

# Ruined

LOST SOUL | BOOK TWO

B. LIVINGSTONE



# *Ruined*

LOST SOUL | BOOK TWO

B. LIVINGSTONE

Ruined

*Lost Soul / Book Two*

# B Livingstone



Copyright © 2022 B. Livingstone

Published by B. Livingstone

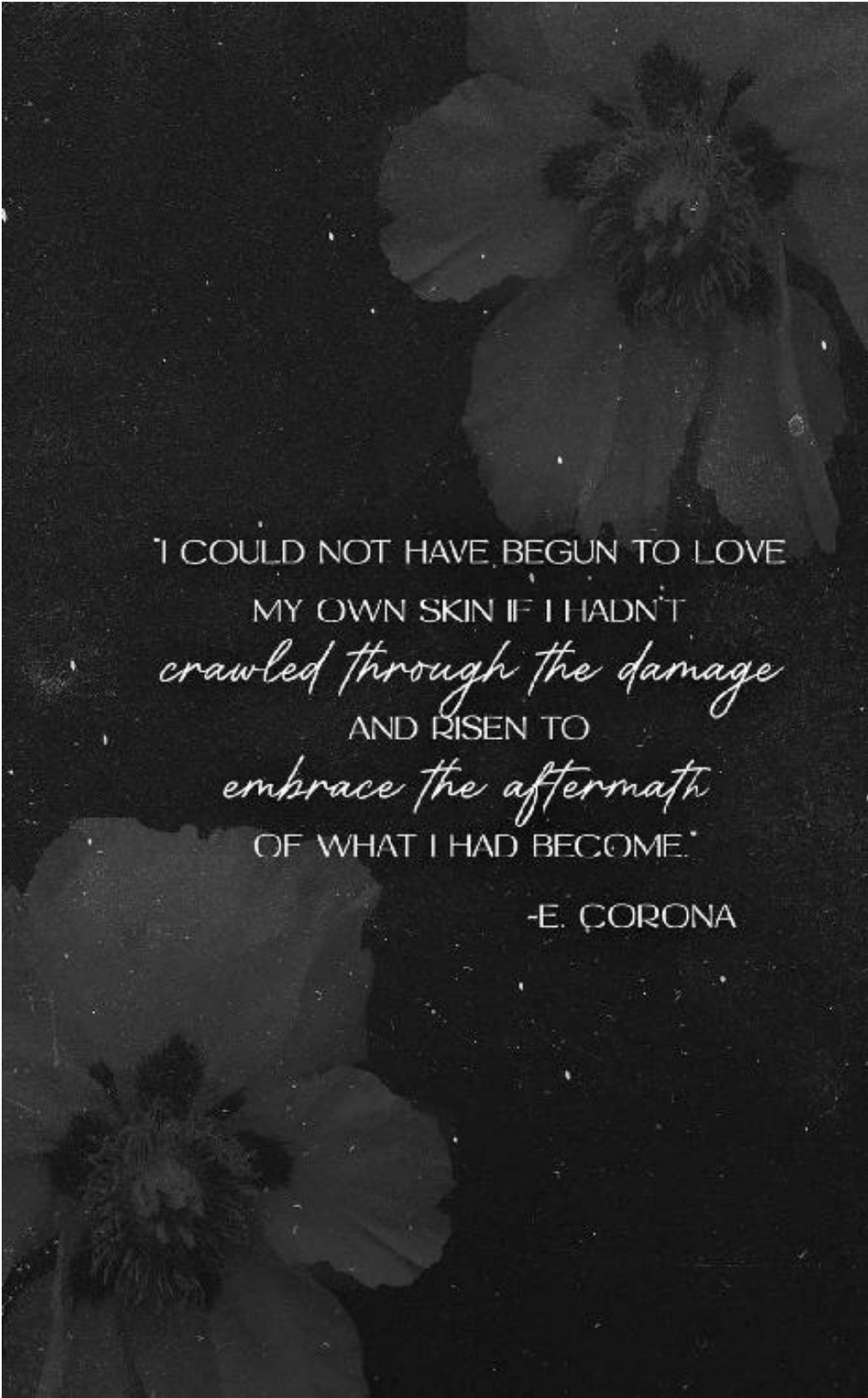
In USA

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced/transmitted/distributed in any form. No part of this publication shall be shared by any means including photocopying, recording, or any electronic/mechanical method, or the Internet, without prior written consent of the author. Cases of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other non-commercial uses permitted by copyright law are the exception. The unauthorized reproduction/transmitting of this work is illegal. This book is a work of fiction and any resemblance to persons, living or dead, or places, events or locales is purely coincidental. The characters are products of the author's imagination and used fictitiously.

---

Cover Art by: [Kismet New Moon Graphics and Design](#)

Edited by: [CB Editing Services](#)



I COULD NOT HAVE BEGUN TO LOVE  
MY OWN SKIN IF I HADN'T  
*crawled through the damage*  
AND RISEN TO  
*embrace the aftermath*  
OF WHAT I HAD BECOME.

-E. CORONA

# Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Please, Heed the Warnings](#)

[Emergency Contact Information](#)

[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](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[A Special Note](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Also by B Livingstone](#)

[Stalk Me](#)



# Introduction

They say Heaven is made of peace and light—pure goodness.  
But what happens when the fires of Hell are all you've ever  
known?

Resolved to save myself,  
I escaped the prison the devil locked me in.  
Only to be caged by a demon more depraved than the last.

*Soul-shattered*

*Hope-obliterated*

My only saving graces are three brothers I never saw coming.  
One with enough blood coating his hands to stain his soul.  
One whose darkness masks the scars he tries to hide.  
One with honest eyes that guard the brokenness within.  
They're determined to save me from the demon who owns me,  
And the devil who's hell bent on reclaiming what's his. *Me.*  
Even if it means forfeiting their own lives.

But I can't let that happen.

I know what I must do,

I'm just not sure they'll forgive me for it.

In the end, the only choice I have will leave me

***Ruined.***

---

***Ruined** is book two in the Lost Soul Series, and not intended to be read as a standalone. This is a slow burn novel that features three possessive, territorial, and psychotic men that will stop at nothing to keep the woman they claimed as their own safe ... even if it means protecting her from herself.*

# Please, Heed the Warnings

This book is rife with triggering content, and is not for the faint of heart. Eden's story is pitch black with sparing beams of sunlight cast throughout. If you are sensitive to the following subject matters, this may not be the book for you : Violence and Gore, References to past substance abuse, sexual assault, physical and verbal abuse, self-harm, swearing, PTSD, and withdrawal.

Suitable for +18 audience.

# Emergency Contact Information

National Eating Disorder Helpline : 1-800-931-2237

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline : 1-800-273-8255

National Domestic Violence Helpline : 1-800-799-7233

National Substance Abuse & Mental Health Helpline :  
1-800-662-4357



“WE DON’T HAVE time for explanations or pleasantries. Right now, there are at least a dozen police officers and detectives on their way here, a warrant in hand, eager to tear this place apart. All based on the word of two shady men searching for her and set on taking you two down for kidnapping.” History is repeating itself, and the pressure weighing on my chest threatens to break me. But this time, the ending will be different. I’m making sure of it. I point at the doe-eyed blond leaning against the doorway across from me. “We need to get her out of here.”

As I expected would happen, they stand, staring at the near stranger in their front doorway, unmoving. “Now,” I bark.

Lucifer’s eyes darken on me as he takes a protective step forward, crowding my space and becoming an impassable barrier between the girl and me.

“I’ll take her with me, and we’ll ride around awhile. You can call when the coast is clear,” Edward says, placing a quelling hand on Lucifer’s forearm. The old man always did have a way with the big hardass.

Lucifer blinks at the contact, tearing his gaze away from me and looks down to our father. “Thank you,” he says, his tone light and appreciative, even if his expression is impassive.

“I should go with them. Keep her safe.” Kain’s fists tighten at his sides, the possessive anger radiating from his body is thick and suffocating. He’s known this girl all of a day, and he’s displaying this level of possessiveness. She must be a witch, casting a spell on them all. I snicker at my thought, if only witches were real.

“You can’t.” A soft, almost shy, lyrical voice rings through the large open space of the foyer, and all eyes turn in her direction. With the heavy weight of our collective gazes, she visibly shrinks into the arch holding her up.

“Like fuck I can’t. I’m not leaving you unprotected,” Kain snaps, taking four long strides in her direction, coming to a stop when he’s nearly chest-to-chest with Angelica. The flinch that passes through her is small, nearly imperceptible, but the groan from my brothers tells me I’m not the only one who noticed it.

Kain cups her face in his two large hands and his tone softens when he speaks, like one would with a frightened animal. “I don’t like the idea of you being out of my sight.”

A soft smile takes hold of her lips as she peers up at him. She places a hand on his chest and whispers, “I’ll be with Edward. I’ll be safe. Besides, if you leave, it’ll look like you have something to hide. I won’t have anyone getting into trouble because of me.”

“She’s right, Kain. You need to be here,” I tell him.

Kain doesn’t look at me, but his deep, primal growl warns me to stand down.

“Enough, Kain. He’s here to help. Daemon could have let this play out, but he didn’t. He put his job on the line coming here to warn us. We *will* follow his lead on this, and when the search is over, we’re *all* getting answers.” Lucifer’s gaze shifts from me to the lone woman now tucked securely behind Kain. “All of us,” Lucifer repeats, his eyes locked on hers. A heartbeat passes before she nods, a look of defeat passing through her large green eyes.

A sharp stab of remorse lances through me, shredding my insides into tiny imperceptible pieces. Guilt. It weighs heavily on my shoulders, rooting me in place. Brown eyes with a similar look of despair shine back at me in place of the watery green. An innocent girl stuck in a war between my brothers, the devil, and me. I shake my head, dispelling the horrid visions from the past. Now is not the time to dredge up those

memories. Though something tells me that time will be coming sooner than I'd like.

“All right,” I bark with a clap, louder than I meant, the sound ricocheting off the marble walls. “We need to get moving. Edward, you take the girl, along with anything that might indicate her presence—” The phone in my pocket vibrates against my thigh, cutting off my words.

A message from Jax covers the screen as it lights up.

“Shit. You need to move quickly. They're five minutes out. Once they hit the main gate, there won't be a chance in hell of getting you off this property,” I tell Edward, tucking my phone back into my pocket.

“I'll get her stuff,” Lucifer tells Kain. Kain nods in return and without a word, spins around and scoops Angelica up into his arms.

“Kain, I can walk,” she protests, her cheeks flaring a bright rosy pink.

“Doesn't mean you should have to, Eden.”

*Eden? Her name is Angelica.*

---

SIRENS in the distance grow louder, resounding off the trees and drifting in on the cool evening breeze as the police cars draw nearer. The taillights of the old blue Ford Focus disappear into the horizon, carrying my future inside.

I turn around and look up, Lucifer and Kain stand shoulder to shoulder, blocking the doorway that leads back inside. I point to the car cresting the hill and vanishing from sight. “There goes my career if this blows up in my face. Tell me I'm not risking everything for nothing.”

“We didn't ask you to risk anything. So why don't you tell us why you're here,” Lucifer counters, raising a single, perfectly arched brow and crossing his arms over his chest in challenge.

At only five-foot-eleven, his extra six inches should be frightening, but we both know I can take him down. Kain, on the other hand, well ... he fights to live, and there's nothing more deadly than a will to survive. If he holds back, it's only to toy with his opponents.

“Something about the men that are looking for her just didn't sit right with me. Jax either. They claimed you kidnapped her. They brought in a picture of you carrying her into the house. She was wrapped up in a blanket, covered in blood, and unconscious.”

The muscle in Kain's jaw pulses with unfettered anger before exploding seconds later. “Fucking assholes,” he bellows, punching the frame of the front door and leaving behind a trail of blood. “We rescued her from a party Donovan was catering at Marco's. You know what his form of catering is. Some shithead was cuttin' on her, and no one fucking did a damn thing about it. We walked out with her, got her looked at, and cleaned up. She's been here the last two weeks healing and coming down off the shit Donovan had her hooked on.”

Kain's anger visibly vibrates down his arms and through his fingers. His bloody pointer finger twitches on an imaginary trigger. The action reminding me I never want to be the one in his crosshairs.

“So, these men—the ones that showed up at the precinct—they were following us?” Lucifer asks, drawing some of my attention away from the trigger-happy man now pacing the lawn two feet to the side of us.

“No, they had a P.I. tailing your girl. You showed up on their radar when you rescued her from a *family friend* that was supposed to be housing her until they could come get her,” I absently respond, one eye still on Kain.

“I see,” Lucifer says in his eerie crime lord slash Godfather voice, and that draws my complete attention.

I'm about to rewind and question the two-week timeline, but anything I'm about to ask is cut short when the first police cruiser pulls up the long driveway, veering off into the yard. I shake my head, already knowing the fight that's about to



ensue. I look to Kain and a glint of devilish humor sparkles in his eyes. He's wound tight and itching for a release, and this officer just gave it to him.

"Asshole," Kain hollers, storming off in the direction of the officer that thought it wise to park on the grass. "Our driveway is long enough to accommodate all of you pig-headed, arrogant, tyrants. What entitlement have you dubbed yourself with that makes you feel like you have the right to park your ass on my lawn? Do you pay the landscaping bill every month? No, you do not, now get your goddamn car off my yard."

Rookie McDonald looks from Kain to me and back again. His eyes are wide and his face pales further with each intimidating step Kain takes in his direction. I bite my lip to hold back the laughter trying to force its way free. Covering my mouth with a hand, I fake a cough to force the lump back down. "Son, if you don't want to become a lawn ornament, I recommend you move your car," I say, continuing to attempt—and probably failing miserably—to mask my amusement.

Some things never change.

Kain shoots me a wink and gives me a quick fist bump as we pass each other on the driveway, him walking back up to where Lucifer is standing and me to where the group of officers are gathering.

The engine of Jax's black Hellcat roars up the driveway, skidding to a stop with a resounding squeal. A face splitting grin crosses his face as he stands from the car, a folded piece of paper in his hand.

Despite me giving him my best *asshole* glare, his grin only grows with my reprimand. "You just can't help yourself, can you?"

"What?" he laughs, shrugging one shoulder. "My girl's got a need to purr. It would be a crime to hold her back."

With a roll of my eyes and a tick of a smile, I turn around, walking back towards the house. "Come on, Jax-ass, we have work to do."

Jax jogs to catch up and hands me the search warrant. “Are they going to cooperate?”

I look to Jax and up to the door where Lucifer and Kain are eyeing the officers spreading out around the property. “We’re about to find out,” I tell him, praying like hell my brothers have their stories straight.

“Gentlemen,” Lucifer says with a nod, by way of greeting, as Jax and I come to a stop in front of him and Kain. “What can we do for Vegas’s finest this evening?”

“Do not patronize us, Lucifer. We don’t want to be here doing this anymore than you want us poking around your business. But we have a search warrant to cover the grounds, the main house, and all outbuildings,” Jax says, pulling the warrant from my hand and handing it to him.

Lucifer unfolds the paper, his eyes scanning over the printed words that give us permission to practically invade every inch of his dwelling. “It says here you’re looking for a girl. Someone named Angelica Larson. We aren’t in the business of keeping girls, but you’re welcome to look around.” He hands the warrant back to Jax and steps to the left, gesturing us inside.

I give the gesture to the officers standing in waiting and they take off, starting their search.

Kain crosses his arms over his chest, knuckles whitening and fingers digging into his biceps. His brows pinch together as his glare on Jax sharpens and the muscles in his jaw tick. *Fuck.*

*Hold your shit together, Kain.*

As though he heard my thought, his gaze meets mine and his stance softens minutely.

Jax walks past Lucifer and stops in front of Kain. “What about you, Kain, do you know Angelica Larson?”

Kain’s eyes narrow and jaw tenses. “No.”

“Hmm,” Jax hums, tapping his chin with the paper in his hand.

“What?” Kain barks, dropping his hands and taking a step towards Jax.

Jax smirks, the corner of one eye wrinkling with the movement.

I give Jax’s shoulder a push, urging him to move along. “Jax, stop pushing him, get your ass inside, and do your job.”

