kiznitch is cobblestone, with freshly blooming flowers on the sidewalks. People shuffle around the place slowly, moving about their day. A large waterfall behind a line of stores catches my eye, but I only get a brief glimpse of the water crashing into the giant pool beneath it as we continue driving through the city.

People stop and stare with a mixture of expressions flashing over their faces.

Shock.

Lust.

Hunger.

Beauty.

Games.

Killian hooks down a side street.

“Where are we all staying here?”

He chuckles. “At one of the founding houses is where we will all be staying. Delila has her own plantation here, and all the others do also.”

“I’ll stay with Kenan.” I’d feel more comfortable with him or Perse, but I know that Perse and King are still in that nice, honeymoon stage, so they probably don’t want someone hanging off them for however long that we’re here for.

“Like fuck you are.”



I drop down onto the bed that Killian put me into, curling my legs beneath my butt. The Corneli plantation is oddly haunting. Cold brick held up by Victorian style windows, but that really offers only a small detail of what it’s really like

inside. The walls are half white and half dark burgundy, with grey trimmings and aged drapes. There's a four-post bed in the room that I'm staying in and an old wood fireplace on the opposite side. A large dresser and a closet sit on the other side, right beside a door that leads into a bathroom. To the left of me are white lace curtains that hide the small balcony which overlooks the entirety of the back yard. In the yard, there're old statues, and a large stone swimming pool with bright blue lights illuminating from the bottom. It hasn't been lived in, in probably years, but it's quite obviously been kept up. Killian also wasn't kidding about the founding houses. I think they're all in a circle. Each plantation style home is acres away from each other, with a large forest right in the middle of them all. In front of the Cornelia house is the number II. I know the complexity of The Four Brothers of Kiznitch and the world that they operate in, but I never completely immersed myself in finding out what a lot of the terminology or rituals that happen really mean. I'm guessing that II means his standing down the line, with King being I. I would have rather stayed at any of the other houses, and I tried to fight him to not stay here, but he didn't budge. Eventually, I gave up so long as I stayed in the wing that he wasn't staying in. He agreed.

There's a knock on the door before it's swinging open. I shuffle up onto my elbows as Val makes her way into the room. "Hey!" She kicks closed the door with her foot. Handing me what looks to be a folded robe, she chews on her lip nervously. "For the ritual that will be happening tonight. Usually, you have to wear your family crest, but we couldn't find one for Royal, and Delila didn't want to talk about why, so she gave you this one."

I unfold it, spreading it out over my thighs. It looks to drop down to my ankles and has a string near my collarbone where it ties. A hoodie is folded beneath and when I flip it over, I freeze.

"It says Cornelia."

Val's eyes flash with sympathy. "I know. I don't know why she did that, but it's what you have to wear. Hey..." She takes a seat on the bed beside me. "Who are your family?"

Obviously, you're Kiznitch, but why the secrecy with your bloodline?"

After running the tips of my finger over the blood red lettering that spells out CORNELII, I shrug. "My family wasn't very well known in Kiznitch. They were at the bottom of the food chain."

"Oh, well that could be it." She brushes me off before flopping back onto my bed.

I internally tell her to get out. I don't know when it was that we became friends, but she's obviously getting comfortable with it. Immensely.

"Are you bi-sexual?"

I turn quickly to face her, to make sure I caught her question right.

"Ah, no. Why?" I ask, pushing the robe drama to the side for now.

"Well, I think I might be."

Just as I'm about to open my mouth, my phone vibrates in my pocket. "Shit. I forgot to turn global roaming off."

I see it's Hope, so I hit ANSWER. "Hey?" Kicking off the bed, I make my way to the balcony door and step outside.

"Sass, tell me you're not in Kiznitch."

I gulp.

Val starts kicking off her shoes and crawling up my bed. I hope that the reason why she asked me that wasn't because she wanted anything with me. Nope. No. "I am."

There's shuffling on the other side of the phone. "I'm coming over. I will text you when I land and give you the details of where I want you to meet me."

"What?" I grip onto the railing. "Hope?"

The line goes dead. I bring the phone away from my ear. "What the fuck?"

"Everything okay?" Val asks, coming out onto the balcony.

I look up at her from my phone, figuring it's probably just something to do with the fact that I'm in Kiznitch and Hope's in America. She can be dramatic when she wants to be. "Yeah, everything is fine. Val?" I raise my eyebrows. "What are you doing here?"

She tucks her long blonde hair behind one ear. "Sorry. I know you're really close with Perse, but." Her cheeks flush red and her eyes meet mine. "Okay." She exhales. "I've only got a very small pool of friends, because of my life in general, and one I'm sleeping with, and the other is not interested in this drama."

"So—" I pause, turning to face her. "Wait! You're sleeping with Maya?"

She jumps up onto the balcony railing. "Yes. But, please shhh."

"Oh wow. I thought what I saw the other night was just—"

"—Kiznitch?" she interferences, a smirk on her mouth.

I chuckle, leaning against the railing beside her. "Yeah, Kiznitch."

She shakes her head, looking down at the floor. "No. Okay, so I've been with girls before. A lot. Not only for the show, but because you know, alcohol and stupidity. I used to mess around a bit, but it was never serious. It was just drunk shenanigans."

"Are we going to need alcohol for this conversation? I might need a shower first because that flight was brutal."

Val laughs. "You're right." She kicks off the railing and lands on her feet. "I'll be back in an hour with alcohol and snacks." She turns her back on me and starts for the door. Pausing, she turns her head over her shoulder. "Killian is known to be a bit of a dick to people he doesn't have time for. Don't take it to heart." Before I can answer her, she's gone. *Sex is not a guarantee for commitment.*

Heading back into my room, I make a beeline for the bathroom, filling up the tub that sits in the corner. There's a

black shower with red fittings, and soaps of all sorts which fill the empty parts of the cabinetry.

After a quick bath, I slip on a pair of tight shorts and a loose Thrasher shirt. I'm making my way back into the room when the door swings open and Val steps through with a handful of snacks and a bottle of vodka. "So, I brought the vodka because I might need it."

I'm trying to hide my laughter behind the fishtail braid I'm doing in my hair. "It's fine. I have a feeling I might need it too."

Val tosses everything onto my bed and dives on, twisting the bottle cap off. "Okay." She takes a swig, swiping her mouth with the back of her hand. "So, it all started on New Year's Eve when Killian broke her heart."

I wriggle into the bed, taking the bottle of vodka off her and taking a swig. "He did?"

Val turns over her shoulder, glaring at me. "What, that's surprising to you? Everyone knows that if Killian wanted her, she would have been his a long time ago." Tilting her head, I watch as her lips wrap around the rim of the bottle. "I don't know if you know this, but Killian is relentless when he wants something."

I snort, snatching the bottle from her. This time I take three big gulps. "I know."

"Because he wants you." It wasn't a question. It was a statement.

"I wouldn't say that..." I answer truthfully. "I think he's more annoyed because I challenge him."

"True." Val nods her head. "You do challenge him, but it doesn't annoy him, Sass, it turns him on because no one does it."

Without wanting to dwell on her words, I pick up the bag of Cheetos and pop them open. "We're here for you, not me." We slip into a relaxed conversation, going back and forth between Killian and my troubles with him and hers with Maya.

Val lifts up the almost-empty bottle of vodka and my brain swims with the effects of it. “I don’t think this was a good idea.”

I giggle, shaking my head. “I agree.”

The door opens on the side and I slowly find myself glaring at a smirking Killian. “Am I interrupting something? Because fucking good.” His facetious tone isn’t quiet.

“No, you’re not,” I disregard him, fighting the urge to roll my eyes.

“Get up. We’re going out.”

“What?” Val turns over her shoulder. “What do you mean? We can’t! We’ve had too much to drink.”

Killian steps in farther, picking up the bottle of Grey Goose and tossing it to the side. “We’re going out.”

Val groans. “Do we have to play?”

Killian’s eyes come to mine. “Always.”

Val rolls off the bed and heads for the door. “Fine. I’ll need your driver, though. See you all there.”

Killian leans against the edge of the bed. “I’m a little bit too tipsy.”

The corner of his mouth tips up, exposing his Colgate white teeth. “I see that.”

“What’s” —hiccup— “so funny?”

“You’re a pain in my ass.” He reaches for my hand, pulling me to my feet. He takes in every curve and exposed area of my body. “But you do need to put some pants on.”

I shake my head. “No, it’s too hot.”

“In here.” He points to the ground. “But not out there.”

I do my best to walk straight to my closet and take down a pair of yoga pants. Stripping off my shorts, I’m putting my feet into one of the holes when I feel Killian behind me.

His chest against my back.

I stop breathing. “What are you doing, Killian?”

His hand moves to my belly, his fingers spreading out. Slowly, he travels up to the front of my throat and clenches so hard that I’m instantly cut off of air. He yanks my head backward. “The games you played with Kyrin are not happening tonight.”

I attempt to pull myself out of his grip. “You can’t tell me what I can and can’t do, considering—” I finally step out of his grip and shrug on the yoga pants. “You fuck everyone.”

His hand grabs my arm and he spins me around, pushing me backward until I’m crashing against the wall. He knees my legs wide and presses himself into me, one hand against my throat and the other carefully caressing my cheek.

“Do you want to fuck him?” His eyes search mine before dropping to my lips.

He licks his, the piercing in his tongue catching the light. “Because babe, if you wanna fuck him, you can come back here and fuck him. Otherwise, stay off his dick.”

“Why does it matter?” I ask, challenging him.

I’ve slept with Killian one too many times already, so I know that I’m in a very vulnerable position nestled against him the way that I am, but I can’t seem to let go. I can’t seem to liberate the attachment I somehow feel toward him. It’s annoying, feeling a certain way about someone who you have conditioned yourself to hate. Killian is filthy, but I’ve been bathing in him for so long, that when I do walk away, I’ll be doing so with remnants of his poison pumping through my veins.

The door opens behind Killian, but he doesn’t move.

“Yo! We’re heading out, so if you’re gonna fuck, do it quickly.”

“Ky...” Killian calls out to him, but his eyes don’t stray from mine. I am well aware that I didn’t answer his question, nor did I deny wanting to sleep with Kyrin. But I don’t. I thought that much was at least obvious the other night when I walked out on their group orgy. “Come ‘ere.”

Kyrin doesn't answer, and I don't want to release my attention from Killian, afraid that he might see it as a tap out.

Kyrin steps beside us.

“Touch her.”

Kyrin scoffs. “I've told you. I'm not getting in the middle of your guys' little games. It's not going to end well.”

“Maybe,” I finally whisper, my attention remaining on Killian. “But it's fun while it's happening, so.” I narrow my eyes at Killian. His jaw ticks slightly. So faintly, I would have missed it had I not been on high alert right now. “Touch me.”

The corner of Killian's lip curls up.

Kyrin coughs. “As much as I'd love to entertain this game, we have to leave because people are waiting for us in the car, and I wasn't fucking kidding when I said that last night only happened because I was drunk. I don't fuck often. Unlike your choice in men.”

Killian pushes off the wall and grabs my hand, tugging me behind him. “She's drunk.”

We start heading down the corridor and down the twin staircase. The foyer drips in opulence, just like everything else these boys touch. Seriously, who owns a private 747? Before we're out front. Killian leads me toward his Lambo as Kyrin slips into the Maserati behind him.

“What's with all the flashy cars?” I ask, reaching for the door handle.

Killian slides in, pushing it to start. “We have cars here and in the US. These are nothing like the ones we have back home.”

He's pulling us out of the long driveway when I turn to face him. “So you guys spend a lot of time here?” Why am I talking?

He drops it down to second gear and we jet forward, my head slamming against the headrest. “Yeah.”

“Why are you moody all of a sudden?”

Again, why am I talking?

“I’m not,” he answers, and turns the stereo on, cutting off any other possible conversations.

I’m confused. I think that much is obvious. Especially to him, but mainly to myself. I’m mature enough to understand that we can’t seem to not have sex, but that doesn’t mean I have to fuel it. I need to learn to push away.

Keep my distance.

I can acknowledge that we’re doing this song and dance, but I can always hit pause.

Twenty minutes later, we’re pulling up to a parking lot. I recognize it slightly, only it looks a lot different than what it used to be.

A dark and lilac archway that’s split in the middle is curved in a rainbow, with the words “Midnight Mayhem” written over the top. The paint is faded and chipped, a complete contrast to what it used to look like when I came here as a kid. The gating around the entry is the same purple cement that leads all the way around Mayhem’s grounds.

“What?” I whisper, reaching for my belt as all the rest of the cars pull up beside us. “What are—” I pause.

“What’s the matter?” Killian growls softly. “Scared of a little Mayhem?”

I turn to face him, blinking continuously. “I don’t want to be here.”

“Why?” he asks, his head tilting. His tone is condescending. As if he already knows the reason as to why I don’t want to be here.

“Because...” I answer, my throat clogged. “I don’t want to.”

He seems to ponder over my reaction before he slips out of the car.

“Shit.” I inhale and exhale, closing my eyes.

“This is where they come.”

I squeezed my mom’s hand as I licked my ice cream. I loved coming to Mayhem, but I even more loved that I got to wear my pretty red dress.

“No.” My mother shook her head. “I don’t agree with this nor will I ever.”

My father kneeled down in front of me. I loved Papa. He was always gentle and handled me with care. Right then, though, I found myself stepping closer to Mama.

“Oh, how your mom is wrong, Zaika.”

I was confused, because his touch was soft, yet the tone of his voice made me feel uneasy. How is she wrong?

“Wow!” Killian’s hands come to my upper arms and he turns me around to face him. Callan is behind him, staring at me up and down in obvious distaste. “The fuck has you so much on edge? If this is what you’re like when you’re drunk, you’re never drinking again.”

Callan scoffs, rolling her eyes and hooking her arm into Perse’s. “I need to talk with you about something.”

“Why are you so hellbent on tormenting me?” I ask Killian, falling into step beside him as we make our way to the abandoned amusement park. Something inside of me stirs, but I’m perplexed as to why.

Killian grins but doesn’t answer.

“That smirk won’t work on me.” Only I’m a damn paradox because it has so far.

“Killian!” I reach for his arm and he stops, just short of the entrance. Turning to face me, his focus moves between my eyes and my lips.

“Because I can.”

I shove past him, running to catch up with Kenan. I can’t do the push and pull between him and I for much longer,

especially not when I still have the effects of the alcohol rushing through me.

“Sass!” Killian calls out behind me, but I ignore him. I don’t want to so much as pay him any attention. Wrapping my arms around my torso, something dark clouds over me as I take that first step into the park.

“Ma! Can we get fairy floss?” I ran toward the stall, only to stop short in my tracks.

There was a man. In a suit. I bent my head until I could see his face.

“Ma!” I yelled, turning around to find Mama.

I didn’t have to look long because Mama was right behind me, her shoulders square. “What the fuck do you want?” Her face paled even more because her sickness was getting worse. So much worse. For the first time ever, I didn’t just feel sad that Mama was sick.

I felt scared.

Sweat trickles down my face as I try to blank out the memory flashes.

“You okay?” Kenan comes up beside me, watching me skeptically. I look to Keaton who is standing beside him. Keaton and I have never spoken before, but apparently that’s not unusual. Keaton is dark. As an individual, his soul is damned, you can see it anytime his eyes land on you. Much like Kyrin, only different shades of black. There’s something holding Kyrin back, with Keaton, it’s as though he’s like this by choice. As if he happily handed his soul over to the Devil.

I nod, licking my lips. “Yeah.” Kenan is momentarily distracted by something, or someone, over my shoulder.

I turn to face Killian, who is watching me carefully. “You been here before?”

How could he...

“Once,” I grind out, passing all of the abandoned rides.

The carousel remains in the middle of the main path, standing out against all other rides due to its sheer size. We continue down as we pass the old food stands and small tents where there’d been tarot readers, crystal readers, and even psychics. I pause when I see the old gold and red merry-go-round. The horses look the same, only aged. The old gold paint and bright red saddles have faded to a soft sepia, as if the rain had washed out all of the color. It was beautiful once. This whole park was.

“You know, Midnight Mayhem used to come back to perform in Kiznitch every six months when I was a kid.” Killian makes his way onto one of the horses, jumping the small gate.

I follow, climbing over the metal gate and landing on my feet. “I remember.”

Killian shakes his head, staring at me from above. “Why do I get the feeling you’re here to test me?”

“Test you?” I ask, my eyebrows raised. “Why would I be here to test you?”

Killian pulls out his bandana from his back pocket. He comes closer, his thumb pressing against my bottom lip. “Because you’re the one test I can’t solve.”

I hold my breath.

“Kill!” King hollers out from behind us. “Play time.”

Killian smirks, and I watch as he ties the bandana behind the back of his head, hiding his mouth. “Ready?”

“For what?” I ask, following him back out of the gate and down the dusty path with overgrown grass.

“The rules are simple.” Killian jumps up onto an old wooden table once we’re back with everyone, his military boots landing with a thud.

“Here we go...” Perse grumbles, folding her arms.

“What’s happening?” I whisper to her, making sure to watch Killian closely.

Killian glares at me. “Hide and seek, only you hide, and we seek...” Killian gestures to the three other brothers, as well as the Six Demons and the few others who work with us.

All the girls—and Kenan—shuffle in our spot.

“Your seeker is your master for twenty-four hours. You are completely at his mercy.”

I don’t like this game.

Perse rolls her eyes and takes a seat on the ground. “Well, I’m not running this time.”

I look around at them all, hoping that someone, anyone except Killian, takes me.

Killian jumps down from the table. I jump at his sudden proximity. So close. He smirks at me, his eyes widening like a fucking maniac. “Run.”

“I—” Val grabs my hand and shoves me forward, and before I can protest, we’re running toward the back of the Ferris wheel.

“Val!” I call out when she doesn’t stop running.

I pause, sucking in deep breaths as I take in my surroundings. Ducking and dodging old fallen plaster boards and tins of paint, I pull open a black curtain that must have been a back entrance for one of the rides. Old furniture is hidden by white sheets, spiderwebs strewn throughout.

I stop walking. Thousands and thousands of copies of myself peer back at me at different angles. A mirror maze. Cool, but not because I might get lost. Being lost has to be better than being at Killian’s mercy, so I do the next dumbest thing that I have done aside from sleeping with him. I get lost in the maze.

I should turn around, but when I hear someone scream from being captured, I jolt forward and take a hard left turn, desperate to have a few seconds alone with my thoughts. Why do I feel this way about Killian? He is everything that I should

hate, and I do, underneath it all, but I can't seem to shake the feeling that he's only using me. He will get bored of me and move on, because he's that kind of guy.

I keep walking until I freeze. Spinning around, I try to backtrack my footsteps. "Hated this fucking thing." After walking another five minutes, I give up and try to get to the start by coming from the end.

My phone vibrates in my hand and I swipe it unlocked, seeing it's Killian.

Kill: Where are you

I type out my reply. **Not telling.**

I smirk, while continuing to aimlessly walk around the maze. I want to get out, but I also don't want to be captured by my nemesis.

My phone goes off again.

Killian: Don't test me.

Before I can stop my fingers from flying over my phone, I type out, **Or what?**

He replies almost instantly. **You really wanna know?**

I pause, a stupid smile on my face. This. This is why I'm angry with myself.

I'm typing out a reply and hooking another right when I slam into a hard chest. Traveling up the granite, tall exterior, I'm not at all surprised to find Killian glaring down at me. He tugs down his bandana so it's resting around his neck, flashing me a cocky grin. "Answer my question..."

"What question?" I ask, backing up until I'm slamming into a mirror.

Both of his hands come to either side of my head. "Wanna know what happens when you test me?"

I straighten in defiance. “Your mind games won’t work on me.”

“Oh.” He smirks, licking his bottom lip. “My mind games are the least of your worries.”

“Really?” I can’t fight the smile on my mouth. As much as I want to, I can’t.

His hand comes to my throat. “Really...” His lips skim over top of mine, his smirk pressing against all of the nerves. I swing my arms around his neck, pulling him into me. His hands glide down my side until they drop to my ass and he lifts me off my feet.

I squeeze my legs around him. He kisses me hard as I grind over him, my nails digging into his back.

Pulling back slightly, he lowers me to the ground. “Turn around and put your hands on the wall.”

I follow his instruction, turning until the side of my face is pressed against the mirror. He reaches for both of my wrists, forcing them behind my back. I feel something drape over them, so I crank my head over my shoulder.

“Really?” I deadpan. “You’re going to tie me up in here.”

He yanks on the knot until his bandana is tight around my wrists. His eyes meet mine in the mirror as the corner of his mouth tips up in a smirk. His hand comes to the back of my ass and he pulls down my yoga pants.

“Kill...” I whisper, or rather whimper. Massaging my butt, he slaps me across my ass cheek and I wince at the unexpected pain.

“Mmmm?” He’s trying to act innocent.

His finger glides over my folds before sliding inside. I hiss, my eyes rolling back. “Just fuck me,” I cry softly. My body reacts to Killian in a way that I can’t control.

My eyes pop open when he retracts his finger and I watch in desire as he grins, bringing his finger to his mouth while shaking his head. “Maybe.” Then he pops it out between his lips. “Or maybe not.”

Kicking my legs wide so I'm bending over with my hands bound, he drops to his knees between my legs and I cry out when his warm mouth massages over my pussy.

“Oh my god.”

He slows his movements, his tongue diving inside and curling against me. I toss and turn, needing to touch him.

“Killian, I need—”

Kill stands to his feet, wrapping my hair around his wrist and tugging my head back. He leans over me until his lips touch the back of my ear. “Need what, baby?”

Baby.

“You inside me...” I plead. “Please.”

His fingers come to my entrance again and I turn my head over my shoulder, my hair falling down one side. “Killian!” I scream. “Now!”

“Alright, alright, jeez...” He chuckles. “Chill. I'll dick you down.”

“I'm going to hit you,” I grind out, anger simmering beneath the surface of my lust. I hear his belt buckle clink.

“Well you can't.”

“We—” He slams inside of me and I scream, my head flying back and my legs dissolving under my weight.

He stops when he's in deep, his balls rubbing against my clit. He leans over and once again brings his lips to my ear. “What was that you were going to say?”

My lips curl behind my teeth.

“Just what I thought.” He tugs on my hair while slowly pulling out. “Look in the mirror.”

I do. I'm fixed on the way he's diving inside of me, my head tilted back. He cocks his head, illustrating his sharp jaw. I feel myself slowly tense around him like a vise. My core pulls and tugs, not wanting to let him go every time he retracts. I'm completely at his mercy.

“I don’t want you with anyone else here.”

I’m too busy grinding against him, lost in the way my body relentlessly climbs higher and higher, reaching for the very tip of my orgasm, all so the world can crumble at my feet when I release.

“Answer me, Saskia. Say yes. I’m not fucking sharing. Not you. Not ever.” His fingers massage into the back of my scalp. When I don’t answer, he tugs on my hair and pauses his thrusting until my head is tilted completely back. His other hand clamps around the front of my throat. “You have three seconds to answer me, baby. *One.*”

“I—” My voice cuts out as he tenses around my throat.

“Two.”

I tap at his hand in defeat as he continues to thrust inside of me roughly. “Killian...”

“Not an answer...” he warns, and my eyes find his in one of the mirrors.

He smirks at me, releasing my throat just enough for me to answer.

“Yours!”

He stills, his mouth falling open slightly in shock. I wasn’t planning on participating in *ho-tivities* anyway, unless I absolutely had to have sex with someone in the cage and if that did happen, I planned to go straight for Kenan. I didn’t have enough time to think about my words in the moment, and he knew that. He didn’t need to gain access into my brain, he just needed to distract me.

“Fuck!” He groans, his head rolling back. “Let go, baby.”

As if on cue and at his command, I release around him, my muscles throbbing, aching. Sweat bubbles over my skin, my breathing heavy and ragged, my limbs liquefying.

He pulls out quickly. “Turn around and get on your knees. Need to come all over this fucking beautiful face.” I turn around and fall to my knees.

His skin flashes with fire, his pupils dilating. I watch in fascination as his hands work over his length. The veins beneath his skin bulging to the surface.

Leaning forward, I suck one of his balls into my mouth.

He freezes before his hand comes to my hair and he piles it all onto the top of my head. “Fuck, Saskia...”

I flick my tongue over him before dragging it up his length. I can’t grip onto his dick because I’m still bound behind my back, but I inch up and slowly suck his tip into my mouth. The soft skin slips down my throat easily as I peer up at him beneath my lashes. His sharp jaw flexes. His violent eyes thrash beneath his thick lashes as they fan out against his flawless skin. His head rolls back.

I feel him tense in my mouth just before he pulls out and hot liquid sprays all over my face. I didn’t close my eyes fast enough because now they’re burning.

“Oh my god, Killian!” I screech. “It burns!”

He chuckles loudly.

“Killian, I’m serious!” I keep them squeezed shut.

A loud burst of laughter erupts from him this time and I actually think I might hit him. “Alright!” His laughter dies out. “Chill, damn.” I feel something rub over my face as my eyes slowly pop open.

“It still hurts. What the hell!”

Killian leans down to meet me at eye level, smirking. Then he licks me across my eye before planting a soft kiss over it. “You’ll be fine. Let’s go. We’ve still got some hunting to do tonight.”

“What?” I stand to my feet as he continues to wipe his cum off my face with his t-shirt. “It’s too cold. We should leave now so you can change.”

His eyes sparkle in mischief. That’s Killian. Mischief. Only his mischief is a ploy to distract you, because below that surface lies fury. I’ve seen an inkling of it exposed a few times

now, and I wouldn't want to be on the receiving end of his wrath—ever.

He slips his shirt back on and winks, pulling me under his arm. “What? I don't need to change.”

I shove him playfully. “You are so gross.”

“I've had my mouth on your pussy, my tongue in it, my finger up your ass, and next time, I plan to have something else around that area too, so I don't think my own cum on my shirt is really going to disturb me.”

Shaking my head. “I'm judging you right now.”

We're heading back through the curtain I entered through when Perse and King pass us. “Well, well, isn't this a sight.” King smirks at us. I didn't know King before he met Perse. I mean, I had heard of him and I remember parts of him as a kid, but apparently, he has changed a lot since being reconciled with her. As if his pain and anguish was put to rest the day she came back alive.

“Psshhh.” Killian flips him off. “You can't talk, lover boy.”

We're walking back through the park when Callan comes skipping up toward us. “Oh, you caught Saskia. I'm so surprised.” If she was trying to hide her sarcasm, it wasn't working.

I gape at her.

Killian laughs, pulling me in closer and plants his lips onto the top of my head. “Fuck off, Callan.”

Callan huffs, disappearing. It should be a red flag to see how he speaks to Callan, but for the time that I've known Killian, he has never sworn at me. I've never felt disrespected by him. Even when he was being Killian and tormenting me, I never felt disrespected. Maybe it had to do with the fact that his eyes were always on me, or maybe it was because I'm naïve, but you can't judge someone's character based on how they treat another person without knowing the full story.

“Can you untie this please?”

Killian laughs. “Nope.” He pauses, regarding me closely. I try to ignore the way the full moon illuminates every single sharp angle of his face. “Actually...”

He leans forward and unties the bandana from around my wrists.

He brings it to my face and ties it from my nose.

“What are you doing?” I ask, shaking my head.

He chuckles, leaning back and pulling out his phone. He snaps a photo, the flash flicking brightly, blinding me for a second, which isn’t a good thing considering I’m partially blind in that one eye still thanks to Killian’s lack of aim.

I tug his bandana down until it’s resting over my neck. “What was that about?”

He peers up at me beneath his lashes, a dark smirk on his mouth. “Don’t worry about it.”

A loud whistle sounds out behind us and we turn to see Kyrin standing on a picnic table. “Everyone got their partners I see! Now you can all fuck off home and get whatever it is that you want.”

I watch as Killian’s focus starts shifting around the place. It takes him a few seconds to stop his searching. I follow his line of sight until I find Maya. She’s standing alone, rubbing the palms of her hands up and down her arms. She looks lost, confused—hurt, maybe? I watch Killian’s face, gauging his reaction. I know how close he and Maya are, but do the same rules that I agreed to apply to him too?

Killian is a wolf in wolf’s clothing. He’s vicious with what he wants and easily stakes claim on whatever it is that he wants, but he never did with Maya.

Is she still a threat? Should I even have threats?

I hate this part of seeing someone. The talking stage. The sex stage. The stage that can feel like purgatory in every relationship.

His smirk falls and I watch as her eyes slowly come to his. I watch the silent conversation pass between the two of them

and suddenly, I want to know their story. I want to know when they first met and how they feel about each other. How they *really* feel about each other.

My stomach drops. When he's done with me, will he go back to her, his home base?

Maya starts walking toward us and I step backward, not wanting to be here or anywhere near them both when they're together. I can feel myself fill with jealousy and I hate it. If I stay here, I'll for sure display that fact out all over my face too.

"Hey," Maya says, smiling at Killian.

"You alright?" he asks. I can hear the worry in his tone. It's not the same tone he uses with me. With me, it's playful, a little caveman like, but playful. But the way he addresses Maya, you can see that he takes her seriously.

My throat contracts and swells, making it hard to swallow. Their chatting dies out, everything around me fading to black. I didn't know that I was walking back to the parking lot until I bang into Val. *I fucked up.*

"Wow!" She reaches for my arms, looking over my shoulder to see where I came from. Her smile turns into a slight frown. "Right, I see you were inconvenienced with KiMay."

"KiMay?" I ask, eyebrows pinched in confusion.

She hooks her arm in mine and leads me back to one of the SUVs that followed behind Killian and I when we drove out. "Yep. Come on, my driver will take you home."

I sigh, tension leaving my muscles when I reach for the door. I shut it after Val is in beside me. As the driver pulls away, I catch Killian spinning around to see where I had gone. It took him that long to realize I had left. My insecurities swallow me whole.

"What's their deal?" I ask, ignoring my phone vibrating in my bra.

“Well.” Val rakes her long blonde hair away from her face as we drive down a road that reminds me of the Yellow Brick Road on the *Wizard of Oz*. “They were born on the same day, two years apart, so they usually celebrate their birthdays together. Delila and Draya, Killian’s mom, were really close. Best friends. Delila isn’t a perfect mom, not by any means, but one day when Maya was nine years old, Delila up and left Maya with Draya. So they ended up being literally raised together. At Kyrin’s sweet sixteen, she lost her virginity to Kill. He laughed it off afterward and she pretended to too, but Maya was heartbroken. She has always held a torch for him. Always. When—” She pauses, her throat gulping. “I should probably stop. Whatever I was about to say, is not my place to say it, but I will say this: Killian is not as harmless as he looks.” She gives me a side-eye before looking back ahead to the road. “He has dark demons living inside of him that were put there by an incident when he was a boy, and then everything he did for Midnight Mayhem after that only fed those demons.”

I gulp. An incident? I respect that she won’t tell me, but it doesn’t mean I’m not interested.

The driver pulls into Killian’s driveway, leaving the car idling.

“What I’m saying is that KiMay have been through life together, and it’s hard to compete for the affection of Killian, period, let alone compete with that, and I’ll be honest, no one has ever come close to being important to him—no one but Maya.” She offers me a small smile. “Just be careful and try not to let any walls down as far as Killian is concerned. He’s damaged. So damaged the only person who will ever be able to comfort him is Maya.”

I sigh, unclicking my seatbelt and reaching for the door handle. “Thanks for the chat.” I push open the door. “I’ll see you tomorrow?”

Val nods. “Yep! Have you thought about where you’re getting marked?”

I groan, cracking my neck. “Not really. I mean, I don’t know where my parents were, so I don’t know.”

Val smiles, but it doesn’t reach her eyes. “Okay. Well I’ll see you tomorrow.”

I shut the door and turn toward the large house. “Great.”

The four white pillars are spread across a vast porch. There’s a chair at the front and solar lights spread throughout the well-kept garden bed that lines it. I jog up the stairs and open the front door, closing it quickly and making a run for my room.

“Oh, hello!” A voice interrupts my step just as I’m halfway up. I turn around to face her.

“Hi! Sorry, I didn’t mean to disturb you.” She’s wearing a white tennis dress and white tennis shoes. Her red hair is in a clean top knot and her face is bare of makeup. She has to be around mid-thirties.

“No!” She waves me off, flashing a stunning smile. “I’m Cora. I take care of the house while the Corneliis are away. I reside in the pool house in the back.”

I shuffle on my feet.

“Sorry,” she apologizes again. “Just let me know if you need anything and I’ll try to do what I can while you’re here.”

“Thank you, Cora, and my name—”

“—Saskia,” she whispers softly.

Shocked into silence, I take one step back down the stairs. “How did you know my name?”

She shakes her head, waving me off. “Killian had told me prior to your arrival, to ensure your room was ready.”

“Ah, okay. Well, goodnight!” I wave her off and continue back upstairs until I’m in my room.

I flip the lock, strip out of my clothes, dumping them in the dirty pile and slipping in and out of the shower, paying extra special attention to scrubbing off my face. Once I’m clean and sedated, I flip off the light and climb beneath the covers of my

bed. I didn't even put my phone on the charger, and before I could mentally drag myself up to grab it, my eyes had fallen and sleep had taken hold.

Black. The room is filled with dark smoke, spilling over my body. My vision is unclear, with no bright spots. No humanity. No light. No thoughts...

Banging. Loud thumping. A gorilla? King Kong banging on his chest? "Gorilla" by Bruno Mars starts playing in the background with laughing chimpanzees dancing around the room.

"Sass!" The gorilla spoke my name perfectly, before banging on his chest again. "Open the fucking door!"

Wait, what?

Another bang just as I shoot up off my bed, my heart racing and hair flying everywhere. I shove my eye mask over my head and rush for the door, worried that something may have happened while I was sleeping.

I swing it open, wincing at the sheer audacity of the hallway light.

Killian is standing in the door frame, seething, his chest bare and scratch marks down his chest.

He takes a deep breath, falling backward and sliding down the wall.

Scrubbing my eyes clean, I finally see him in real light. Along with the scratch marks, there are small splatters of blood over his chest, hands, and face.

"What happened?" I ask, falling to the ground opposite him while checking for injuries. "Killian!" My hands come to his cheeks and I pull his attention to me. "What. Happened?"

When his eyes fall on mine, they're distracted. Lost. As if he's here physically but not here mentally.

“Had to make sure you were okay.” He’s still not looking at me, so I move my head around to try to catch his sight.

“What do you mean?”

He reaches for my cheek, running his bloody thumb over my lip. “Where’d you go?” His voice is strained, and I watch as his vulnerability rears its ugly head.

I lean into his touch. “Home, Killian. I came home.”

“Home,” he answers, his hand falling beside him. “I kind of like the fact that you’re calling my home, home. God, I fucking hate Kiznitch.” His eyes squeeze closed.

“Come on.” I reach for his hand. A heavy thud sounds out from behind him.

I keep my eyes on his. “Am I going to like what I see when I look at what you’ve dropped?”

“Depends,” he says, and for the first time since he interrupted my sleep, I see a slight shift back to the Killian I have come to know. His top lip curls up in a smirk. “You like blood?”

I sigh, breaking eye contact and looking down to the floor. A long and sharp military style knife stares back at me with dried blood crusting over the handle and blade. I mentally count to three in my head.

One, I don’t know what Killian does for Kiznitch or Mayhem, but I have heard stories of what the Four Fathers and Brothers do.

Two, someone is very hurt tonight, and it isn’t Killian.

Three, he came to me and not Maya.

I lean down, picking the knife up from the floor. I take his hand in mine and lead him into my room. Shoving him onto my bed, he remains silent as he watches me move around the room.

I turn the bedside lamp on quickly, before making my way into the bathroom, dropping the knife into the sink and turning on the faucet. “Jesus.”

Inhale. Exhale. Inhale. Exhale.

I'm scrubbing off the blood with soap when I feel his arm wrap around my belly. He drops his lips to the crook of my neck. "Turn around."

I do, slowly turning to face him. His tongue sneaks out and dampens his bottom lip. "I killed someone tonight."

Okay clearly, I'm going to have to up my count.

One

Two

Three

Four

Five.

"Okay. Why are you telling me this?" I tilt my head so that I can look up at him.

He leans down and runs his lips over mine. "Because I killed for you." He presses a kiss against my mouth. "You gonna ask why? Or you gonna be a good little girl and not ask questions that I can't tell you the answers to?"

I bring my hand up to his chest, forcing him away to give myself some distance.

He chuckles. "Are you even Kiznitch?"

I close my eyes, ignoring his words. "Who did you kill tonight?"

When my eyes open again, he's staring down at me. His energy alone is eating up the space between us.

My heart thunders in my chest.

"Someone who wanted to hurt you."

I freeze. "Do I know this someone?"

Killian laughs, shaking his head. "Not sure. But had you not left me unattended back at Mayhem, maybe I wouldn't have had so much pent up anger, and then maybe, just maybe,

I wouldn't have made a fucking mess." He looks down at his chest.

"I don't understand why someone would want to hurt me." I think over Hope's crazy call about me being in Kiznitch.

Killian exhales, stepping forward and running his nose down the bridge of mine. "We're still trying to figure it out, but they want you. Bad."

I suck in a deep breath. "So why did you kill him?"

He holds my stare. "Because I want you more."

I bring my hand up to the side of his cheek, then run my thumb down his bottom lip. Leaning forward, I bring my lips to his.

He groans, his arm hooking around my back, pulling me into him more. "I need to bury myself in you right now."



Thirteen

Saskia

Morning light shines through the bedroom curtains as the sun begins to rise. Killian's heavy arm is locked around me securely as I try to shuffle up from bed. I'm not a big hugger, especially since Killian is a walking, talking heater in his sleep.

Someone knocks on my door. "Kill, get out here," King's voice bellows from the other side.

Killian groans, rolling to his back. I flip over and rest my head on the palm of my hand, looking over "just woke" Killian.

"It's not fair you look cute when you wake up."

Killian smirks, licking his lips and shoving me backward onto my back while resting between my legs. He grinds into me. "I'm always this cute."

"Really?" I reach for my phone, snapping it to selfie mode. He bites down on my jaw as I snap the photo from the side. I

study it closely. For the first time I see what everyone else sees when they look at us.

The door swings open behind us and Killian growls, dropping his head onto my shoulder.

“I hate to break up this fiasco, but Delila is waiting for us downstairs and she’s not in a good mood.”

He bites the flesh on my neck and tugs backward before jackknifing up out of bed. “Fine, I’m coming.”



fourteen

Killian

Biting a cigarette into my mouth, I follow King down the long corridor, blazing it up between each step.

“You and Sass?” King asks, smirking.

“Are just fucking around.” I blow out a cloud of smoke.

King snickers. “Yeah, until she gets hurt because you’ve decided you’re bored with the little doll and you want a new one.”

I ignore his jab as we round the corner and enter the dining room.

The Brothers all watch me carefully. “What the fuck is going on?” Keaton asks as we pull out our seats. “You’re awfully comfortable inside of her.”

I run my hand through my hair, grinning. “You would be too.”

Kyrin kicks me under the table. “You two either fuck or fight.”

I flip him off.

King doesn't answer, so he leans back in his chair, watching me carefully. “You know after the ritual tonight, we're heading back home.”

“Yeah,” I answer, spreading my legs wide.

“So you know you both need to figure that shit out before we go back on the road. Are you fighting or fucking, because you can't be both?”

I snort. “It worked well with you and Perse, and we don't fight. Sass isn't into the dramatics of shit.”

He glares at me. “Perse has fire inside of her, and we never fought or pushed each other around during a show.”

“Yeah, because she just rolled over and took your shit for the most part. You don't know Saskia. Girl is fucking wild.”

“Do you?” King asks, watching me carefully.

“Do I what? Know her?” I lean my elbows on my knees. “I know her enough.”

“Oh good, you're all here.” Delila takes a seat opposite me, pulling her packet of smokes out and tossing them onto the table. She's getting worse and worse as each day passes. As if something is eating her from the inside out.

“What's up?”

Delila places a smoke between her lips and lights the end. “Where's your father's whiskey?”

I look around aimlessly before coming back to her. “Am I going to need it?”

Delila runs her finger over her nose, her eyes squeezing shut briefly as if she's in pain. “You will. Unfortunately, more than you did last time.”

“Spit it out.” I lean back in my chair, annoyed already.

“It's Saskia.”

“What about her?” I ask, eyebrows raised. “Come on, you gotta tell me something, because right now the girl is walking around like a fucking ghost, haunting me with her presence. Can’t keep my fucking dick off her.”

Keaton snickers.

Delila flicks the ash off her smoke. “If I tell you this, Killian, you must contain your wrath. You must promise me that you will also stay away from her, but tread carefully.”

Sometimes the most vicious ghosts that haunt you are those in your memories.



Fifteen

Saskia

Twenty hours. That's how long Val has been hanging around me since Killian left cold turkey this morning. She has not let go. I think of Val as a Great White Shark. Once she has a taste of your blood, she doesn't let go.

"So, I think you should wear this." Val holds up a lacy red bra. "Underneath your robe."

The robe steals my focus again. The Cornelia robe. Something deep inside of me twists and turns. It doesn't feel right wearing it, and I can't pinpoint why I feel that way.

"Just the bra?" I ask, my eyebrows turning in. "That's—"

"—Kiznitch," Val chuckles just as there's a knock on the door.

Delila opens it up, a distant look on her face. She hands me a robe. "You will be wearing this one tonight, Saskia. I'm sorry for the confusion." I take it from her, eyeing it skeptically.

Delila clears her throat as I open it up wide.

I pause.

The back has the words Dragavei with a large angry dragon wrapped around a red gemstone. I recognize the emblem instantly as the very same necklace that Hope had me swear to protect.

“Wow,” I breathe out. “That’s intense.” I don’t want to show my cards by letting them know that I have the necklace, but there’s a reason as to why she wants me to wear this. “What does it mean?”

Delila’s eyes come to mine as she searches her pockets. Finally, she pulls out her pack of smokes and bangs it onto the palm of her hand. “Really hoped I wouldn’t be the one to have to tell you this, but here we go.” She sucks in smoke and then turns to Val. “Leave.”

Val shifts from one foot to the other before she darts out the door. As soon as it’s closed, Delila tosses the pack of smokes at me.

I take one out, bringing it to my lips. Grabbing my Zippo that’s in the bedside drawer, I flick it open and blaze the tip. Inhaling, I sigh when I exhale the nicotine.

“First thing I’m going to tell you is that I can only tell you what I know, do you understand that?”

I lean over and flick my ash into an empty wine glass. “Yes.”

Delila paces back and forth in front of me. “Your last name isn’t Royal.”

I open my mouth to talk.

She cuts me a glare.

I snap my mouth closed.

She continues. “It is Dragavei. Saskia Dragavei. That is your family robe.”

When I know that she’s finished talking, I stand from the bed and make my way to the doors, pulling them open to allow

some fresh air in. “Why do I not know this? My memories haven’t been touched. I remember everything there is to know about my childhood, so why have I never heard that name before?”

Delila sighs, flicking her smoke butt over the patio. “You must wear that tonight during your official initiation.” She ignores my question. “Perse will be going through with you, as well as Callan and Kenan. We have the Four Fathers who have just arrived as well as the Four Wicked Witches.” Delila snickers, and I know for a fact that that’s not what they’re called. Under different circumstances, I might have found her jab funny. She comes closer to me, her eyes searching mine. “Good god, child. I really wish that I could help you.”

Confusion floats around me like a shield, blocking everything out. I don’t remember Delila leaving my room until I’m sitting still on my bed with the cigarette now burning through the butt.

I drop it into the glass and pick up my phone, scrolling through my contact list until I find Hope.

I press dial.

If Delila can’t give me anything else, I know Hope will.

After three failed attempts of trying to reach her, I make my way into the bathroom and start getting ready for tonight.



“Sass!” Perse hooks her arm in mine as she leads me down the dirt path through the large shrubs of the forest. “You’re late.”

“I am?” I ask, surprised. “I thought we didn’t have to be here until midnight!”

Perse looks around us until she suddenly stops, her hands coming to my face. “I have to talk to you later. After we’ve been initiated. Okay? Don’t go far.”

“Why not just tell me now?” I whisper-yell.

Perse shakes her head. “I can’t. Too many...” She waves her hands in the air and I look around us.

“We’re in the middle of a path. No one is here. They’re all there.” I point to the end of the tunnel where branches split open and I see flames dancing through the dark sky. People are laughing, music playing, people chatting.

She takes my hand. “You’ve got a lot to learn.”

I could’ve said the same about her. Shouldn’t it be me who is saying that to her since she’s the one that didn’t remember her childhood for so long.

“You look hot, by the way.” Perse leans into me. “The red bra looks good under the robe.”

On cue, I notice she’s wearing the same, only white. “White?” I ask, cocking an eyebrow.

“Long story,” she mumbles. “Okay, come on. Have you decided where you’re getting your tattoo?”

I shake my head. “No.” Once we reach the end of the path, I grab her hand until she spins around to face me. “Have you seen Killian?” I get that we’re not together, but this is the longest he has gone without either annoying me or fucking me.

Perse winces, the lines around her eyes sharpening. “I—”

“Baby girl.” Kenan pulls me under his arm. “Let’s get this over with so we can get you out of here.”

I search Kenan’s expression, his dark irises peering back at mine. He looks good. With dark eyeliner smudged around his eyes and wearing nothing but his robe over his jeans. “Why?”

“There you are...” King grabs Perse from around the waist, but she digs her heels into the grass.

“No!” Her hands fly out to his chest. Shit. I wonder what King did to deserve her wrath. It’s not like Perse to fly off over anything. “You! You didn’t even say anything!”

King’s face softens when he looks at her but hardens when he comes to me. “Because it’s not my place.”

Perse storms off, heading straight for Keaton who is sitting on one of the many stone seats that surround one massive bonfire.

King stares at me blankly before turning around to chase her.

“What was that about?” I ask Kenan. King has never been outwardly cold toward me before.

He sighs. “I’ll come out and tell you right now. Callan and Killian were together all day today. I’m guessing that’s what Perse is pissed about.”

I swallow the goblet of fire that threatens to set fire to every single organ in my body. “We’re not together. I don’t know why everyone tiptoes around us.”

Kenan directs me toward the small Tiki theme bar behind the fire. “Maybe because the way he looks at you makes people think that you are.” My throat tightens again as Kenan orders us a couple of drinks. “The man is feral with you.”

The barman is easy to pick out. His chest is bare, his abs on display. He tenses as his eyes meet mine.

“Thanks.” I take the drink from him and ignore the zap that passes as our fingers touch. When we’re walking away, I crank my head over my shoulder to have one last look at him. His eyes are bright blue, his facial structure in perfect symmetrical balance. His blonde hair is floppy and rugged, and the eyeliner beneath his eyes only adds to his obvious good looks. His face remains passive.

“Did you hear me?” Kenan asks, snapping me out of the trance.

“What?” I ask, bringing my glass up to my mouth and tilting my head back.

“We’re all flying back tomorrow and continuing on the road back home.”

“Oh.” I smile. “Yeah, I know.” I’m lost in thoughts of Killian and Callan. I’m not going to lie. Hearing that he’s once again jumping onto her does make me feel a certain way. Just

this morning, he was in my bed. Then King called him and I didn't see him after that.

“Can I have everyone's attention!” Kaius, King's father, calls out from the front of the fire. It's the first time I take a real look at the area. A large stone plank is in front of the fire, laying over the top of two thick boulders. There's a man standing beside it, holding a tattoo gun with his hands crossed in front of him. He's wearing a dark hooded robe like the rest of us, only displaying the edges of his sharp jaw. A jaw that I could spot miles away.

I lean into Kenan. “Killian does the tattooing?”

Kenan takes a sip of his drink. “The Corneliis do, yeah. Usually it's Kallisto that does it though, not sure why Kill is there.”

I gulp, swallowing my entire drink. I could probably guess why. Just another way for him to inflict pain on me.

Kaius continues. He's dressed exactly like us, only wearing a mask carved from bone with a long, pointed nose. He gestures to the front of him. “Kournikova, Briele, Nex, and —” His eyes come to mine. I can't see anything behind the mask but his eyes. His eyes I can feel drilling holes into me. The atmosphere turns somewhat hostile for a brief second. “Dragavei.”

I exhale slowly and follow Kenan to where Callan and Perse are standing.

I had witnessed a ritual once when I was a child. I don't know whose it was, but I remember the intensity of it all. Being in the firing line, though, sends chills over my spine.

Perse's hand comes to mine and she gives me a tight squeeze. I relax slightly at the gesture, watching as each of them lay on the plank and receive their star. Callan got hers on her ass cheek, no surprise. I watched as they all moved their robe around the placement of where they got their tattoo. Perse's was below her ear, Kenan on the back of his neck.

“Dragavei.” Kaius gestures to the plank. My fingers twitch around the ties at the front of my robe.

Squaring my shoulders in challenge, I flick off the ties and the robe drops into a pool at my feet, Killian's jaw tenses. I step over the material with my red-soled heels and slowly lift myself onto the plank.

There was whispering as I leaned over and lay flat on my stomach. Scooping my hair over my other shoulder, I peered up at Killian.

“You choose.”

Killian is the Trickster. He's used to girls dropping to his feet and worshiping the ground that he walks on, but that was before and after me. I will never be that girl for him, and if he wants to taunt me with Callan, then I'll taunt him with my greatest weapon—my body.

He growls under his breath, leaning down and pressing the tip of the needle against the side of my upper ribs. I close my eyes as the tip pierces my skin. Tension releases with every stab, my eyes slightly rolling to the back of my head. *Holy shit*. I chew on my lip and exhale. With every drag of the needle, I release even more tension. I know why people love getting tattoos now. It's therapeutic.

When the buzzing stops, my eyes open to see Killian so close to my face I almost flinch. My cheeks heat. “Are you done?”

He seems to ponder over my question, his jaw tense. “Not even close.” I didn't miss the double meaning.

Kaius looks over Killian's shoulder. “We—” Kaius starts, only Killian interrupts him by turning the gun on again.

He leans forward and continues, only this time the pain is higher, dragging down where my bra strap is.

I tense.

I don't want to make a scene, so I endure it.

Finally, he tosses the gun down to the ground in a crash and stalks off to the bar.

Kaius removes his mask and tilts his head to study my tattoo. His eyes fly up to Killian, his head shaking.

Kyrin walks up to the plank next as I'm climbing off and I watch as his tilts too. He slowly grins. "That cheeky motherfucker."

"What?" I snap, turning my head over my shoulder. I can see the end of words that vertically go up my shoulder but not what it says. When Kyrin disappears, Kenan helps me off the plank and chuckles.

"Well, damn, Gina." He hands me my robe and I throw it over my shoulder. "You really gotta stop testing the boy. Dropping your robe like a damn sex kitten. You know that every time you test him, he throws it back in your face."

"What'd he do?" I grind out, taking the two shots off Kenan and shooting them back.

Kenan pulls out his phone, snapping a photo of my back and laughing, handing it to me. *Property of Trickster*. Was tattooed in cursive text above my Kiznitch star.

Inhale. Exhale. Killian is in the corner, where Callan is hanging off his lap and Maya on his other side.

"Are you going to go yell and throw shit at him?" Kenan asks just as Perse comes up behind us. "Because if I get to pick what you throw, I'd say fire would be good."

She hands us both a shot with fire flicking inside of it.

I remain fixed on Killian until he brings his cold eyes to mine. I blow out the flame and wait a few seconds for it to cool, before shooting the liquid back. "Nope. That's what he wants."

Perse shakes her head. "That's what I was going to talk to you about. I expected more from Maya, but Callan?"

I shrug, sighing as the alcohol warms my blood. "I didn't expect any better from any of them honestly."

"But—" Perse says as we make our way to the opposite side of the bar. She pulls out a stool and Kenan and I both follow suit. "Something has happened to make him be this way," Perse says. "He wouldn't flip like this for nothing."

I ignore her, my eyes on the bartender.

“A shot?” he asks, his lips curving in a smile.

“Plenty,” I say, tilting my head. “Tell me.” I lean forward, picking up the shot and allowing it to dangle between my fingers. I’ve never been one to manipulate men with my looks, but that’s not to say that I don’t know how. “Are you Kiznitch?”

His grin deepens, his dimples popping out. I flinch. He reminds me of Killian. *He will do.* “I am.” He moves the robe aside and the Kiznitch tattoo over his hip steals my attention. The exact placement as Killian, only on the other side.

“Hmm,” I murmur. “Interesting.”

Delila interrupts our chat by taking a seat beside Perse. “Kaizer, do you have a death wish or do you purposely like pissing off your cousin?”

Cousin?

Kaizer laughs, his head tilting back as he lines up a row of shots for us. “He looks pretty busy right now.” His eyes fly over my shoulder.

I turn, following his line of sight. Killian. He’s shooting daggers at Kaizer. “Wait.” I turn back to Kaizer. “Killian is your cousin?”

Kaizer leans forward, his arms flexing under his weight. His face is an inch away from mine. “You surprised?”

I pick up my drink. “Well, no, actually.” I shoot it back.

Perse turns to face Delila. “Do you know what happened with Killian and why he’s flipped all of a sudden? Or should we add him to the list of psychopaths that Kiznitch breeds?”

“I fucking knew it.” Kaizer grins. “You’re Saskia.”

I offer him a small smile, leaning back into Perse.

Delila looks right at me. “No.”

I deflate. We drink more. And more. We dance to music. We laugh. And then later that night, Val drives us home.

“Are you sure you’re alright with me staying with you?” I ask Kenan.

Kenan flops onto his stomach, his eyes on mine. “Shut up, Saskia. Of course. And I would totally try to fuck you right now, but I actually value your friendship more than I need to try out my fantasy.”

I shove him playfully, turning back onto my stomach.

“I don’t know what I did,” I whisper softly. Before I can hear Kenan’s reply, my eyes are closed and I’m pulled into a deep sleep.



Sixteen

Killian

Fury ate mischief.



Seventeen

Saskia

“What time do we fly out?” I ask, sipping my coffee. My head pounds from all of the alcohol I consumed last night, and the last thing I want to do is be stuck with Killian at 30,000 feet in the air.

Kenan tosses a buttered toast across the table. “At ten, so eat up.” I pick up the toast and take a small bite, looking around his house.

“Your family plantation is nice.”

Kenan smiles, rubbing his eyes with the palm of his hand. “Wish I could take credit, but I’m afraid that scary motherfucker right there.” He points toward a painted portrait of a middle-aged man dressed in soldier attire. He resembles Kenan in a way. Loud features but timid eyes. “Would probably haunt me if I did.”

I chuckle, guessing it’s his great-great-times however many-grandfather. I didn’t know much about Kenan’s family

line, but my knowledge on my own is limited, so I don't find it strange.

I pick up my phone and dial Hope again. When it goes straight to voicemail, I flip my camera on and snap a shot of Kenan's back turned to me, his ripped muscles flexing as he flips bacon in the pan. Grinning, I click the plus sign on Instagram and choose a filter. I type out the caption **His meat** with a water splash and bacon emoji before pressing upload. We both slip into conversation while we eat breakfast.

Going back to Killian's to grab all of my things was nerve wracking. I didn't want to bump into him and part of me knew that I probably would. Killian wouldn't miss an opportunity to make me feel awkward.

Only he wasn't there, and his house sitter had already packed up all of my things and left my suitcase at the bottom of the stairs.

"That's everything?" Kenan asks, picking up my suitcase and putting it into the trunk of the Range Rover.

"Yeah." I slide my glasses over my eyes, taking my AirPods from my pocket. This trip is going to be long.

Arriving at the airport, we all shuffle onto the 747. I stay close to Kenan and Val, who are following me up the stairs like protective, loyal wolves.

"Hey!" Val reaches for my hand as we enter the cabin. "Ignore it."

It takes me a few seconds before I figure out she's talking about Killian and Callan. Their names rhyme. How have I just realized this?

I don't say anything as she passes me and heads down one of the aisles. I make my way down, passing the lounges and scattered seats. I pass the middle bar before pausing when I notice that all of the people I want to avoid are in the back.

I turn and take a seat on one of the curved lounges with seat belts attached to it. This plane is in the extreme section of

opulence. It's hard to handle.

Kenan drops down beside me. "You okay?"

"I'm fine, Ken. You can stop checking now."

He scrunches his face. "No! No to Ken."

"What?" I deadpan. "So you can give me ridiculous pet names but I can't give you one?"

He chuckles, running his fingers through his hair. It has grown out a lot since I first met him, falling over his face.

"I need to give you a haircut."

Kenan winks. "Deal."

He relaxes back in his chair and I squeeze my belt on, tucking into my oversized Givenchy hoodie. Callan laughs out loud. I find my teeth grinding together, so I pull out my AirPods and do one last scroll through Instagram and Facebook.

I wish I didn't.

I pause on Callan's photo that she took of Killian. He's flipping off the camera, his eyebrows pulled in. He's peering right at the lens. The photo is close and looks like it's taken from her sitting on top of him.

I quickly close Instagram and pop my pods in before flicking through my playlist on Spotify.

I press play on Halsey "You Should be Sad."

I jolt awake to the plane now dark, with nothing but neon lighting that lines the pathway to get from one end to the other. Removing my belt, I take out my pods and toss them across the chair. Walking to the front of the plane, and pointedly ignoring the whole back, I make my way to the bar in the middle. Kenan is talking with Val, who is drinking. They're seated at a small booth to the right side of the bar with cards stretched out between them.

“Sass! Sit!” Val calls out. I grab a bottled water and slide in beside Ken.

“What are you playing?”

“Sixers.” Val grins at me.

I freeze with the bottle just short of my mouth. Perse told me about this game. You would never catch me playing it.

“Wanna play?” Val asks, dealing out their hand.

I shake my head. “Pass. I can’t believe I fell asleep.”

Kenan tilts his head. “You’re still hungover. You need the hair of the dog.”

“The hair of the what?” I ask, confused.

“The hair of the dog. It’s a saying. To cure a hangover, you need to shoot something strong. Try it.”

“Pass!” I repeat, sliding out of the booth. “You two have fun.”

They wave me off as I make my way back down through the aisles of seats. It’s so dark that I have to keep my eyes fixated on the soft blue light that leads you down.

A hand comes out to my arm and tugs me down. I shove up off his chest. “Get off me,” I seethe, shoving him away.

He tears his hoodie down until it rests around his neck. His hand comes to the back of my neck, forcing my eyes onto his. My throat clogs from being under his palm again. I hate it. I hate him.

“You’re a fucking liar, *Little Dragon*.” He releases me and I fall onto the ground.

His hoodie goes back up and his head tilts back to the ceiling as if that little encounter didn’t happen.

I want to yell at him. Punch him. Do all sorts of shit to him, but instead, I go back to my seat and curl up with a playlist.

Landing back in New Orleans was bittersweet. I'm happy to be home, back on US soil, but I can't shake the hostility I felt back in Kiznitch off my back. If I knew what I had done, I could correct it, or at the very least talk about it. I hate when people don't communicate their problems. It never settles when you do that. It's froth that never liquidates, remaining on the surface.

Once we're in one of the cars that are driving us to the main property in New Orleans, my phone vibrates in my pocket.

I reach into it, noticing an unknown number. "Hello?"

"Saskia?" Brian, Hope's husband, breathes through the line. "Have you seen Hope?"

"What?" I look round the car. "No, why?" I lower my voice, unsure again about the energy that's around me.

"She left for Kiznitch two days ago and now I can't get a hold of her."

My eyebrows knit. "I—" I pause. My blood turns cold. "I'll call you back."

Scrolling through my contact list, I open up a text to Killian.

Me: That night. What happened?

I wait. And wait. Until we're bouncing down the long driveway to the plantation.

I open up another text.

Me: My godmother is missing.

Chewing on my lip nervously, I inwardly scold myself for opening up to Killian so easily regardless of the fact that I'm almost certain I can't trust him.

Why is it that no matter how hard we try, we find ourselves back together? It's like we're a tragedy with no destination.

Kill: Are you asking me what I think you're asking me? He finally replies. I swing open my door and make my

way through the clearing behind the main house that's on the property—also known as one of The Brother's houses. I don't know which one, to be honest. I thought it was Delila's, but her mansion is at the back.

Running my hands over my arms and desperate for a shower, I'm jogging toward the RV when Delila calls out to me from behind.

“Saskia?”

I turn around, not wanting to see anyone right now because I need to find Hope. “Yeah?”

“Come with me.” She gestures, curling her fingers and heading toward the side of the main house that shelters the rest of the property. I want to say that it's King's house, since he's the son of Kaius.

The night is cooler, the dark sky bleeding into the sunset.

“Where we going?” I ask, following her footsteps. We must walk for twenty minutes before another small path leads off the dense forest. Flower beds line the pathway with Dragon flowers, blossoming perfectly. I watch as the wild forest slowly melts into a modernized home built from glass and dark mahogany wood.

I pause.

Vines of roses wrap around the two pillars at the front near the door, the walls glass and the wood that holds them together dark. There's a small white rocking chair at the front with a small mink blanket covering the top.

Delila watches my reaction.

“What's this?” I ask, going back to her.

“This is the Dragavei house. In other words, yours.”

My eyes close. “Delila, I need to ask you something.” I think I'm in shock. “How am I a Dragavei?”

Delila tilts her head, studying me. “Your mother.”

I go back to the house. “But growing up, we didn't have a life like this. Mom, she wasn't rich. I actually thought that

when you came to visit me, that I would have to pay their dues by doing Midnight Mayhem's cleaning or something. My parents were nothing special in this world." I shake my head, laughing. When Delila doesn't answer, I quickly look back at her. "Please don't take that as I'm ungrateful for this, because I am. I know that you can't talk to me about everything, but I still have questions."

Something flashes over Delila's eyes. I couldn't decipher what that was and before I could, it was gone. She smiles at me. "Well, I guess you'll start learning that there was more to your heritage than what you've been told."

She steps forward, dropping the keys into the palm of my hand. "Your family trust and credit cards are on the counter in the kitchen. I would really prefer if you stick with your team while we're on the road, but this is your home now."

I chew on my lip. "Thank you." I'm still overwhelmed.

"Don't thank me yet," Delila murmurs, walking away. "Money isn't something that you should be thankful for."

That's something someone rich would say.

I finally make my way up the porch, squeezing open the door. Lemon and lavender with cedarwood engulf me instantly, and I step inside and take in the wholesome architecture. White stairs lead up to the second level, and a kitchen sits at the back. Red bar stools are tucked beneath the island with equally red light fittings that hang from the wall. The dining room leads off the kitchen and tucked at the back is the lounge room. A comfortable three-seater and two-seater are facing each other with an open fireplace sitting in the middle. There's a large flat screen TV hanging on the wall above the fireplace, and plants scattered around in modern clay pots. There are open sliding doors that join the lounge to the porch outside, so I open them wide, inhaling the crisp air as a burnt orange sky is slowly swallowed by the night. There's a large fire pit in the middle of the backyard with LED lights that hang delicately around the porch, reaching out to the firepit. There's even a complete outdoor setting and an inbuilt BBQ.

I already know that this will be my favorite place.

I make my way back inside, quickly checking out the bedrooms upstairs. Three spacious and modern style—all furnished and decorated to fit the overall theme of the house. I head back downstairs, checking the double door stainless steel fridge. Everything is stocked up, as though someone was tasked to make sure it was ready for my arrival.

I take out an iced-coffee and peek through the papers that are on the dark marble table. Figures after figures peer back at me.

I didn't even know this much money could exist. Did every family have a trust account? Likely. Am I the only Dragavei left?

I lean back in my chair, overwhelmed. How could my mom have all of this money and allow us to live the way we did in Kiznitch?

Confused, I tuck everything away and pick up the credit cards, pushing them into my back pocket. Once I'm back upstairs, I hit dial on Brian again. I won't be sleeping until I know where the hell Hope is and that she isn't the person Killian hurt while we were in Kiznitch.

Brian answers on the fifth ring. "Saskia? We found her. She's okay."

"You found her?" I breathe out, leaning back on the chair. "Is she okay?"

"She will be okay. She had issues in customs, and they wouldn't let her out of the country. She's on her way back to the Keys now and said that she will call you."

"That's good! Okay, give her a hug from me when you see her."

"I will." His tone is normal, unnerving. Same old Brian.

"Bye!"

I hang up after being so overwhelmed. Massive sigh of relief, taking in my new bedroom with new, relaxed eyes. The master bedroom is classic and cold. Pure white walls, a floor-

to-ceiling glass window that overlooks the front of the house. An ensuite with a claw tub and rainforest shower. Everything is white and clean and unlived in.

After having a quick shower and finding the Egyptian black cotton towels, I slip into my new bed and drift to sleep.



Eighteen

Killian

It's said that every single person will meet someone who will test them. When I say test them, I mean this one person is directly planted in that other person's life specifically to test them. Saskia Dragavei is that person for me.

"How do you know what she told you is the truth?" King asks, sliding the glass of whiskey over to me.

We're in his plantation house that's on the property. I have one here, too, but rarely use it. When we're not traveling, I'm back in New York. My dad would spend a lot of time there when I was a kid, taking me with him, so I found a deep connection to the city from a young age. As soon as I was eighteen, I purchased an apartment there. We don't get much time off or away from this life, but when I do, I spend it there.

"Because Delila doesn't talk shit." I shoot back the whiskey and reach for the bottle, pouring another.

"True," King agrees.

I swallow past the bile in my throat. I should have known. I should have been smarter. *I should have known.*

“What are we doing about it?” King asks. “Perse picks up on this shit and she’s already grilling my ass about your sudden change toward Sass.”

“So tell her.” I gesture toward the hallway with my glass. “Might make her understand more and stop fucking shoving past me every time she sees me. Bro code ain’t got shit on girl code. Chicks are feisty as fuck.”

King chuckles. “Nah, no way. I’m not bringing her into this. She’s too close.”

I understand why King wouldn’t want her involved. She *is* too close, not just to Saskia, but to me. She would inhale everything with her heart, not her brain.

King leans forward, resting his elbows on the table. “And how do you feel about it?”

For the first time in all of my life, I don’t want to trick anyone into thinking that I’m telling the truth. “I feel fucked up about it, dawg.”



Nineteen

Saskia

The amount of times that I've noticed Delila looking sad lately is around one-hundred. When I came into this, she was always so classy, prim and witty. Now, she's like a shell of the person she once was.

"I thought I'd give you all an update on the dates that we are looking to go back on the road. I know that a lot of you are disappointed that we didn't get to finish the international tour —"

"—we're mainly wondering why it started in the first place?" Maya snaps. Only Maya would step to her mom like that.

Delila holds her stare. "We had our reasons."

Maya rolls her eyes and stands, making her way out of the practice tent that's set up in the middle of the oval field.

"As I was saying," Delila adds, her attention coming to me briefly before flying around the room. "Two weeks. We need

to get paperwork in order and marketing out before we venture off but at the same time, we have days lost so we need to get back on. I would like all of you to get back into training. The time in Kiznitch and travel is time lost. Time we cannot afford to lose. So, from today onwards, all of you are to train at least once a day and up your calorie count to counter the calories burned, because I also want everyone running in the morning during a fasting window. That will help with your agility, stamina, and overall fitness.”

She takes a small pause—when I say small, I mean it was small enough for me to use every single swear word against her because fucking running on a fast? No thanks.

“You are to train every single one of your acts once a day. No choosing whatever you like and doing the next one the day after—do them all.”

I groan, tilting my head back so my hair trails down the back of the chair.

“Saskia, that includes you. I know it’s a lot to ask because of how many you have, but you’ll thank me later.”

Bet I won’t.

I nod, hearing her loud and clear. I actually would love to have my mind taken off the fact that Killian is ignoring me and acting as if I didn’t exist, I’m somehow a billionaire, and I have some secret family last name.

Everyone starts to pile out, but I stay. Kenan squeezes my hand. “What’s wrong?” He tucks me under his arm and presses his lips to my head. “Two weeks then we’re on the road and the silence will turn into the crowds cheering.”

I chuckle, shuffling down a little while unzipping my hoodie, exposing my sports bra. “I’m fine, Ken.”

I stand, tossing my hoodie onto one of the chairs in the front of the ring. I know that Kenan is trying to help. I get it. I would do the same if I knew someone had openly hurt him in such a way that Killian had me, but I can’t dwell on it any more than I already have.

Once everyone has left, I flick through my phone and push play on a random song in my library. Something easy that I can warm up with. I want to practice all day today so that I don't have to all day tomorrow. The song plays and I move around, stretching out my legs and bending into child's pose.

"Want a buddy?" Perse asks. "Rose was supposed to be with me today, but she has the flu."

Rose is one of the other girls who came in with Perse in the same manner. They're best friends because of it and remind me of the kind of friendship that every girl should have. Loyalty, respect and love. That's all a friendship needs to survive, but when one is broken, the other two become heavy and it won't be long before they break too and then, you have no friendship. Rose and Perse are solid in all three.

"She okay?" I ask, gesturing out to the stage. I flick my hair over and pile it all onto the top of my head into a high pony. "I noticed she didn't look well today."

"She'll be fine." Perse tosses her slippers onto the ground in front of us. "I think it's a mixture of jet lag too."

"I get that," I grumble, stretching out my legs, reaching for my toes.

"I was going to ask you something, but I wanted to check with you before we go on the road."

I bring my eyes up to hers. She has my attention.

She takes a seat beside me and copies my stretch. "Do you want me to find somewhere new for Callan. I love my group, but I can't have tension between any of you because it will show during the performance, and she's in the wrong by taunting you with Killian."

I never liked Callan. She wasn't someone who I could picture being friends with—even when I first met her on the flight to New Orleans when they first picked us up. Part of me thought she resented me because I wasn't on the boat with her, and another part of me just thought maybe she was someone that I just didn't vibe with. I let it go. I never let opinions of me reach my soul.

Shaking my head, I answer, “No, I’ll be fine. Her and Killian are fine with each other.”

Perse doesn’t answer and I bring my eyes to her. She offers a small smile. “I’m not worried about you, Saskia. It’s her that I don’t trust. I know girls like her, and beside the fact that Val and I are fine now, I don’t think Callan shares the same morality that Val had beneath her ugly.”

“You’re right,” I agree, standing back to my feet. “You can make a decision because it’s your group, but just know that for me, I’m not bothered.”

After warming up, we slip into an easy routine, dancing between each other and laughing. I genuinely enjoy Perse as a person. She’s easy to be around, so before we know it, we’ve been dancing for two hours.

“I need to practice on my fire bending.” I take a long swig of water, sweat dripping down my chest.

“Your act is by far my favorite out of all.” Perse chuckles, swiping her face with a towel.

“It’s not easy but it’s not hard.” I start walking toward the back room to find all of my equipment. A few people are training now too, with the Six Demons and Angels. I’m sliding the box out with all of my things when I hear the bikes start up at the back.

I freeze. Counting to ten, I force my panic to chill out. We have to share this same floor, so I need to get used to it.

Once the box is at the front of the center ring—a safe distance away from the wheels of death—I grab my phone out of my hoodie pocket and take my AirPods out with them, connecting to Bluetooth. I plug in the pods, shuffling through the song list and continue with my training until the sun is setting in the night. It isn’t until the soft neon lights are blaring from above me that I take out my pods and turn around to see if they’re ready for me to train in the wheel.

But they’re all gone.

Guess I get to skip out on one of my routines tonight.

I've just scrubbed up in the shower when a text comes through.

Perse: Come over to King's. We're having drinks and a cookout tonight.

Flicking back a text to Perse. **I'll be there in 30.**

Val bursts through my door just as I'm getting ready.

"We have to look hot." She hurries through my closet. "Have to."

"Val?" I ask, squeezing my towel. "What are you doing here?"

She's shuffling through my clothes in my suitcases when she finally stands to face me. "We have to make Maya and Killian feel pain."

I laugh, making my way to my lingerie suitcase. So many damn suitcases.

"This is a sweet house. I've always loved it."

There's an awkward pause, but I shove it aside.

I find a black and white lace set. "Yeah, I like it. It's something I would've built myself."

Turning to face Val I watch as she pulls out a black sequin dress that only barely covers my ass, let alone hers. She's so much taller than me. I ask the question I've been wanting to ask for a while. "Did you know who it was that lived here before?" I don't remember Val as a kid, but that's no surprise. We ran in completely different circles. No one knew me.

Val shrugs. "The last people that were in here left when I joined Midnight Mayhem at thirteen. They were the oldest Dragavei to live. Must have been your great grandparents."