With a chuckle, Jax walks inside, leaving a seething Kain at the door.

I wave Kain and Lucifer inside and stand in silence at the front door, watching uniformed officers move from room to room, listening to the resounding clicks of closing doors as each room is searched. Eyeing my brothers, I monitor their reactions to proceeding as the air grows thick with tension with each passing minute.

Every echo of a door shutting causes Lucifer’s cool, collected demeanor to wane, visible by the straightening of his spine, the tight set of his jaw, and tension in his shoulders. Kain rocks from foot to foot, his eyes fixed on the far window, watching the silhouettes of passing officers, hidden behind the heavy curtains as they search the buildings out back. My body vibrates with the growing tension, concerned by the evidence of their impatience—or maybe it’s straight up anger—either way they’re on the edge, and that never ends well. I ball my hands into fists at my sides, my nails biting into my flesh, grounding me, and I ready myself for the impending explosion.

Jax breaks the invisible anxiety wall, returning with what looks like a trashcan in one gloved hand. “Care to explain what this is about?”

Old gauze pads soaked in blood, strips of medical tape, cotton swabs, and steri strips line the bottom of the can.

“Hey, guys, you know you have some new lawn ornaments out there, right? I’m not one to judge someone’s tastes, but I recommend not turning on all the flashing lights at once. Your neighbors five miles away might start to complain,” a friendly voice states from the front door behind us.

“You’re funny, Wyatt. What are you doing here?” Lucifer asks, his shoulders dropping slightly, a sign of relief.

“I’ve come to follow up with my patient. Kain, I need to re-examine that wound and see how it’s healing. If now is a bad time, I can come back after my shift.”

“Now is fine,” Kain grumbles and storms off, shoulder checking Jax on his way past.

“I’m gonna need that back,” Wyatt says, pointing to the trashcan in Jax’s hand.

“Convenient,” Jax mutters, handing the can to Wyatt, who takes it and follows Kain into the room Jax came out of.

Rookie McDonald approaches our small group, looking around warily, probably for Kain, before speaking. “House and grounds are clear, sir. She’s not here.”

“Thank you, officer,” Jax says, and pulls a photo from his back pocket.

“Can you explain this?” he asks Lucifer, showing him the photo of him carrying Angelica into the house.

“Yes, we saved her from a party. She requested not to be taken to the hospital, she’s hiding from someone, but we don’t know who. We got her patched up, and she left on her own in the middle of the night.” Lucifer’s body remains relaxed, not giving anything away.

Jax seems to think over the story Lucifer just shared before questioning it. “How did a girl in her condition just get up and walk away on her own. She would have needed a couple days to heal.”

“She did stay a couple of days. That photo was taken two weeks ago,” Lucifer informs him.

Jax’s expression quickly flips to one of confusion before he schools himself. Reaching into his wallet, he removes a business card and hands it to Lucifer. “Call if you think of anything that could help us find her, or if she happens to make contact.”

Looking at me, Jax says, “Let’s go, Daemon,” and walks out the front door.

I follow him outside and walk with him back to his car. “I’m gonna stay, see if I can’t get more information out of them about the party and what happened. Besides, Edward is coming, and they never could lie around him.”

“Sounds like a good plan. Let me know what you learn.”

“Hey, until we get more information, don’t say anything to the captain about the timeline discrepancy. I don’t know what’s going on, but something doesn’t feel right.”

Jax puts out his hand and locks mine in his. He slaps my opposite shoulder and opens his car door. “I feel it too, man. I’ll follow your lead and wait to hear from you.”



ONE BY ONE, the black and white sedans and SUVs clear my front yard and driveway. *Fucking assholes*. Daemon reenters the front door, his gaze downcast.

“I called Edward. He and Eden are on their way back,” he says, stuffing his hands in his pockets and finding a spot on the wall to lean.

The low murmurs coming from behind the door to the medical room carry through the otherwise silent house. A stark contrast to the banging and yelling of only minutes ago. The air around us grows stale and suffocating with unspoken animosity.

Daemon meets my eyes with a look full of venom, and an awkward silence passes between us, broken by the sound of an old engine roaring up the driveway. I open the front door just time to watch Edward pull open the passenger’s door of Kain’s old beat-up Focus.

I smile as he sticks out a hand to help Eden up. She places her hand in his and smiles wide when he says something too soft for me to hear, causing a faint blush to cover her cheeks.

A warmth I can’t explain burns in the center of my chest, an inferno of light and a fierce desire to protect this woman. Rubbing a hand over my heart, I commit this moment to memory, never wanting to forget that brightness in Eden’s eyes as she gazes up at the man who made me who I am, at the connection they’ve forged.

He pulls her up and wraps an arm around her waist. One unsteady step after another, they slowly make their way across the driveway to the sidewalk.

My heart splinters at the grimace that crosses Eden's face with every step she takes. The pain in her body is evident in the crinkle of her nose, the scrunch of her brows, and the tight set line of her mouth.

I'm done. I walk out and scoop her up into my arms. A fucking adorable, surprised squeak leaves her at the sudden movement, but she doesn't protest. Rather, she snuggles deeper into my hold, burying her nose in the crook of my neck.

The feel of her body pressed tight against my chest, my arms snug around her body, and her arms wrapped around my neck, as she willingly and trustingly lets me hold her, ignites a desire deep in my soul. One that pushes everything else inside my mind to the background. Every mission, every responsibility I have means nothing when I'm holding this angel.

I look down and can't stop myself from dropping a quick kiss to the top of her head.

Edward chuckles from behind me but doesn't say anything as he follows us to the house.

I shake my head and stride inside with Eden secure in my hold. Walking through the front door, I hang a right and enter the parlor. Rather than putting Eden down in a seat of her own, I sit with her, positioning her across my lap in the oversized armchair closest to the fireplace that blazes with warmth and comfort. Reaching behind me, I grab the knitted throw and wrap it around her shaking body, pulling her in closer, and rest my chin on her head.

She tenses for a moment as I run my hand up and down her back, but with each slow slide, her body gradually relaxes. Her rapid breathing evens out, puffs of warm air ghosting over the sensitive skin of my collarbone with every exhale.

Edward makes his way into the parlor, followed closely by Kain.

"Where's Wyatt?" I ask Kain as he sits beside Edward on the couch across from Eden and me.

Kain studies Eden, catching on her fisted hand clutching the blanket to her chest. “He left and said to text him when it’s safe to come back so he can check in on her.”

“I want him back here today. She’s still in a lot of pain.”

“I’m okay, Lucifer,” Eden whispers into my chest.

“You can’t lie to me, butterfly. You’re shaking like a leaf.”

Eden sits up, looking me directly in the eye. “It’s been weeks since I’ve been this active. I used a lot of energy today, and I’m just feeling worn out. I promise, I’m okay.” She holds my gaze for a long heartbeat, and I search her eyes seeking the truth of her words, needing to know she really is okay. I nod and she tucks herself back into my hold, resting her head on my chest, and I relish the connection.

Daemon crosses under the arch into the parlor, and just like me and Kain, his eyes are glued on Eden. He sits in the chair beside us, and as though she can feel the weight of his stare on her, Eden shifts in my hold.

“All right, enough of this shit, boys. Someone tell me what is going on between you three,” Edward breaks the silence before I can snap at Daemon for making Eden uncomfortable.

“Ask Lucifer. I’m sure his version of the story is vastly different from mine,” Daemon snaps from his seat.

“Daemon,” Kain barks, not missing a beat. “It wasn’t his fault.” If only he were right. Guilt roots itself firmly in my gut, sore and unsettling.

“Let’s agree to disagree ... brother.” The venom dripping with his last word, one meant to be a term of endearment and family connection, shreds through me like a serrated blade to my heart. I’m the cause of the rift between these two, if it wasn’t for me, they never would have ended up on opposite sides.

Eden shifts slightly in my hold, her head tilting up. I look down, and her assessing eyes roam my face. Whatever it is she finds there morphs her expression into one of worry.



“He’s not wrong,” I say, and self-hatred wells inside of me as the memory of that late afternoon rises to the forefront of my mind. My hands clench around Eden involuntarily, and she flinches. I force the emotions back down into the steel trap I keep them locked inside.

“Daemon had just made detective. At twenty-one, he was the youngest in his precinct to ever advance so quickly.”

My eyes shift to Daemon and down to the shining badge clipped to his belt. He follows the path of my eyes and releases a heavy, irritated sigh, removing the detective badge and placing it on the coffee table in front of him.

Kain eyes Daemon warily, his fingers twitching on his thighs. I know what he’s thinking, what he’s itching to do. He’s unsure if we can truly trust our brother’s newfound ceasefire and wants his signal jammer. But we need to extend an olive branch if we’re going to work together and keep the girl in my arms safe. Somehow, we have to find our way back to trust.

Daemon clears his throat and metaphorically does just that. “For the next twelve hours, I’m not a cop. I grant you full immunity from any crimes you admit to committing.”

“As if that’s yours give,” Kain mutters under his breath, his eyes locked on the metal shield sitting forlorn on the coffee table. A silent threat to our family looming in our midst.

“Well, it’s the best you’re gonna get, Kain. Take it or leave it, I don’t fucking care.”

“Whatever happened to drive a wedge between you three, the fact remains, you are brothers. And while it may bend and even fray at times, that bond can’t be broken,” Edward says.

“I don’t think we’ll ever get back to that place. Broken trust isn’t easily mended.” Daemon’s tone is flat, unfeeling, and unbelieving.

“Not easily, but not impossible. All things impossible are still rooted in possibility.” Edward, ever the fortune cookie.

Silence blankets the room, an ominous feeling coating us all for a long moment before Eden forces herself into a more

upright position. Her fingers play with the fabric of my shirt, drawing my attention to her. “What happened with the investigation? Obviously, something devastating happened, or we wouldn’t be here now,” she says.

Meeting Daemon’s gaze, I speak the truth that not one of us has been willing to speak in years. “Kain and I had been quickly making a name for ourselves and moving up the ranks of the network as mercenaries for hire, not afraid to get our hands dirty. We’d started making formidable connections with those that could take us places.”

Kain glances over to Edward, watching his reaction to the news that two of the men he’d raised have turned into contract killers. Edward’s expression is knowing and unsurprising.

“What?” he asks, looking back at Kain. “Did you really think I didn’t know you did more than fix bikes? Come now, son, look who you’re talking to. I might be old, but I’m not stupid. There’s no way you paid off all those medical bills for me with a few custom bike jobs.”

“And you’re okay with this? They kill people for a living. They *get* people killed,” Daemon shouts as he jumps up from his seat in a movement so quick, Eden flinches back into my hold.

“Daemon,” I growl, my voice dropping a few octaves.

His attention snaps to me, his mouth open to shout a retort to my unspoken command. When his eyes drop to Eden’s, his mouth snaps shut, and he drops back into his seat.

“I’m sure they have their reasons for going after the people they do, just as you do. While I may not always agree with all of your actions, I trust my sons. All of you. I raised honorable men, Daemon. Men who will always do the right thing. Each of you chose your paths on how you’ll do that. You color inside the lines, maybe even blur them from time to time, but your brothers chose to erase them all together.”

“I’d be dead if they didn’t,” Eden whispers, pinning Daemon in place with her stare.

He doesn't say anything, rather nods in response to Eden's declaration.

"Continue with your story, Lucifer," Daemon says after a moment.

"Two years ago, Daemon came to us about the first case he landed, taking down Donovan. He told us about all the horrific things he was doing. Donovan and the club are under the same council leadership as the rest of us, and I knew there was no way all his extra activities were approved by them. The network would never approve of sexual slavery or forcibly drugging girls into compliance. Angry, I went to them and pushed for a sanctioned hit to remove Donovan from power.

"Donovan must have someone in the higher-ups and caught wind of what I was doing. That's the only explanation for how he knew what I had done because I hadn't told anyone—not even my brothers—what I was doing. He sent Sid and his men to our shop to teach us a lesson, and remind us who was in charge. But we weren't alone that day."

The chains securing the steel trap containing my memories from that day rattle and groan, threatening to snap. I blink away the haze barreling down on my mind and suck in a shallow inhale through gritted teeth. Talking about this—about my failure—isn't something I ever want to do, but right now, at this pivotal moment, it's what I have to do.

The room is silent, so silent I can hear my own pulse racing within my ears. Every set of eyes is on me, waiting for my truth to reveal itself, no matter how gruesome.

"Daemon turned up at the bike shop with Gemma that afternoon. They weren't meant to be there. Fuck, they shouldn't have been there." A slight tremble rolls through my coiled muscles, and Eden curls closer. I suck in her sweet orange-blossom scent and let it soothe the sharpest of edges slicing through me.

"I don't even know why you guys showed up that day, but it didn't matter. We were committed to getting Gemma out. Away from Donovan and his fucking leeches. The other girls, too—with Gemma's help. She was so frightened but brave." I

squeeze my eyes shut, swallowing thickly, my hand on Eden tightening a little more.

“Just like you,” Kain adds, speaking to Eden and filling the silence that fell between us all.

He’s right, Gemma and Eden are braver than any of us, in ways we’ve never had to be.

“That fucker, Sid, betrayed me,” Kain continues, and even with my eyes closed, I can see the scowl morphing his face into something cold and menacing. His anger and hatred fill the space around us, a welcomed reprieve from the heaviness of the soul-crushing emotions bearing down on me.

I clear my throat, and glance at my youngest brother—a man who I used to respect and trust implicitly, even if our professions were at odds. His shoulders are hunched forward, eyes trained on the butterfly in my lap. A perplexed expression coats his features, one I know well. He heard what Kain just said, and still his focus is on Eden.

Tightening my grip on her, I draw the conversation back to Edward’s original question, continuing with a story I wish I never had to tell. “In a surprising turn of events, Daemon agreed to ‘look the other way’ as long as Gemma was safe.” I huff a short, sharp laugh. Eden flinches and I squeeze her shoulder to calm her. I can’t imagine what’s going through her head right now.

“Only, it didn’t matter because not twenty minutes later Daemon was writhing in pain on the ground with a through and through bullet wound to his shoulder, while Gemma laid perfectly still a few feet away from him as a rapidly growing pool of blood haloed around her lifeless form.”

I barely catch Eden’s gasp, too busy shaking my head to dispel the tangy copper scent that coats my senses.

“You see, Sid came strolling into the bike shop with a few of Donovan’s other goons, guns drawn, and catching us off guard. With a cruel smile, and movement too fast for me to alter, he put a bullet through Daemon’s shoulder, smacking Gemma direct center in her chest. A ‘two for one special’ as

he called it, taunting me before setting the shop on fire and leaving us to burn inside it.” Phantom warmth cascades down my back. Even now, I can still feel the heat lick against my skin. Smell the smoke clogging my lungs.

A flash of memory invades my vision, sucking me back to that moment.

*“Time to go men.” Sid’s sinister gaze taunts me as he glances over Gemma’s prone body. “What a fucking waste.”*

Eden’s hand grips mine, giving me a reassuring squeeze and pulling me out of the vortex of memories. I swallow thickly and give her a stiff smile before clearing my throat to continue, “The reality is, Sid may have pulled the trigger, but it was Donovan who wanted to maximize my pain and whip me back into order. Sid was only there because Donovan found out what I was trying to do.”

A heavy sigh heaves out of me. *There, it’s out there. The truth of my culpability.* If that doesn’t shout ‘it’s my fucking fault,’ I don’t know what does.

“Daemon,” Eden’s tone is soft, just above a whisper, and a tremor rolls through her body. “You loved her. Didn’t you?”

Daemon stares at her, hard. Once upon a time, a light used to shine through his eyes. Once so full of love and cheer, despite the shit show of his youth.

“Yeah, I did. But she’s dead, and I blame Lucifer for that.”

Cold eyes bore into me, and only the warmth of Eden’s touch seems to keep it from swallowing me whole.



“THERE YOU HAVE IT,” Daemon says. His assessing gaze is like ants crawling over my skin, an uncomfortable skittering grating along every nerve.

“Please stop,” I whisper, causing him to blink as he seemingly comes back to himself.