It's strange, because my mother and father lived a very modest life within the community. Actually, modest is probably being generous.

“It’s just weird,” I whisper, making my way to where she’s slipping into my dress. Sure enough, it barely covers her upper thigh.

“How so?” she calls out from the bathroom.

“Well, I was a Royal, not a Dragavei. Delila isn’t telling me much and I don’t really know who to ask.”

My fingers flex over a white crop top that dips deep into my cleavage and straps around me like a bra. I pair it with black wide leg pants that are tight around my waist but loose around my legs.

“You’re wearing the genie pants? Good choice with that crop,” Val says, coming back to rummage through my shoes. “And if you want to ask anything, I’d go to Jessie, aka Lucifer. He’s almost forty-years-old and knows about as much as Delila’s old ass.”

“Jessie’s forty?” I ask, shocked. He doesn’t look it. He looks old, but I originally pegged him as early to mid-thirties.

“Yeah.” Val smirks. “Wears it well, huh?”

“He does,” I agree, finding the black heels I want to pair with my outfit. “I’ll do my makeup and then we can leave. Can you go downstairs and find us some liquid courage?”

Val flashes me a wide grin. “Oh, I’d be honored.” She flicks her long blonde hair over her shoulder, disappearing out of my room like a tornado of destruction. I’ve come to warm up a lot to Val. I’ve found her easy to talk to, and aside from Ken, she’s always there for me. I know Perse would be too, but I also know that she’s King’s lady, which means I can’t talk to her about everything because there’s a high chance that she will go back and tell King.

I work on my makeup, turning some music onto my portable speaker. “Flawless” by Beyoncé and Nicki comes on as I’m flicking my top liner. I start dancing and running the deep burgundy lipstick over my lips, careful with the precision of the lines.

Val comes into the bathroom, slapping my ass and handing me a drink of—“What’s this?” I ask, taking a small sip.

Instantly I recoil, my face scrunching up in disgust. “Oh, it burns!” I stick my tongue out dramatically, waving the heat off.

“It’s a Long Island Iced Tea...” she finishes off. “With a little bit of Fire Ball.”

“God! Are you trying to kill me?” I scold her.

Her face falls. “No. You’re the only real friend that I have here.”

I pause, placing the glass of poison on the bathroom bench. “You have so many friends, Val.”

She shakes her head, her eyes coming up to meet mine. “I don’t really. The only true ones I had was Maya and Mischa. I fucked Maya, and Mischa took her side, so... I have you.”

I sigh, picking up my glass. “Well, cheers to us!” We clink our glasses together. “And for the record, friends don’t validate who you are as a person. Some of the best people I know are the ones who have fewer friends.”

Val smiles at me. “You’re so different, Sass. I mean, your personality is a complete contrast to your appearance.” She turns and heads out of the bathroom.

“Did you just say that I looked like a bitch?” I yell out over the music.

“I did!” she shouts back.

I laugh, shaking my head, and continue with my makeup. I decide to leave my hair in its natural state—long waves that drop to my tailbone. My father was darker than my mom, and had the best full head of hair, so I’ve always claimed I got my long, thick hair from his side, since he rocked the shit out of his curls.

Heading back into the room, Val whistles. “Now, if I hadn’t ruined one friendship by sleeping with her, I’d definitely hit on you.”

I shove her playfully. “I’m straight—you dick.”

She laughs. “Mmhmm, so was I until I wasn’t.”

I roll my eyes.

She pulls out her phone and comes in close. “Let’s take some photos, drink these, and go cause some havoc.” It was like she was reading my mind.

We took a ton of selfies, a whole lot of mirror selfies, and single shots taken on the balcony that leads off the small lounge upstairs.

They were amazing photos.

More than amazing.

I decide to upload one of the photos Val took of me on the balcony, looking candidly out to the side, posting it on my Instagram feed, and chose one of our selfies to publish on my story. I start heading back downstairs, checking on my Instagram profile while I’m here.

I falter in my steps. **146K Followers.**

“How the hell did my followers on Instagram jump up so high?” I ask Val as I enter the kitchen.

She shrugs. “Welcome to Midnight Mayhem. Also, when Killian posted that photo of you, even though he didn’t tag you, his mob of loyal followers would have stalked his following and put two and two together.”

My eyes shoot to hers. “What photo!” I quickly click on his profile, finding the photo she’s talking about. “Oh my god.” It was the photo he snapped in Mayhem. The very one of me flipping off the camera and wearing his bandana. He captioned it **Tell her she’s pretty or I’ll kill you.**

“Girl, you had his rag on. That isn’t fucking light, and also, you’re the first girl he has ever posted on the gram. People are losing their minds over it.”

I slam my phone onto the counter, heading for the pantry to find something else to drink. Something that won’t kill me, but will maybe ease the pain a little.

“Are we ready, Little Dragon?” Val laughs. Her phone is pointed on me.

“Are you recording?” I narrow my eyes at the lens.

“Of course I am! You look hot as fuck and if Killian is going to ignore you, I’ll make sure my two point three million followers don’t!”

I freeze, gaping at her with my eyes wide. I can’t believe she just said that.

She must flip her camera to selfie mode because now she’s talking into her phone. “Was that her orgasm face, Killian Corneli? I’m impressed.”

“Val!” I yell at her. Now the whole damn world will know if they didn’t already.

She laughs, pushing her phone into the front of her bra. “Okay, okay, no more torment. For now.”

“Wait!” I start walking toward the garage, where I remember seeing a car inside through the glass doors. I push open the door and gasp.

Val comes up behind me. “An RT Charger?” She whistles. “I’m impressed. I don’t remember seeing this driving around.” The car is lickered in gloss black, with black rims and tints. There’s a silver motor looking thing that’s sticking out of the hood. It looks lethal.

Val grabs the keys that are hanging on a hook, tossing them at me. “Found our ride!”

“Maybe I shouldn’t drive because of that drink? And King’s is only like a twenty-minute walk up the road?”

“The dirt road. We can’t walk on a dirt road in these heels.” She jogs to the passenger side and slips inside. “Come on.”

“Fine!” I call out, squeezing the keys in my hand. She’s right about the heels. I sink into the thick leather seat and push the key in, twisting it to start. The loud rumble vibrates beneath my seat and Val laughs hysterically.

“I’ve always loved older cars. God. This is so hot. Your grandparents were bad asses.”

Everything seems too new, too updated. Where are my grandparents anyway?

I flip down the visor and push the button to open the garage door.

“Saskia the bad bitch dragon!” Val chuckles, and I turn to face her, seeing her phone facing me again.

Wriggling my eyebrows, I blow her phone a kiss. “I forgot my smokes!”

Val brushes me off, running inside to grab them and coming back. She tosses them onto my lap. “Didn’t take you for a smoker.”

“I’m not usually.” I put the car in drive and tap the accelerator. “I use them as a coping mechanism and when I’m drinking.”

“Some would say that’s not healthy,” she jokes, flicking off the bottle of vodka.

We drive to King’s and I park out front. “Hey!” I reach for Val before she slides out of the car. “You didn’t tell me what was going on with you and Maya?”

Val rolls her eyes so hard I almost think they went to the back of her head. “She’s—well, she says that she was only having fun. That we’re only having fun.”

My face falls along with my shoulders. Val has a rough personality, and she’s not easy to be friends with, but I’ve come to learn that when she truly considers you a friend, her roughness softens. “Have you guys hooked up a lot?”

Val shakes her head, her straight platinum blonde hair falling over her shoulders. “God no. I was straight—completely straight until her. She’s the bisexual one. She’s had girlfriends before, two, to be exact, but never any boyfriends. We all knew it was because she was holding a torch for Kill.”

I nod, urging her to continue. I’m not worried about Maya, or even Callan. The truth is that if I walked into that house tonight and sat on Killian’s lap, I doubt he’d push me off. I

pause my thought process. *Maybe I shouldn't have driven.* It's obvious that he's livid about something.

“Anyway, so being with her, she was my first girl, and it felt right with her, you know?”

I didn't. Not really. So maybe I did...

“Sure, and you told her how you felt?”

Val took a long swig from the vodka bottle she's holding between her fingers. “Sure did, and she said ‘it was just fun, Val. Nothing serious.’”

“Bitch,” I mutter under my breath. “I don't know her very well, but Perse loves her, you do, and Killian does. I don't see it. Not right now.” It's not that she's strange—because she is. I love diversity in characters and prefer them over normality, but it's how she silently sits there.

Judging.

Watching.

Or maybe it's just me she's like that with.

“You'll get along with her. A lot. Once this whole Killian thing blows over.”

A bang on my window jolts us out of our small chat. Turning, I see Keaton peering in with his arm pressed against my window. I wind it down.

“Killian's drinking.” His dark eyes press against mine.

“So?” I answer, grabbing my keys and phone. I slip out of the car and Keaton's tattooed hand wraps around my arm.

He pulls me into his chest until I feel his warm breath falling over my lips. “Fix it, since it was the two of you who set him off.”

I shrug out of his grasp. “I don't know what you're talking about.”

Keaton growls as I walk away. “The fucking Instagram photos and videos. Stop acting dense.” *Shit. Shit. Shit.*

I ignore Keaton, passing Kyrin who is leaning against the front door, a bottle of Scotch between his fingers. He's wearing jeans, a black T and leather jacket. Kyrin is classically pretty. He's a hefty combination of handsomeness and viciousness.

Val is hooking her arm in mine as we make our way toward the house when Kyrin glares at us as we pass. "Fucking waste."

I pause for two seconds. I could turn around and press him on whatever it is that he's talking about, or I could ignore it for now and be there for my friend who is obviously dealing with raging woman issues.

"Don't let their cryptonyms get to you. Look at what it did to Perse." Val gestures toward the living room "Let's get fucked up."

I need to be there for my friend. To be here for her. If it was up to me, I wouldn't be here. I would have happily stayed home and soaked in a bath with candles and wine.

I can hear music thumping loudly, spilling into the extravagant foyer of the mansion, directly through the floor-to-ceiling doors in the back lounge.

"We leave any time you want, okay?" I say to her, searching her eyes.

"Yes, Little Dragon. Now, come on!" Her hand grasps mine as she tugs me toward where the music is coming from. I shake my head and laugh off her relentlessness. Passing by a long rectangle table, I swipe up two shots each and hand one to her. "For some courage before we head outside."

She takes two off me and we both pound them back with a hiss after each one.

"Tequila!" My face scrunches.

"Oh, that was definitely Perse!" Val scolds, swiping her mouth. "Her and her nasty taste in alcohol."

Sliding the empty glasses back onto the table, we head outside through the open doors, where the music is playing.

The electric sound of Five Finger Death Punch roars through the dark night as people dance and talk. On the patio there's another large rectangle table where a whole group are sitting, chatting. I don't want to look long because I know that Killian is amongst them. Out of the corner of my eye I watch as their heads turn to me and Val, just as we see Perse, Rose, and King standing near the bonfire out on the grass. They're talking with a few men wearing suits, men I recognize slightly. The Four Fathers and others.

Strong arms wrap around my torso, lifting me off the ground as Kenan's lips press to the back of my neck. "You look like a whole fuckin' snack, Saskia."

I laugh, my head tilting back. Wriggling out of his grip, I turn around to face him when he puts me back down to my feet. "Are you drunk already?" I cock my head.

Kenan leans in so close. Close enough that his lips touch mine. "Maybe." I shove him backward playfully. Kenan always tests his limits with me and although he's cute, that's just it. He's... cute. Killian would eat him for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and then still have room for a six-course meal with some dessert.

Kyrin comes up beside Kenan. "Care for a walk?"

My smile falls slightly. I barely speak to Kyrin, and if I haven't said it enough, he's terrifying.

"Sure," I answer, side-stepping away from my clingy best friend. I turn to face Kenan. "Keep an eye on Val while I'm gone."

"Well we ain't gonna eat her, Little Drago," Keaton growls from the table. My eyes come to his and I watch as a smirk devilishly slips over his lips, his eyes hooded in mischief. He was just shitty with me outside, and now he has completely shifted tunes.

Ky starts dragging me down the stairs and toward the bonfire. He grabs a couple of drinks on our way. We move to the side, behind the fire but far enough away for people to not hear us talk.

He hands me my drink and I take a sip. Whiskey. Figures.

Kyrin studies the fire before turning to face me. “You know, when we all first saw you, we had a hard dick for you.”

I swipe my mouth from the alcohol, slowly lowering my glass to my lap. I squeeze it tightly. “Ah...”

Ky laughs, turning over his shoulder. I follow his line of sight—heading straight to some commotion happening on the patio. He rolls his eyes and brings them back to me. “We know more than you know we know.”

I shake my head. “I’m confused.”

Kyrin’s focus stays on me. “See that’s the thing, I don’t think you are.”

“I don’t know what to say to you or how to defend myself when I don’t know what I’m defending myself from.”

His eyes darken. “You need to stop whatever is going on with you and Killian.”

“I can assure you that it has.” I take another sip, willing the alcohol to kick in faster and numb the aching pounding that’s echoing in my belly.

Ky doesn’t answer, so I turn to face him. “You really believe that shit?”

“What do you want me to say, Kyrin?”

His eyes remain on mine. “I don’t give a fuck about all of this shit, but Killian is a whole different man right now and we all *know* that the juice is not worth the squeeze.”

I throw back my whole damn drink. “Ky, I get it.”

Kyrin’s face doesn’t move. Not even a flinch. He shuffles closer to me, his hands coming to each side of my legs. He shoves them open and grips me behind my thighs, pulling me forward until I’m straddling him on his lap.

“Mmmm,” he growls, eyeing me up and down. I watch his pretty jaw hit all of the right angles as he cranks his head. His hands move down my back and fall onto my ass.

“Ky...” I warn, tilting my head.

“What?” He groans, slightly tilting his hips to press his cock into me. “Isn’t this what you want? Me drippin’ all over you like every other male? You want me to spill all our secrets to you?” His hand grasps my chin, pulling my attention onto him again when I try to move away. “You and Killian are the exact fucking same, and that’s the problem. But what he’s going through right now, Saskia, it’s tormenting him from the inside out. You’re not fucking worth it.”

I lick my lips. “I don’t—”

Someone grabs me from my shoulder, pulling me off Kyrin’s lap. Everything happens so fast. There’s someone screaming, the starry sky, embers from the fire floating above me. I reach up to touch one, my head dizzy when Kenan’s face comes above mine.

“Up, Drago.”

I groan, slowly standing to my feet. “What the—” Everything comes into focus and the first thing I notice is Killian standing in front of me. No, not in front of me, he’s guarding me, as if I’m a caged animal that only he can pet.

“The fuck, Kill!” Ky kicks up from the ground, swiping his mouth. “Really?” Kyrin laughs as blood trickles down his chin. He shoves Killian out of the way. “We’ll talk about this later, motherfucker. Sort your shit out.” Ky reaches for his glass and starts moving back to the patio.

“Killian...” I whisper, reaching for his arm, only as soon as I touch him, he rears away from me, dropping to the chair where Kyrin was, throwing his hoodie over his head.

“Don’t.”

I turn around to face everyone and try to decipher their cryptonyms. Kenan and Perse stand there with King, watching us both carefully. I shake my head. “Give us a minute.”

“Oh my god!” Callan stumbles down the stairs and makes her way to us.

Perse steps forward, a snarl on her mouth, but I reach out and stop her, shaking my head.

Spinning around, I walk straight up to Callan until we're chest-to-chest. "Back the fuck up."

Callan glares at me in shock, before laughing like a psychopath. "Or what? Pretty girl. What are you going to do?"

I search her eyes, a dark smirk on my mouth. "You take one more step near him, Callan, and I will fucking drop you."

She moves forward, but then her eyes come back to mine. She exhales. "Whatever, Saskia. Keep forcing him to hang around you, and I'll still be here when he needs to fuck his demons away." She turns to walk back toward the patio.

"Oh." I start following her, rage thundering through my blood. Perse chases me, her hand coming to my chest. She searches my face. I see the pain in them. Pain and sorrow.

"As much as I know you want to hit her." Her eyes flick over my shoulder. "There's someone else who needs you right now, Sass."

My heart thunders in my chest. I don't know what came over me just then. It was as though every single instinct inside of me came roaring to the surface and I wanted to kill Callan if she so much as breathed near Killian.

"It hurts," I admit, wincing.

"What hurts, honey?"

My throat contracts around the giant boulder that is lodged deep inside. "Seeing him."

Perse exhales. "Go to him, Saskia. He needs you." She rolls her eyes. "He's just stubborn as all hell."

I turn around to find King kneeling down beside Killian, whose face is as hard as stone. It's like staring right at an ancient Greek statue, every single feature carved to perfection. The fire burns orange hues over his tanned skin, only casting off shadows where his cheekbones dip and his eyelashes blink over.

I make my way back to Killian, just as “Trippin’” by Khalid starts playing. King slowly steps back and disappears with Kenan and Perse, leaving us alone. Far enough away from anyone else. My stomach clenches with nerves.

“Kill...” I whisper, but he doesn’t look at me. I kneel between his legs, resting my hands on his thighs. “Talk to me.”

Slowly, his face turns to me. Nothing. Not a smirk. Not an inkling of any emotion. It’s as though someone has removed his soul and replaced it with someone else entirely. I begin to feel like an idiot so I slowly stand, only his hand comes to mine.

I freeze. The air begins to thicken as I bring my eyes to his.

“Want me to sit?” I gesture to his lap.

His attention stays on me, and the atmosphere intensifies as every minute passes. His jaw tenses before he yanks me down onto his lap. I swing my legs over his and he curls his arm in, pulling me in closer. Reaching down, he picks up a bottle of whiskey and brings it to his lips.

I need to somehow separate him and that bottle.

“Why?” he whispers, so low I almost miss it.

“Why what?” I ask gently. I turn into him more to give him my whole attention. I can almost feel people watching us in the background and I didn’t even think to realize that his parents are probably here too, watching this shitshow.

His eyes bore into mine. Blue swarming like hot flames. He hisses, tilting his head back to look at the sky.

His Adam’s apple bobs, and it’s not until his face comes back to mine that I realize he’s chuckling. “Of course.” He shakes his head to himself before bringing his thumb up to my lip. “Do villains have hearts, baby?”

I’m instantly confused by his question. I know that he’s drunk, and I know that I should be mad at him for a whole lot of things right now, but I can’t.

“I don’t know,” I challenge him. “Do they?”

He pauses, swallows, and then his eyes drop to my mouth. I dampen my lip just as he moves closer and closer. His lips slide over mine and I sigh, electricity possessing every part of me. He doesn't kiss me. Merely leaving his lips slightly pressed against mine. "You're mine, Little Dragon, even when you don't want to be, and especially when I don't want you to be."

I gulp, bringing my fingers up behind his neck and running them down the back of it. "You seem different."

He kisses me. My lips open and his tongue slips inside. He doesn't force it, or rush it, or kiss me manically. He merely takes his time, massaging my tongue with his. He runs the tip of his tongue over the curve of my lip. "Exactly how I'd eat your pussy right now."

My thighs clench together as the words leave him. He sucks my bottom lip into his mouth, licking and flicking it, his piercing hitting my teeth every few seconds.

I push myself into him so he has to kiss me harder.

I need him harder.

He doesn't slow his speed, his arm unhooking from around my legs. I swing them around and straddle his lap, unzipping his hoodie to feel closer to him. I press my palm to his chest, the warmth and cut lines instantly bringing me peace. Raking my fingers up the side of his neck, my hands dive into his hair as I pull back, resting my forehead on his. My heart is roaring in my chest at speeds that I can't control, threatening to spin out and burn the whole world down in its wreck. Our breathing is heavy, my panting desperate.

"Say it." His eyes search mine. "Say that you'll always be mine."

"While you go off with Callan? No."

"Fuck Callan!" Killian growls. "Haven't had my dick in her since you've been on it."

My eyes narrow.

He smirks. “Is my Little Dragon a little fucking jealous?” He raises a perfect eyebrow, and I finally see a crack of the Killian I know.

“Jealous? Pretty sure I didn’t hit someone...”

“No.” Kill comes forward, his hands coming to my ass as he pulls me into his crotch. “But I fuckin’ did, and Saskia, I’d kill any motherfucker who touched you.”

I pause, searching his eyes.

He leans back, but his eyes remain on mine. A slow smirk comes to his mouth. “And by the way, pretty sure you almost did hit her...”

I bring my hand to his chin, squeezing his cheek and forcing his eyes to mine. “I don’t like her, Killian. You want to get mad? Fine. Get mad. I don’t expect anything out of whatever the fuck we are because I’m not on the market for a boyfriend and I’m pretty sure you’re not on the market for a girlfriend, but you go near that bitch again and she’s not the only one who is going to get hit.” I release his cheeks when I realize I probably look like a stage ten psycho.

His eyes weaken as he licks his bottom lip. “You’re sexy as fuck when you’re jealous.”

“I’m not joking.”

His smirk disappears, his arm snaking around my back to force me closer to him. He feels weird. His words are coming in, but there’s something... “Baby, I don’t want Callan. You’re right, I’m not on the market for a girlfriend and shit, I might never be. It’s never been something I wanted or planned for, so I won’t make any promises. But I’ll stay away from Callan. You have my word on that. I gotta ask...” He grins, his eyes dropping to my lips. “Why didn’t you ever rub it in my face? Aside from you and the party, you never slept with anyone else in revenge. Or kissed anyone. Any time I saw any of the boys drippin’ over you, you either didn’t give enough of a fuck to notice or was slightly repulsed.”

I shrug. “I’ve never been that girl.”

His focus stays on mine. “What girl?”

“The girl to play games, Kill. I’m not that person. Though, I almost did that night in the RV.”

Killian’s face pales. “Yeah, ‘bout that.”

“What?” I roll my eyes, running my fingers through my hair to push the loose strands away. “You had a big orgy with all the girls? I heard.”

Killian’s eyebrows pull in. “I understand why you would think that I did, but I didn’t.” I look away from him, but his finger catches my chin, tilting my face back to his. “Babe, I didn’t.” He doesn’t flinch. I know that these boys are well skilled to be deceitful, but I do trust his words right now, even if I don’t exactly trust him as a person.

“I believe you.”

His face softens. “Good. That was Maya and Val having a fucking feast.”

“Jesus,” I whisper, shaking my head.

My head starts to pound so I lay down on his shoulder just as King strolls over and takes a seat on the chair next to us. There’s awkward silence for a bit before he says something.

“You’ll need to sort shit out with Ky tonight before you go home. We don’t let that shit bleed into the next day.”

“Yeah, yeah, fuck, I know.” I stay there for over thirty minutes, listening to people chat back and forth with him all while resting against his warm chest.

I didn’t want to move.

“Son...” Her voice was like velvet, threatening to choke me. *There was something...*

I slowly turn around in Killian’s grip, but he squeezes my leg in warning. I ignore him, naturally, bringing my attention to his mother who stands in front of us.

Her eyes zero in on me. “Well, haven’t you grown up. I have to admit, I’m not at all surprised.”

“Mother...” Killian snaps from behind me.

Wish I could say that I remembered her, but I don't.

She has long black hair that almost looks blue, slanted eyes that remind me of evil, and a killer smirk that looks all too familiar to her son's. She's beautiful, if you're into the demonic vibe. She's wearing a thin lace maxi dress with a slit dragging all the way up to her hip, and her big breasts are spilling out of the top. She has a tight body and has no problem making sure everyone knows it.

His mom narrows her eyes at Killian before coming back to mine. "Hmm, interesting."

"Nice to meet you," I answer, because I'm fucking polite. Unlike her. I can already see we're going to hate each other.

She runs her eyes up and down my body. "Oh trust me, sweetheart, it's not."

"Mom!" Killian snaps again, before squeezing me again. He brings his lips to the back of my ear. His mother watches, enthralled. She's shocked, but she's also fascinated by her son's obvious affection. "Baby, go hang with the girls for a bit. I'll be there soon."

Slowly, I slide off his lap, keeping my eyes on his mother. She smirks at me again, and I get the feeling that what she's doing right now would be enough to make others run and hide in fear. I bet she's used to it too. She seems like the type.

She hadn't met me, that's why. I square my shoulders slightly and search her face. She falters a little. I continue until I'm looking right back into her eyes. "Don't stress. He's not bringing me home. He just likes getting me naked." I smirk at her before walking off and finding the girls. I didn't want to stay to hear what her response was. I didn't even want to know. As soon as I was out of earshot, I let out a breath of air and made my way back up to the patio, pulling out the seat beside Rose. Perse was on the other side of her, with Kenan next to her, and then Val, Maya, and a couple of the Angels.

Perse points to them both. "That's Eve and Merica." I nod at them both politely, grabbing one of the water bottles on the table.

“Nice to meet you.”

Both of them have hair, as white as snow, and porcelain skin. They look similar, too similar. Maybe twins.

“How’d that go, baby girl?” Kenan asks, gesturing over to where I was sitting behind the fire pit with his bag of Cheetos.

I take a swig of water. “Fine.”

“You looked comfortable, girl,” Rose slurs, wiggling her eyebrows at me.

I laugh. “I was.” I squeeze the lid back onto the bottle and rest into my chair. “Until his mother came.”

Perse snorts, blazing up a joint and passing it to Rose. I watch as Rose takes a couple of hits.

“She is a bitch.” Perse shakes her head. “The first time I met her I remember thinking ‘Damn. I’m so glad I’m not dating her son’.” Everyone starts laughing except me.

“Thanks, Perse. Real comforting.”

She laughs hard, banging on her chest. “Sorry, hon.” Rose hands me the rolled up joint and I take it from her, bringing the tip to my mouth.

“What if this is a mistake?”

Merica sighs. “The mistakes you make when you’re young are what help you grow as an adult, and how you deal with those mistakes as you get older, is what molds you into a woman. It’s all a fucking ploy.”

Everyone silences.

I search her features. “That’s really deep.” I hand her the joint and she takes it, sucking on it softly. Merica seems demure and gentle. “You obviously dealt with it fine. I might need some tips.”

Merica chuckles, coughing softly while banging on her chest and passing it off to Eden. Her honey eyes come to mine. “I merely learned how to hide mine, so I didn’t have to cope with them.”

“You guys are killing my buzz,” Maya murmurs, bringing her eyes to me. “You and Killian. What’s going on there?”

I didn’t want to talk to her about me and Killian. In fact, I wanted to keep her the hell away from him and I.

“Nothing really to tell,” I answer truthfully. “We’re just us.”

“You’re just ‘us’?” she throws back, eyebrows raised. “I get you’re fairly new to Midnight Mayhem and The Brothers of Kiznitch, but Killian doesn’t do ‘us,’ so I’d remove that from the Saskia Dragavei dictionary.”

I let her rage pass me as she leans back in her chair and goes back to whatever it is that’s going on in that head of hers. I don’t have to justify Killian and I to anyone. I can’t even explain it to myself, let alone to other people.

I look straight at Kenan, who stops chewing, his eyes on mine. He nods. *You okay?*

I shrug. *Whatever.* I’ve never been the type of girl to have a lot of friends. I was never popular at school. I struggled to have girlfriends at a young age, and by the time girls wanted to be my friend, I had already figured out that most of them were only my friend so that they could learn my weakness. I decided to stick to myself.

I went through high school this way. I had one other person who I could maybe classify as a friend, and that was because I saved her from the Regina Georges when they shoved her head in one of the toilets in the girl’s bathroom.

“Really?” I scolded Alicia Rogers, aka the lead bitch who ran the school. I scrubbed my hands while watching Alicia and her loyal pack of hounds as they laughed, holding Alexa’s head over the white porcelain bowl. “You couldn’t think of something more original? You’re all such a fucking cliché.” I wiped my hands with a paper towel before tossing it into the trash. I reached into the stall, grabbing the back of Alexa’s backpack and shoving her to her feet.

I looked at all of them until I finally rested on Alicia. She didn’t say anything. Didn’t so much as mouth off. I think

mostly, she was shocked. The quiet girl has a voice?

“Saskia, hey, didn’t know you were there...” Alicia murmured nervously. She was still wearing her cheer uniform from an early morning practice, and of course, she was obviously dating the star quarterback of our school, and of course he was cheating on her behind her back with her bff, also known as Grace Marks, the beach blonde standing beside her.

“Sure,” I answer, pulling Alexa behind me. “Leave her alone.” I dragged Alexa out of the bathroom behind me.

I don’t know if the reason why they stopped picking on her was because they were either scared of me or because they didn’t know what to think of me. Silence is a weapon when everyone around you has so much to say. When I say I was a loner, it was by choice. People always gravitated toward me, wanting to be my friend, or just downright wanted to know the weird pretty girl with no emotions. Their words, never mine. Anyway, since being here, I’ve found another friend.

Well, three actually.

Perse, Val, and Kenan. That is more than enough friendships to have in a lifetime.

“Where’s Val?” I ask as soon as I realize she’s not here. “She’s supposed to be staying at mine.”

Maya doesn’t answer.

Kenan gestures inside. “She went back to your place.”

I grab my phone and flick through the new text from Val.

V: I’m sorry. I had to tap out. I think I need to put some distance between her and I before I can do this.

My heart sinks for her. I hate that Maya is so obviously toying with her feelings.

Me: It’s okay. That works for me anyway. I’ll be home soon.

She sends another one through just as I’m about to put my phone down. **No, you’re not. I saw you all snuggly on**

Trickster's lap. Girl, you are so gone. Be careful.

My heart races in my chest as I read over those words. Before I can stop myself, I realize I'm smiling like a nerd.

I hit reply. **Don't judge me. I'm always careful.**

She sends a whole lot of laughing emojis. **I just hope these walls are soundproof. Night x**

I send her a quick reply before tossing it back onto the table. I genuinely care for Val, as much as I could care for someone. It wasn't something I expected either, since she threw so much shade toward Perse when she got here, but I think she has changed. Drastically since Perse and King have been together.

Arms wrap around my neck and I instantly melt into a puddle of goo. His cologne is like a welcome home, his touch a reminder of why I'll never be satisfied with any other man.

I bend my neck to look at him.

He leans down and presses a kiss to my lips. Then another. Until Kenan is groaning and throwing Cheetos at us.

"Ready to go?" he asks. Perse is smirking at me smugly.

Everyone is so interested.

Sliding up from my chair, I grab my keys and phone off the table before following him out the front door.

"Wait!" I reach for his hand. "Where's Kyrin? We should talk with him."

"I already have. He was down there with us. Why do you think I took so long?" He tilts his head at me, searching my eyes.

I shrug. "Figured you were stuck with your mom?"

His face falls slightly. "Yeah, that." He turns and I jog, catching up to him.

"Everything okay?" I ask as we fall into step. Figure we can pick the car up in the morning and we could probably do with the walk.

Killian doesn't answer me, his attitude shifting one-hundred different ways. Something is bothering him. Bad. His confusion of whatever he's dealing with is starting to shine bright like a diamond.

"Killian," I say, a little frustrated. "You can talk to me."

"Sass, some shit isn't easy to say. Just drop it for now."

I think over his words, and I know that right now isn't the right time, so I decide to drop it.

For now.

The gravel crunches beneath my feet as we get closer and closer to my house. He hooks his arm over my shoulder and pulls me into his chest, stopping his walk. He kisses the top of my head, and I'm momentarily paralyzed by his silhouette. Wrapping his fingers around the edge of his hoodie, he flicks it down until it's resting around my shoulders.

"Listen." He clears his throat, his arm hooking around my back. "What I'm about to tell you, I'm telling you here because there's nowhere for you to run and there're no weapons that you can use against me—or at the very least access to use against me."

My heart stops for a few seconds as the silence stretches between us. Scenarios go through my head. One after the other. Thinking of what he could have done. Truthfully, it's Killian, he could have done anything.

His arm tightens. "The day before we were leaving Kiznitch, when I left you in bed to see Delila, she told me something that I've been trying to get to the bottom of. I can't tell you what that is right now, because I'm a Brother, that means that we don't share anything outside of our star unless we all agree it needs to be shared. You have to understand that this is what I live by, bleed for and *kill* for..." He tests the words out on his tongue.

I put my hand up. "Okay hang on. Before you move on, yes, I understand and I respect that. But you say kill..."

Killian silences. "Yes."

“Is that what you do?” I ask, squeezing his arm.

“Yes.”

“Often?” I don’t know why that was the first thing I could think of to ask. I think it’s under panic. I know that he told me he had killed someone in Kiznitch to protect me, but I gathered he was lying. Or joking. Now I’m thinking, not so much.

“Too much.”

I suck in a deep breath before asking my next question. “The person you killed in Kiznitch?”

“Yeah?”

I lick my lips. “How did you know that it was me he was after? It could have been anyone?” And I find it hard to believe that someone would be coming to kill me. Me. You don’t get any more civilian type than me in Midnight Mayhem.

He wraps his arms around me and squeezes tightly before his other hand slips into his back pocket and he hands me something.

I unfold the piece of paper, pulling out my phone to use its flashlight. It’s a photo of me on my eighteenth birthday. I’m smiling up at the camera just before I’m about to blow out my candle. Brian and Alexa were beside me, Hope was taking the shot. We never had any family photos. Hope was always paranoid about photographs, so she never let us take them of her.

“He had this?” I ask, lifting it up to Kill.

Killian shuffles his feet and says, “Yeah. They were looking for an assassin.” He watches my face for a reaction.

My hands shake as I hand it back to him. “I don’t know why someone would hire an assassin to kill me.”

Killian searches my eyes. “You sure you don’t know anything?”

I cross my hands in front of me. “I’ve already told you that I don’t.”

He shakes his head. “Yeah, okay.”

He’s being cryptic, but what he’s asking is for me to respect what the Brotherhood entails, and if anything, I do know about that.

He pulls me back under his arm and kisses me as we make our way back to my house.

After showing him around, we make our way up to my bedroom and I strip out of my clothes. “The things that you can’t tell me...”

Killian stills as he throws his top to the other side of the room. I’m momentarily paralyzed by his body. It’s as though every single inch of him was carved by the finest steel and then polished with gold.

“Does it have something to do with me?”

He drops down onto the bed, running his hands through his hair. “I don’t want to do this right now. If I know something that I think you need to know, then yeah, I’ll raise it with my Brothers.”

I chew on my bottom lip. I want to know. I want to know everything that he knows so that I’m not left out in the dark, but I’m also tired. Drained.

I move to the bed, standing in my lace underwear. His eyes turn dark and heavy.

“Fuck,” he whispers, grabbing me by the ass and pulling me onto his lap. He tears off my bra and looks up at me with a smirk, sucking my nipple into his mouth before tugging on it roughly when he pulls away. “Damn, girl.” His arm wraps around my waist and he slams me down onto the bed, spreading my legs wide with his knees. “I’m going to need you to wrap these sexy as fuck legs around my face.”

His hand runs up my navel, his touch electrifying me in all the right places. I don’t want to think of anything else but him. I want to drown in Killian and never resurface.

His hand moves down my belly and stops at my hip. He peers up at me, licking his lips before he dips underneath, his palm pressing against me.

I moan softly, my eyes drift closed. “Killian...”

A finger slips inside. I gasp, jerking my head back slightly. Leaning up on my elbows, my hair cascades down my back.

“Watch, Little Dragon.” He grips onto my lace panties and tears them off, tucking them into the back of his jean pocket. “Grab your phone.”

“What?” I pant, my chest rising and falling as he unbuckles his belt. His muscles flex around his movement.

“Grab your phone and start recording.”

“Killian!” I laugh. “We can’t make a sex tape. What if someone sees?”

He flicks off his button and unzips his jeans. My mouth waters. “Baby, you’ll be the one holding the phone, so if they see anything, it’ll only be me.”

“Why?” I ask. Why the fuck am I even thinking about this crazy idea?

I watch as his hand disappears into his jeans and he slowly pumps himself while keeping everything hidden. He smirks. “Because when I’m not around, or when something happens and we don’t get along, I don’t want you touching or thinking of anyone else but me when you’re fucking yourself. You have this to use at your every need. Get it.”

I pause. Think for two seconds and then shrug. Reaching aimlessly across the bed, I grab my phone, press the camera icon, and wait for it to open until I’m looking at Killian through my phone with a red light flashing.

He peers up and at the camera, killing me with a grin. “Yours.” He gestures down to his dick with a nudge of his head. “On record.”

My throat tightens as his cock springs free from his pants. His thick, glossy head slicked with pre-cum. He stops, leaning

back over me and bending down until his tongue presses against my inner thigh.

I moan, my head tilting back. “No talking, baby, or they’ll know who you are.” He winks at the camera and I suck my lips into my mouth, shaking my head. He knows I can’t be silent to save my life.

He stops. “True that.” He gets to his feet and rips the belt out of his jeans until they fall to the ground.

Killian naked is a bad thing for the entire universe. It would end marriages and split families. I’m too lost in the view that when he’s above my head on the other side of the bed and sliding the belt under my head, my body paralyzes in shock.

He brings his finger to his mouth. “Shhh.” Pulling on the straps until the belt tightens around my mouth, I look up at him as he anchors it.

Fuck. Now I have his leather belt strapped around my head and being used as a gag.

He slides back between my legs and this time skips my inner thighs and presses the front of his tongue against my pussy.

My back arches off the bed as sweat trickles down my scalp. His hand comes to my breast and he flicks it hard at the same time that his tongue assaults my clit. *Ruthless*. I squeeze as my core clutches and everything south attempts to pull my soul from me. He squeezes my nipple again and all at once I release and my muscles twitch as I shake my orgasm out of myself. I’m barely coming down when he throws my leg over his shoulder and leans up on his elbow.

“Watch, baby. Look at what I do to you.” His finger dips inside of me and he brings it to his mouth, sucking me off. “I need to have this every day.” Then he disappears back between my thighs and I struggle to keep the phone up, recording him as his tongue touches my clit again. I scream, even though it comes out as a muffled roar due to the belt. Two orgasms later, and my body is dripping in sweat, my muscles aching from

fatigue. Finally, he raises his head and I whimper, tears prickling the edges of my eyes.

He licks his lips, his smirk or any humor gone as his eyes peer into mine. Reaching forward, he takes the phone from me and stops the recording, tossing it onto the floor.

I remain locked on him, watching every move. Confused, I lean up on my elbows as he comes closer. Grasping around my thighs, he yanks me forward until they're dangling off the bed. Resting his fists on either side of my head, he searches my eyes. "You gonna be honest with me now, Little Dragon?"

He reaches for the buckle and unlatches it. Pain stings around my mouth once it's released, the chaffing rubbing into my skin. I probably have Joker lines.

"What?" I'm so tired, I can barely move my mouth.

He remains focused, crawling up my body. He dips down and sucks on my neck. I open my legs wide for him as he sinks inside of me.

I whimper, instantly my body latches itself around him.

"Fuck," he hisses once he's gone as deep as he can. He leans up as his hand wraps around my throat. He slowly pulls out, before diving back inside, keeping the pace slow and thick, being sure to hit the perfect spot with every thrust.

"Look at me, Saskia," he whispers, this time with a small bite in his tone.

I do, slowly.

"Do you remember me?" he groans, his fingers flexing around my throat.

"What?" I ask, confused. That confusion is slowly drowning my pleasure, but it's making it hard when he's making everything feel so good.

"Do you remember me?" He exhales. "Fuck. Don't lie to me. Don't make me do something I don't want to do with you." He grinds against me, rubbing his pelvic bone over my clit.

“Killian.” I reach up for his face. “The first day I met you was the first day I met you.”

He chuckles, shaking his head. Pausing, he stops and pulls out, standing back to his feet and reaching for his jeans. He pulls them up but leaves them unbuckled, reaching for his pack of smokes in his back pocket.

He puts one in his mouth and pulls out my Zippo from his back pocket. I inwardly scold him for once again stealing my Zippo.

“What are you doing?” I ask, my body struggling to move up from my position. Finally, I have enough energy to reach for the covers and wrap them around my body. White silk sticking to my sweaty flesh, with my hair in a bird’s nest around my face.

He blows out a cloud of smoke, his eyes on mine. I couldn’t help but drop my gaze to the thick bulge in his pants that are still not fucking buttoned.

“I’ll fuck you soon, but first...” He puffs on his smoke, tugging on his hair. “Fuck it. I can’t wait. This can’t wait.”

“What can’t?” My body aches as I whimper and move to the edge of the bed, reaching for his pack of cigarettes on the bed and putting one in my mouth.

“Fuck!” he whispers, and then drops down to the ground opposite me, dragging his feet up to rest his elbows on the top of his knees.

“You’re worrying me...” I stand, tucking the sheet into the front of my breasts and making my way across the small room. I flick the light on in the closet and reach for the bottle of tequila.

Bringing it back to the room, I twist off the lid and take a brave swig. Hissing, I hand it to him. “It’s all I’ve got and that’s thanks to Perse.” I knew something else was bothering him.

Killian shakes his head. “Don’t need it, but you might.”

I take a puff of my smoke and hug the bottle to my chest.

“I didn’t want to tell you right now, and fuck, I actually am not supposed to be telling you right now, but there’s something that I’m hoping I’m right about.”

“What?” I urge, my heart now picking up in pace. Gone is the fatigue.

His eyes bore into mine. “You don’t remember me?”

I shake my head. “No?”

“Fuck.” He runs his hands through his hair, reaching into his pocket, he pulls out his phone and hits dial on someone’s number. “Yeah, you awake? I wouldn’t if it wasn’t important. I need you to come to Saskia’s house.” Pause. “So she doesn’t kill me when she finds out.” He hangs up his phone and tosses it onto the floor.

“Killian.” I drop to the ground opposite him. “Tell me.”

Minutes pass. Three more cigarettes and a whole lot of silence later.

He brings the bottle to his mouth just as headlights flash through the windows and doors close. Three, if I counted right.

He falls silent again before whispering, “I need you to know.”

There’s a knock on my door. “Come in!” As soon as the words leave my mouth, I’m momentarily traumatized by what I probably look like.

Turning to look over my shoulder, Delila, King, and Perse walk into the room. Perse is in pajamas, and Delila is in a silk robe. King is wearing gray sweats and a hoodie. Obviously everyone jumped out of bed as soon as Killian said that he was about to tell me something.

“Jesus,” Perse scolds Killian. “Really?”

“What?” I ask absently.

King chuckles, shaking his head and Delila rolls her eyes.

They shut the door and make themselves comfortable in the room.

Killian is the first to speak. “In Kiznitch, Delila came to the house to tell me—well, to warn me of you.”

“Warn you?” I scowl.

Killian quiets me with a glare.

“Ever wondered where you got your last name Dragavei?”

“Yes, all of the time since finding out. I figured I’d talk to Delila about it sooner or later.”

Killian takes another pull of his tequila. “Your mother was a Dragavei, your father was a Royal. The reason why I didn’t realize it was you at first was because when you were a kid, your parents called you Zaika, and your last name was Dragavei then, not Royal.” He clears his throat. “Your mother was cut off after she started dating your father. Her parents—your grandparents who also owned this house—cut off their only daughter because of your father.”

I stop him, shaking my head. “She was a Dragavei?” I wonder what Papa did to make them angry.

“I was two when you were born. Your parents were already working for my parents. You were born in my damn bedroom because your mother went into labor while cleaning my bathroom.”

“Wait!” I shoot up from the ground. “Pause. What do you mean they were working for your parents? And why—what...”

Perse comes up beside me, running her hand up and down my arm. “Let him finish, Sass. We can figure out the rest once he has told you everything that he knows.”

I look down at Killian.

He continues, “Your parents worked for my parents as your mom, Lucia, cooked, cleaned, kept the house up to standards and in return, my father gave your father protection, the pool house to raise you in, and his gambling debt being paid.” *You were born in my damn bedroom.* My eyes slam closed. “Open your fucking eyes, Saskia, I’m not even halfway done.”

I do, and he stands from his position on the floor. “When you were born, I saw you open your goddamn eyes for the first time ever. I was the first fucking thing you ever saw on this earth.”

I shake my head, stepping backward until the bed hits the back of my legs. “No. No. *Why*—no. We stayed in Kiznitch but only until—”

Killian steps forward. “—You were eight years old when you left. Your father ran after your mother died. I remember. I remember every single fucking thing, Saskia, but the question is, why the fuck don’t you?” He tilts his head. “You hated me as a child. You’d call me a rich brat and make my life a living hell. You ruined so much for me as a kid. Always hanging around. Always fucking there. I made your life hell for those eight years.” He’s standing directly in front of me now, his hands gripping my chin, tilting my face up to his. “So the question is, do you or do you not remember, and are you really just fucking with me for revenge?”

I swallow, the world caving in and the sides of my eyes turning black. “Why—why—would I—” I shake my head. For the first time ever. Ever. Tears prick the corners of my eyes.

“Are you crying?” Perse asks, shocked. “She doesn’t cry,” I hear her whisper to someone.

“I’m not lying, Killian. I’m not sleeping with you for revenge. I don’t remember any of this.”

Killian releases me. He looks to King and then to Delila. “Who fucked with her?”

Delila exhales, standing from the bed and moving to the center of the room. She turns to face me. “I swear you kids are aging me so much faster than I need to be aged.” She reaches for the pack of smokes on my bed and gestures to Killian for the lighter. He hands it to her and she takes a couple of small puffs on her smoke. “Your father didn’t do it.”

“I know he didn’t,” Killian answers smoothly. “I fucking asked him. Who do you think I’d ask first? He’s not bad enough to do that shit to her.”

Delila puffs again. “There was only ever you and the Four Fathers who could perform telekinesis, hypnosis and coercive persuasion to the extreme of it manipulating memories, Killian. No one else. And telekinesis only comes into play when we’re needing to move memories around inside someone’s head. It’s almost the same as moving real objects, only more, you know... realistic.”

“So I can’t unleash her memories like Keres did to Perse?”

Delila shakes her head. “No, and even if there was a possibility, we shouldn’t risk it.”

My hands shake as I snatch the smoke packet from Delila. I put a smoke in my mouth and Killian leans forward, lighting the end.

“There’s another possibility,” King exhales, standing from the bed. He moves to the front of me. “Maybe your father did do it, Killian, but he did it for her. Wouldn’t be the first fuckin’ time he tried to play hero.”

I freeze, blowing out a cloud of smoke. My eyes slam shut. “You guys are wrong. I remember everything when I was a kid. We lived in a two-story small house. I went to Kiznitch Elementary. I—we had a tree at the front of our home with a swing attached to it. I—”

“—the house was dark grey, and the bedrooms were the same color. Your bedroom was up the stairs and your parents at the bottom in a loft style.”

My eyes pop open and Killian is kneeling in front of me, his hands on my legs. “Babe, that was my house. My pool house that you lived in. What else do you remember?”

“Don’t push her, Kill...” King warns.

“I won’t!” Killian brushes him off. “Tell me what you remember.”

I suck in a breath. “I was young, so it’s natural to not remember every single thing, but I don’t remember living with your parents. That house was ours. I don’t—” I shake my head, reaching deep inside of my brain to find something. “I don’t remember the driveway.” My eyes fly to Killian. “Why

don't I remember the driveway?" My legs begin to shake again and my throat tenses. There's ringing in my ears as I hold back a scream.

"She's going to freak out, Killian, stop," Perse snaps.

"Because they haven't wiped your memories." Killian stands back, squaring his shoulders. "They've only removed me from them. In her mind, I didn't exist. My parents didn't exist."

Realization washes over me. He is right. I remember all of The Brothers growing up, not vividly, but I remember seeing them at school and everyone knew who they were. The whole town of Kiznitch knew who The Brothers of Kiznitch were. But Killian isn't in those memories.

I stand to my feet, itchy to move. "Oh my god, I feel violated!"

"Tell me about it," Perse mutters.

I swing around to face Killian. "How do I know you didn't do this? Hmm?"

Killian snatches me by the arm and yanks me into his chest. His eyes are wild, his teeth bared. "Because the last time I saw you, Saskia..." His mouth slams shut. He seems to fight with himself on whether or not he should say anything. Anything at all. He releases me, bringing his cards closer to his chest.

"Because?" I repeat.

"I wouldn't fuckin' do that to you." He shoots a look at Perse. "No offense."

Delila takes a seat back on the chair in the room. "For some reason, I think I trust you," she says to me, folding her leg over the other. "So, when I say these next words, you are to not allow them to leave this room. Understood?"

I nod. "Understood."

Delila lights another smoke. "We go on the road tomorrow. No one knows this, but I have a bug planted in Patience." She blows out a thick cloud of smoke.

“What?” King snaps. “Who?”

“About that,” Perse mutters. “You can take Callan.”

I snort, and then clear my throat.

Delila looks between Perse and I. “Oh what’s the matter? The two queens can’t take a bit of competition. Get used to it. Girls will always be all over The Brothers’ dicks.”

I rear my head back. “Yeah, I don’t care.”

Delila ignores me. “Don’t worry who it is. She has been in there a while and owes me a favor. I wasn’t waiting around and twiddling my thumbs, you should know this,” she says to King.

“I thought that we were going to wait...” King announces, obviously frustrated that Delila made a decision without him.

“For what? The Fathers to give their blessing? That will never happen because in their eyes, well, all but Kallisto, they’d just take them all out.”

“Seems legit.” Killian shrugs, taking a seat on the bed but facing me, with his knee pulled up and his elbow resting on top.

Delila laughs. “Sometimes I find it truly fascinating how similar you are to your grandfather. He would be proud.” Delila stubs out her smoke in the ashtray beside the bed. “We will go on the road tomorrow, and we will get to the bottom of this, Saskia.”

My eyes go to Killian. “Is that why you pushed me away? Because you thought I was using you? You thought I was here with you as some kind of revenge?”

He doesn’t flinch. “Yes.”

“I don’t have any memories of you,” I whisper, shaking my head.

“You won’t want them,” Killian answers.

I feel myself slowly crumbling inside, the walls I’ve spent so many years building slowly turning to rubble. My lip quivers.

Killian reaches for me, pulling me into his chest. I sink into his grasp, confused and not wanting to talk anymore. I don't want to so much as entertain anyone with small talk.

"Is this official?" Perse asks, gesturing between us but pointing her question at Killian. "Because if it is, I have the right to chop off your dick if I see Callan hanging off your arm next time."

I snuffle. Usually, I'd laugh, but with the mixture of everything that has been said, the sex and all of the orgasms Killian has given me tonight, I'm struggling to keep my eyes open.

"It's not, but you don't have to worry about Callan coming near me, Little Bird."

"And other girls?" Perse persists.

"P," King growls. "Let them sort that shit out, it's none of your business."

Perse sighs and then drops down opposite me. "We will talk some more tomorrow. For now, I need you all to get some rest." Perse's hand comes to mine. I relax at her touch. "I'm sorry, Saskia. I'm going to be here for you through everything."

"It's okay, Perse. It's not your fault. I'll see you tomorrow."

She kisses me on the head and glares at Killian. "Take care of her, Trickster. I mean it about your dick."

"Oh come on," he jests. "The one time you say something about my dick and it's in the context of chopping it off."

"Snip, snip!" she sing-songs while closing the door behind her.

And then it's just us.

"Hey." He pulls me back, searching my eyes. I can barely look at him. I don't know how to feel about or toward him now that I know—without knowing. When someone knows parts about you that you don't know, they get to decide

whether or not they want to give them back to you. That's a lot of power for Killian to have over me.

“Just tired,” I murmur, yawning.

“Yeah, okay.” He pulls me into his chest more, flipping the bedside light off. Before I can move myself in a position that will make him comfortable, I'm drifting off to sleep with his scent and touch drowning me.



Twenty

Killian

It was four a.m. when I woke this morning. Not that I got much fucking sleep to begin with. Between my raging hard cock, Saskia's body wrapped around me, and everything that happened last night, sleep didn't want to come.

So that's why I'm here.

Feet to grass running through the woods we run through any time we're back in The Big Easy. "No Regrets" From Eminem is pulsing through my headphones as sweat pours from my chest.

I fucking told her last night, and what's worse, is that I believe her. I believe her every single time she looks up at me with those bright blue eyes. I squeeze mine shut briefly in an attempt to block hers out, only it never works. She and I are fighting the same war that neither of us will win.

I left her early this morning, needing to restock my clothes from home before we set out on the road tonight. Hitting

King's house, my phone vibrates in my pocket and I pull it out to a text from her.

Drago—Where'd you disappear to?

I type out a reply. **Had to grab some shit and shower.**

Drago—Oh, true.

She doesn't reply again so I make my way into the house, kicking the door closed behind me. Perse is standing in the hallway, leaning against the doorframe that leads to the back of the house.

"Good run?" She blows on her coffee.

"What'd I do now?" I smirk, flicking off my headphones to sit around the back of my neck.

She laughs. "Nothing. Yet. Are you ready? Where's Saskia?"

I roll my eyes. "We're not together, Perse. She doesn't have to be everywhere I am."

"True," Perse murmurs, following me into the kitchen.

I start pulling out all the things that I need to make my protein shake.

"Don't take too long. A lot of people are after her."

I freeze.



Twenty-One

Saskia

I consider myself a reasonable person. I can look at both sides of any argument and decipher it to make sense to me, but Killian is something I can't make sense of. You put his broken parts in my hands and all I'll probably do is try to fix them, and Killian isn't someone you can fix.

"You've got everything?" Kenan asks, pushing his aviator glasses down over his eyes. "Why the sad face?"

I grasp onto the handle of my suitcase and start heading to the front door. "I'm not sad."

"You better not be. You had Killian Cornelli under you last night."

Blowing on my to-go coffee, I ignore his jab as Val pulls down my driveway in a hot pink golf cart.

I pause. "What the?"

V laughs, bringing it to a stop outside the steps. “What? You’ve never seen a golf cart before? Come on. It’s easier to navigate around here with it.”

Chuckling, I jump up beside her as Kenan hops on the back, holding both of our suitcases. “Lucky all the rest of our luggage is already there. Don’t think we’d all fit otherwise.”

“Oh it has a trailer,” Val answers smoothly, putting the cart into first gear and jolting us forward toward Delila’s house. “How was your night with Trickster?”

“They fucked a lot and then he left her!” Kenan hollers from the back, just as we hit a speed bump.

“Can you not?” I glare at Kenan.

Kenan shrugs, blowing me a kiss.

“I’m glad the walls are soundproof, though I could have slept through a damn tornado last night.”

“Well, yeah, it was good. I don’t know, Val. I don’t know about him.”

“What about him?” she asks, looking at me over her arm every now and then. I’ve yet to ask her if she knew who I was after being told my last name was Dragavei, but I don’t know if I’m allowed to yet. Her long blonde hair is moving with the wind, her gold skin hitting the sun perfectly, as if they were meant to be a match. Her and the damn sun. I hope Val finds love one day, even if it’s not with Maya. I’m not sure Maya deserves her anyway.

“He’s complicated. There’s so much to Killian that I don’t think I’d ever come close to touching the surface.”

She pauses. “Do you want to go below the surface?”

It was a double-edged question. If I answer yes, that means that I want more. To know him more—which I do—but I’m not sure whether I want anyone else to know that yet. And if I answer no, Val will know I’m lying and then it’ll just bring me back to scenario one.

“I do,” I answer truthfully. “But not in that way. I want to know him because I feel connected to him.” I know the reason

now, because we have known each other since I was born. Our souls recognized each other when my memories did not. Maybe that's why it's called soulmates, because they see each other even when the human eye cannot.

“Before you go any further with this,” Val adds, just as Delila's house comes into view at the end of the road. “You need to know that Killian isn't a man you should have feelings for. Not deep feelings. I've known him all of my life, Sass.” She pulls up to stop around a stone display fountain outside of the house. “And he isn't someone that you can rely on to have feelings for.”

“Thanks.” I smile at her, because she's only being my friend. Someone who I need on my side and who will tell me point blank if I'm not seeing something that is right in front of me. “I know, and that's not what I meant when I said that I want to know him. I just mean—”

“—You want to know what's beneath the surface.” Kenan rolls his eyes. “Seriously, do all girls talk like this during their girl time? You literally did a full circle.”

I ignore my annoying best friend and slide out of the cart, reaching for my suitcase from Kenan.

“Sass.” Val touches my arm, dragging her sunglasses over her head. “Just please remember what I said.”

We make our way through Delila's house until we come out the other side through the sliding doors. Her home reminds me of the old Victorian mansions. You know the ones that have manicured hedges and statues in the backyard. The large patio stretches out onto the lawn, where a human-sized chessboard sits in the middle.

“Oh good! You're here!” Delila claps her hands. “The vehicles will be here any second.”

I lean against one of the walls as Val and Kenan argue about a new song Halsey just released. I had already heard it and loved it, but the song reminded me of the flight back to the US from Kiznitch.

Arms wrapped around me from behind, and I didn't have to turn to know who it was. Smirking, I sink into his chest, turning around in his embrace. "Hey."

He kisses me against my lips. "You wanna ride with me?"

My eyebrows shoot up in surprise. "What, as in your RV?"

"Nah, as in on my dick."

I shove him and he laughs, his white teeth a complete contrast to his tanned, smooth skin. Two dimples sink into each cheek as he leans down and bites my bottom lip between his teeth. "I'm not joking," he growls over my mouth, but only loud enough for us both to hear.

"I know you're not."

He pulls back slightly as Delila starts talking in the background. Spinning around but remaining in his arms, I rest my head against his chest as we listen to Delila's plans.

Killian's mouth comes down to the back of my ear. "Are you going to make me wait for your answer?"

I shake my head. "I don't know."

He exhales. "Perse doesn't want you near Callan until she figures out her next move, Callan is on the side that we don't really trust right now."

Makes sense now. It's not that he wants me in his bus, it's that Perse doesn't want Callan in mine.

"What do you mean you guys don't trust Callan?" I whisper, needing more of an answer.

"Don't know yet. There's just some shit that has been happening, and we need to find out where it's coming from. In the meantime, you're riding with me."

Just as I ponder over what he's offering, Delila yaps about our schedule, which starts in San Antonio.

"Saskia, it's a seven to eight-hour drive. It won't kill you."

I sigh, biting the inside of my cheek. "Fine."

He sucks on my neck, enough to leave a bruise. “Good girl.”

“Did you just give me a fucking hickey?” I reach for his dick and squeeze it in the palm of my hand, keeping a smile on my face. Anyone in front of us can’t see because I’m blocking the view.

“Babe,” Killian coughs, pushing my hand away.

I release him with a smirk. He grabs me roughly, squeezing me into his chest. “You’ll regret that,” he whispers into my ear, biting down on my lobe.

“God, can you both not?” Val jokes, shoving me backward and farther into Killian. He feels good behind me. Even if he did just literally mark me. Twice. But, I feel safe. Protected. For the seconds that I’m in his arms, the minutes don’t matter.

“If we can all move to the front of the house so we can ensure this goes smoothly.”

We do. The whole time Killian refuses to let me go. It’s confusing for the most part, but I go with it. I’ve not seen Callan since we’ve been here.

“Why are you stealing my best friend?” Kenan scolds Killian just as I’m about to step inside The Brothers’ infamous RV.

“Ken,” I hush sadly.

“Listen, if that bitch murders me, it’s your guys’ fault,” Kenan declares.

Killian groans.

I look up at Killian.

“Nope. No, fuck you.” He shoves past me and heads into the RV.

“I tried.” I shrug at Kenan.

His eyes turn to slits. “Tried what?”

“To get him to agree to you coming with us in here.”

He looks confused for a brief second. “You both had a conversation without having a conversation? Yeah, you’re both fucked. I’ll see you in eight hours!” Kenan turns, leaving me with my thoughts.

Was he right? Did that just happen?

I climb the steps until I’ve landed on the final one and I’m looking at all of The Brothers—except King—who are watching me carefully.

“Okay, I get it,” I say, stepping farther into the bus, just as Killian is walking down the stairs. “You don’t want me here.”

“No one said anything about that...” Keaton doesn’t bring his eyes to mine.

Kyrin glares at me.

I shuffle uncomfortably as another person stumbles up the stairs.

“Sorry I’m late, didn’t want to fucking come!”

I turn around to see who the voice belongs to when I’m stopped in my tracks.

His eyes turn weak. “Wow, we meet again, and I see my cousin is making it comfortable with you now.”

I turn slightly over my shoulder as Killian yanks me into his chest from behind. He may as well throw me over his shoulder too since he wants to be a fucking caveman all of a sudden.

“Hey, Kaizer, right?”

He smirks at me. “Right, and you’re Saskia? The girl who slays dragons.”

“She is the dragon, Kaiz. Go to the driver’s seat where you need to be.” Kyrin sounds bored as Kaizer shuffles past us and heads to the front of the bus, dropping his bags beside him. I take it in quickly. Though I’ve been in here before, I’ve never had the chance to really see inside. Take it all in.

The interior is executive style, with black sleek fittings and fixtures, and opaque painted walls. There are silver lights that

hang down from the ceiling over the dining table that's large enough to fit six people, and bar stools tucked beneath the kitchen island. Turning to the left, there's the stairs that lead up to the second level where all of the bedrooms are, with the exception of the back room on the first floor, i.e., Perse's old room.

I look up at Killian. "Where am I sleeping?"

Killian rolls his eyes, releasing me and tugging his shirt over his head. "Your shit is already upstairs."

I stare.

"In my room."

"Wait—"

"Saskia, it's only for seven hours or until Perse has sorted out the dynamic of your group. She has to do this as the leader."

I sigh, taking a seat opposite Kyrin but beside Keaton at the table. "I know."

Killian heads to the fridge as the bus pulls away. "Want a drink?"

I nod. "Thanks."

Kyrin studies me carefully. "What's been happening since the last time I saw you, which would have been with this asshole's fist in my face."

I flush. It doesn't feel like that was just last night considering everything else that has happened from then to now.

"Well, let's see..." I pick up the glass Killian puts in front of me, smelling the whiskey right away. I put it back down. "Not much."

"Hmmm," Ky murmurs, watching me carefully with his sharp eyes. "Interesting how good of a liar you are."

I take a sip of my drink anyway, suddenly feeling like I'm way out of my element in this RV and we have approximately six hours and fifty-three minutes remaining in our journey.

Keaton hasn't breathed a word, yet his eyes have remained on me. Watching. Always watching. Examining. Psychoanalyzing probably.

Kyryn gestures to the two of us. "This looks a lot more serious than a 'we're just fucking around'." He leans back in his chair, his glass dangling from his two fingers. Kyryn is interesting. Words leave his mouth, but his eyes are cold. He is where death would go to be comforted.

Killian slides out from his chair and takes my hand. "Let's go."

I don't hesitate, following him up the stairs and down the hallway until he's opening the door into his room.

I pause for a few seconds, taking in the style. I didn't expect it. I figured he'd have blank walls and lifeless décor. He didn't. The walls are black, his bed sheets black silk. There's no tacky art hanging on the walls. A TV hangs on the wall across from his bed, and on the opposite wall near the door is a large abstract art piece.

"This is amazing." I touch the canvas, lost in the intricate swirls and colors. It starts light and fresh, with vibrant colors. Greens, orange, red, yellow, purple before it begins to merge together in the middle, forming a darker tint, and finally to the core where it's black. I tilt my head as I continue to study it, entranced within the meaning. People express themselves with not just creating art, but with the art that they own. Listen to it. It doesn't lie.

"Who did this?"

"Kohen," he answers.

"As in King's brother?"

He nods his head. "The very same."

Killian grips my hips and turns me around to face him. He grins against my mouth. "Stop overanalyzing my art. Don't you know that it's a window into my soul?"

I reach up and press my lips to his. "I want to know more."

“You know too much already.” He picks me up and tosses me onto the bed. Crawling up my body, he stops when his head is above mine, his eyes searching mine carefully. “What is it with you, Little Dragon.”

He caresses my cheek softly before his thumb moves across my mouth and slips between my lips. I suck him softly, flicking my tongue over the cushion of his thumb. “Absolutely nothing.”

His lips drop to mine and my legs open farther, allowing him to sink into me.

He bites down on my neck, chuckling. “Oh, these seven hours are going to be fun...”

I no longer care about the exact number of hours or minutes.

After throwing on Killian’s “Trickster” Brothers of Kiznitch shirt, I’m walking down the stairs, well, waddling down the stairs after Killian’s onslaught of pleasure. Kyrin is sitting at the table, flicking through his phone.

“Hey,” I call out, and his eyes drag up to mine. With Kyrin it’s black and white. I’ve felt his hostility grow the more time I spend with Killian, but I don’t know where it comes from. Maybe he thought I was using Killian too.

Grabbing a water bottle from the fridge, I take a seat opposite him.

His eyes stay on mine. “I don’t trust you.”

I pause, water still in my mouth. Swallowing, I tilt my head. “Why?”

Kyrin shrugs, tossing his phone onto the table. “Have my reasons.”

I place the water bottle onto the marble top, leaning back in my chair. “Is it because I’m hanging around with Killian?”

He leans forward, resting his elbows on the table. “Nah, more than that.”

“Wait.” I shake my head, attempting to clear my thoughts. “So it’s not because I’m sleeping with Killian, you don’t trust me overall?”

Kyrin blinks a couple of times and then finally opens his mouth. “Truth. I don’t. I couldn’t give a fuck who Killian gets his dick wet with, considering the fucking thing is never dry for longer than twenty-four hours. I don’t trust you as a person. I know about who you are, and I don’t believe for one second that you don’t remember your life, and if you truly don’t, then I even more so don’t trust you.”

I study him as he flicks a switchblade around his fingers, just as Keaton takes a seat beside him. Keaton is dripping in tattoos. Including on his face. It’s hard to imagine him without them, but with or without them he’s hot. With blond hair shaved close to the scalp on the sides to see his tattoos, wide prominent jaw, and thick lashes, he’s every bit as pretty as the rest of them. But there’s something else about Keaton. He’s not someone you would want to be left alone with.

Kyrin is dark in a different way. There’s rhyme to his reason. He’s smart. Too smart.

Keaton I feel would just straight up kill people for the fun of it.

“I can’t stop you from feeling the way that you feel, but just so you know, Perse and Kenan are my best friends and I’d rather die than see them be hurt.”

“Wish I could say I believed you.”

“Wish I could say I cared.” I rolled my eyes and slid out of my chair.

He chuckles to himself, going back to flicking the blade between his fingers. I’ve noticed he always has that blade. I’m not sure I want to know what it’s really for.

“Little Dragon! Come talk to me. You’re fucking my cousin, which makes us family,” Kaizer calls out from the front.

I drop down on the passenger seat, watching the passing trees and farmland. “Well if that’s the case, you have a very

big family.”

Kaizer laughs, rubbing his hand over his chin. “True, true, though it’s in our DNA to be big fat sluts. I’m truly sorry you’re bedding one.”

I snort, shaking my head. “You look similar.”

“Does that mean I get to fuck you too?” He winks at me.

“Fuck off, Kaiz!” Killian shuts one of the cupboards in the kitchen as he reaches for a bottle of alcohol. He ignores me, taking a seat opposite Keaton where I was seated not long before. Worry burns in my veins at what they might talk about. What if Kyrin tells him what he just told me? This is all too stressful. I need to be back in my RV and away from these brothers.

“You’re worried he’s going to tell Kill what he just said?” Kaizer asks quietly, so only him and I can hear.

I swallow, nodding my head. “Yeah, and I don’t know why I suddenly care so much.”

“Because you like him.” Kaizer shrugs. “I get it, you’re not the first one to fall for the Trickster with no heart.” He pauses, watching me carefully. “And that’s what he is, the Trickster with no heart, so make sure you don’t give him yours.”

I freeze. “What? No!” Shaking my head, I reach inside my brain to bring up something else. “That’s not...”

“Listen,” Kaizer mutters. “Guys like Killian, the ones who don’t have hearts, they don’t know what to do when they’re given someone else’s, so they break it. They hurt you bad. Whether they want to or not, they will.”

I groan. “I don’t like him like that, but I do feel protective over him, over what we have. Which, by the way.” I glare at Kaizer. “Is just a friendship thing right now.”

Kaizer throws his head back as a deep laugh erupts from him.

I whack him with the back of my hand. “Shut up!” Smirking, I go back to watching the road. “I can’t give too

much of myself, because there's not much left of me to give." The words were a soft whisper when they left my lips.

Kaizer doesn't answer for a few seconds before he finally does. "Be careful."

"What the fuck are you talking about?" Killian leans against the frame behind me, his muscles tensing as he folds his arms in front of himself.

"I was warning her off you, obviously." Kaizer ignores his cousin's presence.

"Yo!" Keaton calls out from the table. "Who wants to play a game?"

I lean over to look at him. He's shuffling cards between his fingers, a grin on his face.

"If you say Sixers, I'm going to pass."

Killian comes back to me, licking his bottom lip. "Scared?"

"Never," I reply instantly.

"Then let's fucking play."

I groan, standing and following him, as he walks back to the dining table. Kyrin is still there, flicking his knife between his fingers.

"Ky, put the fucking knife away." Killian snatches it off him, flipping it shut and shoving it into his pocket.

"I don't want to play."

Kyrin grabs the bottle of whiskey and twists off the lid. "Liquid courage."

"I'm not playing Sixers," I answer, wrapping my lips around the rim, my focus remaining on Kyrin.

"Why?" he asks. His features morph into something of confusion as he quickly glares at Killian before coming back to me.

I shrug, unfazed. "I don't want to. We can play something else."

Hours later, we're pulling into the bright lights of San Antonio and parking at our destination. I left The Brothers' RV with my bag and the rest of my belongings but still wearing Killian's hoodie. He tried to fight me and get me to stay, but honestly, I needed to put distance between us. Between Kyrin because he's scary as fuck and Keaton who I sense can see every single thing that goes on in my head.

I shut the door to my RV and let out a loud breath, just as Kenan comes down the stairs. "You're back and you smell of sex."

Stomping up the stairs, I dump my bag on the kitchen bench and go straight for the fridge to eat my feelings. "I don't want to talk about it. Where's Callan?"

Kenan pauses on the bottom stair, slowly making his way to me. "She's out."

Tossing deli meats and butter onto the counter, I raise an eyebrow. "What do you mean? Is she in another RV now?"

Kenan shakes his head. "Nope. She's out *out*. As in for good."

I pause just as there's a loud knock on the door. It swings open and Perse is walking in holding a clipboard. "Sorry to interrupt!" Her long red hair is messy, as if she's just woken up, her eyes tired. "I just—"

"—Perse, I didn't expect you to kick Callan out of Mayhem altogether!"

Perse sighs, resting the clipboard in front of her, as she makes her way into the kitchen. "I know, Sass, but here's the thing; I don't like girls like her in general and I sure as fuck don't want them as a part of our family. Because that's what we are. Family. If one of us can't trust the other, the family crumbles, so she had to go. She's more than able to take care of herself now, and there are other things surrounding why she had to go."

I know she's talking about what Killian told me, how they don't think they can trust her.

I take a few deep breaths. “Wow. Okay. Where’d she go?”

“That doesn’t matter. So, obviously we need four people, so I need you to officially meet our new fourth, and please for the love of God will you both get along. Only Delila and King know that I recruited this person, but it was the best I could do.”

I’ve finished stacking my sandwich. “Promise. Who is she?”

The door opens and Perse slowly turns, displaying who it is that walked in. “You mean, he.”

Kaizer stumbles in holding a suitcase. “Surprise,” he smirks, winking at me.

Bread gets stuck in my throat and I bang on my chest, willing it to come out. “Wait! What?”

Kaizer walks farther into the RV, shutting the door behind himself. “I’m your new fourth.”

Perse is smiling at me but it’s forced. As if she knows she’s going to be in trouble for this, but she’s going to act innocent about it anyway.

“And what does King think of this?”

Perse chuckles. “Trust me, it took some convincing, but he’s fine with it if—” Perse takes a deep breath. “If I partner with Kenan and you partner with Kaizer now.” Her smile widens.

“I hate you,” I deadpan. “And your possessive boyfriend.”

Perse laughs, nudging Kenan. “Aside from the dance routine you both do solo, she’ll be partnered with Kaizer now and I with you during our group routine.”

“I’m not that bad,” Kaizer mutters, moving farther into the bus.

I hold my breath. “That’s not what I’m worried about.”

“What?” Kaizer grins. “My cousin?” The tension in the air crackles at that exact moment he mentions Killian.

“Well.”

“He won’t care.” Kaizer rolls his eyes. “You forget what I told you?”

I relax a little, taking in his words. He’s probably right. I’m overreacting. I just don’t want to give Killian yet another reason to cause a problem with me.