“Sorry,” he grumbles, pinching the bridge of his nose and giving his head a little shake. “Anyway, we’re not the reason I’m here. I have zero interest in mending our little fucked up family. The reason I’m here is Angelica. I need to know more about the men that are looking for you.”

Goosebumps break out along my arms and ice water fills my veins. I know who’s looking for me, so he doesn’t need to say it, but he doesn’t know that.

“Virgil, your father, and Vincent, your fiancé.”

Their names ring through my ears and echo around inside my mind like they were spoken in a never-ending tunnel. My stomach twists painfully and bile burns its way up the back of my throat.

*No. They hold zero control over you, Eden. You’re free of them. You’re safe.*

“They are not my family. Virgil may have been my father’s brother and murderer. And he may have married my mother after and pretended to be my father. But that man has never been my family. He’s my abuser, my captor. And Vincent ... Well, he’s nothing more than a rapist and a thug, nipping at Virgil’s heel for power.” The words drip like venom from my lips.

Daemon's head tilts to the side, his lips twitching back and forth as he mulls over what I said. "So, I'm guessing you weren't kidnapped from your home in Cambridge, nor from a family friend that you were staying with when you got free?"

A sarcastic bark of laughter rips through me at the absurdity of the lies he's been told. "Not a chance in hell. After years of Vincent taking what he wanted from me, even if I wasn't willing to give it. And suffering under Virgil's punishments in the name of unjust penance, I was done being the sacrificial lamb. I ran, unwilling to remain bound to them anymore."

Lucifer's hand tightens where it rests on my hip, pulling my body closer to his. His other hand continues to rub soothing circles up and down my spine. His grounding touch infuses me with a sense of security I haven't felt in a long time. Like nothing and no one will ever hurt me again, so long as this man is here. Thank god today is one of my good days because without his touch, I don't think I could get through this.

Across from me, a low growling noise of distress tears through Kain. His hands curl into fists on his lap, clenching and unclenching with each heavy inhale.

"Kain—" I start. The flames of unchecked fury burning in his hazel eyes cut off anything else I might say. A memory flits through my mind, to the moment when Kain first heard my story and something he said, a promise he made.

*I will seek vengeance on every single person that dared touch you. And together, we'll burn this place to the ground.*

At the time, I thought he was talking about the club, but seeing him now—the anger coiling through his muscles—I finally understand his full meaning. He'll cut down anyone and everyone who has ever hurt me or ever tries to hurt me.

I pat Lucifer's hand on my hip, silently asking him to let me go. He relinquishes his hold and I stand, draping the blanket around my shoulders, and walk slowly around the table to stand in front of Kain.

Tentatively, I reach out and lightly run a knuckle down the side of Kain's face. He flinches at my touch but quickly settles. I nudge at his knees with my leg, and he parts them, allowing me to take a step closer until our bodies touch and I can wrap my arms around his shoulders.

I lean into him, placing my chin on his shoulder, my lips beside his ear, and whisper, "I'm okay, Kain."

His hands meet my hips, and he pushes me back until he can look me directly in the eyes. His searching gaze bores into me. I hold that stare, hoping he can see the truth lingering just under the surface. I cup his face in my cold hands, this time, he doesn't flinch at the contact.

"You gave me strength when I had none left. You gave me hope when I thought all was lost. You saved my life, Kain. I'm here. I'm alive. And I'm going to be okay because of you."

Kain doesn't say anything in response, just pulls me down to sit in his lap and wraps his strong arms around me. Gentle yet firm in his embrace.

"So how did you end up here?" Daemon asks after everything falls silent.

"I can answer that one," Edward chimes in, that gentle smile lighting up his face.

I nod and he jumps in, explaining how we ended up on the same bus and about Virgil and Vincent showing up just as we were about to leave the bus depot.

*He saw that?* I had no idea.

He continues to regale them with the tales of our travel while I sit in Kain's lap, my fingers playing with the hair at the nape of his neck. Every now and then I hop into the story to explain something in more detail, such as the texts I got from Virgil that ended up with my phone being destroyed and flushed.

I can hear the wheels in Daemon's mind turning with each new piece of the story he's told.



“Lucifer told me that they rescued you from a party that Donovan was catering. How did you end up there? Do you work for him?”

My body stiffens and my stomach clenches with his questions. “Work? No. I thought I did in the beginning. He was so kind, talking about how much he cared for his girls and the lengths he’s willing to go to in order to protect them. But that first night made it very clear that I was nothing more than an object to him. Something to pimp out and make money with. Sure, I got paid something in the end, but I had no say in what happened to me, to my own body. It was basically slavery.”

“No basically about it. You were a fucking slave,” Kain growls, his hold around me almost bruising with his anger.

I close my eyes and force the memories of everything that happened to me while under Donovan’s control back behind the shield I’ve erected.

Hands and lips grazing over my body, branding me with their vile touches. Suffocating under the weight of bodies writhing over and inside of me. The burning of slashes from blades and leather slicing through my flesh. Hot rancid breath and words ghosting over my ear as they whispered their putrid words and desires.

Another twist of my stomach causes a shiver of revulsion to quake its way through my body, and I lurch forward. Darting off Kain, I tear through his hold and stumble my way quickly to the half bath on the first floor, just in time to drop to my knees and lose the contents of my stomach. The chocolate milkshake I had gotten earlier in the day while out hiding with Edward had tasted like heaven going down, now though, it tastes of spoiled milk and burns like acid on my throat and tongue.

Gentle hands gather my long blonde hair, holding it at the nape of my neck as I continue to heave every ounce of disgust, anger, and shame into the porcelain goddess. When the tremors in my stomach finally stop, I drop back to sit on my

heels, my head resting on my folded arms on the side of the toilet as I breathe, trying to control my thoughts and feelings.

A firm palm comes to rest between my shoulder blades for a moment before it slides down my spine and back up again. A sigh escapes me at the firm but soothing touch, slowly easing the tension from my body and mind.

A lifetime passes, or so it feels like it, and the hand in my hair lets go in favor of wrapping two strong tattoo-covered arms around me and turning me to sit across Kain's lap. He hands me a glass of water, and I take a small sip.

"Thank you," I rasp, my voice sore and feeling as though I've just swallowed shards of glass.

"Just relax here for a little. Lucifer will explain to Daemon how you ended up at Donovan's. You don't need to relive that." He wraps an arm around my waist and the other around my shoulders, pulling me into him. I don't fight the gesture, or tense. Instead, I sink into his warmth, needing it to chase away the chill that's invaded my bones from the flood of memories.

"I'm going to have to relive the worst of it though, aren't I?" I ask, knowing they can't share what they don't yet know. The parts I haven't shared with anyone, not even Edward.

"Only if you're ready and want to share it."

I snuggle deeper into him, comforted by his words and the knowledge I don't have to open up those wounds today. I've bled my truths enough for one day. They can share the rest of the story they know with their brother without me.

"Can I go lie down? You don't need me in there for the rest of the retelling, do you?"

Kain smooths down my hair and places a kiss to the top of my head and whispers, "Of course, it's been an eventful and emotional day. Come on, I'll walk you."

He helps me to my feet, and with an arm around my waist and a hand holding mine, he helps me to my room. As we walk through the foyer, low murmurs of the conversation taking place in the parlor echo off the marble.

“Angelica needs to go further into hiding. She needs a whole new identity complete with a history,” Daemon says, surprising me. “I could get something made up at the precinct, but that’ll take time, and it’ll raise some red flags. I won’t be able to hide her.”

“I’ll take care of it,” Lucifer replies, his tone cold.

“Good.” Daemon’s one word response is followed by a long beat of silence before he softly says, “These men aren’t going to stop. The look of possessiveness in their eyes ... I’ve seen it before, Lucifer. It’s the same look Sid had when he looked at Gemma. These men will kill her before they allow someone else to claim her. Add Donovan into the mix, and she’s in real danger.”

The worry in his tone causes me to freeze mid-step. My hand in Kain’s tightens and my breathing becomes rapid. I look up to Kain and ask, “Am I going to die?”

Kain whirls on me, gripping my shoulders in a tight hold, and bending so we’re eye to eye. “Not on my fucking watch. No one is going to lay so much as a fucking finger on you. As long as there’s breath in my lungs, I will fight to keep you safe.” He wraps his arms around me, picks me up, and carries me to my room.

He lays me in the middle of the large, oversized bed and pulls the covers up over my body, tucking them under my chin. Crawling up, he lies down beside me—on top of the covers—maintaining a comfortable barrier between us and respecting my need for space right now, for which I’m grateful

I smile at him and roll over on my side, facing him and tucking my hands under my cheek.

Kain tucks a piece of hair behind my ear and whispers, “Rest, Eden. You’re safe with us.”

A deep yawn draws out of me, and my eyes drift shut. “I know. I trust you, Kain,” I say sleepily as the darkness ebbs in closer, beckoning me into its embrace.



I WALK INTO THE STATION, the place that's been my home for the past four years. The place that gave me a family when mine betrayed me. But now the place feels wrong, like it's been invaded by a foreign spirit intent on bringing us down. I won't allow it though; I'll fight like hell to keep the corruption out of my house.

Ignorant to the hustle and bustle around me, my mind is wholly focused on the image of Eden—not Angelica—as she processed my questions about Donovan. Her face had gone from pale to deathly white. Fear filled her faraway gaze as though she was living memories over again inside her mind.

When she stood and ran off, my first instinct was to run after her. To comfort and protect this woman. But that wasn't my place. God, how I'd felt like an ass asking her to relive some of the worst moments of her life. The idea of leaving her there in the care of my brothers gutted me. It was her words that whispered in from the foyer that left me frozen in place.

*“Am I going to die?”*

Not a fucking chance. This time, Donovan will be the one to end up in a body bag, along with anyone that dares stand between me and him. Law be damned. The law failed Gemma. *I failed Gemma.* But I won't fail Eden. Even if, in the end, that makes me no better than the corrupt and I lose everything in the process.

A black gift box, no bigger than a shoebox with a blood red bow tied neatly on top sits in the center of my desk. Scrolled in perfect penmanship on a wooden tag, hanging from one loop of the bow, is a simple message.

*To Detective Wright, with the fondest of memories.*

Sinking dread fills me as I stare at the box. I really do *not* want to know what's inside here.

From the corner of my eye, I catch sight of Jax approaching. I sigh with the reprieve his presence offers and place the box in one of my desk drawers.

“How'd it go after I left? Did you learn anything?” Jax asks, dropping into his chair at the desk across from me.

I sit and wonder how much to tell him. How deep does he want to get into this? He watches me expectantly, waiting for a reply.

“I did, but before I tell you anything, I want you to think long and hard about how far down this road you really want to go.”

The intrigued look on his face transforms into one of seriousness. “It's that bad?”

“Yes. I know what I have to do, but I could lose my job when this is all over if I'm not careful. Is that a risk you're willing to take?”

“Fuck, man.” Jax sits back in his chair, his eyes wide and mouth flat.

“You know I trust you with my life. You're my partner, my brother-in-arms. I don't want you to do anything you're not comfortable with. I can keep you clear on the side of the law if that's what you want. I just ask that you not question intel, or me if I have to withhold something from you.”

Jax nods, contemplating what I said. He opens his mouth to reply, but a loud booming voice hollers from the doors to the pit, cutting him off.

“Where is my daughter?” Virgil comes to a complete stop beside my desk. His gaze is lethal as he stares at me.

“Why don't we go into the conference room, and we can talk about this,” I tell him, gesturing to the same room we used yesterday.

Jax stands and starts walking. Virgil thankfully follows him in seething silence.

I release a heavy breath, reining in my ire and contempt for the man, and crack my neck before following him into the confined space.

Shutting the door behind me, I force myself to take one more deep breath and let it out slowly.

“We executed the search warrant, however, there was no sign of her—or any female for that matter—anywhere on the grounds. They informed us that the photo you provided was in fact two weeks old and she had left them a few days after it was taken.”

Virgil’s eye ticks and jaw tightens in his attempt to suppress his anger.

I look at Jax and run my finger down the side of my face. Jax blinks, allowing it to last a fraction longer than a normal blink, signaling he sees the tension as well.

“So, Mr. Larson, can you run over that timeline again for us? Starting at the beginning?”

Virgil’s fist slams against the table and he stands abruptly, his chair flying back to hit the wall behind him with a loud thud. “What is this, an interrogation? I’m the one who came to you looking for help, and now you’re questioning me and my integrity?”

He stomps to the door and wraps his hand around the handle. “I’ll find her on my own,” he says and wrenches the door open with enough force that it bounces off the wall to slam shut behind him with an ominous bang.

“I guess we got our answer about who Angelica really needs saving from,” Jax comments. “If you need me, partner, I’m here. No questions asked.”

“Thanks, Jax.” Having Jax on my side eases some of the tension, but I know I also need to be careful with how deep I let him get.

I make my way back to my desk and pull the mystery package back out of the drawer and fortifying myself against the horrors and dread waiting inside, I remove the bow and lid.

Pictures of Gemma and I during our short time together, smiling and walking. Visits to the ice cream shop in the next town. Walks along the trails at sunset when we thought we were alone.

The further into the box I dig, the more intimate the pictures become. One of us through my bedroom window, Gemma's bare back in full view.

Seething fury pulses through my veins with each picture I see until, suddenly, ice water floods my system in pure terror. My hands shake as I reach to the bottom of the box. Red spots my vision and the muscles in my jaw tense. At the bottom of the box, buried under the thousand memories with Gemma, is a single photo of Eden, one taken today from outside of the house as she returned with Edward after the search. An image caught through a rifle's scope.

I flip the image over, and in the same scrolling penmanship as the tag, is a chilling note. *History does love to repeat itself.*

Over my dead fucking body.



*Thump.*

*Thump.*

*Thump.*

ANGER BOILS UNDER MY SKIN, slithering down each arm to coil tightly around my fists, breaking with every firm blow into the solid brown leather bag filled with sand. It sways with a moaning creak from the metal hook in the ceiling under the force of each hit to its center.

*Thump.*

*Thump.*

*Thump.*

Images of Donovan's smug grin as he held me in place, outnumbered by his goons, and demanded Eden service his sick, demented VIP. And Paul's leering eyes on Eden's body as she walked away. Followed by Sid's gleeful smirk as a girl laid bleeding to death—alone—on a cold concrete floor.

*Thump.*

*Thump.*

*Thump.*

*Thump.*

*Thump.*

*Thump.*

Eden's tears of fear and grief streaking down her cheeks as she pulled her knees into her chest, hugging herself tight.



Frozen in place, I bend over, my hands on my knees. Pounding behind my ribs echoes in my ears, the swishing of blood rushing under the surface of my skin, the only sound I hear. Heat settles around my neck and face as my anger spikes higher. A vibration in my hands has them flexing for a moment before it travels up my arms until my entire body trembles with unchecked rage.

The bag swings close and my body reacts of its own volition.

*Thump.*

*Thump.*

*Thump.*

Feelings of helplessness wash through me at my inability to comfort and protect Eden. That helplessness morphs to pure, unadulterated fury as images of finding her naked, bloody, and near death after I promised her freedom and safety fill my mind.

*Thump.*

*Thump.*

*Thump.*

Who am I really mad at? Donovan, Sid, Virgil, Vincent, Paul ... Yes, I'm enraged with them, but it's really myself I feel the most violence towards. With a roar, I let loose the rage, my fists connecting faster and harder with the bag. Shocks of pain race from my knuckles up through my wrists and into my shoulders. My back stiffens, and my jaw clenches.

"I should have protected her," I growl with my next hit into the bag. "I should have gotten her out of there."

*Thump.*

*Thump.*

*Thump.*

Harder. Faster. I push all my anger, fear, and hopelessness into my fists.

The bag swings higher with each hit and comes back harder.

*Thump.*

*Thump.*

*Thump.*

“You couldn’t,” a voice says from behind me as I land a hit and the bag swings high.

I spin around, ready to attack the person who dared to sneak up on me. Zero sense of self-preservation. *Idiot.*

Edward sits with his ankles crossed on the wooden bench along the far wall, a white towel dangling from his hands.

*Thwack.*

The heavy bag slams into my back, knocking me forward and forcing an unsuspecting *oomph* from my throat. Edward chuckles, and I glare up at him from my place on the floor.

“Shut it, old man,” I grumble, getting back to my feet, and shaking the tension and stiffness from my arms.

Edward holds out the towel to me, and I take it with thanks. “What are you doing down here?” I ask him, wiping the sweat from my face, neck, and bare chest.

“Eden was asking after you,” he tells me, a knowing glint in his eyes.

I haven’t seen Eden in two days, not since I put her in bed and laid beside her all night. My draw to her is too strong. My desire for that woman muddles every thought, every emotion, every action I make. And Daemon’s right, with her past and Donovan coming for her, we need to be alert, clear headed—no distractions.

“Is she okay?” Did I miss something while I was down here?

“She was asking the same about you. I thought maybe you could check in with her, let her know you’re still alive and just being an ass and avoiding her.”

I cock my head to the side, my brows shooting up in surprise. “I am not,” I protest. “I’m just busy trying to keep her safe. There’s a lot that needs to be done if we’re going to keep her stepfather ... uncle ... Virgil, from getting to her. Not to mention Vincent and Donovan. Which reminds me, I need to speak with Lucifer. Do you know if he’s in his office?”

Edward stands and steps forward, placing a hand on my shoulder. “You’re avoiding the issue at hand.” He raises his other hand to silence the protest about to spill from me. “Which is fine. For now. But you can’t avoid what’s in here,” he places his hand over my heart, “forever. Sooner or later, you will have to face the past and decide what you want for your future.”

He gives my cheek a light pat and walks away, whistling a tune that’s a little bit jovial and a lot taunting. I smirk at the old man’s back, not giving into his daring taunt to try and contradict him.

The front doorbell rings through the large manor and I jog up the stairs, slipping a shirt over my head and down my torso as I go. I meet Lucifer at the front door in time to watch the bike messenger ride off down the driveway. In Lucifer’s hand is a white envelope with something written in near perfect penmanship. *Fancy.*

“What is it?” I ask after he opens and reads whatever it contains inside.

“A threat,” Lucifer states, his tone cold and unyielding. He hands the note to me. Three lines is all it contains. Three ominous, threatening lines.

*This is only the beginning. I will have what is mine.*

*You have two days to return her to me.*

*~Virgil Larson*

A loud explosion from outside vibrates through the walls and floor of the house. Beyond the open front door, flames lick the air and smoke bellows from Lucifer’s burning car.

“He’s a dead man,” I growl, my trigger finger itching at my side to put that man down like the piece of shit he is.

“No,” Lucifer says coolly, his eyes narrowing on the burning car as his mind plots. “No.” It’s only a whisper of the word, but paired with the tilt of his head, and the corner of his lips tipping up into a sadistic grin, it’s enough to make even me shiver with the impending retaliation he’s planning. “We let him play his game, let him think he has the upper hand. And when he’s comfortable in his control, we rip it away from him and make him regret every decision he’s ever made.”

Liking his plan to tear this man’s world apart, I release a deep breath and mutter, “Well, someone needs to die, and soon.”

Lucifer looks me over, lingering on my twitching hands. His expression returning to one of neutrality, his normal air of authority and coolness. “Maybe start with her tormentors from the club. I’m sure Harley and Xavion can help you obtain a list of her regulars.”

A slow sadistic grin splits my face. Red coats my vision and thoughts of warm blood dripping from my fingertips as my blade cuts out the hearts of the men who abused Eden’s body and tormented her mind, fills me with a sick anticipation and joy.

I pull out my phone as I head off to my room to change and send a quick text to Harley and Xav.

**KAIN**

*I need a list of all the VIPs that used Eden.*

**HARLEY**

*I don’t like where I think this is going.*

**XAVION**

*You got it. How’s she doing?*

**KAIN**

*She’s healing.*

**HARLEY**

*Kain. Don’t do what I think you’re about to do.*

**KAIN**

*Get me the list.*

**HARLEY**

*Fucking hell, Kain. Fine.*

I toss my phone on my bed and ready myself for a satisfying hunt. Dressed in my signature black suit and silver cufflinks, I secure myself in my metaphorical armor. Two guns in their holsters hidden under my jacket. Another tucked into the back of my pants. A smaller gun strapped to my ankle. And a copious amount of knives hiding in seams and pockets topping off my ensemble.

A chime from my bed signals an incoming message—Xavion with a list of twenty names and a jovial note that reads, *I'd start at the top. Happy Hunting.*

---

THE HIGH-RISE OFFICE building that houses the Minor and Smith law offices is one of the tallest in the city, with thirty floors of office space and a penthouse apartment at the top. Inside, on the thirtieth floor, a man who sits behind his desk, his world perfect with a loving wife and doting daughter. I skim down his online social media profile, flipping through pictures of smiling faces and family outings. The latest, a celebration dinner at a fancy restaurant for his wife's birthday, a wife he doesn't deserve. This man has a secret, one I'm about to expose for all the world to see.

I ride the elevator to the twenty-ninth floor and climb the stairs one more. Most people have left for the day, but I wait in a small alcove on the stairs for Mr. Minor's receptionist to say her goodbyes and enter the elevator.

Waiting for the elevator to close and start its descent to the ground level, a familiar feeling of excited anticipation hums through my body, igniting every cell and making me feel truly alive.

On silent feet, I exit the stairwell and approach the heavy wooden door. I rap my knuckles on the frame leading into the office of one senior attorney and co-partner of Minor and Smith. "Mr. Minor," I say, keeping my face expressionless.

He jumps at the sound of my voice, obviously not expecting anyone to be in the office this late on a Friday evening, before composing himself, and asking, "Can I help you?"

I step slowly into his office, my hands in my pockets, a relaxed note to my stance so as not to set him off too early. I want him quaking in fear of me, need it, but not just yet. "I'm hoping you can." I push a little sorrow into my tone, letting him relax into my presence, but only for a moment. I take a seat in a chair across the desk from him and pull out my phone, lighting it up with an image of Eden, bloody and broken filling my screen. "You see this girl," I turn the phone so he can see the screen, "do you know her?" I ask.

His complexion pales as he stares at the screen. Is it the gruesome image that has him turning a shade of green now, or is it the fact that he's been caught?

*Do you honestly care?* I ask myself. Not really, but I do wonder if he ever felt this sick after one of his nights with her at the club. After he took leather to her milky skin, wrapped his meaty hands around her neck, left bruises and marks all over her, and took what he wanted without her say. Maybe after the first night, before the power and control corrupted his mind. The barest hint of recognition crosses his face, a twitch of his right eye, the way his pupil dilates, and the small hitch in his breath when he looks at the screen. "I'm sorry, I don't," he finally says, swallowing hard.

Pulling the phone back, I glance at the screen "Hmm, are you sure?" I hold the phone back out to him. "Look again, and I caution you against lying to me, Mr. Minor. While you may have friends in low places, you should know they will do you no good against me. I don't fear any of them," I whisper, reveling in the way his body trembles.

“I-I might have seen her at a club I sometimes frequent. I think she’s a dancer there. Scarlet Bush Club.” He sits back in his seat as though he’s shared everything he knows and is completely relaxed and not at all worried about what might come next.

I stand, running my fingertips along the edge of his desk as I walk around to stand behind him and grip the back of his chair. “So, you’ve never talked to her? Never had any interactions with her?”

“Nope, none that I can recall.” There’s a slight visible tremor in his hands, one he tries to hide by gripping the arms of his chair.

Bending down close, I speak low next to his ear. “You’ve never gone to a back room with her, never requested to have some one-on-one time? Maybe live out a fantasy or two?”

“N-no,” he stutters. Sweat beads along his brows and hairline.

I grip the back of his neck in a firm hold. “You wouldn’t be lying to me, Mr. Minor, now, would you?”

“Of course not,” he blurts out a little too quickly and loudly.

I turn him around in his chair and place my hands on his while he grips the arm rests, his nails biting into the brown leather. “Let’s play a game. You win and you get to remain whole, physically speaking. I win—let’s just say, you walk away missing a few pieces.”

“But I told you everything I know.” There’s a high pitch resonance in the whine he attempts to dissuade me with.

“No, you told me what you think I wanted to hear. I told you not to lie to me, Mr. Minor. Now stand up and strip down.” I straighten, giving him space to do as I say.

“What? I’m not going to strip for you.” The fear lacing his voice as he protests in earnest is like the sweetest of lullabies to my ears. My head tilts back and I drink it in.

I pull a gun from the holster under my jacket and tap the barrel against his desk. “I think you might want to reconsider your position.”

“Fuck.” Is the only thing he says before standing and ripping off his jacket. With trembling fingers, he works the knot of his tie loose and unfastens the buttons of his shirt, removing both.

“And the rest of it,” I tell him, using the gun to gesture to the lower half of his body when he stalls with the rest of his clothing on.

Once he’s fully naked, I gesture for him to sit back down in his seat. “Log into your social media,” I order him, though I’m sure if I just enter the web address of one, he’ll already be logged in. The prick probably considers himself untouchable and doesn’t think about things like web security.

Once I’m sure we’re in his accounts, I pull a pack of zip ties from my back pocket and use them to bind him to his chair, pinning his hands and feet in place. He watches in horror as I prepare to start a new live feed video with him the star of the show. “So, this is how this is going to go, *Jeffery*.” I use his first name, belittling the social hierarchy he’s built for himself. “You’re going to go live and tell everyone that you enjoy visiting Scarlet Bush Club and forcing unwilling girls to service you in any manor you so desire, including torturing them for your sick satisfaction.”

“What? No, that would ruin me and my life.”

Reaching into my pocket, I pull out a pair of black leather gloves and slip them on. I pick up the discarded necktie, making it into a loop, I twist it tight around Jeffery’s testicles, pulling until he’s crying out in pain and tears are leaking from his eyes.

“I hear this is how they get bucking bulls to perform during rodeos. I don’t know if that’s true or not, but I can imagine that would piss them off enough. Are you feeling pissed off yet, Jeff?”



His breaths come in heavy gasps and his eyes squeeze shut. His hands fist tightly over the edge of the armrest as he tries to keep himself very still.

“Now, let’s try this again. Are you ready to tell the truth about your association with her and the club?”

Silence sits between us for a beat too long. I sigh and tug on the tie, causing him to wince in pain. His eyes fly open, his pupils large and swallowing his irises. “Yes. Yes. Yes,” he says quickly between clenched teeth.

“Yes, what?” I ask, raising a brow and tilting my head to give him my good ear.

“Yes, I’ll admit the truth,” he says, nearly screaming his agreement.

With a grin firmly in place, I stand and press the record button on his computer. The light indicating his camera is on flashes to life at the top of his monitor. I nod for him to start.

He pulls in a shallow, harsh breath and a bead of sweat rolls down the side of his face. He licks his dry lips and I knock on the desk. He flinches at the sudden noise and his voice cracks as he speaks.

“I’m a frequent visitor at a gentleman’s club ... S-Scarlet Bush Club. I’ve, I’ve watched girls dance half n-naked, stuffing bills in the band of their limited clothing.” He squeezes his eyes closed and sniffs.

I pick up a tack off his desk, aiming for a nipple I let it fly. He jerks with a squeak and groan when the tie tightens. Air hisses through his clenched teeth and he continues, “I’ve gone with ...” he swallows as he meets my eyes and I shake my head “...taken. I’ve taken a girl into a backroom for VIPs. We can do ... anything we want w-with—and to—the g-girl.”

I hold up my gun, pointing the end of the barrel between his eyes. A silent threat to keep going. His eyes cross and his face pales more as he focuses on the gun, and I think for a second he might just pass out.

“I’ve forced a girl to suck my dick,” a sob tears through him with the last word and he looks down at the angry purple

appendage. “She was high on drugs and not all there. I h-hurt her with a whip. I tied her up and had s-sex with her. I’m so s-sorry.”

His chin drops to his chest, his tears flowing more freely but are they for what he’s done or for the fact that he’s been called out, I don’t know and honestly, don’t give a fuck.

Hitting stop on the live recording, I watch as the comments of disgust and outrage pour in. Family members asking if this is a joke. Strangers making crud remarks and references. Friends questioning his sanity and judgment. Seconds pass and his phone rings, going to voicemail only to start ringing again. A never-ending frantic call for answers.

“Well, Jeff, I think our time is just about up here. You’ve effectively ruined your life publicly. Just one more thing before I go.” I pull out a knife and small wooden box from my pocket.

His body jerks in the bindings, a sad attempt to pull away. “W-what are you doing?” he asks, a frantic note to voice.

I kneel at Jeffery’s feet and run the side of my blade up the inside of his thigh until I reach his firm, angry purple testicles. Without ceremony, I slice through the skin housing the round sacs and cut them free, dropping them in the box.

Like the depraved son of a bitch I am, I soak up every scream, every whimper, every ounce of pain and fear he releases, like it’s a balm made for my battered and bruised soul. His cries of pain and agony soothe the beast inside of me, if only for a short while.

I roll up his shirt and stuff it under his cock and cut his hands free. “Hold that there tightly and you might just make it to the hospital.” Standing, I slide his phone closer to him and hit 911 on the screen. “Thank you, Mr. Minor. You’ve been very helpful today. No need to get up, I’ll see myself out,” I say, and hit call on the screen.

A friendly female voice crackling through the little speaker, “911, what’s your emergency?” followed by Jeffery’s

broken reply, “I need help,” are my swan song as I leave his office and wait for the elevator to take me down.

I stop by the security office on the ground floor and ensure there’s no footage of my presence here today, nothing they can use to tie me back to Jeffery, not that the man has the stones to attempt to point a finger in my direction.

As I walk outside, I pull out my phone and bring up the saved list of names Xav sent me and cross off Jeffery Minor. One down and nineteen to go, saving the best for last ... Paul Little.



WYATT LEANS BACK in his chair, his white button shirt sleeves rolled up, since the tattoos are no longer a trigger for me. He runs his fingers through his messy brown hair and calmly places his right ankle on his left knee resting a metal clipboard on the bend of his right leg. As though he's got all the time in the world to just sit and talk with me today. He straightens his glasses on his face, I have to admit, I'm a sucker for nerdy glasses. "So, Eden, tell me how you're doing? And remember, nothing shared will leave this room."

He spared me the awkwardness of a paper gown by allowing me my comfy cotton robe, but I still feel out of place up on the medical table. I toy with the blanket underneath me as I search inward for a truthful answer to his question. Rather than the automatic *I'm fine* response I typically give one of the guys when they ask.

"I'm healing. Of course, you already know that, you've checked my physical wounds. Mentally and emotionally, however?" I bite my lower lip, pulling it between my teeth, and worry at the flesh as I contemplate how to continue. "Those are harder to heal."

Wyatt nods as I talk, never taking his eyes off me, giving me his full attention. It's been a long time since I've had anyone give me their attention like this. To sit with me, and really be interested in what I have to say, in how I am. He doesn't ask me to explain, rather sits and waits for me to be ready to dig deeper.

I grab the pillow, hug it tightly to my body and pull my legs up to sit crisscross. "Some days I'm fine, completely normal—if there is such a thing as normal. Loud noises.

Touches from the guys. Being alone in the dark. It's like none of it can touch me. Other days, I feel like I'm losing my mind. My entire body is a basket of shaking nerves that I can't control. Lungs that refuse to listen when I tell them to expand. Hands that won't stop trembling no matter how much I try."

Tears slip from the corners of my eyes, leaving a wet trail down my cheeks. I wipe them away with angry vigor, so tired of crying. "And this—" I shake the tears from my hand "—I'm so fucking sick of crying for no fucking reason at all."

"Eden, what you went through and survived, no one should ever have to go through. You've come so far in your recovery, and I don't mean just physically. The fact that you have days where you don't feel nervous and jumpy is amazing. You are so strong, and you need to give yourself credit for the progress you've made."

A burning sensation starts in my legs and travels up my spine. A need to stand, to move, has me putting the pillow down and jumping from the table. Fight or flight rides me hard.

I pace the length of the room, always keeping Wyatt in my line of sight. It's not that I don't trust him, I do, but survival demands that I not let my guard down right now.