Later that night, I slip back into my bedroom, tossing and turning and struggling to sleep. Rolling onto my stomach, I play over what the conversation must have been like between Perse and Callan. Callan will for sure hate me now, and there’s nothing I can do about that at all.

Black walls cave in around me as a phone rings in the background.

Ring and ringing. That classic iPhone tune. The one I hate. I don’t know why I hate that sound, but I do.

I search around the floor, my fingers grazing over the concrete. My nails tear from the skin when I scratch against the concrete ground. The tune gets louder and louder. Blood is dripping down my fingertips. I start to panic. Sweat pours out of my pores as I continue to frantically try to find it.

“Why can’t I see anything!” I scream when the sound and pain become unbearable.

“Because we don’t want you to...”

I shoot up from the bed, swiping the sweat off my face. Another stupidly graphic nightmare, but when I check the clock on my bedside table and see it’s seven a.m., I’m no longer mad. I got a full seven hours’ sleep last night, even though I struggled to go to sleep.

My phone rings and I jolt from the bed, that same ringtone blaring through the room. Shivers break out over my skin as I stare at the unknown caller. This isn’t my ringtone.

The sound continues until I shake off my unwarranted fear, swipe to unlock it, and answer.

“Hello?”

“Saskia Dragavei, the time is so close.” The voice that comes through the other side of the call is like ice being pumped through my veins.

My heartbeat quickens in my chest as I slowly and shakily get to my feet. “Who is this?”

The line goes dead.

I stare down at my phone, confused. Who was that?

There’s a loud bang on my door and I jump in shock before it’s being kicked down and Killian is standing on the other side with nothing but loose jeans that aren’t buttoned and no shirt. It’s as though he got out of bed and came straight here, with his hair unruly all over his head and his eyes manic.

“Killian, what the fuck!” I yell at him, a mixture of panic and confusion from my weird morning.

He points to my suitcase. “Pack your shit.”

“What the hell are you doing? Are you high?”

Killian laughs manically. “Oh, you fucking wish I was high, baby, then maybe I wouldn’t have to fight the need to fucking strangle you. Pack. Your. Shit.”

“I’m confused,” I answer, because it’s all I can think to say in the midst of the chaos. “Why do I have to pack?”

Killian has had enough obviously because he’s now unzipping my suitcase—which was only partially unpacked to begin with—and starts throwing clothes inside of it.

“Killian!” I yell, which must have woken the entire bus because now Kaizer and Kenan are standing at the threshold of my door.

Kaizer is spooning granola into his mouth, watching the commotion.

Killian, as if sensing him, spins around. “Get the fuck out, Kaiz.”

Kaizer pauses and then looks at me. “I was wrong. He is losing his shit.”

“Pack.” Killian points.

“Killian, no!” I reach for the clothes he’s taking. “I’m not leaving, I have to stay here.”

He holds the clothes above his head, so I have to jump and reach for them. It’s useless since he’s almost an entire foot taller.

I point to the two of them. “Get out.” They both leave and I kick the door closed before going back to Killian.

I reach for his arm. “What’s the problem?”

Killian pauses, his jaw tensing a few times. “The problem is that you don’t know Kaizer, Saskia, and I don’t want his bullshit around you.”

“Oh, but I can have your bullshit around me?” I throw back, raising my eyebrows and completely forgetting about the weird phone call and dream that just happened.

“Yes,” Killian hisses, walking closer to me, until I’m backing up against the wall.

His fingers flex around my throat. “You gonna ask why my bullshit is allowed around you?”

I square my shoulders. “Why, Killian?”

“This isn’t even about Kaizer as a person, Saskia, it’s fucking about you. About how I may be many things, but a liar is not one of them.” He releases me, shoving me back against the wall and tossing my clothes back onto the bed. He turns around to face me just as he reaches for the door. “You’re right, Little Dragon. You do what you need to do.” Then he stalks out, slamming the door behind him.



Twenty-Two

Killian

“What was that?” Kyrin asks, as I’m making my way back to our RV. Of course the fucker came for the show, and that’s partly my fault. At first, Ky just wanted to fuck her. Bad. But now I think he’s actually intrigued by her because of the interest I’ve had in her.

“Nothing,” I mutter, just as King is stepping out of he and Perse’s bus.

He whistles out to us and waves us over, putting a smoke into his mouth. We make our way to him as he’s blowing out a cloud.

He hands it to me. “You need this?”

I watch him carefully as he throws a shirt over his head and I bring the tip of the smoke to my mouth. “You knew?” I ask, inhaling angrily. I let the harsh nicotine choke me to death before exhaling it out through a hiss.

“I did,” he says, rubbing the palms of his hands over his face. “Truthfully, I didn’t think you’d give that much of a fuck, but fuck, Kill, the whole fucking compound could hear the two of you arguing.”

I suck in another gulp of poison before blowing it back out. “That wasn’t arguing.”

King and Kyrin share a stare before they both look back to me.

“Are you forgetting the plan?” King murmurs. “Because if you’re not equipped to do it, I can send someone else in.”

I freeze, the cigarette just short of my lips. “You can’t actually, because Saskia isn’t someone who lets anyone in. She has walls so high that no motherfucker can climb.”

“You did.” King glares at me.

I grin. “I didn’t actually, I just tore the fuckers down.” There’s not one fucking person walking this earth that is as close to her as me—and that’s including Kenan.

King seems to ponder over my words before he snatches the smoke back from me. “Maybe, but that, brother, wasn’t supposed to happen.”

A smirk crawls onto my lips, my eyes hooded. “Or was it?”



Twenty-Three

Saskia

Killian's back and forth reminds me of being on a pirate ship. It rocks constantly, but you know that you better hang on for your life because he'd have no problem throwing you overboard.

I've missed this. The anticipation to a show, not knowing what could or couldn't happen. I haven't spoken to Killian since the morning he stormed in and out of my bus. I'm worried about how my act is going to go tomorrow night because of it.

My phone vibrates in my hands as I'm making my way over to the tent to train. Clicking it unlocked, I open a message from Hope.

Hope: I'm sorry for worrying you, Saskia. I am ok now.

Pausing my footing to shuffle my bags into my other hand, I send off another message to her. **R u home now?**

She replies almost instantly. **I am. Where are you? Still in Kiznitch?**

I quickly reply, **No, in San Antonio.**

She doesn't respond, so I carry on back to the tent, pushing my thoughts about Hope to the back of my brain. I want to ask her why she was coming to Kiznitch to begin with, but I keep forgetting every time we talk. I'll ask her tonight.

Dropping my bags at the front of the stage, Rose, Val, and a few others are flipping around the aerials when I enter, music pouring out of the seams of the tent. I start warming up, popping my AirPods into my ears to remain focused. "Devil" by Nikyee Heaton plays as I move around the stage until my body is hot and sweaty. Someone taps on my shoulder after my third round and I quickly tear out the pods, turning to face Perse.

"You can have the speakers now!"

"Thanks." I smile at her.

"You've got the floor now until six, then The Brothers are coming in."

I nod, tearing off my shirt until I'm standing in nothing but my sports bra and Nike spandex shorts. "That's cool. It's all the time I need."

Perse hands me the remote, so I can control the music, and I sync it to my phone. I flick through the songs again. The thing that I love about having my own act is that I'm allowed to choose when I change my songs or how I change them. I have complete control over my fire scenes—both of them. The rope and dragon staff. I try to keep with two different genres of music to keep it fresh but realistically, I don't need to. It's not like the same people are watching our show more than once in each city. Pushing play on Halsey's "You Should Be Sad," I light up both ends of my dragon staff and start warming up. Rolling it against my back until it falls into the palm of my hand. The music pounds through the speakers loudly. I flip the staff up as the hook exits and the chorus kicks back in. The song is powerful without being loud. The lyrics

float on top of the tune, creating a perfect balance of synchronized harmony. It's too much. Too close. *Too much.*

I snatch up the remote and change the song. After practicing for the final two hours that I have, I pack up my things and head backstage to put everything near my compartment and mirror. I know the songs that I'm using for my solo acts tomorrow, and I'm almost certain that we're doing the same routine for the group and Kenan and I tomorrow since Perse hasn't said anything, and also, the bikes have started up, so I just want to get the fuck out of here.

The smell of gasoline and burning rubber fills up the tent almost instantly, as if the vast space of it means nothing. As if the sheer opulence that constructs all of Midnight Mayhem's tents means nothing as soon as these boys ride their Harleys up in the arena.

Making a beeline for the exit out the back, I quickly scrub up in the shower and get changed. I know that there's a cookout happening tonight like there is every night, before and during shows, and aside from the fact that I don't particularly enjoy too many social settings, I do want to make more of an effort with the people I genuinely care about here, like Perse, Val, and Kenan.

I run the brush through my hair, allowing natural waves to fall down my back all the way to my tailbone. Swiping my lips with red lipstick, I quickly dress in jean short cut-offs and a Harley Davidson crop top that's torn in all the right places. Slipping my feet into a pair of red Chucks, I push my phone into my back pocket and make my way down the stairs and into the kitchen. The door opens behind me and I stop short, just as the bottle of tequila grazes my fingers.

"Oh shit, you drinking tonight, Boo?" Kenan chuckles, walking in with a joint hanging out of his mouth.

"Actually, no." I chuckle, shaking my head. "I'm bringing it for Perse because she is."

Kenan hands me the lit joint. "I don't know how that girl never has a hangover."

I take it from him and put it between my lips. “She’s crazy, that’s why.” I take a few puffs before giving it back to him. “You coming tonight?”

He nods. “Yeah, I’ll be down after a shower.” He pauses, and then grins. “Seen Kaizer?”

The pot instantly relaxes me. Shaking my head. “Nope. Not since this morning.”

He chuckles. “Wait for me and we’ll go down together. Here.” He throws another joint at me. “Take a seat and chill.” I take it, pulling out my pack of smokes from my back pocket and placing them both on the table. Flicking my Zippo around my fingers, I watch closely as the light hits the edges of the silver casing. The embedded patterns engraved in the steel. The shower turns on. I continue flicking it.

Biting a cigarette into my mouth, I blaze the end and open my phone. I don’t need extra drama or drama in general in my life; in fact, I hate drama and do my best to stay away from it, but since being in Midnight Mayhem, it’s proving difficult to not get caught up in it.

Five minutes later, Kenan is shuffling down the stairs doing up his belt with freshly showered hair. He runs his hands through the ends. “Blaze that joint and let’s go.” He takes the tequila as I light the end and we make our way out of the bus and toward Val’s RV where the parties usually are. The fire pit is in the middle and a small makeshift bar to the side. It’s almost identical to how it always looks, no matter what town we’re in. I wonder to myself if they do this as a false sense of stability.

“You’re here!” Val comes crashing into me, her arm swinging over my shoulder. It’s crowded, way too crowded for my comfort. Good thing I’m high off my face.

I drop into the chair opposite her and sip on a cup of juice that Kenan brought over to me. He grins, pressing a kiss against my cheek. “Just drink juice so they think you’re having alcohol.”

I smirk up at him, tipping my head back and taking a long sip.

I'm stoned as shit. In fact, when I try to look Val in the eye, everything is moving around her in slow motion. The flames from the fire lick through the dark night, morphing into faces and objects.

I shake my head just as Perse reaches for my hand and tugs me to my feet. I drop my cup, the bright orange liquid spilling out against the fresh green grass. Perse and I start dancing with Val coming in the middle. A couple of the Angels slip in with us too, with the Demons standing. We're all wasted or drunk or high, and all around it's a good vibe.

I look up slowly to see all four Brothers sitting in their chairs right near the fire.

Killian is wearing a leather jacket with no shirt underneath and dark, ripped jeans. His combat boots are loose around his feet, his legs spread wide.

He stretches them wider with a smirk on his mouth as his eyes drop all the way down my body before coming back up to meet mine again. I hate the way he makes me feel. How can someone hold so much power without physically holding any? The chemistry between us seems to only get hotter and hotter the more time we spend around each other, whether we like or want it.

"Nonstop" by Drake starts playing loudly. Killian's tongue slides out and dampens his bottom lip.

He curls his finger.

I fight it, ignoring him and turning around to face Kenan who's watching me carefully from the other side. Kenan and I are completely platonic. We talk a lot of shit, or he does, but we both know nothing would ever happen between us because we mean too much to one another.

I spin back around. Killian gestures to his lap. *Now*, he mouths. A harsh dose of adrenaline takes over me and before I can stop myself, I find my feet going straight to where he is.

Once I'm within arm's reach, his hands squeeze around the backs of my thighs and he yanks me down onto his lap so I'm straddling him.

His hand comes to the back of my neck and he shoves my face down, my lips barely touching his. He groans, smirking. "Hmmm, kinda want to punish you right now."

Heat rushes through me, and like a crack addict, I absorb every single drop of it. "Why?" I ask, though my mouth feels like it's moving slowly.

He leans forward and sucks my bottom lip between his teeth. "Because you've been a pain in my fucking ass, and now I sort of want to make yours hurt." He pushes up from where he was sitting, taking my hand in his.

With his other hand, he downs the rest of his drink and then tosses his cup to the ground, reaching into my pocket to grab my smokes and Zippo. He lights one and puts them into his pocket, before dragging us behind Val's RV.

It's strange, because even though we're only behind the RV and everyone is right there, it feels like it's far enough away. I can hear the song "STARGAZING" by Travis Scott playing loudly just as he slams me up against the bus with one hand latched around my throat.

"Do you want Kaizer?" And there it is.

"What?" I breathe out, or attempt to.

Killian tilts his head, studying me as if I'm a science project. Some freak that he's captured and attempting to decipher. There's something frightening about being manhandled by a killer. The very hands that make me come are the same that end lives. But then there's the power that comes with it, because he hasn't hurt me.

"Killian..." I tap his hand and just when I think he's not going to release any air, he slightly loosens his grip.

Pushing the smoke between his teeth, he hisses, baring his teeth and I swear if it didn't put the fear of God in me, I would orgasm by the animalistic sound that vibrates out of him. He smirks, but his eyes remain feral as he wraps my hair around

his fist, spinning me around. My face slams into the side of the RV. He shoves me harder, keeping one hand secured around the back of my neck, holding my face against the metal.

“Arch your back, Little Dragon...”

I do, leaning over more. I’ve become accustomed to how Killian fucks.

He has such a violent grip on my neck and hair that I didn’t expect him to be so gentle when I feel the palm of his hand run up the inside of my thigh.

My eyes close.

“You’re a fucking dirty bitch just like me.” His fingers dip into my panties from the back, and I clench around his invasion.

“Take your jeans off.” He releases me, flicking his smoke to the side, as I unbutton my jeans and they drop to my ankles, along with my panties.

His hand comes back to my neck, and he bends me forward as his other hand comes to my mouth. “Spit.”

I try, but because of all the weed, I’m dry.

“Open your mouth.”

I do, and his fingers go down my throat, reaching for my tonsils. I gag, spitting on his hands.

“Good girl.”

He brings his hand to my pussy from behind and I groan at the slick touch of him. He rubs me back and forth slowly, his finger pressing against my clit with every thrust before it disappears and the tip of his cock presses against my opening. He slams into me roughly and I scream out, my back arching and my hair flipping back. Heat flushes through me, sweat beading on my forehead.

“Shit.” His cock touches the tip of my cervix every single time, and I cry out as tears pour down my cheeks.

He pulls out just before I feel myself start the climb.

“Kaiz,” he calls out, and my eyes flash up in a panic, everything south turning down a notch.

My heart thunders in my chest as Kaizer comes forward out of the shadows, a smirk on his mouth and a bottle of whiskey hanging from his two fingers. He’s wearing a white shirt and blue jeans with Nike high tops on his feet.

“You still wanna play, Little Dragon?” Killian coaxes behind me.

“What’s the game?” I examine Kaizer.

“The game is truth or dare.”

I gulp. “Doesn’t look like any truth or dare that I’ve ever played...”

“That’s because it’s not,” he answers, just as his hand comes back to my pussy. “So, truth or dare?”

I think over his words, while trying to settle my body from falling for his touch.

“Truth!” I don’t want to do dare just in case he dares me to do something I don’t want to do.

His touch becomes frantic as his cock presses against my opening again. “Is it true that you want to fuck Kaizer?” Killian asks as he reenters me. I whimper against him, bending over even farther.

I don’t answer.

He goes deeper, thrusting inside of me relentlessly until I’m crying out in pain but moaning in pleasure. “True?” he asks. “If you say yes, Saskia, I’ll have Kaizer fuck you right here and now and I won’t give a fuck about it, but this would be the only time that you will be allowed. Do you understand?” No, I didn’t, because people fucked who they wanted for the final act. But I nodded, because he was terrifying right now.

“I understand,” I breathe out, slowly pressing myself against him and not caring that Kaizer is watching the whole thing.

Killian slams into me. “So do you want to fuck him?”

I shake my head. “No!” I cry out as he slams into me forcefully. Not fast. Just hard.

“Then stay the fuck off his dick.” His hand grips my hip as his other yanks on my hair, forcing my head back. I scream out when he pounds into me.

“Aw, come on, cuz, come cover her mouth...” Killian calls to Kaizer.

“With my dick?” Kaizer jokes, coming closer.

I freeze, stilling beneath Killian’s grasp.

It was small, but Killian’s thumb circles over my hipbone, and I don’t know if that was his way of reassuring me that he’d never let that happen and that he was just being exactly who he was, a fucking trickster, or if I was reading too much into it, but the motion went straight to my heart.

“Bring it anywhere near her and I’ll fucking cut it off.”

Kaizer chuckles, bringing the rim of his bottle to his mouth. “Damn, well, that’s new.”

Killian pushes into me harshly again and picks up the pace. With every thrust, my cervix shakes and screams, the life being torn out of me.

“Little Dragon, he’s gonna cover your mouth.”

I nod, just as my core tenses.

Kaizer’s hand comes to my mouth to shut me up as Killian continues to drive into me from behind. Within seconds, I can’t take the onslaught of pleasure anymore. My muscles lock up, my legs liquify and turn to jelly as I groan, biting down on Kaizer’s palm.

“Holy fuck,” Kaizer smirks, looking down at me with hooded eyes. “She fuckin’ bites?”

Killian groans, pulling out of me as hot liquid shoots out on my back. “Yeah. She does.”

I slowly stand, fighting my shaking limbs and dizzy brain from the weed. I snatch the bottle off Kaizer and bring it to my mouth. I didn't intend to drink tonight, but I need a shot. One shot. Just to calm my nerves.

I ignore the drip of Killian's cum slipping down my spine as Kaizer turns to make his way back to the party, shaking his head.

"Fucker!" Killian calls out, tucking himself away as I pull up my panties and shorts. "Get it now?"

Kaizer pauses, looking between Killian and I as if we're both crazy. "Oh, loud and clear. Literally." Then he turns and disappears back into the party.

"My Love" from Justin Timberlake starts playing. I lick my lips, reaching for my smokes in his pocket and grabbing one out.

Killian blazes it up with my Zippo and then lights his own, blowing out a thick cloud of smoke.

"Why'd you do that?" I ask, confused. I partly don't want to look at him. The song is loud, corrupting the atmosphere, trying to shift it deeper than what it is. "You know that I haven't been with anyone here, Kill. You know that I don't just open my legs to—"

He pushes into me until I'm backed up against the RV, his legs coming between mine with his finger pressed against my lips. "Shut up. I'd never let anyone lay a fucking finger on you, much less their cock."

His eyes search mine and I'm momentarily paralyzed by the way he makes me feel. "Why?"

He puffs on his cigarette, bringing his lips to mine and blowing smoke between my lips. I inhale it slightly before puffing it back out. His hand comes to rest on the side of my head. "Don't know. I guess I'm a fucking idiot."

"You're not an idiot." I shake my head, dropping my smoke on the grass and pressing it into the blades with the sole of my shoe.

“Nah.” Killian chuckles, but it’s not sinister. “I am.” He pushes up from the bus and releases me.

“Hey!” I reach for his arm, but he rears away from me. “What’s wrong?”

He looks right through me, but I notice it this time. The flash of pain that bares itself to me briefly. “I’m a fucking idiot.”

He turns, leaving me fucking speechless and with his cum dripping all over me.



Twenty-four

Killian

My father leaned down. “Put your hand out, son.” I did. I always followed orders from him, even when I knew it was uncomfortable for him to give them to me. My father wasn’t like Kaius, he had too much heart to be a Father. I remember my grandfather scolding him for it.

“How could you be a Corneli and not want to make people hurt. You’re an embarrassment.”

I felt bad for my dad for a while, but then I slowly realized that my pops was right.

This was what we were. The Brothers were savage, but we did the things that The Four Fathers didn’t need to do anymore. We were at their beck and call. Our hands would get dirty for their sins. We wore the blood of their enemies as a fucking Brioni Vanquish suit, and we wore it fucking well.

“What’s this?” I asked, shooting him with a look. I was fourteen. I fucking knew why he was giving me the Blood of

the Blade. I knew he had failed the blade a lot. The blade that was carved from our ancestors' bone and blessed by the Kiznitch witch. It's all fucking dark magic that existed in our world, only you'd never see it. You'd just know that it fucking existed from the mere fact that this kind of evil didn't exist in a normal world.

"The Blood of the Blade. It was your grandfather's when he was a Brother, and then when he became a Father, he gave it to me when I became a Brother, and now it's yours."

I squeezed it in my hand, feeling the power seep into me. That's when I knew for sure. I knew I was nothing like my father. I was everything like my grandfather.

I smirked. "I won't let you down."

Dad frowned slightly, tucking his hands into his pockets. "I wish you would."

"Well, I won't. I'm not a quitter."

"You're not," Dad sighed, taking a seat in the kitchen. "Unfortunately."

The day I was handed The Blood of the Blade was a defining moment for me. I knew that no matter what, I'd always do what I needed to do for my brothers. Always.

That is, until Saskia Dragavei walked her fucking ass back into my life.

I run my hands through my hair, tossing and turning in bed. How can something so fucking simple be so fucking difficult? If it wasn't me or my old man that fucked with her, then who the fuck was it?



Twenty-five

Saskia

The lights were dim. I hadn't spoken to Killian since last night, but I've come to the realization that this is probably our thing. We fuck, talk, and then it gets weird, but not right before it gets sweet.

Eh.

I slip into my leathers and quickly change my mindset for my first act. I want to start it off by blowing fire to start the staffs, so I need to be sure I'm wearing absolutely nothing flammable.

I make my way to the center of the stage as Delila introduces me on the other side. "The Bleeding" by Five Finger Death Punch starts playing as the curtain drops. I already have the liquid in my mouth, so I blow out until the flames ignite the end of the staff, before I light the other end with the remaining liquid in my mouth.

Thankfully, I didn't catch on fire, so a surge of adrenaline spikes through me as I flip the staff around and the crowd erupts over the song.

I spin it around, moving my body around the stage to the music with the flame following me. When the song ends, I sink into the background as the curtain drops. I'm so hyped up from feeling the fire around me again in Midnight Mayhem that I don't realize Delila is glaring at me from across the room. She yanks me back into my cubicle where Perse and Val are getting ready.

"You weren't ready to blow. Why'd you do that?"

"I was ready!" I protested. "I wouldn't have done it if I wasn't."

Delila sighs, massaging her temples. "I swear, all of you are going to kill me."

The next act up was the rope. My favorite. Not because Killian is with me during it, but because I feel like it's what I excel at and what comes most natural.

This time it opens differently. Delila doesn't introduce us. I begin swinging the rope with the flame burning on the end. I slow the turn as Killian revs his bike loudly in the back of the audience.

I close my eyes and inhale, slowly breathing out as I allow the loud pulsing of his Harley to soothe my erratic heartbeat. "11 Minutes" from Halsey starts playing loudly as I swing to the beat, sliding the end to the bottom of the ground so the circle of gas that's around me ignites. I start flicking it around my legs and doing my same routine as Killian rides up the stage. My eyes meet his, his Joker face makeup doing nothing to calm me. The audience is hyped, standing and clapping, as I swing the rope around my neck and kick it back out with the end of my foot. Killian rides his bike into the fire and revs the engine until his back tire is kicking up smoke and putting out the flame. He spins it in a complete circle until the whole flame is out and reaches for the rope, snatching it back and kicking up the stand on his bike. He makes his way toward me, gripping onto my hair and forcing me to the ground.

He forces his thumb between my lips until my mouth is wide and that's when I realize what he's doing. He wants me to put the flame out with my mouth.

Slowly, he lowers the tip down into my mouth and I'm praying that the paraffin that I used to ignite the flames isn't still toxic in my mouth. Fire eating is difficult. More difficult than fire breathing and I've got to admit, breathing and blowing fire is hard in general. If you so much as suck in any air, you're lighting your entire insides on fire—but fire eating is hard for other reasons. One, being that a great fire breather should never blister themselves, and two, being that there has to be a quick reaction as to cutting off oxygen in your mouth, which is essentially what puts out the fire—not so much your saliva.

I wrap my lips around the flame that's burning upward now, just as Killian squeezes his hand over my mouth, cutting off all oxygen. The fire goes out and the audience once again erupts into fits of applause.

I'm breathing so hard with my heart pounding in my chest that I don't even realize I'm still on the ground and the curtains are being drawn

Killian helps me up. "You good?"

I nod. "Yeah."

"You're a natural." He kicks up his bike and wheels it to the back and back out the exit. I want to talk with him about last night, but I don't know how to approach it. I just know that I want to. Their act isn't for another two, so I make my way outside, coming face-to-face with him. He was obviously coming back in.

"Can we talk?" I ask nervously. "Before your act."

"Ours. I still need you, but yeah." He pulls out a smoke and lights it up.

"About last night..." Instantly, he drops his smoke on the ground and puts it out. He turns to leave, but I reach out for him.

He pulls away. "Don't think into anything I say, Saskia."

“How could I not!” I ask, and my hands are up doing the dramatic dance that girls seem to do any time they’re trying to drive a point home. “You say these things and act a certain way...”

“Sass... fucking stop.” He sighs. “I knew I shouldn’t have gone there with you, but I fuckin’ did because I’m an idiot. For so many reasons other than the ones that you’re aware of. It won’t happen again.” He turns, leaving me outside with a confused fucking brain and anger simmering so deep inside of me that I can’t fucking think straight.

“I knew I shouldn’t have gone there with you...” My phone vibrates in my pocket and I reach for it aimlessly, pulling it out to see a text from Hope.

Hope: I’m in San Antonio. Can you meet with me?

I ignore her text and hit dial. When she doesn’t answer, I type out a reply. **I’m in the middle of a show. Tomorrow?**

I’m heading back inside when she replies. **I know. I’m sorry. Can you meet me after the show?**

Me: Ok.

Hope: But Saskia, I don’t want anyone knowing. I can’t risk people knowing that I’m here. I need you to sneak away. If you can, meet me at Tabella. It’s an Italian pizza shop in town that’s open twenty-four seven.

I reply instantly, telling her that I’ll find a way to meet her after the show.

The show that I don’t want to have to perform in right now after that conversation with Killian, much less get in the wheel with him.

But I do. We go through the acts like usual until the very end. I’m walking back to my RV, feeling sick to my stomach, when I bump into Kenan.

“That was electric!” He pulls me under his arm.

I laugh, heading upstairs to change.

“Night, Kenan!” I call out, as he’s heading out to the party.

I sneak back through the RV, shutting the door behind myself. I’ve never been to San Antonio before, but I know that we’re right near the city. I can call a taxi to pick me up and take me to the pizza place. After throwing on a hoodie, I head back out.

I’m walking past Perse’s RV when I hear her call out to me.

I freeze, turning to face her and shocked to see not just her and King, but the rest of the Brothers too—along with Kaizer. I don’t know what they were talking about, but it looked heated.

Perse starts jogging over toward me. *Shit. Shit.* What am I going to say I’m doing leaving at this time with a damn hoodie over my head and my makeup not washed off.

“Where you going?” she asks, confused.

“I’ve—” I search her eyes, when I realize something. She’s my friend. Maybe I could trust her with this. “Do you promise not to say anything?”

Perse shuffles uncomfortably, peeking over her shoulder slightly before coming back to me. “If it doesn’t get you in trouble then yes.”

“It won’t get me in trouble, I’m safe. I’m going to see my godmother. She texted me wanting to see me since she scared the shit out of me with her disappearance.”

Perse laughs, tying her long red hair into a topknot. “Oh, well that’s alright. How are you getting there?”

“I’m catching a taxi or Uber or something.”

Perse shakes her head. “No, you can’t do that. Are you crazy? It’s almost three in the morning. It’s not safe.” She looks over her shoulder again, and we both catch them all watching us closely.

She hooks her arm in mine and leads me back the way I came. “Come on. You can take Killian’s truck.” I know that

they bring a couple cars on the road, not their fancy ones, but the bigger ones.

“I don’t have the key!” I whisper to Perse. “And honestly, we’re not in a good place right now.”

Perse ignores me, picking up her pace to a jog and directing me through an opening of trees that lead to the parking lot where all the vehicles are.

She drags me to a big black Chevy, ducking behind the driver’s side and reaching under the wheel. “I put the key here this morning because I didn’t have time to take it back to his RV.” When the sound of metal dangling fills the silence, I realize now that she’s serious.

“You want me to steal his truck.”

“I want us to steal it.” She slides into the driver’s seat.

“No!” I pull her arm until she’s falling back out. “Ouch! You’re freakishly strong for a small thing.”

“You can’t come.” I jump up into the driver’s seat.

“Why!” she whisper-yells.

“Because I told her that I wouldn’t tell anyone. I’ll need you to go back and keep Killian occupied so he doesn’t know I’ve stolen his truck too.”

Perse sighs. “Do you have your phone?”

I nod, flashing it to her. “Yes!”

She snatches it off me and opens up Snapchat. Tossing it back onto my lap, she points. “I turned on your location so I can see where you are. Don’t look at me like that! Anything could happen. Even if you are in Killian’s big scary Raptor.”

“Okay! Fine. Thank you!” I shut the door and turn the key, putting in the restaurant Tabella in the GPS and reversing out of the parking area.

The way Persephone came into Midnight Mayhem was a little savage, and the things that happened to her during her early initiation wasn’t kind either, but I admire her tenacity to

remain soft and kind. That's Perse. Her heart is too good for this world. Too fucking good for Kingston Axton too.



Twenty-Six

Killian

You know that feeling in your gut when you know that something bad is about to happen? Yeah, well that is basically my fucking constant right now, especially as Perse walks back to us without Sass beside her.

“Where’s Sass?”

Perse ignores me, looking straight at King. It’s a new thing she does whenever I’m in the vicinity of wherever she is. I’m almost certain it has to do with Saskia and the whole Callan thing. I know that Perse isn’t a fan of guys fucking with other chicks. She got enough of it from Val.

“Can someone remind me why Saskia got a house in New Orleans?” Her eyes twitched. She rubbed the palm of her hand against her legs.

She couldn’t look me in the eye.

I could fucking sniff the deflection that was seeping off her.

King clears his throat, his eyes coming to me, and then Kyrin and Keaton, before going back to her. “She’s a Dragavei.”

“Meaning...” Perse hurries him up with a wave of her hand.

“Meaning she’s a Dragavei. I’m not doing this with you right now, Little Bird. Did she go to bed?” King obviously picked up on the same thing I did. He and I are similar in that aspect.

I step closer, waiting to hear what she says next, just as Delila steps out from her RV, eyeballing us while wrapping her silk gown around her malnourished body. “Do I not work you all hard enough? Why are you making so much fucking noise?”

“Perse!” I growl when she doesn’t answer. “Where the fuck did she go?”

Her eyes come to mine. “Fine. She’s gone to see her godmother—okay? Leave her alone, Kill.”

I freeze.

My blood turns cold and my hands ball into fists. “What do you mean?” I pull out my phone and hit dial on her number, ignoring the photo I took of her back in Kiznitch when it’s ringing. She ignores the call.

“Wait!” Delila raises her hand. “Before you do anything drastic, Killian—”

“What are you both talking about?” Perse yelps in the background.

It’s my turn to bring my eyes to her now. “Saskia can’t be going to see her godmother.”

Perse massages her temples. “Oh, really, Killian? How do you know that?”

I smirk. “Because I killed her.”



Twenty-Seven

Saskia

Pulling up to Tabella after searching it on my phone, I'm surprised to see that the parking is underground. The truck is even louder with the concrete walls barricading the sound waves, confining them to such a vast space.

I pull into a parking slot and take out my phone. I see four missed calls from Killian.

Ignoring them all, I'm just about to text him and ask him what he wants when he's calling me and the photo I took of him and I in Kiznitch is point blank in my face.

His smile. His dimples. His white teeth biting at my jaw. His sparkly blue eyes that I know aren't showing. So different to my blue eyes. Dark hair. So similar to mine. I won't lie, we look good together.

Sighing, I swipe the phone open just as I'm slipping out of the driver's side and jumping down to the ground.

“What’s wrong, Killian?” I absently hear a car pull up behind me. Turning around, a black SUV skids up beside me and the doors swing open.

“Get home. We need to talk.”

“I’m sorry for stealing your truck, okay? I just have to see her.”

“Saskia, I swear to fucking God, get home now. I don’t give a fuck about my truck. Fucking get home.”

My mouth opens just as an older man in an immaculate suit steps out of the black SUV. “I’ve—”

“—Drop the phone, Saskia,” the man orders, and I watch as he unbuttons his jacket and fluffs it up. His hair is short, greying on the sides, and his neck is covered in tattoos. My mouth turns dry as my palms twitch.

“Who are you and where is Hope?” I ask, forgetting that I have the phone still pressed to my ear.

“Fuck!” Killian curses in the background, but before I can say anything, another man steps out from the front of the SUV and slaps my phone out of my hand. I watch in slow motion as it skids to the side.

The old man smirks. “Get in the car, Saskia. Now.”

I look to the side, and then to the truck where the keys are still in the ignition. I could run. I’d have to jump up high, but I could run. Maybe if Killian didn’t have a fucking lift kit, I’d have a chance.

“Don’t try it, doll. You’re coming with me.”

I try it. Spinning around, I reach for the handle and just as the door pulls open, something hits me in the back of my head and everything goes black.

I wake to the sound of a circus tune playing in the background. It resembles a jack-in-the-box tune. Something I don’t want to hear first thing waking up.

Waking up.

Getting hit over the head.

Killian's truck.

I groan, pressing against the cold tiles on the floor. Instantly, I freeze, recognition slamming into me at a hundred miles an hour. I shuffle back, but the chains that are locked around my ankles restrict my movements.

The room is a gentle pink, with a crystal chandelier hanging from the ceiling. There's a metal bed, and a dresser to the side, but that's not what catches my eyes first.

It's the dollhouse that's sitting in the corner, tucked away from view. Dragging my eyes away from that and needing to find an escape route, I find the door. One entry in and one entry out.

It's warm. Too warm. Sweat swallows my flesh as it pours over me, and I'm thankful that I have just enough slack to swipe it all away. Where the fuck am I? The door opens, and a man dressed in a grey suit steps in. The same man.

"You're the one who took me?" I ask, tilting my head. "Let me fucking go!"

The man grabs the rocking chair that's on the other side of the room, taking a careful seat and rocking back and forth. He's old. Has to be pushing late fifties judging by the way his hair is greying around his scalp. He has angry features, but gentle eyes. A complete contradiction to himself.

"Who are you?" I ask, although I'm almost certain that he will not answer me.

He kicks his leg up, resting his ankle on his knee, reaching into the front of his suit jacket and taking out a cigar. His lips wrap around the end as he rolls it between his lips.

"I'm your worst nightmare, Saskia Dragavei, but I'm also your destiny."

I ignore his words as my name rolls from his tongue and latches around my throat like a vise, threatening to choke me.

I scatter back farther, confused. When I look down, it's the first time I notice what I'm wearing. A hot pink crop top made

from vinyl and a short hot pink skirt. I reach up to touch my face, feeling the oily makeup slide onto the cushion of my fingertips. *He fucking dressed me up?*

My anger flares. “What is going on? Why am I here and why am I dressed like this!” I fluff up, my long dark hair curving around my body.

He ignites his cigar and puffs on it softly. “I’m going to be real with you, I was a little skeptical on how this would work, but I’m convinced,” he agrees, licking his lip. “Do you know what this is, Little Doll?”

I take another look around the room. “No.”

He smirks, and when he does, the gold front teeth flash. “Well, since you have no patience...”

I suck in a deep breath. “Patience?”