"But I don't want to jump and have a mental breakdown every single time one of the guys wants to hold my hand or comes up and wraps his arms around me. I like those feelings. Logically, I know they'll never hurt me. I don't know how I know that, but from the moment I met them, I felt it in my bones that they wouldn't. So, with them, why can't I control this? Like right now, why can't I turn around and let you be out of my line of sight. *I trust you, but my body refuses to.*"

Wyatt studies my movements as I pace. He keeps his expression neutral, no pitying sad smiles. Thank fuck; because if he did, I might just snap.

"The body has a strong will to survive, Eden. It's designed with its own fight or flight instincts. It'll shut down minor organs to protect the vital ones in times of physical trauma. It'll erect a mental barrier in times of extreme emotional and

mental distress. So, while the mind is a powerful tool, the body as a whole is even more powerful. Trust yourself, listen to your body. You're a little out of sync right now but you'll get back there and soon enough your body and mind will be on the same page."

He taps his fingers on the clipboard as I continue to pace the room, seeming to deliberate over something hard. "I want you to try something for me. Can you do that?" he asks.

I force myself to stop pacing, pressing my body against the cool marble wall, and let out a deep sigh. I swallow thickly and place one hand over my racing heart, counting backwards from twenty. With each number passed, the storm raging inside my chest ebbs. Meeting Wyatt's eyes, I nod, not trusting my voice to not break.

"All right. I want you to ask the guys to touch you. It can be as simple as holding your hand, or a press of their leg against yours while sitting on the couch side by side. Or, when you're ready, it can be more intimate such as cuddling while watching a movie. By asking for it though, you're initiating the act and taking back control of your desire and need for human contact."

"Okay," I whisper, sliding down the wall to land on the floor next to the only exit. My body grows heavier by the second as the adrenalin leaves my system, replaced with a bone deep fatigue.

My head drops, my chin hits my chest, and I snap my eyes open, even though I don't remember closing them.

"Eden," Lucifer whispers from beside me, crouching down in the doorway. "Let's get you to bed, butterfly." He holds out a hand to me, and I look over to where I remember Wyatt last being. He sits, relaxed in his chair, just as he was, though in his hand he now holds his phone. He nods his head with a smile in encouragement for me.

I place my hand in Lucifer's and he stands, tugging me up from the floor. My legs wobble under my full weight and Lucifer wraps an arm around my waist, catching me before I fall.

“Are you okay?” he asks quickly, concern filling his voice.

“I’m okay. Panic attacks are exhausting. I really don’t like them,” I tell him with a humorless chuckle.

“A little bit of rest will do you some good then,” he says, guiding me from the room.

As we pass through the foyer, Kain walks through the front door. Blood dots his shirt and smears along his jaw. It’s been nearly a week since he last spoke to me, and the hole in the center of my chest has me aching for a bit of contact with him.

His gaze, not cold or invasive but rather heated and appreciative, rakes over my body from my toes to my eyes. The slow perusal is so primal and possessive it almost feels like a physical caress, leaving goosebumps in its wake. When his eyes meet mine, there’s hunger in their depths, a hunger for me.

I take in the rest of his disheveled appearance. Messy hair, dark circles under his eyes, blood smears on his face and staining his shirt. My attention stops on the bulge pressing against the front of his pants, and a new feeling of excitement fills me, one I’ve never felt before. Hot and heavy in my lower abdomen. He looks down, and I follow his gaze to his hands. Dry blood coats his palms and fingers, and he promptly tucks them in his pocket as though trying to hide them from me.

Just as quickly and surprisingly as he appeared, he disappears down a long hall towards the stairs that lead to the basement and workout room they have set up down there.

I stare after him, confused and a little hurt at being dismissed without a word. “Why won’t he speak to me? He made a declaration that he’d keep me safe. That he cared, and yet, now, he won’t come near me.”

“He’s been on a mission this last week; I imagine he’s just about done though. Once he completes it, I’m sure he’ll be back to his normal, broody self. One thing you should know about Kain is that he is very dedicated to his missions, and until they are completed, they will wholly consume his every

thought, every action, every waking moment. It's best to give him room until he's done."

I nod and slowly walk off, leaving Lucifer standing in the foyer. I need space and time to think. To think about who I am now. How I feel about these guys who have infiltrated my life and heart.

Kain's hunger for me, or at least my body, was clear in his reactions to me. But the way he walked away so quickly, dismissing my presence so easily, perplexes me.

Lucifer ... whispering sweet nothings in my ear, touching me every chance he gets, gentle holds and caresses. Saying they're mine and asking me to be theirs. So at odds with the cold and calculating leader I've heard him be when he thinks I'm not listening.

These guys make my head spin in so many directions, I can't always tell which way is up.

I crawl into the bed the guys decided was mine, in a room bookended by theirs, and bury myself beneath the thick, blue down comforter. The way it cocoons around me, wrapping me in its warmth and protective embrace is calming, and I dig my nose into the pillow under my head, the faint scent of Kain still lingers in the tightly woven threads. The smell of whiskey and aftershave are quickly becoming two of my favorite scents.

Inhaling deeply, I let the scents infuse my cells and drag me down into sweet dreamless slumber.

*Buzz.*

*Buzz.*

*Buzz.*

An insistent vibration reverberates inside my head. I bat my hand lazily through the air, shooing the fly away.

*Buzz.*

*Buzz.*

*Buzz.*

"Go away," I grumble, pulling the blankets over my head.



*Buzz.*

*Buzz.*

*Buzz.*

“Fine,” I groan, sitting up and flipping the blankets off. I reach over to my nightstand and grab the phone the guys got for me since mine was taken from Donovan. Without looking at the screen, I answer the call.

“Hello.” My voice is heavy with sleep and annoyance.

“Eden, oh my god, you’re alive,” a cheerful but disbelieving voice nearly screams, causing the little speaker to crackle in my ear.

“What? Who is this?” I ask, rubbing my eyes, trying to dispel the hazy fog of sleep from my mind.

“It’s Kitty. Where the hell have you been? I haven’t seen you in weeks. Oh my god—” Kitty runs from one thought right into another, not allowing me to answer her question. “Remember those guys I told you about, the ones that approached me about giving you that message that they were coming to get you? They’re here. They’ve been hanging around the club like they own the place, and it’s putting Donovan on edge. Earlier today, Donovan came downstairs seething. I mean like face red, hands fisted level of seething. I’m really worried. Harley never followed him down, and I haven’t seen him all day. What if the reason Donovan was so upset was because they did something to him?”

“Kitty, slow down. How did you get this number?”

“Xav.”

“How did Xav get my number?”

“I don’t know, why does that matter? Anyway, I was hoping maybe you’ve heard from Harley. I know he really cares about you. His updates are the only reason I haven’t stormed over there to check up on you myself.”

“Thank you for not just dropping by. And, no, I haven’t heard from Harley in a few days. I’ll check with the guys though and get back to you. Try not to worry too much, I’m

sure he's fine." The words taste like acid dripping off my tongue. Worry punches me in the gut like a sledgehammer. "I'll text you as soon as I hear anything."

"Thank you, Eden. And I'm really glad you're doing okay. You are, aren't you?"

"I'm getting there. Better every day." A heavy weight roots itself in my chest and my mind plunges into dangerously dark territory. "Kitty," I choke out around the lump forming in my throat.

"Yeah?"

"What do the guys hanging around the club look like?" I have a sick feeling I already know who they are, but I can't help but ask.

"One is kind of tall, Latino, *overly* muscular, by a lot. Gives me the total heebie-jeebies. The other is older with balding-grey hair."

Fuck, confirmation really does suck.

"Stay away from them, Kitty. They're bad news."

"No need to worry there," she tells me. "I've got to get ready for tonight. Let me know if you hear anything."

"I will. You know you really should quit," I say, hoping maybe she'll listen to me and get out.

"I can't, Eden. I had blinders on before, not seeing or maybe just choosing not to see what was happening right in front of me. But I see it all now. How can I leave when girls I'm supposed to be leading are being taken advantage of? Used, abused, and drugged within an inch of their lives. If I can help them in any way, I have to try. I know those guys of yours are doing something to end it all, and Harley, maybe even Xav are helping them. If I can pass on information that might help, I have to stay." She sounds defeated, yet determination rings through every word.

"I know. Just promise me you won't do anything to draw attention to yourself, that you'll stay safe."

“I promise. Now I’ve really gotta go,” she says and disconnects the call.

A gaping hole forms in the pit of my stomach. Virgil and Vincent are hanging around the club, Harley is missing, and Kitty’s caught in the middle of it all. Dark thoughts swirl around inside my head.

*Is Harley dead?*

*Is Virgil taking back power and staying in the city?*

*Is he waiting for me to return to the club?*

*Will he use Harley to try and force me to go back?*

*What if they hurt Kitty?*

My hands tremble and my breaths come in short, sharp inhalations, an attempt to fill my lungs. *No. No. No. Not now.* Picking up my phone, I blindly hit a random name on my contacts list and let it ring. The phone slips from my hand and I slide to the floor. Huddling in a corner, I pull my knees to my chest and rock back and forth until the panic steals my body and mind, rendering me completely immobile.

A muffled voice next to my ear breaks through the dense swooshing of blood rushing through my veins. “Eden, listen to my voice. Focus on me. Everything is going to be all right.”

The chill infused in my system has my body frozen in place with my arms locked around my knees. An invisible hand wraps tight around my throat and I gasp desperately for air. My nerves vibrate uncontrollably and every inch of me aches from the violent rattling of my bones.

A gentle hand caresses my cheek and I recoil, unable to see who’s in the room with me. “Don’t touch me,” I rasp around the hand gripping my throat, and drop my forehead to rest on my knees.

“Okay, Eden. I’m just going to sit over here across from you. You know, I was a little thrown when I first heard your name. I’ve never met an Eden before. How did you come up with that name?”

I breath sweet oxygen, each inhale coming easier with the passing of time. My mind replays the question asked over and over, mulling over the answer. I lick my dry lips and wait for the words pass through them. “It ... felt fitting. The Garden of Eden was corrupted by the serpent that tricked Eve. I’ve been corrupted by the serpents that hunt me.”

“You don’t think Eve would be a better fit for you? I can’t see that you’re the corrupted.”

“No, I’m the corrupted, tempting others into sinning.” I finally lift my head and stare into the most intense honey brown eyes I’ve ever seen. “Daemon,” I whisper, pressing the heel of my hand against my temple.

“Welcome back,” he says, giving me the most beautiful, crooked smile.

I drop my hand and look around. No one else is in here but the two of us. “What are you doing here?” I ask, confused.

“You called me. I happened to just pull in the driveway when I got your silent call. I rushed in when you didn’t say anything and found you here.”

“Oh,” I whisper. Embarrassment that it was him I called, sends a rush of heat to settle in my cheeks. “Thank you.”

“I don’t want to leave you alone, but I’ve got to meet with Lucifer and Kain. Do you want to come along?” He stands but makes no move to leave.

“I’m okay, you can go.”

“Are you sure?” He looks torn between leaving and sitting back down.

“I’m really okay. I just need a few minutes to sit by myself to think things through, collect myself, really. Please, don’t let me keep you from something important.”

Daemon studies me, assessing my truths and lies. He nods and takes a step forward to bend down and place a kiss on the top of my head. “I’m just a call away if you need anything.”

A zing of electricity shoot through me at the contact. *What was that?*

“I know you are, and thank you again.” I surprise myself with that beginning statement. It’s true though. I know if I really need him, he’ll come running.

He holds my gaze for a heartbeat too long, causing my heart to flip in my chest. There’s an emotion hiding behind those honey brown orbs that I can’t quite put my finger on, but one that affects me all the same. He offers me one more swoon-worthy smile before walking out my door, leaving me confused and exhausted on my bedroom floor.



THE WHITE, square cloth in my hand quickly turns red, the blood from my latest hunt tainting the once pure fabric. Interesting symbolism for my soul. I watch in fascination as the red liquid spreads from one twisted fiber strand to the next.

Heavy footfalls echo down the corridor, and Daemon, clad in jeans and a white short-sleeve shirt and armed with his shoulder holster and badge, exits Eden's room with what looks like a black shoebox tucked under one arm.

“What the fuck were you doing in there?” I demand, striding across the foyer to crowd his space. He has no business being in her room ... alone.

He pushes me back with a groan and hand to the center of my chest, and I give him one step of reprieve before I murder him. Brother or not.

“Easy, Kain. Fuck, give me two seconds to explain before you cut my nuts off, will you?”

I take another step back, and he breathes a little easier.

“She blindly called me in the middle of a panic attack. I just happened to have arrived when she did. I was only helping her. She's fine now, by the way. She asked for time to collect herself.”

The bitter taste of jealousy coats my tongue followed by a wave of insecurity. Why would she call him? Does she trust him more than me?

“Stop it, Kain. She was in a haze of panic and blindly hit a contact on her phone. It wasn't a conscious decision; she didn't even speak. It connected, and all I heard was whimpering and erratic breathing in the background. Honestly,

I'm surprised you guys put me in her contacts at all. I mean, I assume you provided the phone for her since the only contacts in it are the three of us, Dad, and someone named Harley."

Something settles inside of me with the knowledge that she didn't intentionally seek out Daemon, but a part of me still burns that I wasn't around to help her when she needed it.

"How would you know who's in her contacts? Were you going through her phone? It's not okay to invade her privacy, Daemon."

"Go fuck yourself, Kain. I hung up her phone once she was calm and the screen returned to the last one it was on—her fucking contacts. Pretty easy to glance five names on a screen. You really have so little faith in me?"

*Shit. Fuck.* I berate myself for letting my anger at my own shortcomings get the better of me. It's not his fault, he was here. I was out slaying her demons, but she doesn't know that, she can't know, not yet.

"What's that?" I ask, pointing to the box under his arm and trying my damndest to distract myself from storming into her room. *He said she needed time.*

"This is why I'm here. I need to talk with you and Lucifer." The quick change in expression tells me whatever is in that box is fucking serious.

I grunt and walk towards Lucifer's office. Daemon falls in behind me, each step he takes getting progressively louder as we make our way down the long hall.

"I hope you don't do a lot of stealth missions," I say, throwing a glance over my shoulder, ribbing him a little about his career choice like I used to do in the old days.

"Why?"

"Because you walk louder than a raging bull," I say and chuckle silently.

A slap to the back of my head leaves me frozen in place, stunned by the familiar act. Daemon storms by me, a little extra bounce to his step, and I gape at his back for a minute.

“Is that how it’s going to be?” I holler after him, jogging to catch up. I wrap an arm around his neck and pull his head down, locking him in the bend of my elbow. I rub the knuckles of my free hand roughly against the top of his head as we storm through the doors to Lucifer’s office.

“Get the fuck off me, Kain,” Daemon demands, his voice muffled by my body. His fist connects with my lower back, and I let him go with a mix of laughter and groans.

“What the hell is wrong with you two?” Lucifer asks, his tone chiding, and his eyes narrowing on us both as he stands up and braces his knuckles on the desk.

Some things never change. And fuck if that little banter didn’t feel good.

“Nothing of importance,” Daemon says, straightening his shirt, and then holding out the black box he continues, “this is why I’m here.” He removes the top of the box, placing it on the desk. Tipping the box over, he dumps out hundreds of photos. They’re all of Gemma. Gemma alone in her apartment or walking down the street. Gemma with Daemon, many of them in vulnerable moments that were meant to be private. All surveillance photos, from the look of them.

“What the fuck is this?” I growl, picking one up that was taken from outside of our garage, moments before she was murdered by Sid.

“This isn’t even the worst of it.” Daemon reaches into his back pocket and pulls out another photo. From where I stand in front of him, I catch sight of a familiar scroll of black ink on the back. He places the picture on the desk and everything inside of me demands blood, screaming at me to hunt, to protect. The beast demands retribution.

Lucifer picks up the picture of Eden outlined in a sniper’s crosshair and flips it over. His eyes flit back and forth as he reads and rereads what’s written on the back. With each pass, his lips thin and the muscles in his jaw tick as he grinds his teeth.



Lucifer's gaze locks with mine, and I nod. "He knew," he says, clutching the photo tighter. "He had a hand in all of this; even from afar, he was pulling the strings for years." Lucifer's voice drips with venom and his hands shake with unchecked fury.

"What are you talking about?" Daemon asks, looking from Lucifer to me.

Lucifer pulls the note that was delivered a few days ago out of his top desk drawer, the one from Virgil, and hands it to Daemon.

"I don't understand."

Lucifer lays the picture on the desk, face down, and takes the note from Daemon, placing them side by side. "It's the same handwriting," he explains, pointing to the script on both.

"Shit," Daemon whispers, narrowing his eyes on the desk. "You think he masterminded the hit that got Gemma killed?"

"Or he knew about you and Gemma and had other plans, but Donovan went rogue and messed them up, and he's capitalizing on the emotions of that event to his advantage now."

"That makes sense," Eden says, standing in the doorway.

"What are you doing in here?" Lucifer barks with a bit too much venom. He's in leader mode, and softness, even for her, is not something he's afforded in this state.

I take a step to the side, about to go to her to soften his blow and assure her that he's not upset with her. But while she flinches, she stands her ground, only raising a brow at his commanding and gruff tone.

A smile ticks up one corner of my lips at her show of strength. Her refusal to cower under the weight of my brother's glare.

Eden pushes off the frame and strolls into the office, seemingly unfazed by his gruffness, coming to stand between me and Daemon, her hands tucked in the pocket of her hoodie. *My hoodie.* The possessive, domineering side of me loves

seeing her in my clothes, like a claim has been made over her. Or maybe it's her claiming me.

“Kitty called. She has some concerns. First, there are two strangers that seem to be taking over the club, pushing Donovan out. Second and worse, she hasn't seen Harley since he was put on Donovan duty and followed him upstairs. A few hours ago, Donovan came down, but Harley never resurfaced.”

“According to one of my CIs, whispers of a power shift are making their way around the underground. There's a storm coming, and I don't think anyone is ready for it.” Daemon's note of doom and gloom hangs in the air, sour and bitter.

The ping of a cellphone notification jars me from my spiraling thoughts of end days and plans to keep Eden safe. It serves to remind me of Harley's earlier text. “I got a text from Harley early this afternoon. Virgil is forcing Donovan to stand down, and he's called a meeting of select network area leaders. Harley thinks he's trying to replace Donovan with someone he can control, Vincent most likely, by using his daughter as a bargaining tool.”

“As if I'd play along,” she scoffs, brushing aside Virgil's plans for her and focusing back on what really matters, Harley. Genuine concern for the man who's become like her big brother in their short acquaintance thickens her tone as she asks, “Have you heard from him since?”

“No.” I pull my phone from my pocket and hit call next to Harley's name. We all stand in anxious silence as the sound of ringing echoes through the room.

“If you've reached this recording, I'm either working or hanging with my favorite girl, either way, leave me a message and I'll get back to you.” Harley's cheerful tone and the giggle of a little girl in the background heightens the tension in the room.

“If Virgil hurt him, I swear to god—” Eden's hands fall from the hoodie to her sides in tight fists. “I'll castrate that son of a bitch.” Her protective nature over the man who quickly rooted himself in her life fuels my own. And her vow of

vengeance sets off a burning desire that shoots straight to my cock. I'm going to need a long, cold shower tonight.



I TOSSED and turned most of the night. Between Harley's radio silence and the Virgil, Donovan situation, well sleep was illusive at best. While memorable nightmares had a play in my restless night, I must be dreaming right now. That's the only explanation for the vision of the angel dressed in white with long blonde hair shining in the sunlight. Pure light and goodness stands across the room from me glancing out the large bay window. Her fingers toy absentmindedly in the heavy drapes, deep in her own thoughts.

A strong desire to touch her, to bask in her glory and light, overtakes me, propelling my feet forward. I know I shouldn't. I should announce my presence, tell her I'm here. But I have no voice, no form of communication. Four long strides, and I come to stand behind her. My hands find her hips, and I marvel at how well she fits in my hold.

An elbow connects with my ribs, and I groan, leaning into the sudden shock to my system. The hips in my hold are replaced by air. And in a blink, Eden is across the room, pacing the length of the far wall as she wrings her hands together. Like a broken record stuck on repeat, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry," pours from her ruby lips over and over again.

I step into her path and grab her by the shoulders, she jerks once against my hold, but I force her to stop. With one finger under her chin, I guide her face up and wait for her to look at me.

"I'm so sorry," she gasps out breathlessly. Panic fills her eyes and tears line her bottom lashes, ready to fall.

“It’ll take a lot more than an elbow to my ribs to do me in, butterfly,” I tell her with a reassuring smile that seems to melt away some of her panic.

Her eyes flit back and forth as though she’s searching for something within my gaze. Perhaps a lie or half-truth? “Are you okay?” I ask her.

The fucking giggle that escapes her before she slaps her hand over her mouth is like fairy bells ringing through an enchanted forest. High and light and fucking magical. The answering grin that crosses my face is probably the most genuine expression of joy I have felt in a really long damn time.

The wall I erected around my heart twenty-something years ago cracks, and she steps right on through without even trying. Like there’s a fucking neon welcome sign hanging over the entrance. I am so fucking screwed when it comes to this girl.

“I’m sorry for startling you but applaud you on the quick reflexes with the elbow. It gives me a crazy idea. Maybe a way to help you reclaim some of that power that was stolen from you.”

“How?” The innocence in her voice, soft and shy, hits me like a sucker punch to my gut. All I want to do is wrap this woman in my arms, haul her to the tallest tower I can find, and lock her away where no one and nothing can ever touch her again. Instead, I’m going to have Kain train her, turn her into a weapon, because the world we live in is dangerous and fucked up. Also, because I’m too goddamn selfish to ever let her go, and she needs to be able to protect herself.

Pulling my phone from my pocket, I shoot off a text to Kain, telling him to meet me in the parlor.

Eden walks back over to the bay window and sits sideways on the bench seat, her knees bent, pulling one of the decorative pillows into her lap. “Harley called me,” she whispers, looking back outside.

*Fuck me.* “He’s okay then?” I ask, shocked by her sudden switch in topics.

She rests her head back against the cool glass of the window. “He is, and he said he’ll reach out to you and Kain soon, but first he needs to take care of something.”

I take a seat in front of Eden and pull her feet into my lap. She flinches for a second but quickly relaxes. Using my thumbs, I massage the arches of her feet. I watch her face for any signs the contact is making her uncomfortable. Instead, the heavy lids of her eyes and the slope of her shoulders tell me she likes what I’m doing.

“I’m glad to hear he’s okay. Hopefully, he’ll reach out soon and let us know what happened.”

“That would be good.” Her eyes drift shut, and words are slightly slurred when she responds, as though she’s entered into a drugged state.

I press into the joints of her toes, causing little crackles and pops to echo in the room. “Oh god, that feels good,” she blurts out with a moan.

“What the hell is going on in here?” Kain barks, and Eden jolts away from my touch like she’s just been electrocuted.

“Real smooth, Kain,” Edward chastises, smacking him in the back of the head as he walks past him and into the parlor.

Eden snickers behind the pillow she’s using to hide her face. She’s so fucking adorable. The more she breaks out of her shell, the more playful and fiercer she becomes, and I can’t wait to get to know this Eden.

“Why the fuck does everyone keep smacking me on the back of the head?” Kain complains while rubbing at his head. He drops his hand and narrows his eyes on me. “What did you want, Lucifer?”

“I had a thought, possibly a way to help Eden reclaim her power. I’d like you to train her, teach her to protect herself.”

Kain takes a seat on the fireplace, resting his elbows on his knees and clutches his hands together in front of him. He

narrows his eyes on a spot on the floor, humming as he seems to think over my request.

“I think it’s a great idea,” Edward chimes in, breaking the tense silence.

“I’m glad you approve. I have a request to make of you as well,” I tell Edward, grateful he joined us, sparking another plot in my plan to help Eden. “I’d like you to be there for at least the first few training sessions. Extra support and as a monitor. I want Kain to teach her how to break out of holds, and those can be very triggering. With you there, you can act as a barrier if Eden becomes uncomfortable.”

“Of course, I’ll help in any way I can.” Edward walks over and places a weathered hand on Eden’s shoulder. “Anything you need, dear, you just ask me, okay?”

Eden beams up at my father, her entire face radiating affection. An unexplainable pang of jealousy hits me again. *Fuck, I never thought I’d be jealous of my old man.*

“Okay, I’ll do it. On one condition,” Kain says loudly, clapping his hands together, and turning to Eden. “You must be completely honest with me. You have to tell me what you’re feeling, even if you don’t think I want to hear it. That’s the only way this is going to work. If something we’re doing makes you uncomfortable, you *have* to tell me. Got it?”

Eden sits up straighter, and nods. “Got it,” she says, her voice steady and strong.

“Good girl,” Kain replies with the barest hint of a smile.

A warm red glow fills Eden’s cheeks, and I wonder if she always blushes when offered praise. My cock hardens at the images that conjures in my mind, Eden on her knees as she takes me in her mouth, me praising her as she sucks me deeper. I shift on the bench seat, trying to hide my body’s inappropriate reactions to this woman.

*Dammit, Lucifer. Control your fucking self.*

Kain stands and brushes the invisible lint from his pants. “Well, no time like the present to get started. Let’s go,” he says and walks away. We all stare at his back for a moment before

glancing at each other with equally confused expressions at his cold indifference and distance.

The basement door clicks shut, and I shake my head. “Oh, brother. Well, let’s not keep him waiting.” I hold my hand out to Eden, which she accepts immediately, and I smile down at her. We walk hand in hand to the stairs leading down to our in-home gym.

At the bottom landing, I point off to the right towards a wall of lockers and a bathroom. “Inside the first locker there are clothes, sports tops, and yoga pants that should fit you, and at the end, behind that door, is a bathroom.”

Eden squeezes my hand before letting go in favor of reaching up and gripping my shoulders. When she gives them both a tug down, I bend forward, and she places a light kiss on my right cheek. “Thank you for thinking of this,” she whispers and walks away, a little extra bounce in her step now.

I place my hand over my cheek as if I can hold the feeling of her lips pressing against my flesh forever. My mind is quiet for the first time in longer than I can remember, startled by the slip of a woman who’s done me in.

“You okay there, son?” Edward asks, a shit-eating grin on his face.

“Nope. Not in the slightest,” I say with an answering grin and a snort. “I’m so fucked.”





I DON'T RECOGNIZE the girl staring at me in the mirror anymore. Dark circles under sunken eyes. Her pale complexion and boney cheeks. Faded, dull blonde hair. And eyes filled with sorrow and pain. But underneath all that is an unbridled anger and rage at the injustice of the life she's lived.

My hands braced on the counter, I lean in close to the mirror, my eyes locked with the dull green orbs looking back at me. "Who are you?" I ask her.

Silence is her only reply.

"Do you have nothing to say?" I whisper shout, slapping my hand against the mirror. My head drops forward—hanging between my shoulders—and a tear of frustration drips to the counter.

The door to the bathroom creaks open, but I don't move. The smell of peppermint fills the small space and Edward's soft hand comes to rest between my shoulder blades. "Figuring out who you are after a lifetime of being locked away—being manipulated and abused—will take time, my dear. Don't be so hard on yourself. It's only been three weeks."

I look in the mirror, and scan his warm, caring expression. "I feel lost all the time, adrift like a feather blowing in the wind with nothing to tether me to the ground. Even the softest gust of wind will blow me away."

"But imagine the view and all the things you'll see along the way. What a wild ride that'll be." His smile is large, giddy, and childlike.

A small laugh bubbles up inside of me at his excitement, and I smile in return. Turning around, I wrap my arms around

him. “Thank you,” I say into his shoulder, though it comes out muffled by the fabric.

He pats my back with a deep rumbling laugh. “Oh, my dear, there is nothing you need to thank me for.” He pushes me back slightly by my shoulders, keeping hold of me, he grins and says, “Now, let’s not keep Kain waiting.”

I eye him speculatively. “Why do I get the feeling you’re up to something?”

“Because he’s always up to something,” Kain says, leaning against the doorway, his arms crossed over his chest. I drink in the sight of him in loose grey sweatpants and a tight black tank top. “You ready?” he asks seriously.

I nod, trying to swallow the saliva pooling in my mouth, and follow him deeper into the gym. He hops into the boxing ring and holds the ropes open for me to climb through. A roll of white cloth sits on the floor, and Kain picks it up, holding out a hand to me. I place my hand in his, and he tenderly traces a fingertip over and between each knuckle. He turns my hand over, and his thumb traces the faint white mark running along my inner wrist. The barely-there touch is feather light, sending shivers racing down my spine.

He glances up and meets my eyes for a moment before refocusing on my hand and methodically wrapping the cloth around my hand and knuckles, looping it through each finger and securing the Velcro strap around my wrist.

I inhale a breath and wordlessly thank him for not asking questions. Though I’m sure they’ll come at some point in time.

In silence, he proceeds to wrap my other hand, paying close attention to each scar and mark that mars my pale skin as he does. After he’s wrapped them both, he lifts my hands to his mouth and places a kiss to the back of each.

A warmth blooms in my chest at the tender act by such a gruff and ruthless man. Images of the first night at the club flash through my mind. When he held my face, cupping it between his strong hands, and promised me vengeance. He’s

both hard as steel and soft as a gentle breeze, and the contradictions make my head spin.

“First, I’m going to show you how to break a hold so you can run away. If you can escape your attacker, do it. Don’t go looking for a fight.” Kain starts, bringing my attention back to the here and now.

He walks behind me and steps in close, his front pressed firmly against my back. He wraps his arms around me, one hand spanning my lower belly while the other crosses my chest to hold my shoulder. A new feeling rises up inside of me at the intimacy of this hold, a mix of excitement and, I’m pretty damn sure, arousal.

“I’m going to lift you off the ground, you’ll have no control. How are you going to get free?” Hot breath ghosts over my cheek with every word he speaks low in my ear, and my body races into overdrive.

He lifts me, tightening his hold on my body. The arm around my center bands around my ribs, cutting my breath short. The arm across my chest slips an inch closer to my neck. Panic wells inside of me, buried memories forcing their way to the surface. Hands wrapped around my throat, squeezing until not a whisper of air could get through. The feeling of arms wrapped around me from behind as they pushed me against a wall and forced themselves inside of me.

“Eden, where are you?” a voice whispers in my ear.

“The club. In the third room.” My voice breaks, and I fight against the arms that hold me tight.

“No, you’re not. Open your eyes, sweetheart, you’re in the gym. You’re safe. No one can hurt you here. I won’t allow it.” The conviction in the voice as he growls the last few words has my eyes flying open. I suck in a deep, shaky breath. The sweet oxygen rolling over my tongue and filling my lungs feels like life renewing every cell in my body.

Kain loosens his hold and I grab his hands. “Don’t. Don’t let go,” my voice is weak, but my determination to get through

this is iron. “Go again,” I command, this time my voice doesn’t waver.

“I don’t—” Kain starts, but I cut him off.

“Go. Again.”

Kain lifts me off the ground, his hold tightening around me once more. A singular moment of panic flashes through me, but I remain in the present. I grab the arm across my chest, using it to anchor myself in place. Then I kick back, aiming for his knees.

My left foot completely misses the mark. My right heel connects with his knee, but it doesn’t do what I’d hoped. An image of Virgil gripping his nose my last night at the compound flits through my mind, sparking inspiration. I kick at the knee again and quickly throw my head back. The pain that shoots through the back of my head is nothing compared to the roar of pain I hear come from Kain after he drops me.

“Shit.” Kain pinches the bridge of his nose, stemming the flow of blood.

“I’m so sorry. Are you okay?”

Kain laughs at my question, and I worry for a second I did more than give him a nosebleed. Did I scramble his brain?

“I’m fine, that was good. You do that just a little harder. Break their nose and then run like hell.”

“Got it. Wanna go again?” I ask with a smile, and Edward laughs from his seat on the bench beside the ring.