“Ah, you have heard of us.” He leans forward again until his elbows are resting on his knees. “Tell me, what have they said about us?”

“Just that you’re disgusting.” I sneer and instantly regret it. “How did I get here?”

He leans back, sighing. “Nope. You’re not ready. You need more time.” He stands, swiping the dust off his suit.

“Wait!” I say, desperate for him to not leave me here without any answers. “Not ready for what?”

He glares at me, his lip curled. “The truth.” I watch as his back disappears through the front door and that same melody plays over and over again.

I sit back, and then lay down, desperate to find a comfortable position that will allow the shackles to not bite into me.

“Fuck,” I curse, squeezing my eyes closed.

The light flashes out, and then, slowly, I watch as pink comes to life in the middle of the dollhouse. It casts off shadows for the windowsills and ornaments inside.

The bedroom door opens and a girl walks in. She's in a red pleated dress and thigh-high boots. Her hair is blonde, and braided into two fish braids that fall down both shoulders.

She leans down in front of me, placing a tray on the ground. "Eat."

I glare up at her. She's so close that I can see the flecks in her eyes. I can't make out the color from this angle. "Not hungry."

She doesn't flinch. "Eat."

Then she stands, swipes her dress, and almost robotically walks back out of the room. I don't eat. I shove it away and curl into a ball, hoping that I will wake up and this will all be some bad, messed up dream.

Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock.

I'm sinking into the soft cushions of the sofa.

Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock.

My chest is heavy, my eyes closed.

Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock.

I can't feel anything. It's black. All so black. Dark. Like death.

Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock.

"Saskia Dragavei, come forward."

I jolt awake, my eyes popping open, as realism takes hold once again.

This time I'm not alone. The same girl from earlier sits in the rocking chair opposite me, her feet pushing up from the ground to the tune of the song.

"Please stop that fucking song."

"Hmmm?" she asks, tilting her head. This time her hair is out of the braid and has been ironed dead straight. Her makeup

is thick, with nothing around her eyes and foundation over her eyebrows, hiding the color. She seems strange, but I don't know if she looks it or whether she has been doused in so much makeup and fakeness that it has stripped her from looking human.

“The song,” I repeat, squeezing my eyes closed. “Turn it off.”

She stops rocking. I still at the way her face changes and her eyes look through me. She looks crazy, that's what she looks like. As if she should have been in the movie *Sucker Punch*.

She leans forward, watching me. Only she doesn't look at me the way a human would look at another. Her strange eyes look as though I'm a boring object that is not worthy of her time.

She leans farther, and that's when I see the flash of her eyes.

They're purple. The softest, mellow violet eyes. On a normal day, I'd tell her how much I loved them, but the girl is creepy as fuck and I'm not here for it. Her hair is silver, borderline grey on the ends and her roots dark. She's confusing.

I inch back, my skin crawling when she comes too close, but she only falls from the rocking chair and shuffles closer to me.

Closer.

And closer.

Until the tip of her index finger is pressed against my bottom lip.

I stop breathing out of fear. This girl reeks of death, if death was a perfume that Tom Ford concocted.

Slowly, I watch as her mouth spreads wide and a smile flashes across her face, displaying her clean white teeth. The diamond on her front side tooth distracts me briefly from the fact that I have a maniac touching me.

I shiver.

She licks the top of her lip. “You’re so preettaayy.” The way the letters wrap around her tongue is confusing, muffled and incorrect. Maybe she has a stutter? I didn’t want to insult her.

She giggles, standing back to her feet and bouncing toward the dollhouse. She looks young. Very young. Too young. She begins scraping the dollhouse across the floor, bringing it closer to me.

I pause, holding my breath. She’s weird, she talks funny, and her eyes are those of a corpse. *Who is this girl?*

She kneels down beside me, watching for my reaction. As if a child has just given you something they’re proud of, without understanding how to express themselves. That is her. Her eyes are wide, her mouth agape, as if she’s fascinated.

“What?” I ask, searching her face. The more I look at her, the more I find her fascinating. I’ve never encountered a girl like this before.

She points to the dollhouse and I follow her gesture until I look closer. The doll is standing in a bedroom, wearing the exact clothes that I have on. The house looks familiar, but I can’t touch the surface of what it is.

“Is this yours?” I ask, still unsure on how old she is.

She shakes her head.

I look closer. The bedroom where the doll is has a four-post bed pushed against the wall with boy band and rock band posters on the wall.

My mind wants to reach for the similarities, but just as I squeeze my fist around it, the memories disappear in a cloud of fog.

“Do you know what they want from me here?” I try my hand at asking the question I want to know.

She smiles again, nodding her head.

“What is it?”

She shrugs. “You.”

The girl leaves not long after that, and I’m back curled in a fetal position, my eyes closing.

The door opens again and I slowly raise my eyes up, hoping to see the girl from earlier, only it’s not.

The same man dressed in the suit is back in my room wearing a different suit, and two armed guards on either side of him.

He kneels down in front of me. “Saskia, such raw beauty. The finest. So untouched.”

I flinch away from the way his finger runs down my cheek.

He laughs smugly. “Oh it’s too late for that, Little Doll, for I already took you when you were of age.” The man stands, clicking his fingers to the shackles around my ankles. “Unleash her, she will not leave me, and I have a gift for her.” I don’t move as the men unlatch my ankles and handcuffs. I squeeze my wrists and stand to my feet.

“Why are you letting me out of the shackles?”

He leans forward. “Because the gift that I’m about to give to you, will ensure you remain here.” I don’t answer. I can’t.

“What is going on?”

He grins, walking out of the room as the two men step behind me. They shove me forward when I don’t follow him.

Black walls and red trimmings. It’s a rude awakening from the soft pinks of the room I’ve spent however long in. We pass doors, similar to the one I came out of, only when I take peeks inside them, they’re all either pink or blue. Nothing else and nothing more. We reach a set of stairs and walk down them, landing in the lobby where glass white tiles are spread over the floor. Gold trimmings line the stark white walls. It’s immaculate and reeks of opulence. You wouldn’t know that just upstairs, there are rooms where this sick fuck must lock people in. My heart sinks. I miss Midnight Mayhem. I miss my friends.

I miss Killian.

Just the thought of Killian has my throat tight.

“Come on, Saskia, your gift might expire...” The old man directs us to an area where a white U-shaped sofa greedily owns the room.

“Sit.” He points to the sofa, and it’s then that I see the young girl standing behind the only other chair in the room that is sitting opposite the U-lounge.

I do.

“Lay down.” He points. “On your stomach.” I hesitate, and he raises a dark eyebrow. “Do I need to inflict force?”

I shake my head, dropping down.

As soon as my face hits the cushions, hands are clenched around my head. He massages my scalp as another tune starts playing. One I don’t recognize.

I feel myself getting tired. My eyes are heavy, my brain struggling to form any sentences.

“Saskia, there’s a box. Can you see it?” the voice starts. I don’t recognize the voice, and I know it’s not the old man’s. “Grab it.”

I squeeze my fists together, fighting the frustration. “I—”

“Shhh...” A hand caresses my cheek. “Just unleash yourself, Little Doll. You can do it. Grab the box.”

In the corner of the room, a bright light illuminates, revealing a worn, old leather box. It looks more like a chest.

“Do you see it?” he whispers, his breath invading the side of my cheek.

I flinch away from him, but find myself reaching for the box.

“Open it.”

My fingers flick the metal claw, flipping the lid open. I’ve lost my ability to speak, but the scream that tears out from my lips is primal and unnatural. My scream is loud enough to

reach Hell, which is good, because all of my friends live there. My limbs shake, my lips trembling as every single memory infects my brain at once...

When I was eight years old...

Killian came crashing into my bedroom, his chest heavy and his scrawny body tight. As if he had something to say. I wanted to tell him to spit it out because I wanted to go back and check on Mommy, but I knew Killian and the type of boy he was.

He was a bad, bad boy. Papa didn't like me around him.

"You weirdo. Get out of the house."

"Killian," I whispered, fighting a whimper. "I can't. My mom, she's sick and needs me."

Killian walked up to me, closer and closer, clutching his shirt in his hand. "Did I fucking ask?"

I flinched at the use of a curse word.

"Why?" I backed up until my head smacked against the kitchen counter.

"Because one, it's my fucking house, and two, my mom needs you. Now."

I sighed. I hated being told what to do, especially from Killian, but Papa always said that I had to do what the Corneliis wanted. That they saved him and our family. Whatever that meant.

"Fine. I'll go and tell my mom." I rushed upstairs where my mom was lying asleep on the bed, wires and drains hanging out of her. Her pale skin was getting worse with each day, as death slowly sucked the life from her body. My lips trembled.

I would not cry. I would not cry. I would never cry.

Forcing the tears back down, I squeezed Mama's hand. "I will be back. I promise." I scribbled a note and left it on her bedside table so that if she woke and I wasn't there, she wouldn't panic. Papa was at work until late tonight, so I knew that she would freak out.

"Hurry up. This is fucking important!" Killian yelled from the door, shocking me out of my slumber.

I shook off the emotion from seeing my mom the way she was and followed him down the stairs and out of the house.

"You fucking owe me since you live on my property."

I looked back at the pool house that we lived in on his parents' property. I knew this. I knew all of this. My papa worked for Mr. Corneli and my mama used to be their cook before she got sick. She would also make sure that the grounds were kept up to standard and the cleaning too. That hasn't been the case for some time.

A black limo pulls to a stop, rounding the fountain. Why would a ten-year-old be wanting me to get into a limo?

"Get in," Killian grumbled, shoving me into the car. We weren't the only ones in the back. King and Keaton were there too.

"Why am I here?" I asked, confused.

"Because it's King's birthday party and we all have to be there."

I shook my head. "I don't want to come. I thought you said your mom wanted me?"

Killian smirked at me, for the first time ever. Not a scowl or a snarl, a smirk. It was alarming how uncomfortable that made me feel. "I don't give a shit what you want."

That night, my mother died. I wasn't there to watch her take her final breath. I wasn't there to kiss her warm cheeks one last time.

I wasn't there.

Because of Killian.

Because he's a stupid trickster who likes playing games.

Because of the stupid Brothers of Kiznitch.

When I was eight-years-old...

My father packed up a suitcase, shoved us into a beat-up Honda, and drove us away from the property I once called home. My home housed my enemy, but at least I always knew where he was. I was raised in this house, conditioned to endure the cruelty of Killian Corneli. I didn't know any other way.

"Papa!" I yelled when his frantic eyes wouldn't hold still for longer than a few seconds. "What's happening?"

I would never cry.

Not ever.

Not when my mom passed.

Not when my father looked as though the Devil was chasing us.

Never.

He swerved onto the freeway, sweat dripping from his temples.

"Papa, you're scaring me..."

My father looked over at me, finally, with tired eyes. "They found out, Zaika," Papa said. I never liked my name. I thought it was weird.

"Found what out?"

He shook his head, going back to the road. "You're strong, Zaika. I have so much I need to tell you. So much." He reached into his pocket, narrowly missing a bus. He hit dial on the phone. "Hope?" He cleared his throat. "It's time. I know she's not! She's too young, but I don't have a choice." Silence, with a woman yelling in the background. "Hope, we will be at the meet in a few hours." He hung up the phone and squeezed

my leg. “Everything is going to be fine, because you’re strong. Just like your mother. Nothing like me.” He exhaled. “Your mother and I have not been honest with you, Zaika. We—” He struggled to say before turning to face me. “Your mom and I have been working for other people as well as the Corneliis.”

“What? How? You work so long as it is.”

He nodded, taking an exit. “I know, but the other people we work for—” He paused, turning around to face me as much as he could without losing track of the road. “They’re my family. Kiznitch is your mother’s family.”

My eyebrows drew in, my blinking rapid. My muscles tightened at the information he was about to lay out for me. “Your mom is a real-life princess, Zaika, well at least she is with Kiznitch. She’s a Dragavei. She has dragon blood in her. When your mom was ten years old, she ran away from Kiznitch after her parents disowned her and she found herself with my people. We took her in and raised her, that’s how she and I met.”

I gulped. My throat was tight and the air felt hot.

“When we were both fifteen, we returned to Kiznitch, but when your grandparents met with your mom again, they didn’t want anything to do with her anymore. More your grandmother, and she hated me more than she hated your mother. We were on the street when Mr. Corneli took us in. He was not like the other Fathers. Nothing at all like them. He was kind and allowed us into his home, which was more than what we could have ever hoped for, your mother and I, because we were back in Kiznitch for a reason, and that reason was a group called Patience.”

I sat stunned, my mouth agape and my fingers tingling. My thoughts were fuzzy, but I knew Papa was about to drop a bomb.

“Patience is the archenemy of Kiznitch, Zaika. They are very, very bad people. When your mother and I figured out that we actually liked the Corneliis, we cut off contact with Patience. We tried to dodge them and we knew that as long as

we were with the Corneliis, they wouldn't come near. Until, the Corneliis found out who I was."

"They know?" I asked, just as he pulled into an abandoned playground.

Papa pulled up the emergency brake, looking around frantically. There was no one here. I was surprised to see that we had been driving for a couple of hours, too. "They know, Zaika. Oh they know everything."

"But Mr. Corneliis isn't a bad man. Maybe he will talk to you?"

Papa searched my eyes. I could see that he wanted to rage at my naivety, but he suddenly sagged back, rubbing his hands over his face. "No, baby. He may be a touch better than the rest of them, but they are The Four Fathers, Saskia. They rule with an iron fist and have no problem eradicating people, especially Patience."

His eyes flew over my shoulder as a dark SUV pulled up beside us. I panicked, but he hushed me. "It's alright. That's Hope, your godmother."

"I have a godmother?" I asked, confused.

"Well, she's actually my sister. I guess I can say that now." He reached for the door handle, but I remained in the car. Motionless. Shocked. Nighttime was bleeding into the day and all I wanted was to stop time. Maybe rewind it to before I was born.

My door opened and a small, petite woman with short blonde hair bent down to grasp my leg. She looked nothing like Papa. Papa was tanned, quite brown, she was very much white, like Mama.

"Hello, Zaika, I'm Hope."

Papa dropped a bag beside Hope's feet. "Stop calling her that now." He tossed a passport onto my lap. I flipped it open. "It was the name that your mother and I always wanted to call you."

Saskia Estel Royal.

I looked up at Papa just as Hope was putting our bags in the SUV. “Are we going to be alright, Papa?”

He leaned down as Hope got into the driver’s seat and started the car, leaving her door open.

His hand came to my cheek, his lips to my forehead. “Always.” I relaxed, my muscles slacked. I would always have Papa.

I heard it before I felt it.

Pop!

Hope screamed.

Warm liquid fell down my forehead as particles sprayed across my arms.

My father’s body slowly dropped to the ground in a thump.

I don’t scream. I sit stunned. Looking to the left, I remained emotionless against reality.

“Zaika!” Hope grabbed me, threw me into the passenger seat and crawled to the other side, starting the car. My breathing was heavy. My heart raced. My brain was dead.

Hope reversed and headed out of the parking lot, but not before we passed a black limo that sat across the park with its window down.

Everything slowed. I wanted to close my eyes. I knew they would for sure kill me too. The closer we got, the harder my heart pounded.

Thud.

Thud.

Thud.

I saw the gun pointed out of the car; the barrel aimed right at us.

And then I stopped breathing, because the person who was holding it, wasn’t Mr. Corneli, or any of the other Four Fathers.

Bright blue eyes shaped by fluffy black lashes.

Messy black hair.

Then slowly, that smirk slid onto his face with his two dimples sinking into each cheek.

Killian Cornelii killed my father. At eleven years old, he killed my father.

Instead of shooting me, he lowered the gun and let us drive away.

Once again, the Cornelii family took something from me. They took everything away from me that made me, me.

They took away all that I loved, and instead of killing me too, they made me live with the emptiness of having no parents.

I hated him.

When I was thirteen years old...

Mother Nature visited me for the first fucking time ever. Seriously? I thought I would have had more time than this? Thirteen? I knew a couple girls from school who got theirs when they were younger, but seriously?

Hope came walking down the long hallway, holding a coffee mug. "It's time. They'll be here soon."

"What, today? But it's Monday!"

Hope offered a small smile. "Sorry, Sass, but you know the life."

I sighed, leaning my head against the top of the couch. "I knew it. But how did Kosta?"

Hope pushed off the wall. "He knows everything. Will you be okay? It's not that bad."

I nodded. "I'll be fine." I was used to this. I was groomed for this life since I was eight years old.

That night, Kosta raped me.

That may have not been directly Killian or Midnight Mayhem's fault, but everything avalanches into one eventually.

I lay still. Motionless. The leather on the sofa sticks to my sweaty back, but I don't dare move. Not for a second.

I remember everything.

I remember Kosta. I remember the life I lived with Hope, the life I lived with Patience. Weekends were for Patience; weekdays were for my school. For my normal life. When I was with Patience, they trained me with fire. That's how I knew what to do the first time I ever picked up the dragon staff. But I didn't remember any of it. Until now.

"There are parts that I remember, that I shouldn't..." I whisper, gazing at the ceiling. I begin counting the dots.

"Yes," Kosta murmurs, leaning back in his chair and rubbing the beard on his face. "Those are the times that I would shuffle your thoughts around. I needed you to report back to me every now and then, Saskia. You were planted in Midnight Mayhem for me. I trained you in fire with the purpose of you being initiated into their show. You owe me. I am your master."

"You are my master." I swallow, the words slipping from my tongue effortlessly. It's true. Kosta took care of me, protected me, fed me the truth when everyone else starved me with lies.

I turn to face him, smiling. "Why couldn't you trust me to check back with you? Why did you manipulate my memories after getting the information, and how is it I have two different events inside of my head of the same occurrences?"

Kosta takes out a cigar and puts it in his mouth. He lights it, and the smell resonates with my bones, resting inside of me. Like comfort.

Like home.

Like trust.

“Because of Killian and Kallisto. They’re much stronger than I, and stronger than the other Four Fathers who also practice within Coercive Persuasion. I created false memories inside of your brain, just like The Four Fathers and Brothers, by using advanced Psychological Coercion, hypnosis and telekinesis to move parts of your memories around in your brain. I can convince your mind of the memories that you don’t need, and while you’re under hypnosis, I can replace events inside of your head with whatever I want. It’s why you had blank spots. I have to admit, doing this every time I’d get information from you was exhausting.”

I swing my legs over the sofa, blinking back the tears.

I will not cry.

It’s weird. I remember all of my memories now, only the ones that Kosta played with aren’t as clear. Everything up until this point is.

The initiation.

Delila coming to my house.

Everything was some sick trick to get back into Midnight Mayhem because I was a Dragavei. But if that’s the case, Delila would have had to know that I was a Dragavei before she put me in. Zaika Royal had no ties to Midnight Mayhem. Delila knew who I was all along.

“Hope gave you your family crest just in case they never found out who you were. We needed you in as a Dragavei.”

“Killian killed my father?” I ask, which was more to myself but came out aloud.

Now that I remember who she is, Lilith steps forward, running her tongue over her straight teeth. “He did. We have to end him.”

I freeze, and then I realize the reaction I had to hearing what she said and quickly relax. “Agreed.”

“What is he to you, Little Doll?” Kosta asks, reaching forward as his hand disappears up my skirt. My stomach coils.

“Nothing. He is nothing.”

I wash myself internally, blocking out his touch. “Where are we?”

Kosta leans back in his chair and I instantly relax with his grip no longer against my sex. “Patience.”



Twenty-Eight

Killian

Emotions are fucking annoying. That was something I learned at a young age, so my father and uncles taught me how to switch them off. Emotions are a liability, not a necessity.

Learning that Saskia was Zaika wasn't a shock. I mean, fuck, it was, but not as much as the shock of her father being born Patience. Or finding out that she was the rat all along, feeding shit back to Patience, and I fell for it. I fell for all her bullshit. So we conducted a new plan. I pull her in, to keep her shut out. It's easy to sniff out the snitch when your face is buried between her thighs. The thing that they didn't teach me, though, is the power of one girl. No motherfucker told me that there is always an exception, and no one has the power to choose who that exception is.

What's the point of trying to be the good guy in someone else's story when they've opened the book knowing that you're the villain? That's what is going to happen with Saskia now, and it goes both ways.

“Killian, are you okay?” Delila asks from the passenger seat as we start maneuvering through traffic.

Forty-seven. That’s how many cars we have loaded up, ready to take these greedy fuckers down once and for fucking all.

“Fine,” I snap, glaring out the window.

Kyrin shoves me. “So you were fucking the villain all along, good thing we don’t fuck to be the hero.”

I ignore Kyrin.

“We have seven snipers already set up, scoping the scene out and twelve men on foot.” The cool metal of my gold Desert Eagle presses against my hip as she says the words. We drive down a bumpy road, the gravel loose, kicking up dust until we’re pulling into an industrial building that’s attached to a house.

I mean really, coming back to Patience was dumb, but I give them props for their lack of creativity.

As soon as we’re sliding out of the car, with others skidding up behind us in a kick of dust, the guards that are standing at the front of the mansion fall to the ground.

Kohen is at the top of a tree with a smirk on his face. He’s right in his element. I’ve fucking missed the unhinged maniac.

Cocking my gun, I begin weaving to the front of the house as people spill out behind us, Keaton and Kyrin behind me with Kaizer. King is up in the back tree, popping off people as they come into view. This is what the fuck we do. I feel rage burn at my fingertips, stirring the side of me that’s trigger happy.

She fucking fooled you. My jaw clenches.

A young boy bursts out from the bush, charging toward Delila. She raises her arm and shoots the kid right between the eyes, without even flinching or looking.

I chuckle to myself, shaking my head.

“Shut up, Trickster.”

“Just sayin’,” I joke. “Pretty sure that kid was your youngest. You’re getting savage with old age.”

We shove through the door, and by the time I’m there, the soldiers from the other side, including my old man and King’s, are standing in the lounge room, with motherfucking Kosta sitting on his chair.

There’s a small, blonde girl standing behind him, laughing.

Laughing? The fuck. Harley Quinn psycho looking bitch.

Everything slows as I turn my head to face Saskia, who’s perched on the sofa, unfazed. Her hair is long, dropping to her hipbones and her slender legs crossed.

“Fuck.”



Twenty-Nine

Saskia

They all poured into the room with guns raised. I knew this was going to happen, I'm pretty sure we all did.

"Well, if it isn't the notorious crew..." Kosta grins around his cigar, blowing out a cloud of smoke. "Gotta say, you took long enough." He glances down at his watch.

Lilith breezes past him, taking a seat on the sofa beside me. She leans into my ear. "Did you get to play with all of them?"

My jaw tightens. *Contain yourself.* "No."

"A shame," she whispers, her eyes flying between Killian and Kyrin. She settles on Kyrin. "A real shame." I want to laugh at her.

"Don't bother with him. He's the Devil's favorite pet."

"Well, then call me the Devil."

My eyes roll to the back of my head as I reach for my packet of smokes on the table. Placing one in my mouth. A Zippo lands on my lap with a heavy thud. I focus on the pattern that's engraved into the metal. A distorted dragon. Knowing it was Killian who threw it at me, but not willing to face him yet, I flick it open and light the tip, leaning back into the couch with an exhale.

Killian, Keaton, and Kyrin walk to the back of the sofa Lilith and I are sitting on, giving them a direct view of Kosta. I can almost feel Killian breathing down the back of my neck. He will know by now. Know why I was put in Midnight Mayhem.

Movement shuffles behind me as lips brush the back of my ear, but he says it loud enough for everyone—including Kosta—to hear. “You deserve a fucking Grammy for your performance.”

My heart squeezes in my chest. I want to say that I didn't know, but I can't.

Delila takes a seat on the sofa beside us, closest to Kosta. “You've been quite the pain in my ass, Kosta. When will this shit stop?” She crosses her legs, flicking the rings around on her finger.

“Oh, D, still so naïve.”

She raises her finger. “Not so much anymore. I mean, here we are, ready to kill you with enough power to make you and all of your team disappear, and yet here you are, with your saggy nuts and loose morals. Raping girls? You are disgusting. I would say you're the one who is naïve, not me. Patience has been doomed from the very beginning, Kosta, but now your clients are thinning.”

“Rape, huh?” Kosta grins, looking to me and then above my shoulder. “I'd hardly call it rape if the girls love it.”

My face pales, but my nostrils flare. Before I can say anything, Delila says, “She was thirteen. They were all close to her age.”

She knows?

My fingers twist on my lap. I don't want to face this music.

"But your daughter, Kosta?" Delila says, unmoving.

I see movement out of the corner of my eye when the Four Fathers enter the room. The atmosphere shifts. Four middle-aged men in expensive designer suits, some tattooed, some not. A couple with longer hair, one with no hair. They stand powerful, strong, without even breathing a word.

I turn to face Lilith, watching as her face remains passive. As if the words don't trigger any part of her messed up soul.

Delila turns to face me. "So, is anyone going to ask me why I brought in Saskia Dragavei to Midnight Mayhem?" Delila looks around the room, meeting every face that's in here, before finally resting back on Kosta. "No? No one? Not even you? Did you not think that I damn well knew she was connected to Patience?"

Kosta stiffens.

"I mean." Delila stands, chuckling. "You have to give me some credit." She walks directly in front of Kosta, resting her hands on either side of his chair. "I do everything for a reason. But you, Kosta, being the biggest failure of The Fathers ever."

Poor Lilith. She doesn't give a fuck about her father's lack of love. She replaced love with insanity. A long time ago.

"Did you not think that both myself and your *nephew* would do something about that?" She tilts her head.

My eyebrows pull together.

Kosta doesn't have a nephew. He only has Lilith.

Delila runs her perfectly manicured finger down the side of his face. "We knew she would fall in love with him."

Someone steps out from the side, and I watch as Killian flicks a knife around his fingers with a cigarette hanging from his mouth. He looks over at me and winks before walking closer to Delila and Kosta.

Killian grins, taking the smoke out of his lips and blowing it out. “When Delila finally told me who Sass was, I knew that her mind had been touched. I killed her father, I ruined her life, there was no way anyone was that good of an actor, and above that, I could never tap into that pretty little head of hers. Not completely, anyway.” He continues to puff on his smoke as my throat constricts. “Makes sense now. You trained her to be strong, to not give in to the impulses of Coercive Persuasion. Smart, I’ll give you that, but you’re still a sick bastard. Ever so dark about you not being born into The Four Fathers.”

“Never claimed I wasn’t,” Kosta snickers. *Kosta is Kallisto’s brother?*

Killian’s eyes come to mine. My heartbeat flips around in my chest as my cheeks flush with heat. “I’ll ask you again, Little Dragon.” He licks his lips and I subconsciously draw my tongue out to wet my own. “Do villains have hearts?”

Everything comes back to me at a hundred miles an hour. It was all there in black and white. He dropped breadcrumbs for me, but instead of picking them up, I trampled all over them.

My chest tightens from his burning gaze. “I don’t know...” My gaze clouds, distancing in and out of view. My thoughts freeze.

My eyes connect back with him, and I see it. The flash of uncertainty in his vision. *He killed my father. Ruined my life.*

“Yes.”

I watch slowly, the corner of his mouth tips up, curving around his teeth. No one knows what that question means. Only us. Him asking if villains have hearts is him asking if I’m still in there. He knows that I didn’t know what was happening. He knows that I didn’t know I was being a rat.

“You have one issue,” Kosta mutters, leaning forward to flick the ash off his cigar. “You can’t kill me.”

Killian finally drags his eyes off me, taking his heat with him. “Oh really? And why’s that?”

Kosta's wrinkles press around his cheeks, showing his age. My stomach churns in aversion, conflicted with my thoughts. "Because if you kill me, I have someone ready to take every single one of you out." Kosta's eyes drop to the center of Killian's chest, where a bright red dot is aimed. "I knew you would come here, did you really think that I'd come back to Patience to run from you all? Patience is close enough to Kiznitch to not do that anymore. You underestimate me."

"Enough!" Kaius snaps, stepping forward and into the firing line. "I can and will kill you, Kosta, but for right now, he's right. We can't kill him, which is exactly why I told Delila to hang back until I drew orders."

"And when would that have been?" Delila asks, an eyebrow cocked judgmentally. "When it was too late?"

"Wait!" I raise my hands, clearing my throat in annoyance. "Which is it? Am I the villain, or am I the damsel, because I'm confused."

Killian comes closer to me, until we're toe-to-toe. Louboutin to combat boots. He raises his hand and brings it to my cheek. "What do you wanna be?"

I bring my eyes up to his. "Free."

He freezes, his body vividly turning rigid. I watch as he slowly turns to face Kosta. "I say we kill him and go with our chances."

"To answer your question," Delila murmurs, moving to me. "You were part of the plan. I've known about you since you were a child. I've known where you were all along."

"Is that right?" Kosta stands from his chair, coming closer. "They're forgetting one other person that they stole from you, Little Doll."

My breathing picks up as a tingling sensation forms over my flesh. "What?"

His lips curve around his gold teeth as a grin beams from him. "Hope."

I freeze. The room changes.

“Hmmm, really?” Killian moves Kosta out of the way. “You really thought you could play that card on her.”

“I don’t need to.” Kosta smiles in triumph. “She’s already mine.”

Chills break out over my flesh as flashbacks fly through my brain. I’m conflicted. My head pounds as the two sides of myself battle with each other. My stomach sinks as my focus flashes between Killian and Kosta.

Someone who did despicable things to me, to us all, but also conditioned us to make us feel important. Wanted. Is that what abusers do? They violate not only your body, but your mind. Hope said it was normal. Everyone said it was normal. Everyone I trusted.

“She was the bug that you planted in Midnight Mayhem...” King whispers to himself, and I turn to face him as he seethes at Delila. “You can’t just overrule the Four Fathers and expect there to be no consequences to your actions.”

Kosta’s eyebrows draw in, his stance becoming restless, as he slowly stumbles back to his chair. “No, this was my plan. I needed you all here so that I could finally take over the business that was *mine* to begin with. Saskia was my weapon, not yours,” Kosta sneers at Delila.

Delila smirks, lighting a smoke and blowing out the cloud. “Wrong. She was mine, and now I get to kill you for what you did *that* day to Kyrin, Kosta, and for what you do to all of the children of Kiznitch. I brought her in with the intention of bringing Patience down. This has been planned for years, but I had to wait. Always wait until the right timing. In order to have the Dragavei back in her home, we knew we had to get her in a different way than we usually do. We knew she wouldn’t just leave you, so we decided that we would make you think that you had her.” Delila smiles. “We made you think that it was your plan, but really it was ours, so the seven-point star is complete again. Aside from that, you were the reason why we had to close down Mayhem in Kiznitch. There’re years and years of bad blood between us, and finally,

I get to fucking spill some. Patience will be no more after tod —” A gun fires and I flinch, shooting up from my chair.

Silence rings out loudly. In slow motion, my eyes fly to Killian and his to mine. I did a quick search over his body as his eyes dropped down mine. Spinning around, I grab onto Lilith’s hand, pulling her down to take cover on the ground.

I flinch when I see Delila on the ground, blood spilling out of her ear. I quickly spin around to face Lilith, just as shots fire off behind us in fast waves. I start crawling toward Delila when someone grabs me by the ankle and yanks me backward.

Killian is glaring down at me as I lay flat on my back. “If you fuckin’ die, I’ll kill everyone here. Don’t fucking move.”

I pull away from his touch. “You killed my father.”

“I did.” His lips curl.

“You killed Hope!” I yell, right in his face.

His nose presses against mine slightly as his eyes frantically move between mine. “I fuckin’ did.”

“Why?” I choke out. My throat is tight, unwilling to let any other words through. *You will not cry. You will not cry.*

He brings his hand up to my cheek. “Because they’re fucking bad people.” The shots firing off in the background and smell of spilled metallic blood soon drifts into the background and it’s just Killian and I having an argument in the middle of a damn war.

“You’re a bad person, too,” I whisper, as a small tear slips from the corner of my eye.

“Fuck,” he grunts, catching the tear with his thumb and bringing it to his mouth to lick it off. “Yeah, babe, I am, I’m the fucking worst. But to beat the monsters, one must become one.”

“Killian! Get them out!” Kallisto screams from the background.

I spin around to see Kyrin throwing a feisty Lilith over his shoulder.

“Get up,” Killian murmurs, but I don’t. I have to check on Delila. Spinning around to face her one last time, I see she hasn’t moved, and there’s more blood on her face.

“She’s gone, baby. Get up. We need to get you out of here.”

I pull away from him. “I don’t trust you.”

“I don’t trust you either.” He glares at me.

“So why are you helping me? I’m a lost cause.”

He pauses, searching my eyes. “People are only lost because they don’t have anyone willing to find them.”

“I’m so lost, Kill. I’m—I remember everything, Killian. What he did to me. I’m stuck with him. This is all I really know.”

Killian presses the cushion of his thumb to my lips. “Fuck what he did to you. You were a victim. Just like all the others, which is why we needed to bring them down. You think you’re the only one who has been on the end of his dick? You’re not, and he’s had younger. If he’s not selling them at his shows, then he’s got them under him.”

“I went to a show a few times—” My eyes close as images flash through my head. “There was this one time, when someone asked if I was for sale.”

“Yeah?” Killian asks, his eyebrows raised. “Tell me what you remember about that night...”

“I—” I chew on my lips.

“Dig deep. Tell me what you remember. The red light? What else...” Gunshots pound off in the background as my mind slips back into a memory...

I walked down the long corridor, the cold, damp walls leaking with mildew and the smell. The smell would be something that I would remember forever. Like damp concrete and fermented flesh. Squeezing my hands into fists, I knew what it was that I was supposed to do—play with fire. I was

thirteen years old, but I had been practicing for years now, almost having the poi and staff down to perfection, but this would be the first time that I would be performing in Patience. Hope said it's okay and that it's normal. I wasn't for sale, I was a child of Patience and we're not for sale. We put on a show with the people who are to be sold. Hope said that they're willing, wanting this life. I chose not to listen to anything and to keep to myself.

I was Kosta's favorite, and he liked to share me out whenever the right time came.

"Saskia, you're up!" The doors opened, and I was met with a dark room and a single red light bulb hanging from the center of the ceiling. It allowed me to see the audience, to an extent. The audience is the same, with them all wearing a masquerade mask to hide their identity. Each person is assigned a pager. If they want to bid on one of the girls or boys, they page in and a waiter comes to them to take their bid and order.

Picking up my torch, I light the end and slowly swish liquid around my mouth before blowing harshly against the end. Flames react to the area, lighting up the crowd. A big one. I go through my steps as girls and boys walk across the stage to Marilyn Manson "Kill4U." I flipped the staff around and go through my routine like a robot, manufactured by Patience. When I've finished up, I drop down off the stage as Jessika, one of our waitresses, waltzes over to me.

She nudged her head to the back of her shoulder, leaning into my ear. "Got people asking if you're for sale..."

My eyes followed hers, to see four men all wearing different masks. The bone curved around their eyes and nose, allowing their jaws and mouths to remain on display.

I rolled my eyes. "Of course you told them I wasn't, right?"

Jessika snorted, snatching up a glass near the front of the stage. "Of course. Just don't know if they bought it..."

“You...” I murmur, searching his expression. “You were all there? Why?” I had hundreds of questions, and although this wasn’t an ideal place to be asking them, I was desperate to hear the answers.

“You trust me?” he asks, tilting his head.

“No. Do you trust me?” I shoot back, inching up onto my elbows.

“Would you two please not start fucking in the middle of a goddamn war!” Keaton yells out just as the shots die out.

“I don’t,” Killian admits. “But I don’t have to trust you to save you.”

“Save me?” I ask, not sure how those words taste on the tip of my tongue. “I’m messed up in the head, Killian. The girl you knew for the past few months is a little different to the one I am now, now that I have my memories back.”

Killian licks his lip. “What you went through, Saskia, it was fucked up. I know that. Just because you were abused, fucking raped and taken advantage of, doesn’t mean shit up against what you mean to Mayhem. Like it or not, we’re your family, and that’s not just because you’re a Dragavei.”

“Why else?” I ask, wanting to know his answer, but subconsciously knowing that again, right now is probably not an ideal time.

“I’m not doing that with you right now.” He pulls me up to my feet, just as my eyes land on Kosta.

“I don’t want to do this,” I whispered as Kosta and the two men he keeps close to him turn on the lights. “It’s going to hurt.”