“Fuck no, you’ll really break my nose next time. We’ll do more holds tomorrow after my nose has a little time to heal from your abuse. Now, I think you’re ready to learn how to hit someone properly,” he finally says, breaking the silence. “Make a fist.”

I follow his directions and ball my hands into tight fists, holding them out for his inspection.

“First, slide your thumb down so it covers the middle knuckles of your pointer and middle fingers. Second, pull these two,” he slides his finger under my ring finger and pinky,

“fingers up so your knuckles are straight across the top.” He draws his finger along my covered knuckles. “Good. Keep your hand up so your wrist is straight and aim to hit with your first two knuckles. This will keep your wrist from buckling under the weight of the hit and you from hurting yourself.”

Kain drops my hand and takes a step back.

I shake out my hands and look down as I ball them back into fists. “Okay, thumbs down, hands up, wrists straight, hit with the first two knuckles. Got it.” I bounce a little where I stand, a sudden spark of excitement coursing through me.

He smiles at me and holds his hands up, palms out. “Good, now hit me.”

“Didn’t she already do that?” Edward asks with a laugh, and I chuckle, looking at Kain’s swollen nose.

Kain doesn’t reply to Edward’s taunt but claps his hands together and holds them out again, ready for my hit.

I throw a punch, hitting the palm of his hand with all the strength I can muster.

“Good, this time I want you to twist your hips, so your upper body is facing me when you connect. Put your whole body into the movement.”

I bite my lip and get into the stance. Bringing my hands up, I narrow my eyes on the center of his palm. I pull my fist back, twist my upper body to face him head-on and connect with his hand.

“Better,” he says. “Now, let’s throw in some leg sweeps. I want you to aim for the outside of my knee using the inside of your foot. Don’t forget to use your hips with this as well. All your power comes from your core muscles,” he presses on his abdomen with his fingers, “right here. So, twist your hips, and knock me on my ass.”

“This I gotta see,” Edward chimes in. He’s sitting forward, elbows on his knees, and his chin resting on his open hands. His eagerness makes me chuckle.

“Old man, I’ll throw you out of here, now shut it.”

“Boy, don’t make me come in there and remind you to respect your elders.”

A full belly laugh escapes me at the imagery Edward’s statement conjures in my mind. Kain’s scowl causes that laugh to roll through me again.

“Is that how it’s going to be? Fine, I’m upping this training, no more kid gloves. Try and catch me ... if you can,” he says and bounces to the side, his hands still raised.

---

“COME ON, I HAD YOU,” I pant, bracing myself with my hands on my knees, inhaling gasps of sweet, precious oxygen. I’ve been chasing Kain for what feels like hours around this ring—trying to land a punch or kick—as he taunts me with open hand smacks to my arms, head, and ass. The few hits I was able to land seemed to bounce off as if I merely tickled him.

Kain walks circles around me, stretching his arms over his head, behind his back, and across his now very naked, very distracting chest. “The problem is, Eden, you’re weak. The poor diet you’ve been subjected to for years has wreaked havoc on your body. You have little to no muscle mass.”

I stand straighter, narrowing my eyes on him and cross my arms over my chest, trying to hide behind them. “Well, geez, don’t sugarcoat it or anything. Let me know what you really think of me.”

He stops in front of me and places a hand on each of my shoulders. “You’re small, fast, and have quick reflexes. More importantly, you have a strong desire to live. Those things give you an edge over any opponent.”

“Oh,” I say, dropping my gaze to his chest. My eyes catch on a small tattoo over his left pec. Scrolled in beautiful calligraphy script is one word, *live*. I lift my hand and trace each letter. “It’s beautiful,” I whisper, covering the tattoo with my hand. I close my eyes, feeling the rapid beat of Kain’s heart against my palm.

Kain sucks in an audible breath, his body going rigid as he spins and nearly runs from the ring.

“We’re done for the day,” he calls, not looking back.

I slide out from under the ropes of the ring and stand beside Edward. “Why does he keep doing that?” I ask, shaking my head and unraveling the bindings from my hands.

“I think he believes he’ll scare you if you see how strongly he reacts to you, and not just physically.” Edward rubs his fingers along his chin, staring in the direction Kain stormed off.

I look at him, confused by his statement. “What do you mean?”

“There’s a darkness that lives inside all of us, Eden. For some, that darkness can easily be hidden away, nearly forgotten. For others, like Kain, that darkness needs to be fed or it will overwhelm them. Kain’s past has twisted something inside of him, something he’s tried to hide for so long. It’s that piece of himself he’s trying to hide from you now. I fear when he becomes worked up, as you just saw, that darkness takes over, and after everything you’ve been through, he’s terrified it’ll scare you. Kain doesn’t allow himself to care for others freely. Therefore, rejection, for him, is like a knife to the heart.”

I drop down on the bench, exhausted and confused.

“Don’t think too hard on it. He’ll come around and realize you’re stronger than you look,” Edward says, placing a kiss on the top of my head and following after Kain.

I gather my clothes from earlier and head upstairs towards my room. Reaching the top of the landing, I pass Lucifer, my head still in a daze from what happened with Kain only minutes ago.

“How was training?” he asks as I pass him.

“Confusing,” I reply because what else can I say? I’m really fucking confused.



CROUCHING LOW, I sweep my right leg out, catching Kain's ankles and knocking him to the floor. I jump up, bouncing on the balls of my feet then raise my hands, ready for him to kick himself up from the floor and attack.

Lying on his back, his eyes closed, he drops his arms, stretching them out to the side. His chest rises and falls rapidly as he pants for breath. "We're done for today," he rasps. "You've sufficiently kicked my ass enough for one day."

"I think I'm getting the hang of this now," I say with a wide grin and reach a hand down for him to help him up. He takes my peace offering, and I haul him up. "What do you think?" I ask, running a towel over my face and chest, mopping up the sweat dripping down my body.

"I agree, you broke out of that hold in seconds. You've also gotten a lot stronger this last week. Your dedication to training is really paying off," Kain says, walking beside me as we head towards the armory for our next lesson, blades.

It's been a week since Kain started training me in self-defense. Since then, we've moved onto more intense fighting and close proximity weapons training, such as quarterstaffs. When I questioned why I needed to learn to fight with a stick, he replied with, *even a broom can become a weapon if you know how to use it.*

"It's also very therapeutic," I laugh, remembering my evening two nights ago when I spent hours punching the heavy weight bag, picturing the faces of the men who used me to fulfill their darkest fantasies. And of Virgil and Vincent, who made my life hell for nearly twenty years.



“I know that feeling,” Kain says so low I almost miss his remark. “How are the triggers? You don’t seem to be getting lost in the memories as easily, but I know how easily looks can be deceiving.”

“They’re getting better. In the beginning, I had to remind myself a lot that it was just you, and that you weren’t there to hurt me. Touch isn’t so much an issue anymore; I’ve become desensitized to it in a way thanks to the exercises Wyatt has me doing, but the positions can be triggering. When I feel the rise of panic, I tell myself that I’m prepared. I’m in control and I can handle it. I’m not the same person I was when I arrived on that bus months ago. I’ve changed. I’m stronger.”

Kain swings an arm over my shoulders and pulls me against his sweaty side. “You were never weak, sweetheart. You were always a badass in my book.”

Heat crawls across my chest and up my neck. I playfully push at Kain’s side, but he holds fast to my shoulder, keeping me tucked against him.

“How did your check-up with Wyatt go? You’re healing okay, we’re not putting too much strain on anything are we?”

“I honestly can’t remember a time I felt this good. I feel strong, healthy, resilient even—though I’m not sure how to describe that last one. I’m alive for the first time in a long time, and no matter what’s thrown at me, I know I can survive it. Mental, physically, emotional—nothing is going to tear me apart again.”

Kain’s grip on my shoulder tightens and he stops walking. He turns to look at me directly, the expression on his face serious. “While it thrills me to hear you say all that, I need to know what Wyatt said about your healing. Does he have concerns about your injuries and training?”

I inhale a large breath and let it out quickly. “He’s not exactly onboard with everything. However, he knows I’m not going to stop. All of the cuts and tears have closed, and nothing has reopened by anything we’ve done. My shoulder is a little tender, but it doesn’t hurt.”

“Eden,” Kain growls low, a warning we’re entering territory he doesn’t like.

“No, Kain,” I say and take a step back. “This is my choice. While Wyatt doesn’t fully support it, he does respect my decision. He understands how important this is for me. I’ve agreed to regular check-ins with him and promised that if I have an issue or pain beyond the normal discomfort that I’ll have you call him. I’m icing every day as directed and taking anti-inflammatory as prescribed. You’ll have to trust me, Kain.”

His eyes narrow as he studies me. Butterflies dance in my stomach and a tingling sensation skitters down my spine the longer he holds me in his grasp and drinks me in with his eyes. “Okay,” he finally whispers with a nod and pulls me in for a quick hug.

“O-kay,” I repeat and fall into step with him.

As we enter the weapons room, something I’ve only recently gotten to see, my eyes catch on a glint of metal under the fluorescent lights. I run my hands over the new table covered in knives, marveling at the various blades and colorful handles. I pick up one with a silver and black marble handle and a serrated blade. “Is it wrong that I would kill to use this blade on the man who still haunts my nights?”

Kain picks up a blade and twirls it between his fingers. “Are you still having nightmares?”

“Every day that ends in y.” I clutch the blade in my other hand, feeling the cool bite of the steel pressing against my flesh. I flinch when it breaks skin and sinks into my palm. Red rises from the small cut in my hand, a stark contrast to my pale complexion.

Kain grabs my wrist, his eyes fixed on the cut and red liquid pooling in the center of my palm. His breathing quickens and a new expression fills his eyes. Desire ... Maybe? He lifts my hand to his mouth. With his eyes closed, he sucks the blood from my palm, leaving it with a soft kiss before lowering it again and locking eyes with me.

The only sound I hear is blood rushing through my veins and the hard thumping of my heart. Heat floods my system, gathering low in my belly.

“What would you do if he was here right now?” he asks, startling me.

“What?” I ask, breathless and confused.

“If *he* was here, what would you do?”

“Everything he ever did to me. You promised me vengeance once. I’d take my vengeance.”

Kain gives my hand a gentle squeeze, his eyes locked on our physical connection. He seems to be warring with something inside his head, something he wants to say but isn’t sure he can.

“Is vengeance something you want?” he asks, unable to meet my eyes.

“Yes,” I say firmly, squeezing his hand in return.

He finally lifts his gaze to meet mine. A vicious grin growing across his face. “I have something to show you.” His smile grows wider, and his excitement fills the air around us. “Come with me.”

He takes off for the door, nearly dragging me behind him in his haste. Making it to the garage, he grabs two coats from the hook and helps me into one. I lift the collar to my nose and inhale the sweet scent of whiskey and aftershave.

“This is yours,” I say with a smile, wrapping the sides tightly around my body.

“I like seeing you in my things.” He raises a brow, shrugs one shoulder, and offers me a boyish grin in a *what can I say?* gesture.

“I like wearing your things,” I say back, heat filling my cheeks.

“Good, then we’re in agreement, you’ll wear my stuff more often. Now get in, we’re going for a little ride.” He points to a black SUV beside the old Focus, the one Edward

and I had used when Daemon showed up with the search warrant, looking for me.

I sit in the passenger's seat, riding in silence and watching as the neon lights of the Vegas strip pass by. We drive by a tall man who reminds me of someone important. "Did you ever hear from Harley?"

Kain's hold on the leather covered steering wheel causes it to creak under his tight grip. "I did. Virgil detained him for nearly a day, questioning him relentlessly about his connection to you. Harley didn't lie to him. He told him about how you started at the club. He also told him about your time living in Donovan's home. About how he chained you up during the day in his office, and how he'd let Sid and his men toy with you."

A knot forms in the back of my throat, growing larger with every word he speaks and cutting off my airways. Tears fill my eyes, and I swallow hard, trying hard to keep them at bay. All my shame. All my faults. Everything I didn't want them to know, everything I hadn't told them, has come to light, and I had no say in it.

"You should have told us what he did," Kain growls, his hands twisting around the steering wheel. "You should have fucking told me."

"Why?" I shout, my nose burning with the impending flood of tears. "It's my story to tell or keep. Harley shouldn't have told you a fucking thing." My lungs constrict, refusing to expand as I suck in rapid breaths. My hands shake, and my vision blurs.

*I can't do this. I can't do this. Why is he doing this to me?*

Kain turns hard to the left, and I slide into the door. My head hitting the window. He pulls into an empty warehouse parking lot and slams on the brakes, causing me to jerk forward, not expecting the sudden shift in trajectory. He unsnaps his seat belt and throws open his door. Without a word, he exits the car and slams his door shut.

I wait in silence for a heartbeat, reminding myself that I'm not that girl anymore. I'm stronger than that.

My door swings open, and Kain reaches over me to unfasten my belt. He hauls me from the car by my arms and nearly slams me back into the side of the SUV.

“Why, Eden? Why should you have fucking told us what he did? Because I'll fucking kill him. That's why. I'll fucking kill them all. No one gets to lay a fucking hand on you ever again. Do you understand me?” Kain growls, his nose inches from mine, his nostrils flaring with every harsh inhale. His pupils are blown wide with fury, nearly swallowing the hazel of his irises, and making his eyes look almost demonic.

I lean forward a little, crowding his space and forcing him to lean back. “Why do you fucking care, Kain? You've spent weeks avoiding me. Acting like I was some kind of plague on your existence. If it hadn't been for Lucifer asking you to train me, I bet you wouldn't even be talking to me now.” I know I shouldn't push him, but—dammit—he pissed me off, and I need to know.

Kain paces four steps away, shaking out his hands at his sides and muttering something under his breath. He turns around, locking his eyes with mine, and returns quickly to where he left me standing. Placing a hand on either side of my head, he leans in close to whisper, “Because you're fucking mine. Mine to protect. Mine to ruin. Just, fucking mine.”

My heart beats wildly behind the confines of my ribs, threatening to shatter them. I should be terrified of this man. He's unhinged and dangerous. I've seen him come home covered in other people's blood. I've seen the way he reacts to the violence. I've seen the hunger in his eyes when he looks at me, the desire for more.

But a deeper, more primal part of me calls to him, desires to be near him, to love him. It's that part of me that has me leaning in, closing the distance between us, and sealing my lips to his. I grab the front of his shirt, high on his chest, and pull him closer, not wanting a breath of air between us, and deepen the kiss. It isn't sweet and loving. It's violent and

demanding, each of us demanding the other's submission and neither of us willing to concede.

Kain rips his mouth away and rests his forehead against mine. We're both panting heavily.

He cups my cheek in his hand, his eyes searching mine, and whispers, "What are you doing to me?"

"Nothing you aren't doing to me."

"And what I am doing to you, sweetheart?"

"Consuming me."

His lips tip up in the corners into a grin so wide it crinkles the corners of his eyes. The look promises wicked things ahead. "Not yet, I'm not," he says and takes a step back. He holds out a hand to me, and I place mine in his much larger one. A blank canvas being swallowed by a beautiful work of art. "Come on, I have a gift for you."

"Gift? I can't remember the last time someone got me a gift," I say, smiling up at him.

An almost sadistic chuckle leaves Kain as we walk across the parking lot to a smaller outbuilding behind the main warehouse. "These can't be returned to their senders, so I hope you like them."

"If you got them, I'm sure I'll love them."

Kain lets go of my hand and enters a code in the keypad beside the door to the building. A buzz sounds, and he pulls open the door. "Ladies first."

The room is dark, not a single light illuminates the space. A muffled groan comes from somewhere deeper inside. I squint trying to adjust my vision so I can see into the obscurity.

Kain steps in behind me, closing the door. He places a hand on my hip and tugs me back into his side, holding me to him.

One by one, the lights turn on, starting in the back of the large building. Metal walls and concrete floors. Metal tables

with various tools are revealed under the florescent lights. A long black hose snakes along the floor. I follow the line of the hose with my eyes, and an audible gasp leaves me when I reach the end.

The man who's haunted my nights for months is bound, naked and bloody, to a metal chair in the center of the room. A ball gag stuck between his teeth and belted around his head. Black tasseled clamps are firmly in place on his nipples.