Kosta smirked, unzipping his pants and walking into the middle of the room. There were cushions set up, scattered everywhere.

“Lay down, Little Doll. I promise it’s not as bad as you think.”

The two other men who were behind him, stalked toward me, too. One was holding a metal object that had two clamps on either side.

“Why?” I asked, because I always asked questions.

“Because this is when your training can start.” He kneeled down to my level, stroking himself through his pants. “This is where your life starts.”

I shake myself out of a blur, reaching for the knife Killian has in his hand, with his gun in the other. “Babe, what are you doing?”

Before I can think about anything else, I rush forward, jumping over the dead body at my feet. Kosta is laughing, watching the pure manic scene that’s unfolding around us. Right now, I don’t care that there are stray bullets flying through the air.

I don’t care.

I just want one thing. *One.*

I lean up with a scream, launching the tip of the knife right into his chest. I’m shocked at how easy it was to sink it into his body.

His cigar falls to the ground, his face crumpling.

Someone is yelling in the background, but I ignore it. “You needed to die,” I whisper, pushing him backward until he’s falling back into his chair.

Killian’s arms wrap around me as he slings me over his shoulder, everything turning upside down. He draws his gun and shoots one of Kosta’s guards that are near the front door. It’s not until we’re out in the open that he puts me down to my feet.

“I—” I stop talking.

Killian grabs onto my hand and directs me toward a jeep that’s on the outskirts of the property, where it merges into forest land. Kyrin is in the driver’s seat, waiting.

Killian picks me back up and throws me into the back, swinging the passenger's door open to slide in.

"Kill!" King calls out, running up to the car. "We're going to burn the house down to the ground."

"How many did we lose?"

King's eyes come to mine as he shuffles in his spot. "Two."

"We'll be back."

King bangs on the roof of the car and Kyrin sets off, driving us through a clearing between bushes. We duck and swerve between trees, completely off road.

After maybe ten minutes, Kyrin stops, jumping out of the car as Killian comes around to face me.

"What? You're going to kill me?" I ask, knowing that that was probably going to happen. I've caused a lot of drama. I was a snitch without realizing I was a snitch. They didn't care about that, though, all they know is that I was a Patience child. I had to go.

"You think we're going to kill you?" Killian laughs, pulling me out of the Jeep. "I need to show you something."

Kyrin follows closely behind us as we head through two small trees. A cabin comes into view, wooden walls constructed by rusted metal fittings. There are no visible windows, and an aged rocking chair at the front.

"I know this place. Why am I here?" I scrunch my eyes as if to block out the memory.

"You aren't the only person who has been fucked up by Patience," Kyrin mutters behind me, and I turn to face him, shocked at the soft tone he used.

"You?"

Kyrin's eyes darken, even more than usual. There's an air of danger that hovers around Kyrin, and I get the feeling that I'm about to finally get my first inhale. He starts walking toward the cabin, and I follow behind him with Kill next to

me. I know it looks stupid, and if this was a movie, I know that everyone would be screaming at the stupid girl walking into a random cabin in the woods with two killers, but I do anyway. Is that trust? Who knows.

We all stomp up the stairs, the heavy weight squeaking beneath us as Kyrin opens the front door. He pauses at the threshold. "Haven't been back here since that day."

I think over what he's saying. "I know what they used to use this cabin for. I remember. It was when Mayhem and the Four Fathers thought they got Patience out of Kiznitch, but they didn't. Kiznitch was so busy looking for their hiding places in Patience that they forgot to look in their own backyard. Patience didn't shit where they ate. They'd house the people, kids, who were for sale, in here. The kids were always snatched from Mayhem before it shut down. In the bedrooms, there are shackles, beds, old urine stains on the floors..."

Kyrin freezes, and I inch my way in beneath his arm. "I was here once, too."

"I know." Kyrin looks up at me from beneath his lashes. "I saw you one day, coming in here and being tied to the table right there." Kyrin points to an aged dining table with four wooden legs.

"Why am I here!" I yelled, desperate for an answer but unwilling to show any weakness.

"You need to train. Stretch. Your legs. This..." Kosta latched the metal spreader to my upper thighs while connecting me to the feet of the table. "I'll be back when I think you're ready."

Lilith's eyebrows furrowed slightly, but she shook it off. Lilith was about as soulless as her father, but I thought she was a friend.

"Forty-eight hours later," I whisper, leaning down and running my hand over the foot where the indentation of my cuffs remained. "And I still wasn't wide enough for him when he continued to fuck me the next day."

I look up at Kyrin as pain flashes through his eyes. Sweat beads down from his temple. “Fucking hate that bitch.”

“Who?” I ask softly, standing back to my feet.

“Lilith.”

I slowly make my way to him, noting how Killian stiffens beside Kyrin. “What did she do?”

“Does it matter?” Kyrin murmurs, searching my face and my lips. “The only person who really knows what it feels like —” He pauses, swallows and looks back at me. “Is you, but you hide it well.”

“I had my memories taken, Kyrin. I cheated,” I say, now that we’re toe-to-toe. “And aside from that, it’s all I’ve known. Pain. Hurt. Anguish. Neglect. This place, though...” I look around, shivering as I take in the cool stone walls, open fireplace with dust build up inside of it and neglected kitchen. “So bad.”

My eyes come back to Killian, who’s watching me carefully. “We tried to buy you at a show once, to save you. I remember what they did to you over those two days, Saskia, it came close to what I had to endure for the days I was here. We obviously didn’t know your name, didn’t know who you were, but I recognized you from the cabin.”

“You guys would have been fifteen?”

I do the math in my head. I didn’t have to question it. I never looked the same while in Patience. I was always dolled up. Made to look fake and plastic and artificial. There’s no way they would have thought I looked like the 8-year-old girl who left all those years before. Dressed in Barbie attire with a bedroom to match my dollhouse. All dolls had a dollhouse, and every dollhouse matched their room. When a doll would die, the house would be burned with the doll. Lilith was the leader of all the dolls, and rightly so, what with Kosta as her father.

I gulped, my eyes closing. “I don’t want to think about the last time I was here.”

The chaffing of the metal continued to bite into my flesh as my thighs ached to close. I didn't want to be here, but I had to train. Kosta was very displeased with my performance, and he needed me more experienced. To be able to bend and stretch my body for long periods of time.

Someone walked in behind me, unlatching one hand and spreading it wide to attach to the other leg of the table. Now I was completely starfish, my ass in the air. Before I could protest, someone entered me from behind. Raw. Hot. I ached. I was dry, completely dry, so I screamed out in pain as the sting started to dissipate. It had only been one week since I had been taken by Kosta. One week. I was still inflamed by the brutality of him. He was upset. Upset that I couldn't do something so simple as to keep my legs open for him. My inner thighs felt bruised, I was weak, so now I was here. To do better. Get better. The spreader for my arms and legs were now wide enough for my muscles and bones to protest under distress.

He continued. In and out. In and out. "You're going to be punished for your weakness in the very place your kind resides, Little Doll." I didn't know who owned that voice. I didn't care. I lost my self-worth the second Kosta raped me, now anything after is a wrinkled version of reality, warped and twisted.

I looked up from watery eyes, directly at another boy opposite me. He was wearing a hoodie, covering his face. He was chained. Before I could think too much about him, I drifted off to sleep as the onslaught continued.

"Do you know how many, Saskia?" I knew what Kyrin was asking.

Tears built up in my eyes. "I don't know. I fell asleep."

Killian shuffles so he's beside me. Kyrin's hand comes to my chin to tilt my head up to his.

"Fifteen." I choke out a cry, my hand covers my mouth. Tears slide down my face for the second time tonight and I

can't stop them. Pain takes hold in my chest as energy drains from my limbs. I feel vacant while my body feels occupied by people that didn't belong in there.

“You were fucking thirteen, Little Dragon...” Kyrin says softly.

“Baby...” Killian whispers into my neck, his lips softly rushing over my flesh. “I'm here.”

My eyes flash open to find Kyrin's on mine. I can't trust anyone, ever. No one. But for right now, I want to put my trust in Kyrin and Killian. Kyrin has displayed more emotions than I have ever, or would ever think he could, and now we share a common ground.

This ground.

The ground of this cabin.

My mouth opens—but Kyrin's phone starts blaring in his pocket and he reaches in, bringing it to his ear. “What's wrong?”

He hangs up his phone. “I'll be back soon. They need my help.”

“With?” I ask, though I'm not sure I really want the answer.

Ky smirks. “Ever seen a face with no flesh?”

I cringe. “Ew.”

Kyrin chuckles. “I'll try not to be too long.”

When Kyrin leaves, I swallow past the pain that's throbbing in my throat, my pulse increasing. I need to know. I need to understand. Before I can stop myself, I'm reaching up to Killian's face. When my finger touches the curve of where his cheekbone meets his jaw, I stop breathing. “It hurts.”

Killian steps forward, sucking my finger into his mouth as his other hand circles my lower back. “What do you want from me?” His lips come to mine, and I open for him as his tongue dips inside my mouth. My arm hooks around the back of his

neck as I feel my tears roll down my cheek, falling from my lips.

I pull back slightly, my heart aching and my vision blurring slightly.

“I don’t care what they did to you, Saskia, I care what you feel.”

My eyes squeeze closed. “I need to—this cabin.”

His hand slips beneath my pants, the cushion of his thumb pressing against my clit. “I’ll kill them.”

My mouth falls open, a soft moan slipping between my lips. “You have demons too.”

He grips onto my waist and lifts me onto the table. The table that helped steal a piece of my soul. His hand dips beneath my top, removing it slowly. “True. I have many, but I wouldn’t be the devil I am today if I never got to commit the sins I did then.” His lips fall onto mine, and I open my mouth as he slowly removes my clothes, until I’m wearing nothing but my panties and bra.

He licks his bottom lip, his eyebrows pulling in. “You’re going to fuck me on this table.” He leans up and takes a seat beside me, grabbing me by my hips and bringing me to his lap, so I’m straddling him. He breathes over my lips. “You’re going to use me to take back your control.” I sob into the crook of his neck, running my tongue over his skin. Slowly, he peels off my panties and flicks them to the side. I reach for his buckle on his belt pulling him free.

He hisses, biting down on my nipple. “Fuck. Make this quick because I don’t know how I’m not supposed to be rough with you.” I slide over his girth, my fingers flexing behind his neck. I clench around him like a vice, unwilling to release him as I draw out and slam myself back down.

“Fuck, babe,” he whispers into the side of my ear as I bring myself up again and grind over him.

He brings his lips to mine, kissing me roughly as he struggles with himself on where to put his hands. Finally, one hand is fisted in my hair as the other rests on the table beside

him. I ride him hard, until the slapping of our bodies colliding amalgamates with the animalistic sounds that leave us both.

He brings his palm to my mouth. “If you keep screaming that way, baby, I’m going to get you pregnant.”

I’m about to bite his palm when my orgasm crashes into me in a vicious wave, threatening to drag my ass right out to sea.

Killian releases my mouth, pressing another kiss to it. He’s gentle when he’s rough. He may fuck you within an inch of your life, but he’ll give you back a mile when he’s finished. I climb off his lap, and he watches me carefully. “What are you doing?”

“Stand.”

His face shifts as his eyes twinkle with mayhem. “Don’t get used to this. It’s a one-time thing.”

“Hmmm.”

Killian does as he’s told, sliding off the table as his jeans and briefs fall to a pool at his feet. His cock is heavy in my hands, and thick. Angry. I graze the cushion of my thumb over his tip.

“Jesus,” I cry out, my face falling against his chest. Killian will always be more than enough for me. I will never have my fill of him. Aside from all of the revelations tonight, I need him for right now.

Killian groans, his head tilting back until his hoodie falls around the back of his neck. Slowly, I slide down to my knees and take him between my lips. His smooth thickness glides over the top of my mouth, as I try to take him all the way in. Gagging, I pull back and cover Killian. *My Killian.* I don’t know why I’m feeling possessive, but a rush of power rolls over me at that realization that Killian is and always will be mine. Forget the stars aligning, Heaven and Hell moved when we were born. I just don’t know how this is all going to end...

Killian pulls out, getting agitated as per usual, guiding me up by my hair.

He picks me up from the ground and I wrap my legs around him.

Continuing to ravish my lips with his, he starts pushing one finger into my opening, twirling it in circles. I have a feeling what he wants us to do. Good thing it won't be the first time...

Killian's hand wraps around my mouth as his fingers reach down my throat. "Spit. And make it a good one."

I gag, spitting into the palm of his hand.

"Jesus Christ," he murmurs, leaning down and sucking on my nipples. Killian rubs the saliva over my ass, gently massaging inside my pussy. I hear the movements of his finger and my juices swirling around. He rubs that over my asshole.

"Ready?" he whispers into my ear.

I moan, nodding. "Yes." Slowly, the tip of his cock is pressing against my opening, and I flinch, knowing that the pain is about to come.

"Relax, baby."

I do, as if on cue, and my ass swallows him as soon as his tip enters.

He groans so loud the vibrations are felt through the pulsing of my heart. "Fuck." Biting down on the side of my neck, his teeth graze over my collarbone, sending tingles to explode all over me.

"Holy fuck!" I scream when he pulls out, holding Killian into place by his neck. I need to feel in control.

As if reading my mind, he searches my eyes. "You're in control. You wanna stop? We'll stop."

I nod, licking my lips, just as my body relaxes with the fullness it's experiencing downstairs. "I don't want to stop."

"Good, because fuck that—" He draws out just as he slams back into me.

I'm coming, shamelessly coming after one thrust, but he doesn't stop. Killian's sweaty face is against my chest, his

teeth biting into my flesh as he pounds into me relentlessly. His growls are animalistic, my moans as loud as a siren. My core clenches again as stars spin behind my lids. I'm dripping in sweat, my skin hyperaware.

"I'm going to come again," I whimper, my head falling onto Killian, my limbs turning to mush. He speeds up, pressing against a spot deep inside, promising to unleash hell upon my body.

As if on cue, a loud scream erupts from me painfully, unleashing all of the pleasure, pain, agony. He empties inside of me seconds after, before slowly pulling out and stumbling backward. My legs give way, and I'm falling—only Killian's arms swing out to catch me, standing me back to my feet. Cum is dripping out of me from all places, but I feel something else right now.

Elation.

Shaking my head, I chuckle to myself as Killian removes his hoodie and tosses it at me to clean up. I scrub in double time, needing my clothes back on my body when I hear Killian's truck pull back up outside.

Once I'm changed, Killian hooks his arm around my back, his worry etched over his beautiful face like a painting on display. "You okay?"

I smile softly. "I am."

It wasn't a lie. What we did replaced a bit of the darkness with some color. When someone or someones violate you, that doesn't give them the power to own parts of you.

This cabin? Maybe before today, I wouldn't have been able to look at another cabin without thinking about that night. Now, I can at least replace that with something new. To have an emotional trigger to a past event is giving your demons power to control you. To control what is going to set you off. It's never going to be easy, but the first step we can do is work to take back that power.

Kyrin. I don't think I'll ever know the true torment that's embedded into the dark corners of his soul, but I do know

everyone is different. What works for some won't for others.

Killian stands in a white shirt with sweat seeping through, but leaves his jeans unbuckled as he reaches into his pocket to pull out his smokes.

I take one, and he lights it before lighting his own.

“Why did you kill Hope?” I ask the question that I've been wanting to ask but couldn't gather my thoughts fast enough to ask it. Between the murder and the sex. “Was she not good...”

“Not good?” Killian mirrors my tone sarcastically. “She was barely fucking human. There's a lot that I need to talk to you about with your family, Patience, Kiznitch, and hell, even this cabin. Can we do this back in Kiznitch, or fuck, even on the plane? Got a lot of shit that I need to do, including be there for my best friend whose mother just died.”

There's a part of me that is disappointed with his answer. I know that Delila being dead is going to cause a massive shift in the Midnight Mayhem world, but my world has also shifted. I've found out parts of myself that I didn't know existed, and now I don't know who I really am.

“Of course, I get it. But when she came here, why did you kill her?”

Killian draws in his smoke and then blows it out. “She tried to cut a deal with us. Wanted you out. Said that she couldn't have you as a liability anymore, and that she was worried you'd flip on Patience. She wanted you dead, so I killed her instead. I admit, Delila was pretty pissed at me for doing it, you know what with my impulses...” He smirks at me. “There were a few of us there, and the whole thing was caught on video, so if you don't believe me, I have proof. I couldn't tell you at first because we were still trying to figure everything out. Could you imagine if I had told you then and there? You would have thought I was a psycho.”

“Ehhh.” I shrug. “Still up in the air.” I shake my head. “I don't understand why she would do that.”

“How is that not obvious to you right now?” Killian drops his smoke on the ground, crunching onto it with the bottom of

his boot. “She was Patience through and through, Saskia. She bled that shit. She was weak-minded, all of them are—but not you, and that’s because of your DNA.”

“How can you be so sure about my strength?”

Killian steps closer to me, bringing his finger up to my face. “Me and Maya rescued Kyrin the day he was brought in here. We stumbled upon the cabin when Maya was running me around the woods. They tried to take him, a fucking up-and-coming Brother, but they failed. We didn’t have time to call it in and Kyrin never wanted The Four Fathers to know, so we kept it secret, until Delila got it out of Maya years later. After spotting him through the window, I went into murder mode and needed him out, so we waited until the guards were upstairs or out the front before we snuck in through the back. While we were untying him, we saw you tied to that table too. I remember thinking there was something about you but not knowing why. You were young, wearing a blonde wig, makeup all over your face. It’s how you looked the night we came to the show.” He breathes out. “You are fucking Kiznitch. You were born to be a fucking Gladiator warrior. There was no way that this was going to define you.”

I sigh just as Kyrin stumbles inside, carrying a gasoline container. “We’re burning this shit to the ground.”

I take one of the containers and make my way into the sitting room where I saw the boy all those years ago. I pause before slowly tipping gasoline over the spot. Kill and Ky go upstairs and empty out the rooms before coming back down just as I’ve finished dousing the kitchen.

I pull out my lighter from my pocket. “I hate this Zippo.” Killian watches me carefully. “I started smoking when I was fourteen as a way to cope with whatever was going on at the time. Kosta gave me this as a gift, had the patterns inscribed into it. Now that I know my real name and heritage, I understand the meaning of the hidden dragon.” I flick it open and toss it into the puddle of gasoline. “Up in flames.”

We all pile out of the cabin and back into the convertible Jeep. We watch in silence as the cabin slowly burns, the metal

roof caving in until it's ignited into a ball of flames.

Kyrin pulls out from the way we came. "Love the fucking smell of revenge."



Thirty

Killian

I hated being that fucking person. The one that someone has to lean on in order to get through whatever it is that they're going through, but I knew that two girls needed that from me right now.

After we dropped Saskia back off at my plantation home in Kiznitch—with my fucking mother and the rest of the witches—we make our way back to Kosta's house in Patience. Patience is a town on the outskirts of Kiznitch. When Midnight Mayhem was started, and those who didn't make the cut got hurt, they moved out of Kiznitch and straight into Patience, which was only an hour drive away. It was far enough away for none of us to step on each other's toes. Through the years, there was no vivid beef between us. I mean, we always hated them and them us, for obvious reasons, but we never were actively warring with each other, until the shit went down with Perse. We knew that we could end them if we wanted. Not only did Kiznitch have the manpower and

numbers, but the Four Fathers are four of the most powerful men in the world. Each Father has a talent, and each Father, has a skill—a career—that they provide for Kiznitch and help keep our world alive. Us as Brothers take on our Father’s role when the next generation comes up, but it’s not always guaranteed that we get another Four Brothers of Kiznitch. Once one brother has a kid, we will all have to try for them. Hopefully not until we’re over fucking thirty. Until then, we’re Brothers until the time comes. The seven-point star that we wear as a crest signifies the seven founding families of Kiznitch. Initially, they did it years ago to stop any family lines from crossing over. If we all knew where we came from, we knew where not to go. I mean, this was fucking hundreds of years ago, when the town was only just founded. Now we have thousands and thousands of civilians who live in Kiznitch amongst us, but they all know who the founding families are. Where they came from or where they crossed from. Not all families who live in Kiznitch were born there. It’s like any town. Only with seven powerful last names. Kiznitch isn’t a small town by any means, it’s only small if you’re one of the Four or one of the founding families.

Axton

Cicero

Nero

Cornelii

Patrova

Kournikova

Dragavei

All seven founding families, fucking Kiznitch royalty. Now one of the greats has fallen, and not just anyone, fucking Delila. She has been the rock of Midnight Mayhem since before I can remember. Maya and Delila didn’t have the best relationship, but they loved each other as much as either of them could love.

“You going to go to Maya?” Kyrin asks as we make our way back into the war zone.

“When I get home, yeah.”

Everyone is quiet when we walk in, blood spilling out over the affluent marble floor in the lounge room, right where everyone drew guns not long ago.

Our fathers are still in here, along with King, Keaton, Kohen—King’s twin brother—and Kaizer. Delila is in the same spot, unmoving. Her body has obviously started to shift into rigor mortis, with her skin palling to an unnatural shade of purple and her body swelling.

I count the bodies. “Seven? Thought there’d be more than that.”

Kaius, King’s dad and the leader of the Four Fathers, shakes his head. “There would have been, had the rest of them not submitted.”

I shuffle farther into the room, taking a seat on the sofa where Saskia once was. “By submit, are you saying that we’re going to invite them into Mayhem?”

Dad sits down beside me, drawing his ankle up to rest on his knee. “No. They will need a transition. Weed out the bad ones.”

I shake my head. “No. I don’t fuckin’ want any of them near—” I pause, searching for the right words.

“Saskia?” Kaius asks, leaning against the wall farthest from me.

“Yeah.” I run my hands over my face.

“Son, what are you doing with her? She was planted into Mayhem, how do you trust her?” My father interrupts Kaius.

I bring my eyes to his. “The same way you trust Mom, even though she sleeps with everyone in the coven.”

Dad rolls his eyes. “What your mother does isn’t something I care about.”

I know that. I didn’t grow up in a family where my parents were in love, or kissed or cuddled. Probably has a lot to do with my issues with women as I’ve grown, and probably my

sexual aggression, but whatever, I don't deflect. I own my problems.

Instead of trying to explain something to my father that he's not wired to understand, I shake my head. "Doesn't matter."

Keres, Keaton's father, pushes his glasses down from his head, examining Delila. "She'll be buried in the Patrova plot in Kiznitch."

I nod. "Agreed. The rest of this house can get burned to the ground."

"Firstly, I didn't want to be here, but I gotta say, I did enjoy the spilled blood, secondly, I could really do with a fucking drink," Kohen murmurs. Exiting the sitting room.

I sigh, sitting back, as Kaius calls for the clean-up crew to pick up Delila.

"What's up with you and Saskia, son?" Dad asks, instantly annoying me with his question.

"Why do you care?" I answer, not willing to look him directly in his eyes.

"I care because I know that girl must have a chip on her shoulder, and that chip was put there by you. So that's why I care." He leans forward, resting his elbows on his knees. "She was a sweet girl, Killian, but she is not that same girl anymore."

I know that he's right, and I know that underneath it all, he means well, but I'm not in the mood to listen to one of his speeches.

"Leave it alone, Dad." I kick up from the sofa and watch as the cleaning crew comes in with a gurney and black body bag. My thoughts zone out as I watch them pick Delila up and move her onto the metal bed. "Delila always trying to do good by everyone in the most fucked up way possible."

King squeezes my shoulder. "You gotta be there for Maya, bro. You know this is going to hit her hard."

Sighing. "I know."



Thirty-One

Saskia

I'd classify myself as a feminist. I want women to succeed and I truly feel like we are a sisterhood. We are cut from the same cloth. We should support each other and uplift one another, but Draya tests my patience more than any woman ever has.

I never liked her as a kid.

I even more so don't like her now.

Draya rests her elbow on her knee as she leans toward me, her long dark hair spilling over one slender shoulder. The woman needs a meal. "Can I ask you something, Dragavei?"

Oh, and also, I've noticed that she calls everyone by their surname.

My legs feel restless. "Sure."

Draya studies my face closely. "Did you know that the Corneliis are not monogamous? Killian and Maya have a bond

that cannot be broken, let alone touched by anyone. Will you be okay being second best forever?”

I stiffen at her aggressive words. She has hung the bait out for me, hoping I'd bite.

Keeping my eyes on hers, I smile sweetly. “What makes you think I want your son like that, Draya? He bullied me as a child, killed my father, killed my aunt, and played games with me from the day I joined Midnight Mayhem.” Her eyes narrow, but her mouth kicks up in a smirk. “You don't have to worry about me breaking their bond, because I have no desire to go near it.”

Slowly, she leans back in her chair, just as Ash and Dhalia—King and Perse's moms—reenter the room, carrying glasses of whiskey. Usually, I'd decline, but after the day I've had and because I can still smell sex and murder on my skin, I take it when Ash hands me it.

“Thank you.”

“What are you two talking about in here?” Dhalia asks, flicking her long perfectly manicured finger toward me as she brings her glass to her mouth. Dhalia is beautiful, not to say Draya isn't, but when they're seated beside each other, you can see the different glow. Dhalia has a good heart, Draya is dirty.

I take a sip of my whiskey, relishing in the burn that it leaves whispered over my lips. “Just clearing up a misunderstanding.”

“Hmmm.” Draya dismisses me with a simple flick of her wrist.

Ash runs her hand over my leg. “I had a feeling you were related Dragavei but couldn't put my finger on it. Your mother and I were very close.”

“Thanks, Ash.” I bring my hand to hers and squeeze.

A few very awkward moments later, the front door opens in the foyer and voices spill into the sitting room. I ignore the way my stomach twists when I hear Killian. As if on cue,

Draya smirks at me. She's so much like her son. I see it now. Killian is his mother's boy, not his daddy's.

Killian drops on the sofa beside me, and I suck in a breath when his thigh presses against mine. I wasn't kidding when I said that I wasn't interested in him. I am not. He has caused me too much chaos for me to just allow him in. He may be in my life but that doesn't mean he has to be in my heart. I appreciate him for giving me the closure at the cabin, but now I have to think rationally. Or at least try to.

The thick aroma of smoke, ash, and cologne swiftly seizes the room, and I know what they've done. Burned the damn house down. *Delila*.

"They're preparing her for a funeral in two days from now." King pushes through the room, going straight for the mini bar on the other side of the fireplace that's burning behind Draya's chair. "I've already got the crew and girls on the first flight here. Killian hasn't told Maya yet..."

I freeze.

King continues. "But he will when she lands."

Kaius shoves his hands in his pocket, looking at all of us in the room. All of the Four Fathers, their wives, The Brothers, and myself. "Delila being taken means someone will have to step up to run the show. Ideally, it is supposed to be Maya, since that has always been a Patrova role to do, but there's Perse."

Killian's leg jiggles against mine and I can almost feel his anxiety seep into my pores. "You can't give that role to Perse. She's a hybrid."

"But," King adds, bringing his eyes to Killian. "Perse and Delila were really fuckin' close. I'm not sayin' that Maya shouldn't step up, but I'm saying I think Perse is the right person to do this. Maya has a lot of growing to do, and besides that, she has just lost her mom." King shakes his head. "You know Maya, brother. She's going to lose herself, be reckless, and do a whole bunch of shit that she shouldn't do. We can re-evaluate when the time comes, but I think Perse knows

enough, was close enough, and is crazy enough to take that throne for now—until we need to re-evaluate.”

I put my hand up as if I’m in a fucking school session. “What would that mean for the ringmaster? Delila was that too, and Perse can’t do that on top of everything else.” Just as the words leave my mouth, Kyrin walks in, slipping his gun back into the waistband of his jeans.

“Lilith...” I whisper. I can’t help the smile that stretches over my face. “You have to use Lilith.”

Killian leans forward, glaring at me. “We’re not using our enemy.”

I shake my head, bringing my attention to him. “Lilith is black and white. She doesn’t think in colors. She isn’t your enemy. She’d be your nothing.”

“What are you saying?” Kaius asks cautiously.

My eyes swing around the room. “I’m saying that Lilith doesn’t see the world like we do. She doesn’t have a moral compass.”

“Was she born like that?” Draya questions. “Was she born retarded?”

“Shut the fuck up, Ma!” Killian snaps at her.

I ignore them both, while tucking it away in my brain to get to the bottom of why he hates her so much—aside from the fact that she’s a massive bitch.

“No,” I answer Draya, without paying her any attention. “She wasn’t. When she was a child, she was always crazy. She would talk a lot, do a lot of weird things for the sake of adrenaline, but after the years, life has worn on her—and it shows.”

“You killed her dad. She will want blood,” King answers.

I chuckle, shaking my head. “You guys still don’t get it, do you?” When no one answers, I take a sip of my whiskey and clear my throat. “You all may be killers, and horrifying ones at that, but you all have one thing in common. Loyalty. Patience isn’t like that. We don’t have loyalty as a morality. We have

the killing, the rape, the human trafficking, the at times, incest, but we have no loyalty. No brotherhood. No friendships. Lilith doesn't know any of those things. She would come in and be a reliable asset to Midnight Mayhem."

"How so?" Kyrin is the one to ask a question now.

I bring my eyes to his. "Because she was the ringmaster for Patience, and well, I'm sure you remember the ringmaster—right?"

Kyrin's face flashes with recollection. "That was her?"

I nod. "Yes, so, I think—"

"—She's right. Lilith should be the ringmaster."

Kallisto steps forward, watching me. "This will be on you if it fails, Saskia."

"I wouldn't have mentioned it if I didn't already know it."

Killian grabs for his hair and tugs. "Still not with this idea. You want to plant a goddamn enemy and put her in the center of our show, and give the rest of the responsibility to Perse, who is herself new to this?" He stands and rushes out of the kitchen, slamming the door behind his retreat.

I feel everyone's eyes turn to me, as if I hold the answers. As if I hold the key to Killian's frustrations.

I don't. No one does. That's a key that doesn't exist.



Thirty-Two

Saskia

The funeral was dark, and King was right, Maya isn't handling it well at all. We flew home from Kiznitch yesterday after staying for two days for the funeral. Killian and I haven't spoken much at all, and anytime he tries, I find myself moving away from him. To be honest, I've been battling with a lot inside of myself since finding out about who he is and his role in my life, in who I am.

I can't just forgive him for all that he's done, but to make it worse, I don't think he can either. He didn't just save me, I saved him, too. We saved each other through a complete calamity.

"Saskia!" Killian snaps from the entryway to the practice tent back in New Orleans. We're setting back off in a couple of days, with Perse running the show.

"What?" I don't turn to face him, bending over to stretch my hamstrings.

I think a big part of the tension between Killian and I is that we don't trust each other now. Trust is the complication that delays love, it's the bridge that joins two people together, so when that bridge burns down, it takes time to rebuild it, and that's fine. You spend time rebuilding it, laying down the foundation again and putting all the time, blood, sweat, and tears into it, but here's the thing. If you rebuild it, you better make sure the other is willing to cross it for you.

I don't think either of us can say that we can. From the beginning, I struggled to differentiate what was real and what wasn't. What part of Killian did he show me was real, and what part of me that I showed Killian wasn't?

"Where the fuck is Lilith?" he snaps at me, rocking me out of my deep and meaningful solo therapy session.

Rolling my eyes, I stand back up to my full height and stomp down the makeshift stage. I take one step. Two. Another. Until I'm close enough to him. I'm an ant beside Killian, with his staunch height towering over mine.

I crank my head up. "I don't know, Killian." Then I shove him out of my way, stepping out to the heat and making my way to my RV. Lilith has moved in with me, naturally, and to say that she's taken the transition easy from Patience to Midnight Mayhem is a lie.

It's as though she needs to be dominated. She needs to need something more than what Midnight Mayhem can offer her. In saying that, she's going to cause an absolute shitstorm during the shows. I'm here for it.

"Yo! Don't fuckin' run away from me!" Killian yells from behind me as a few people pass me by. I reach for the handle and pull the door open. Too many words are swimming in my head, and I want to drown them all.

Just as I pull it open, his hand slams against it and closes it with a bang. I feel his chest against my back, his heat radiating off him in violent waves, threatening to pull me into him.

"What the fuck is this, Little Dragon, thought we were over this shit?"

I close my eyes to reach for some self-restraint as I feel the fog from his breath whisper over the back of my neck.

He killed your father. He killed Hope. He bullied you as a kid. He tricked you while you were here and you believed him. You will always be second to Maya.

“Leave me alone, Kill.”

“Fuck that,” he growls. “I’m not leaving you alone, Saskia. You’re not winning this one.”

“Winning what?” I yell, spinning around, as rage takes hold of me. I search his eyes, the brilliant flecks of blue a deadly reminder that not all that glistens is gold.

He gestures between the two of us. “This. You’re not fucking winning this.”

“What do you want from me!” My throat swells as defeat slowly bleeds into my veins. My shoulders sag as the release I’m fighting begins to win, the rope from the tug of war that we’ve been struggling with finally about to snap.

He presses against me until my back slams against the RV. “Isn’t it obvious?” The corner of his mouth tips up, his dimple sinking into his cheek. “You.”

Tears threaten the corner of my eyes, and I find myself once again angry that Killian has me between a rock and a hard place.

Metaphorically and literally.

“That’s not something I can give, Kill.”

He stills, his hand coming to my cheek. The tug of war begins again, but my hands are tied. “Babe, talk to me.”

I dampen my lips with my tongue, squeezing my eyes shut. “I can’t forgive you right now.” My body shakes as my legs threaten to give way. My stomach flips upside down, desperate to empty its contents. “I can’t—”

His lips brush over mine, both his hands caging me in on either side of my head. “Look at me.”

I can't. I refuse. I turn my head to the side, needing to find something else to fixate on. Something that doesn't make my heart feel like it's about to expire. He gently hooks his fingers under my chin, turning my face to his.

I bite down stubbornly, my eyes crossing as I come face-to-face with my—whatever he is.

“I know I've done fucked up shit in my life. Shit, you don't even know the half of it. I killed your dad, I did, but I was a fuckin' kid that was being raised with an AK as a damn pacifier. I was born a killer. We all were. If you want me to stand here before you and tell you that I'm sorry for killin' your dad, then I can't do that. He was a piece of shit for allowing Patience to come for you. For running as soon as your mom wasn't here anymore to stop him—because you know that's what happened, right? And if you don't believe me, I have fucking proof.”

“What do you mean you have proof?” I ask, and I don't know why I skipped over all of the other raw details he spilled and reached straight for that—closure maybe—but I did, and I wanted to know.

He pushes off the RV and takes my hand. “Come.”

I do, because aside from my trust issues with him, there's one thing that with all that we've been through that I absolutely know, and it's that Killian wouldn't kill me. Maybe that's the first plank that has been laid down on our bridge. I follow him through Delila's home, ignoring how haunted the mansion feels now with her not here. I don't think I've come to the realization of her not being here anymore.

He continues down the hallway and into a room that's at the very end of it, opening the door.

King, Keaton, and Kyrin are inside, talking around a mahogany table. My eyes fall to the picture frames that are on top. All of Delila and Maya. My heartbeat thickens again.

“Give us a minute,” Killian says to the boys, and they all look between him and I.

“You sure about that?” King asks, an eyebrow raised. “Don’t know if it’s a good idea.”

Killian picks up a black remote before his eyes collide with King. “Give us a minute.”

They all spill out of the room as Kill leans over the desk, his arms flexing. “I’m showing you this because I don’t want to have this conversation again. You can forgive me, or not, it doesn’t matter to me. I’d still want you to watch this.” He runs his hand over his sharp jaw. “Kyrin is a fucking genius. When we were kids, he used to do a lot of fucking filming.” Kill shakes his head, turning to face the TV. “There are hours and hours of film, a lot with you in it too, and a lot with your dad...”

My brows pull together as I round the sofa.

Killian presses play and the TV shows static before two boys come on.

Killian

“You’re a fucking idiot.” I shoved Kyrin in his arm when he aimed the camera right at me.

“No, I’m actually not.” He knew I was kidding, because he was the furthest thing from an idiot. We were fucking around outside after target practice with our dads, when the front door to our pool house slammed closed, stealing both of our attention.

Kyrin’s eyes came to mine. Dead. Angry. Hateful. That’s Kyrin.

I smirked. “Let’s go.”

“What the fuck are you doing?” Kyrin asked but follows me. Everyone knew to follow me. My ideas were always bad, but they always followed.

I brought my finger to my lip signaling for him to be quiet.

He glares at me before stomping up the stairs.

I hit him with the back of my hand. “Shut up and film, asshole!”

“I don’t give enough of a fuck about this world to be an asshole.”

I rolled my eyes while slowly pushing open the front door.

“No,” Peter hushed into the phone that was pressed to his ear. “I can’t. She’s not gone yet.” There was a pause as Kyrin lined up the camera to be pointed directly on Peter. Peter sighed. “I don’t know when. Soon. She’s not got long, and then it’s done and I’ll be back in Patience.” Pause. “Yes, I will keep up my end of the deal. You grant me back into the trust and I will allow her to become a Little Doll.”

“What the fuck does he mean?” Kyrin whispered from behind the camera, shocking me out of my trance.

“Don’t know. But we’re going to tell Dad.”

Saskia

My ears buzzed

“What else happened?” I ask, my throat dry.

It’s silent for a while before Kill clears his throat. “I went and talked to Dad. We concocted a plan. We knew that your mom was sick. I was angry...” Killian whispers, and I turn to face him.

He falls down onto the chair that was tucked under the table, running his hands through his hair. “I didn’t know why, but I remember that I was angry.” His eyes came to mine and sucked what little life I had inside of me out with it. “I wanted

to protect you as a kid. It was three weeks later that your mom died and sure enough, your father packed up and was heading to Hope to drop you off.” He glares at me. “You know what family does, Saskia?” he asks, his tone a notch softer.

I swipe the stray tears that have fallen down my cheeks away angrily. Annoyed that I’m once again crying.

“Fuck,” he whispers, pushing up from his chair, making his way toward me. He pulls me into his chest and for a very brief second, I allow myself to be healed by him. In this moment, it didn’t matter that the same hands that had caused so much carnage were the only ones that could tame my sadness. It didn’t matter to me in this moment that most of the battle scars that Killian hides beneath his sharp looks and swagger were inflicted by the same man I called Papa. Or the same woman that I admired growing up.

He kisses me on the top of my head as I breathe in his scent. “The biggest fuckin’ lie that the world tells us is that family is what matters. Fuck that. Blood only stains the way you see toxicity. Your mom was good, baby. She was good and pure and smart. She stayed with us to protect you.”

I swipe my tears away and step out of his hold. I need space, because if I don’t get it, Killian will possess every part of me.

“She was?” I ask, relieved. The memories I have of my mom are pure, so to hear that she was good, is a relief.

Killian nods his head just as a voice booms from behind me. “It’s true.”

I instantly freeze before turning to face Draya.

She looks me up and down. “Your mom was good, but I still didn’t like her.” She picks at her fingers, crossing her legs.

“You’re fucking hateful, that’s why, and people who are filled with hate start spreading it all around them when it becomes too much for them to contain.”

Draya laughs, her head tilting back briefly, before her eyes land on mine. “Maybe, but let me tell you one thing, Little Dragon. I may be a hateful bitch, but I love my son.”

“Are you saying that she didn’t love me?”

Draya brings her eyes to mine. “Yes. Because if she did, she would have fought harder to keep you away from the monsters, knowing full well that you would become one.”

I take a few slow breaths.

“Why are you here?” Killian snaps from behind me.

When her eyes shift to him, I see them soften around the edges. “Maya is looking for you.”

Killian exhales. “I’ll be up soon.”

I find the door that she snuck in from, leading out from the back of the office. I could hear music spilling down the stairs loudly, as the silence in the room stretches for too long.

Draya stands, walking back to the door she came from. Just when I think she’s about to go upstairs, she turns to face both Killian and I. “I tried so hard to keep you both away from each other. I was friends with your mother, Saskia, and though you may think I’m a bitch, that is only because I, unlike my son, tend to have stronger family values. We didn’t want you two to become like this.”

“Why!” I ask the question that I’ve been desperate to ask since I noticed her animosity toward me.

Her head tilts. “You would both comfort each other as kids. You were actually a restless baby. You struggled to sleep some nights, so I would come to the pool house to help your mom while your father was off working for Kallisto. Of course, I’d have Killian with me during those times, because he didn’t let me leave his sight.”

She smiles softly as if the memory comforted her in some way. Deep down, I know why. Killian can be cold toward her at times, but I’m thinking that has more to do with her sexual relationships within Mayhem and less to do with his childhood trauma.

“It happened at random one night. Your mom and I decided to leave you to cry, see if that helped or if you’d put yourself to sleep after screaming. You went silent about three

minutes in, and we were shocked. We both ran for the room—albeit quietly—which was when we found Killian in your crib. He had climbed up the rail and snuggled in with you. He was just over two years old, and you were weeks old. Your mother and I thought it was cute until it kept happening. You would cry, and Killian would know. It was as though you were a siren for him, singing his very own song. We knew then and there that you and Killian were somehow drawn to each other. As though his soul was waiting for your birth.”

I wrap my arms around my torso, fighting the shivers that are running through my veins.

“I needed you away from my son, Saskia. You, a girl of Patience, the very first hybrid, you could ruin him. This brotherhood. This world. I didn’t know what part of the spectrum you would fall on, good or evil. All I knew was that my son was wanting to do anything to soothe your cries.” She shakes her head, tucking her long black hair behind her ear. “Then Maya arrived not long after you, and well, that changed things drastically. He was torn even as a child between you and Maya. Eventually, I helped push him toward choosing Maya, by convincing him that you were a pest. By the time you were both of talking age, he didn’t like you anymore. I was sure deep down he still struggled, but for the most part, he fought to hate you.”

“Yo, okay, stop...” Killian steps in front of me like a protective beast. “That has nothing to do with what you were talking about, Mom. Back the fuck up, and I will never forgive you for the things you said about Saskia when she was a kid.”

“What?” Draya torments. “I didn’t do anything that you wouldn’t have felt eventually, Killian. I didn’t manipulate you by using a talent.” She looks between the two of us. “And you don’t think that girl already knows that you and Maya will end up together?” Then she brings her eyes to me. “Because let me tell you something, Saskia. My son comforted your pain, but you could never comfort his, and that’s the difference between you and Maya—”

“Enough!” Killian snaps. “Leave. Now.”

“Killian Corneli, I’ve had about enough, and I’m not done talking.” She once again brings her eyes to mine, and the dagger that she flung into my heart thrusts deeper inside of me, missing every important artery and slowly killing me. “Your father was Killian’s first kill. As you know, if you do math, that made him very young. But that day wasn’t when his nightmares started, he wasn’t born that way. He was a happy child. Until he learned his first responsibility—you. For whatever reason the gods graced us with, he felt the need to watch over you—even when he hated it.”

I suck in a breath, my heart beating in my chest. *Boom. Boom. Boom.* Blood rushes through my eardrums as my world feels as though everything is caving in around me. The edges of my vision blur, a buzzing sound ringing out in my ear.

“Hey!” Killian’s hands are on my cheeks. “Don’t fucking listen to her. She’s crazy.”

“She’s right...” I whisper. “You may have hated me as you got older, but she’s right.”

His arm hooks around my waist, pulling me farther into him. “She’s not, and I didn’t hate you. I was a kid, confused with my feelings.”

I shove away from him. “I need a minute.” Turning around, I run out of the kitchen and through the house, shoving my way out the door. My breathing doesn’t slow. Not when I’m pushing my way through the trees, and not when I’m leaning over my knees heaving, my stomach flipping at every turn.

I stop running when I’m in the forest that connects Delila’s house to mine, swiping the sweat from my forehead.

“I can’t—” I shake my head, spinning around when I hear footsteps.

Killian is heading straight for me, but before I can say anything else, everything goes black.



Thirty-Three

Killian

“She’s going to be fine. She fainted. Can’t say I blame her. She was bound to snap sooner or later.” King gestures to Sass, who is stretched out on my bed. After she fainted in the forest, I carried her back to my bed at the house I have on the property.

“I told you all to leave her alone,” Perse mutters, brushing her hair back from her face. “She has just found out all this information, way more than I had to, and you expect her to also stand up against your mother?”

I flinch, because she’s right. I didn’t think about everything being piled on top of what she already knew.

“Is it true, Kill?” Perse asks, turning to face me. The sun hits her red hair from the back, beaming through the binding doors that open out onto the patio.

“Is what true?” I ask, even though I half know what she’s about to ask.

“That you’re stuck between her and Maya?”

I can’t help it, my head tilts back and a laugh erupts from my mouth. “Let me ask you something, if I wanted Maya in that way, would she not already be mine?”

“But Saskia isn’t exactly either...”

“Saskia was mine the day she was born, Perse. That was inevitable. When she came in as a Royal, and if she had stayed a Royal, she would have been wife’d already, but then Dragavei was revealed and Patience happened. I tried to fight my impulses at every turn because to be honest with you, I didn’t trust her. Her intentions. Patience is manipulative and toxic, and I wasn’t sure exactly how much of that was sewn into her—but the day I found out that she was *my* Saskia, it all made fuckin’ sense to me. Even if I didn’t trust her.”

Perse grins. “So she is yours?”

My eyes snap to hers as a round of chuckles sound off behind me. I flip them all off. “Don’t act like you all didn’t already know.”

“Oh, we knew,” Keaton mutters. “But we weren’t sure you did.”

There’s a knock on the door, and I make my way toward it, swinging it open to see my mom on the other side.

“What?” I love my mom, and I hate disrespecting her, but every time she does something to hurt Saskia, it’s my impulse to rear my back up and protect her, because I know what my mom is like. I know how she plays. I know that she doesn’t just play a game, she owns the whole board.

“Maya needs you.”

My grip on the door handle tightens. “What’s wrong?”

“She’s not handling this well, Killian. I get that you want to be here for Saskia.” She looks over my shoulder, and I turn, following her sight.

Sass is awake, watching me across the room. A pool of emotions begins swimming in my gut. Confusion, need, *hunger*.

Mom draws my attention back to her. “But right now, Maya needs her best friend.”

I lean against the door frame. “She’ll have to settle for you until I know Sass is fine.” Shutting the door in her face, I make my way to the bed.

Sass wriggles into the covers farther, bringing my dark cotton sheets up to her mouth, displaying her eyes only. “I like your bed.”

“My bed likes you back.” I grin at her.

She looks around the room. “Am I in trouble? Why is everyone here?”

Perse scolds her. “You fucking fainted. Freaked me out when Killian was carrying you through his house.”

The only reason why I brought her back here was because my house is the closest to Delila’s, and I didn’t want to take her back there with Maya on some next level shit.

“I’m sorry,” she says, flipping the sheets off her body and swinging her legs over the bed. She turns, looking at me over her shoulder. “Thank you for bringing me back here.”

“Where the fuck else would I take you?”

She rolls her eyes at my outburst, standing to her feet. Over the months, I’ve come to learn how well Saskia takes my personality. It ain’t an easy one to handle, either, but she takes it in her hands and fucking owns it. It’s the sexiest shit in the world when a woman knows how to handle a troubled yet defiant man.

She stretches her arms just as Keaton and Kyrin pile out behind King. Perse pauses, watches me, and then brings her eyes back to Sass. “I’ll be out there if you need me. We’re just getting the last minute things ready for the road.”

Sass nods her head, piling her hair into a knot on the top of her head. “I’ll be a minute.”

Dropping down onto the foot of the bed, I run my hand over my face as she takes a seat beside me. “You need to make sure Maya is alright.”

I still, shaking my head. “Wish people would shut the fuck up about that.”

“Killian...” she whispers, and I bring my eyes to hers over my shoulder. I hide my mouth behind my shoulder, looking right into her bright blue eyes.

“Saskia...” I reply in the same tone she used.

She turns to face me, her hand coming to my cheek. “It all makes sense now, right? The you and I, the bond, but I can’t help but think about the same bond you also share with Maya. I’m a jealous person, Killian. I can’t share anything.”

I open my mouth. “First of—”

“I’m not done.” Her thumb presses against my lip, and I have to fight with all of my instincts that are telling me to suck the fucking thing into my mouth and bite on it. “On top of that, you need to be a good friend to her. She needs you. It’s not in my nature to be selfish and take you away from her.”

“Fuck that.” I stand from the bed, unable to contain my anger.

She searches my eyes from her seat, and I step closer, bringing my hand to her chin and slowly slipping my thumb between her teeth.

“Fucking be selfish, baby. Take me. Hell, just tell me where the fuck to go and I’ll follow willingly. You don’t have to be selfish with anything else, Saskia, but you will *always be* selfish with me.”

“How so?” she asks, tilting her head.

I feel when she twists her fingers into mine and my heart pounds in my chest.

“Because I’m yours.”

She flushes, sucking her bottom lip into her mouth. “Thought you weren’t into monogamy.”

I keep my eyes on hers. “I wasn’t, until I met someone who made me not want to be with anyone else.”

Her eyes squeeze shut, and I lean down to face her. “Look at me, baby.”

She doesn’t open her eyes, so I bring my lips to hers and kiss her softly. The electricity that shoots through from her to me is electric, fucking hypnotic and damn earth shattering, but she doesn’t pull away.

I don’t pull away.

I bring my hand to the back of her neck and slowly massage the skin between her hairline and her spine. “Look at me,” I murmur over her swollen lips.

Slowly, she opens her eyes and sucks the oxygen out of the room while doing it.

“I can’t promise you that I won’t make mistakes. I’ve never had a girlfriend before, and well, my relationship with my mother is fucking fragile. Those are red flags alone, and I know that, but—” I need to fucking breathe, but my chest isn’t working. She inches closer, waiting for my next words. “And I know that I’ve done some fucked up things. I will do more fucked up things in the future too, because this is who I am, and I won’t change. I can’t change. You don’t have to forgive me right now for your dad, or even for Hope, but I still need you to know that I’ll wait.”

Slowly, I hear her release air from between her lips.

I continue. “I’ll fucking wait for you for as long as I need to, because time doesn’t tick unless you’re in my arms.”

Tears slip from her eyes. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t...” I whisper, kissing her softly on her lips while swiping away her tears. “You wouldn’t be the girl I fell for if you didn’t make me work for it.” My lips curve up in a smile, and I notice the exact moment she caught my words because her eyes pop open, shock flashing over her flawless features.

“What?”

“What?” I pretend that I don’t know what she’s asking.

“Now’s not the time to play with me, Killian, did you just —”

“Admit that I’m in love with you? Yeah, fucking aye I did. What, you think I’d go through all this trouble for a chick I just want some ass from? Have you seen this face? I can get ass anywhere—”

“—Killian!” She whacks me with the back of her hand, but the smile on her face was well worth the banter. “You love me?”

I roll my eyes. “Yes, Saskia. Of course I fucking do. Wouldn’t put up with your shit otherwise.”

She ignores my jab and stands with me. “Do you trust me?”

My lips curl between my teeth. “Do you?”

Her eyes narrow. “I asked first.”

“And I second, so, do you trust me?” My heart has ADD.

She swallows. “I trust that you would never hurt me—”

“—and would kill anyone who did,” I add.

“And that.” She nods. “But we’ve been through so much inauthenticity that I need a minute.”

“What, so the two villains in each other’s story won’t get a happily ever after?” I joke, winking down at her.

She smiles softly. “I guess the story is still being written.”

I lean down and kiss her again, wrapping my arms around her back. “This is some *Mr. & Mrs. Smith* type shit. Just saying.”

She chuckles against my lips and my hands come to the back of her thighs as I toss her onto my bed.

“Killian...” she warns, and I take in this moment to acknowledge just how fucking beautiful she is. I mean, she’s fucking flawless.

“What?” I smirk with a quirked eyebrow. “One more. Once. More. And then I’ll leave you alone and give you that space I told you I would give.”

She giggles, and the laugh was enough to render me fucking speechless. I'd never heard her giggle, and fuck me. *Fuck. Me.* What I would give to hear that sound for the rest of my goddamn life. You know, when she's done being stubborn.

She grins, curling her finger toward me.

I pull off my shirt and unbuckle my belt, licking my lips while crawling up her body. She opens wide for me to settle between her legs, her eyes searching mine. It's intimate, and I feel the room shift around me until everything is black except this girl. This fucking girl. The fucking villain in my story who stole my black fucking heart.

She leans up and kisses me. "I want to say the words back to you, but I don't want to until I feel good."

I shake my head, grinding my dick against her pussy. "I didn't say that I love you for you to say it back. That's fuckboy shit. I said it because it was true, and I know how you feel about me, Little Dragon."

"How?" she asks, eyes again narrowed into slits.

I smirk, my eyes heavy. "Your eyes tell the explicit story that your soul tries to hide."

Her lips crash onto mine and my hands are all over her again. I strip her down, enjoying the way her nipples swell beneath the palms of my hands. Leaning down, I bite down on one and suck it into my mouth. Her back arches off my bed as my other hand reaches for her button and flings her jeans and panties off. I look down at her, eating up every single fucking inch of her beautiful skin on my way up.

The tattoo on her back. I didn't need to ink her to claim her, she smells of me, bleeds me. Everything that she is, is me. But damn, that tattoo is sexy as fuck.

Bringing my body back down to hers, I push into her as her walls clench around my length. I groan, savoring the feeling of me being wrapped up in her. Pulling out, I slowly grind inside of her, keeping the same pace as I kiss her. Hard. I don't think I stop kissing her.

Not when I push her over the edge from her third orgasm.

Not when sweat drips off my forehead and onto hers as I ride her out further.

Only when she looks up at me pleadingly, screaming that her body hurts from the pleasure, do I slightly pull away. But then my lips are back on hers. My tongue against hers, flicking and sucking her lips between mine.

“Killian,” she whimpers. “Please.” I bring my forehead to hers and grind against her. The slapping of our bodies filling up the space between us.

“Can’t. Don’t wanna let you go.”

She brings her face up to mine, her fingers hooking around my neck. “Always yours. No matter what.”

I groan as my cum shoots out from me and spills inside her pussy. Her hair is wet and matted against her face, her lips opening as she screams out one final orgasm. Her walls clench around my thick cock like a fucking vise. “She doesn’t want me to leave either.” I smirk as we both allow our bodies to tumble down together.

I press a soft kiss against her lips, and then against her neck to the side. I’m still inside her when I bite down on her neck. “I’ll give you space,” I say breathlessly. “But if you try to fill that space with another man, I’ll kill him, and then fuck you over top of his rotting corpse before sending him back to his family members piece by piece. Comprende?”

“You already know that’s not me, and it really should be me saying that.” I pull out of her reluctantly, loving the way our cum is dripping down my balls.

I reach down and swipe some of it up before rubbing it over her swollen tits. “Mine.”

“Yes.” She nods.



Thirty-four

Saskia

We were on the road for three days before we finally arrived in New York. Our first stop without Delila. I knew this was going to be hard for Maya, not that I had seen her much. She has withdrawn a lot from everyone, but attached herself even closer to Killian. Justice is dealing with it better than I would have expected, and I think that has to do with him trying to be strong for Maya. Killian and I haven't spoken much at all since his house in New Orleans. I've made my decision, and I know that I have forgiven him, but now I don't know how to go about making it known that I have. I don't want it to look like I'm taking him away from Maya, who needs him more than I do right now—so I'll wait. At least a little longer, until Maya is looking healthier or at the very least, she's not using drugs anymore.

I'm walking through the crowds of people that are hanging around the front of the tent, ready to enter for our first show when I feel someone watching me in the line.

Spinning around, my eyes fly all over the place as shivers wrack my body. I don't like that. Knowing someone is watching me and feeling that it's not in a good way.

"Damn..." someone grunts under his breath, and I turn to face where it came from. I'm wearing what I'll be wearing for my first fire scene, so the metal bralette, leather skirt and Cal, the snake. I feel bad naming it that now that she's no longer here, but Kenan has heard from her and he has said that she has moved to somewhere in the Pacific Northwest.

My hair and makeup are done to perfection, as per usual, and my body is shining with glitter.

When my eyes land on three guys and one girl, who has epic pink hair and is holding a small belly in front of her, I smile at them all to be polite. They're all very attractive, and would probably fit into this life had they been given a chance.

"I wouldn't touch that..." King says, walking up behind me when he catches the guys staring at me. I thought he was talking to me until I notice he's looking right at the guy who said *damn*.

"Oh, come on. When did The Brothers get so fucking greedy!" the guy says, and I can't help but chuckle. They obviously know The Brothers to be able to say that statement out loud.

"Ignore Eli." The pink haired beauty rolls her eyes. "He hasn't had any pussy in months."

Eli's face falls, shocked at the pink haired girl's admittance. "You are getting way worse in the second trimester."

The pink haired girl looks at me. "I'm Tillie, this is Eli, Nate, Brantley, and Bishop." I try not to look at all the guys for too long, knowing that she's obviously with one of them.

"I'm Saskia," I say, bringing my hand to hers.

"No way!" Tillie smiles. "I love that name!"

"Oh, here we go," the guy closest to her grumbles.

“So why is she out of bounds?” Eli asks, and I can’t help but smirk at him. He’s cute. Very attractive in a pretty boy way. Very pretty.

“She’s Killian’s.” King laughs, shaking his head.

“Ah, but Killian shares!” Eli starts walking toward me and King shakes his head, his hand coming to Eli’s chest.

“Not this one.”

Shock flashes over Eli’s face as his eyes swing up to a couple of his friends. “Wow. Really? Am I really going to be the last one who is not pussy whipped out of all you motherfuckers.”

This time I can’t contain my laugh and I bring my eyes back to Tillie. “When are you due?”

She rubs her hand over her belly. “I’ve just started my second trimester. We’re having a boy, so I’m lowkey panicking that he’s going to turn out like the rest of these assholes.”

I snort again. “Well, I can’t imagine—” I freeze. Panic seizes my muscles as realization comes crashing into me in waves. “Shit,” I whisper, but not loud enough for anyone to hear.

“Hey.” Tillie brings her hand to my arm, and I peer up at her. Her face falls. “Oh, shit...” The unspoken horror must have been displayed all over my face. She steps closer to me. “My car is here. Do you want me to take you to grab one?”

I can’t muster any words, so I nod my head without saying anything. She starts pulling me away when King’s voice breaks through my panic.

“Where you going? It’s forty-five minutes until the show!”

I chew on my bottom lip.

“I have a Ferrari. I can get her back in twenty.”

“What the fuck?” the pretty boy covered in tattoos snaps at her.

Tillie glares at him pleadingly, and I watch as something falls over his face and he nods, allowing us to leave. Then Tillie's hand comes to mine and we're moving through the sea of people. I don't know who this girl is, but something inside of me says I can trust her. That may be her pregnancy or getting there wasn't as easy as it looks.

She beeps a black Ferrari and I slide into the passenger seat, my knee jiggling beneath my weight. "Listen," she says as she starts the car. "First of all, what's the relationship with the 'could-be' father?"

"Rocky," I answer, clearing my throat as she floors it onto the freeway. "When I say rocky, I mean he's a bad man."

She chuckles. "I know all about those kind..." Shaking her head, we pull into the next 7-Eleven and in double time, we run through the store, ignoring the cashier's raised eyebrow at one already pregnant girl buying a pregnancy test and me dressed like a hooker.

"I don't think I want to take it back at the bus. I need to know now." I clutch the box in my hand, and Tillie's long pink hair swings around as she searches for a bathroom.

"Hey!" She points to the cashier.

The young boy with glasses and teen acne freezes under her gaze. "Yes?" He looks behind himself before looking back to us.

"Where's your staff bathroom?"

He shakes his head, shoving his glasses up his nose. "Sorry, I can't let you back there. You will have to use the McDonald's down the road."

Tillie walks closer to him and the poor kid cringes beneath her glare. "Unless you want me to drop my fluid all over this floor, I would advise you to show me your fucking bathroom."

She's actually scary when she changes her tone, and I find myself wanting to know her. Her story.

The poor kid flicks his finger to the side of the store. "It's right there. Please don't. I'm not good with blood."

Tillie rolls her eyes and takes my hand, shoving us through the doors and locking it behind us. It's one toilet so we're both in here.

“Okay, take it.”

I nod, ripping the box apart and taking out the test. “What are you guys doing here tonight?” I need a distraction, so I hope she can give that to me while I pee on a stick in front of someone I've never met before.

“Well,” she says, double checking the lock. “My man and his pack of wolves have been friends with Killian since they were babies. Something about our world and your world being best pals. I guess they always visit every time the show is here in NYC.”

Finally, I pee, and breathe in and out. “This is scary. I'm sorry we had to meet like this.”

“Oh please. You should hear how I met my best friends.” She laughs, but I hear the seriousness in her tone. After wiping, I put the test on the counter and wash my hands. “How late are you?”

I cringe. “I think only around two weeks.”

Tillie nods. “I'm sure everything will work out.”

I bring my eyes to hers. “I hope so.”



Thirty-five

Killian

“So, Tillie and Saskia ran off somewhere.” King runs his tongue over his teeth, smirking. “Gotta say, I’d be worried about that if I was you.”

I still, my hand over Maya’s hair as she spills her guts out the back of the tent. “I’m not worried,” I murmur. “I would if it was Madison, because one, Madison isn’t pregnant and two, she’s crazy as fuck. Tillie isn’t exactly sane, but she runs in a different race.”

Every time Dad and I were in New York, we’d meet up with Hector, Bishop’s old man. As I got older, I learned just how closely our worlds spin together.

King snorts. “Whatever you tell yourself.”

“Maya...” I squeeze her arm. I’ve been going back and forth with her since Delila’s death. To say that she hasn’t been handling it well is a complete fucking understatement. She’s handling it as bad as you could. I feel for her, and I care about

her, but I've reached that point where I can't do anything more to help her. "You can't perform tonight."

She shoves me away and I clench my jaw. "I'm fine!" she snaps, swiping her mouth with the back of her hand. Her pupils enlarged and dilated before she stumbles toward me, shoving me in my chest. "Why, Killian? Why her?"

My eyes narrow. "Shut up about shit you don't know anything about while you still have a fucking friend." I'm not patient, but I feel like I have been very with her. I can tolerate anything said about me, but you go after Saskia and I'll lose it.

"Just why her?"

"Why?" I ask as Kyrin's hand comes to my arm in an attempt to stop the next words that he no doubt knew were about to come spewing out of my mouth. I breathe in and out. "Reasons that you couldn't count."

Headlights beam up behind us, and I turn around to see my old man climbing out of a limo. He's unbuttoning his suit when he comes closer to Maya.

Her eyes fall on him and then come back to me in shock. She shakes her head. "No."

Everyone knows that my dad has connections in the medical field, being a surgeon himself in the real world. Obviously, Maya put two and two together. She was right.

"Yes," I answer, swiping at the makeup on my chin. "Sick of your shit, Maya. You need to get better, and when you come back, you better have a better attitude toward Saskia or this"—I gesture between her and I, just as my father's guards are latching cuffs behind her back—"is over."

Her lip quivers. "I don't want to go to rehab."

"Tough fucking shit." I realize I'm being meaner than usual with her, and my heart twinges. I step closer and caress her cheek. "Get better. Not just for me and for Mayhem, but for Delila, Maya. She wouldn't want this for you."

Her shoulders sag and her head drops between her shoulders. She knows I'm right.

I watch as they lead her toward the limo with Val helping them open the door.

Val's somber expression meets mine as she nods her head with a sad smile. *Thank you*, she mouths, and I nod my head back.

"Where the hell is Saskia!" Perse comes storming out of the curtains. "I have Lilith being a crazy bitch and Saskia nowhere to be seen."

My lips curl between my teeth. "How's the new job?"

Perse's eyes snap to mine. "Let me just say I now have a new understanding of Delila. But seriously, Killian, Lilith is a little scary."

"You don't say..." Kyrin grins from beneath his makeup.

I raise an eyebrow. "How the fuck would you know?"

Kyrin holds my stare. "Because all the crazy ones usually are."

I go back to Perse. "She disappeared with Tillie. I'll call her." Just as I'm pulling out my phone, Bishop and Nate come around the corner with Bran and Eli hot on their tail.

"Let me just say, I think we're fucked with our women..." Nate chuckles, pulling me in for a shoulder tap.

I greet them all one by one. The situation between all of us is a difficult one no matter how you look at it, but let's just say that the time Kyrin spent in the cabin had a lot to do with Brantley's father. Apparently, Bishop's girl off-ed him anyway, and I can't say I'm surprised. The man was fucking evil. The type of shit he put Brantley through, though, was another level below Hell.

I nod my head at Bishop. "You good?" Bishop is the leader of The Elite Kings, and he carries a lot of what they do on his shoulders, but I've never seen him the way he looks right now.

He shrugs. "Am I ever?"

I watch as he slowly releases my stare and pulls out his phone. Poor fuck. I don't know what's happening with him

and Madison Montgomery, but it must be something serious. Their world is about as messed up as ours, which is exactly why we're allies.

"Where'd they go?" I ask, looking around at all of them.

Eli shrugs. "Who knows, but can I just say that if it doesn't work out with you and her, I'll gladly have her."

"Fuck off, Eli." I chuckle, shaking my head.

"Fine, I'll settle as her stepson. Wanna adopt me?"

"Are you still fucking talking?" Tillie interrupts us, walking around the corner with a pale faced Saskia. Something was wrong, and it had every single killer instinct inside of me on high alert.

"You look good, Tillz. Nice and pregnant." I grin at her.

She smirks at me, her eyes darkening. "Mmmhmm. Okay, Trickster. Settle down."

Nate pulls her under his arm.

My eyes come back to Saskia.

She clears her throat. "Can you guys give us a minute?"

They all spill out, the Kings probably going into the tent to their seats.

"You okay?" I ask, walking toward her closely. I feel like shit that I haven't checked up on her more lately, especially after New Orleans, but I'd been trying to organize Maya into the best rehab clinic in NYC. There was a reason why we came here first and not somewhere else.

She licks her lips and then brings her eyes up to mine. I can sense her fear and I growl, reaching for her hand and pulling her into my chest. "What is it?"

The next words that leave her mouth put a stop to my breathing. "I took a pregnancy test."

I falter in my steps, my eyes closing. "And?"

"Killian, you can stop squeezing me. I'm not pregnant."

I let out a deep breath, sagging forward. "Jesus fuck."

“But it got me thinking...” she whispers, breathing out between her lips and bringing her eyes to mine. She smiles softly. “It had me thinking that one day, that test is going to be positive, and there’s no one on this earth who I’d ever want to share that experience with but you.”

My chest inflates and I can’t fight the full cheesy smile that comes on my face. I wrap my arm around her waist and pull her in closer, kissing her on the lips. “Our kids would be pretty fucking cute.”

She giggles against my lips. “Little villain babies with black hearts?”

“Hell naw.” I smirk, biting down on her lip and sucking it into my mouth. “They have better parents.”

“Oh so you believe in nurture not nature?” She smiles. “Hmmm.”

After her giggling dies out, she sighs, resting her head against my shoulder before bringing her eyes to mine. “I don’t want to come off as greedy with you because I know that Maya still needs you, but I love you, Killian, and I forgive you. I think I forgave you a long time ago. It was me who needed to forgive me for forgiving you so easily.”

My hands wrap around the backs of her thighs and I carry her toward where the cage is, pressing her against it and pinning her there with my hips. “I love you.”

She smiles and then runs her tongue up the side of my cheek. “I love you, too.”



Epilogue

Saskia

So I know that some may be asking... how? How could two people who wanted to destroy one another at one point in their lives come together and be content. Well, they don't. That's the short answer. Killian and I will never be placid. It's not who we are and we're okay with that. Love is a destination that not many have the opportunity to find. Everyone's road is paved differently, and we all have dissimilar paths that lead off of it. Every choice you make will be the deciding factor on whether you reach your destination or not. So although mine and Killian's path was rocky, had lots of hurdles, was slicked in the blood of people we knew and some we didn't, throw in a lot of bad choices and events that were out of our control—ultimately, we both took that final turn together to our destination. I found out that I was the last Dragavei, and I don't know what that will mean for our line if I end up marrying Killian. I guess we will have an Ashley Kournikova situation on our hands. I also found out what Delila was probably going to continue to expose right before someone

shot her, and that was that if one family drops their family line, the Four Fathers would then need to choose someone from the outside to move in to take over that family name. They couldn't be short a family as it would come off as a weakness. A weakness to who, I have no idea.

Delila being a proud woman of Kiznitch couldn't have that, which was why she went against The Four Fathers so much. Her death continues to hang around. Sometimes I swear I hear her yelling at us that we're not training hard enough.

I hear Killian's bike rumble from the back of the tent as the rope swings around and around, as Niykee Heaton's "Fire Starter" starts playing loudly in the background, my Dragavei necklace dangling from my neck.

I smirk, looking up at his shadow beneath my lashes as the crowd roars with cheers...



After Show

I sat in the darkest corner of the tent, like always, busting open a bag of popcorn. This show was different, and Delila was noticeably absent. I found that not so interesting, as her days on this earth were numbered. What I did find interesting was the new girl they had, standing in the center of the ring.

I paused.

I leaned forward, entranced by her sheer divergence. She's not at all what I would have expected. Not that she doesn't fit in with the rest of the beautiful faces in Midnight Mayhem, but more, because there's something about her that is frightening. The way her eyes look into the crowd as if she's not doing this to please anyone. She's soulless.

She's a corpse.

Her long blonde hair swings around as she dances out onto the stage, holding a mic to her mouth as she sings through the lyrics. The audience stops talking when they hear her sing, with good reason. Her voice is beautiful, but it doesn't match her energy.

She looks empty. Dark.

She could be a problem...

After the Demon and Angel show, the fire bender comes out with a dragon staff on fire and moves through her routine. She's very pretty, I think. The kind of pretty that makes other girls instantly hateful. The kind of pretty that makes me hateful. She works the fire like a pro, and I toss some popcorn into my mouth, enjoying her selection of music and her dance moves. So talented.

When I hear a bike start behind me, I watch as Killian and her share a stage. So intimate for people in Mayhem to share a stage with someone.

Just like Dove and King.

So... intimate.

My time is limited. So very limited. I want so badly to run into the center of this stage and tear their whole world down, but for now...

We wait...

In Silence

She Screams

Midnight Mayhem: Book III coming soon.

Kyrin, ?, and Lilith.

Acknowledgements

I usually write out a strong, witty, (and slightly sassy), acknowledgment section, but I deleted it all and just want to keep this one simple.

I'm thankful for everyone who has supported me over the years of my writing career.

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My husband. It takes a special kind of man to be married to a writer. To be married to someone, who at times, locks herself in her office and doesn't function until she finishes her book. A wife that might be moody, or dark, or maniacally happy depending on the current scene she's writing because she's so deep inside a world that she's creating. A wife that stayed up all night writing an emotional scene, so she probably doesn't have any emotions left to give him the next day. A wife who neglects a lot of the housework and duties at home to meet her deadline.

My husband is amazing because he puts up with all of the above (and more), but still supports my career, comes home from work and cooks (despite this dedication), cleans, and

makes sure the house is ready for the next day. He loves me even when I'm a blank canvas after being affected by something I've written. I'm an overly emotional person by nature, but when I write a book, I pour all of what I have into it. It's intense. So, I need to thank my husband, because seriously.... Did you read all that?

Thank you, husband. Love, your zombie wife.

To myself. Because we should always acknowledge ourselves. Our strength. Our weakness. It's all what makes us, us. So, I need to thank myself, because damn, I been through a lot, man, and I'm still here. Fighting.

To you, the reader, who just read my rambling after saying I wasn't going to ramble. May you find whatever you are searching for in life, but most of all, may you always feel peace. I can't promise you'll feel it through this book—in fact, you won't. But deep down, may your strength be the anchor to your peace, so that when your troubles seem heavy, they won't be as heavy as your peace.

Other Books

Midnight Mayhem

In Peace Lies Havoc

The Elite King's Club

The Silver Swan

The Broken Puppet

Tacet a Mortuis

Malum: Part 1

Malum: Part 2

Razing Grace: Part 1

Razing Grace: Part 2

Perilous Love (Sinful Souls MC, #1)

Intricate Love (Sinful Souls MC, Volume 2)

Tainted Love (Sinful Souls MC, Volume 3)

Crowned by Hate (Crowned, #1)

One Hundred & Thirty-Six Scars (The Devil's Own, #1)

Hellraiser (The Devil's Own, #2)

The Devil's Match (The Devil's Own, #5)

*F*ucker*

Losing Traction (Westbeach, #1)

Flip Trick

Manik