One slow step after another, I approach the man. His eyes widen, and he shakes his head as I approach, but I know it's not me he's afraid of. No, he fears the shadow at my back. A dark corner of my soul wants that fear to be of me, though. It demands it.

Little nicks litter his body where the blood trails started running from. Nicks in his arms, his chest, his thighs. My eyes get stuck on the deep purple mushroom resting between his thighs and the bright silver ring at the base restricting the blood flow.

"Well, that looks painful," I say with no humor and zero sympathy.

"I promise you, it is," Kain says, wrapping his arms around me from behind and resting his chin on my shoulder. "This isn't the only gift I have for you."

He takes my hand and leads me to a metal table lined with sharp instruments. Various knives, hand saws, surgical scalpels. In the middle of the table sits a wooden box with a flip latch. Kain picks up the box and holds it with the latch facing me. Red dots one corner of the box, and I trace a finger over the darkened spot.

"What's this?" I ask, my hand resting on the lid, my thumb toying with the bronze latch.

"My gift to you. I made you a promise, and I always keep my promises." The uncertainty written all over his face belies the serious tone to his voice, which makes me swallow hard. Kain made me one promise, vengeance. Excitement and

trepidation course through me as I consider the possibilities of what I may find inside this box.

I flip the latch and, with two hands, I ease the lid open. Sitting on a pillow of black silk fabric are at least twenty greyish-red ovals made of flesh. I tilt my head, studying the objects. Studying the obvious veins that run through each one.

Shock floods me, and I have to force my face to remain natural. I need to be careful of how I react, Kain is just letting me in, and I don't want him to shut down again already. "Are these ... testicles?" I nearly release a hysterical laugh mixed with something akin to affection and horror at the last word but manage to maintain my composure.

"Yes, from all the men who regularly visited you at the club, except for one. Him. I brought you the man relatively intact. Do you like them?" There's a softness to his eyes that has me choking back tears.

I sniff back the affection I find myself holding for this gruff man who obviously has lived a life surrounded by violence and abuse. It's unconventional, I know, but his gift shows just how much he does care.

"It's odd because I shouldn't find this endearing, and, yet, I do. These men hurt me; they took what they wanted from me repeatedly, regardless of the fact that I wasn't willingly giving it. You promised me vengeance, and you delivered it in a beautiful wooden box lined with black silk. Best of all, you delivered the one who hurt me the most so I can carry out my own vengeance on him." Standing on my tippy toes, I place a kiss on Kain's cheek, and his face flares rosy pink. He releases a heavy sigh as though he wasn't sure how I'd react to his brand of gift giving and was preparing for the worst.

I smile at the adorableness of this tattooed dark knight in leather. "Thank you, Kain."

"I'm not done yet. I still need Sid and his men. Then there's the man from the party. I want to see him bleed."

Nodding at Kain's declaration, I stuff the horrid memories of Sid and his men and the man with the scar over his right eye



back into their boxes and focus on the here and now. I pick up a dull pocketknife with a red handle and cut my gaze in Paul's direction.



THICK RED LIQUID drips from the tip of the blade hanging loosely in Eden's hand, hanging by her side. Her other hand rests on her hip as she studies the words she just finished carving, her brows dipped low in concentration.

She's a vision of carnal sin and desire with blood on her hands and revenge in her eyes. Dressed in those tight black yoga pants that hug her ass and hips, showing off the long, lean line of her legs, and a sports bra framing the muscles she's built from hours of training. Both highlight the curves her body has taken on now that she's eating properly. She removed my jacket before getting started, stating that she didn't want to taint its perfect scent with Paul's abhorrent blood.

Fuck if my cock doesn't jump with every move she makes, inflicting pain on the monster sitting in the center of the room who tortured her—mind, body, and soul.

"I don't know if this really describes him fully. What do you think? Maybe something else?" she asks, turning to face me, a torn expression on her face.

"Delusional. Sadistic. Pervert. Slimy. Putrid. Vile. Trout Sniffer. What the hell is a trout sniffer?" I ask with a chuckle from my place leaning against a pillar after reading off the words carved into Paul's chest and thighs.

Eden shrugs one shoulder and gives me a smile. "We'd have to ask Buzz."

"And who exactly is Buzz?" I cross my arms over my chest as though jealously just hit me.

"That's Kevin's big brother."

“And who the fuck is Kevin?” I stand up straight and drop my arms, my hands in fists pretending to get frustrated. The laugh that escapes Eden lets me know the show is working.

“From the *Home Alone* movies.”

“Woman,” I growl. “You had me ready to murder. No man gets near you that isn’t me, one of my brothers, my father, or someone we approved of, like Harley.”

“Possessive much?” she teases, turning her attention back to Paul.

“Fucking right, I am,” I say, resuming my position against the pillar to watch her work.

“I like it,” she whispers to herself under her breath, but I still hear every word. She has no idea what she’s just done with those three little words. She’s sealed her fate. That’s it—I’m never letting her go—even if it means I have to brand her to make sure she can’t leave me.

Eden walks behind Paul, trailing the sharp edge of the blade along his skin, a teasing, torturous touch. Standing behind him, she presses the tip into his skin, carving something new into his shoulder. Blood runs down his chest, and he screams around the ball still in his mouth.

Paul jerks away from the knife, causing it to slip, and Eden sighs in frustration. She slaps him on the side of his head and growls, “You messed me up. Now I’ll have to start over on the other side.”

Paul’s eyes screw shut with the first slice of her blade, and a strangled noise escapes him. His hands fist the metal arm rests, and his body visibly vibrates with his efforts to remain still.

“What are you carving there, little killer?”

Eden’s head snaps up, and a wicked grin crosses her face. “Little killer, huh? I kind of like it. If you want to know what I’m doing, come and see.”

Standing behind Eden, I place my hands on her hips. God, now that I’ve let myself taste her, I can’t get enough of

touching her. The feel of her body close to mine, wrapped in my arms, my hands possessively holding her, is like a drug. I crave her when she's not near and need more of her when she is.

"Hmm, not bad. The lines could use a little fine tuning in areas but, overall, the artistry is well done," I say, peering over her shoulder at the image of a dick she's carving into Paul's shoulder.

She twists her wrist, adding two small bumps to the bottom, and hums to herself. "I think it's done."

"It's beautiful, little killer." I kiss her on the cheek and step back. "What's next?"

"I need him on his back, on the metal table," she commands, walking over to the table with tools meant for couples to share during *trust filled* intimate moments. Tools that were instead used to inflict pain and humiliation on my beautiful girl.

I cut Paul loose and forcefully walk him forward five feet to the metal table and push him on top, positioned on his back. He bucks weakly under my hold. After a week in captivity—tied to a chair—and a couple hours of slow, torturous pain, he's not putting up much of a fight. I bind his wrists together and tie his arms over his head to the legs of the table.

"Legs apart," Eden chimes in as I gather more rope, about to tie his ankles together.

Nodding in understanding, I spread his legs, and tie one to each of the legs of the table. "Do you want his arms spread out as well?" I ask, looking over my handiwork, tugging on the ropes to ensure they're secure.

"No, that's fine. He didn't pay much attention to my arms when he tied me down. On this table, I want him to experience what he put me through." She cracks the whip she's holding in the air. The leather strips snapping together causes Paul to flinch and whine where he lies.

"You remember what you did to me with the whip, don't you?" She swings her arm, cracking the whip against the

bottom of his right foot. Red lines rise on the sole of his foot. “You remember how raw my feet were, how you stripped the skin from them until they bled. I know you do. You took a lot of pleasure in causing me pain.”

*Crack.* The leather of the whip slashes along his foot again. Paul’s muffled cries feed the darkness in my soul and, seemingly, my angel with horns’ as well.

“Do you remember that first night when I got off the table and fell to the floor because the pain was that excruciating? Do you remember your reaction to my suffering? I sure as fuck do.”

*Crack.* She sends the leather strips sailing along the bottom of his left foot. She walks up to stand over his face and pulls on the ball in his mouth, pressing his lower jaw down to open wider as she forces it over his lower teeth. Not caring about the damage she inflicts.

“I want to hear you beg me for mercy. Mercy you never cared to show me.”

“I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. Please stop. Please,” Paul begs, tears running down his cheeks.

“Why? Did you stop when I asked? Did you stop when you broke my skin, when you left your handprints around my neck from choking me or bruises on my ribs when you punched me? Did you stop when I begged you not to force your sad excuse for a dick inside of me when I was so dry you tore me up inside? No, you fucking continued on as though I was just some fucking sex doll there for you to get your rocks off with. Fuck my well-being, I didn’t matter. Well, guess what? You don’t matter, I need to get my rocks off, and I’m going to use you to do it.”

Eden swings her arm, bringing the whip down across his chest. *Crack. Crack. Crack.* Over and over, she slashes at his chest. Her face contorting into a mess of pain and fury, her eyes fixed on the reddening skin.

*Crack.* Blood pools in the valleys of his abdomen, flowing more freely with each new slice of leather that breaks skin.

She moves down his body, beating him with the whip as she moves. His cries grow louder until the pain overwhelms him, and he falls silent. Too silent.

“Eden,” I call her name softly, not wanting to startle her. “Eden.”

Nothing, no twitch of the eye or tilt of the head. Tears flow down her cheeks as all the pain, anger, and mess of emotions she’s been bottling up for months—maybe years—pour out of her and into him.

I walk up behind her, wrapping one arm around her chest, catching some stray strips of leather in the face as I catch her wrist with my other hand before she can hit him again.

“Eden,” I growl low in her ear.

She spins around angrily, her red eyes meeting mine. Splatters of blood coat her from the top of her head down to her feet. Tear tracks streak through the blood on her cheeks.

“It’s okay, little killer.”

She shakes her head vehemently; her arms dropping to her sides and the whip slipping through her fingers. Air saws between her clenched teeth as she tries to breathe. The anger I saw in her eyes moments ago morphs into soul-shattering sorrow and heart-breaking grief. She steps forward, fisting my shirt in her hands, and buries her face in my chest. I wrap my arms tightly around her just as sobs rack through her body, and she melts in my hold. “No, it’s not. It’s not okay. I’m not okay.”

Her legs try to give, but I hold her up in my embrace, refusing to let this asshole or any others break my girl. I rub a hand up and down her back, trying to soothe away some of the grief.

With a sniffle, she pushes away from me and looks over the bloody man on the table. “It’s time to end this,” she says and storms over to the metal tray with a line of knives. She picks up a sharp switchblade and returns to the head of the table, and I move to stand beside her, seeing where this is going.

“Stop, little killer.” I cover her shaking hand with my steady hold, slipping the blade easily from her grip.

“No, he needs to die.” The conviction in her voice is raw and real.

“Eden, look at me,” I command, leaving no room for argument.

She looks up, tears filling her bottom lids, but she’s holding them back in a death grip.

“My strong girl. You have no idea how powerful you are. As much as it fucking turns me on—because, fuck, if you aren’t beautiful covered in blood and wielding my tools of pain and death—taking someone’s life leaves a stain on your soul, one that will never wash clean. I agree, he needs to die, but despite everything you’ve been through, everything men like him and Donovan—even your stepfather—put you through, you’ve kept this beautiful light inside of you. This glimmer of hope and goodness. If you do this, the same darkness that stains my soul will snuff out that light in you.”

I cup her face between my hands. “I can’t have that. I need your light to guide me out of the darkness that swallows me. You are the one pure thing in my life, and I’m not ready for that to dim. Let me save that part of you. Let me be your weapon and shield you from this part.”

Sliding my hands down to her shoulder, I nudge her to turn around. “Turn around and close your eyes. You don’t have to see it to know what’s happening.”

With one hand on Eden’s shoulder, I reach out with the other—blade clutched firmly in my hold—and slide the edge along Paul’s neck from ear to ear. Slicing through his carotid arteries.

An ominous gurgling sounds as blood spurts from his mouth and neck while his unconscious body gasps for air fills the room.

I wipe the blood from the blade along my pant leg and close the blade, sliding it into my pocket. Gripping Eden’s

shoulders, I lead her out of the warehouse, not allowing her to look back.

The once clear night sky is now filled with clouds and cool rain. Eden tilts her head back, the rain washing the blood from her face. She turns and looks up at me with a small smile. Reaching down, she takes my hands in hers and holds them up to collect the rain. Silently, she wipes at the blood that paints my hands until they're clean.

Wrapping her arms around my neck, she stands on her toes and tucks herself in closer to my body. I lift her with my hands around the back of her thighs, and she wraps her legs around me. "I'm not as unblemished as you think, Kain. My soul has stains, too. I want to stand in the purity of the rain with you and let it wash us clean."

I walk her to the SUV and press her back against the window. "Little killer, there isn't enough rain in this sky to wash me clean."

She squeezes her legs around my waist and pulls my hips closer, causing my growing erection to press against her heated sex. A soft, almost inaudible moan pass her lips.

A groan leaves me at the feel of her heat aligned with my cock. I slide my hands from her thighs to her ass and use my hold to grind her slowly along the length of my cock. "Oh, fuck, little killer. You're killing me."

She leans back against the truck and presses her hips into me harder, making little circles as she grinds against me. Her mouth parts, and her eyes slide shut. One of her hands leaves my neck to caress across her bloody chest and, fuck, the sight spikes the flame burning inside of me.

I slide the switchblade from my pocket and flip it open. I skim the dull side of the cool metal along the heated flesh of her neck. Marveling in the fact that she doesn't so much as flinch. "Eden," I growl in warning. "I can't ... We have to stop."

She opens her eyes and removes her hand from her fabric covered breast and takes the blade from my hold. "Let it out,



Kain. I'm not scared of you."

"No," I turn my head to the side, "I can't see that fear in your eyes again."

She cups the side of my face, turning my head back to face her. "What do you mean, again?"

I lean in and place a soft kiss to her lips. "When we brought you home from the party, you were detoxing, and when you saw me, you thought I was him, and the terror in your eyes when you looked at me was gutting."

"Kain, I'm so sorry."

"You have nothing to fucking apologize for. I know you weren't seeing me for me, you were seeing the similarities between my art and the marks of the man who attacked you. But I'll never forget that look of pure terror in your eyes when you looked at me and saw him. If I ever put that fear in you and caused you to really look at me like that—fuck, Eden—I'd never be able to live with myself."

"Do you think I don't know about your darkness?" She searches my eyes. "I'll let you in on a little secret, Kain. You don't hide it well. I know about your dark side, and it doesn't scare me. For fuck's sake, you gave me a box of testes for a gift. I know what you need, and I want to be the only one to give it to you."

She pulls my face down and locks her lips with mine, kissing me like I'm the air she needs to breathe.



THE SKY OVERHEAD OPENS, and the rain pours over our heated bodies as we drink each other in, consumed in our need and desire for the other. I want him over me, wrapped around me, inside of me. He's already stolen pieces of me—mind, body, and soul—but my need for this man goes beyond all that, it's fundamental. Without him, I don't think I'd survive tomorrow.

I'm not the only one feeling this, either. I can sense it in him as though the feelings are my own. He needs this, me, just as much. He needs to know I'm not going to run. That I accept him, darkness and all.

Pulling back, I place a hand over his lips, needing to get this out, needing him to see that I crave every part of him because we're the same. I hold the blade steady against my collarbone. The cool metal of the razor's sharp edge scrapes lightly along the surface, causing goosebumps to rise along my arms. I watch as his eyes dilate, the black of his pupils swallowing the hazel of his irises as he tracks the blade's path across my chest. His gaze isn't cold and intrusive like those of the men who took from me. No, his is heated and my body craves more of it—more of him. In this my mind and body are in unison.

“Eden, I can't.” His voice is harsh with desire and the strain of self-control. His hands on my body flex as he holds himself back from giving into his wants.

“I can see it in your eyes, every time you come back from doing one of those jobs for your brother, the network, or maybe it was one of your missions for me. Blood on your hands and staining your clothes. When you'd look at me, there'd be a hunger in your eyes, a deep desire to fuck me. The

violence, the fear they fed you, the blood. It all turns you on. This is what you need.”

“I won’t ask this of you. Everyone who has ever touched you has been out to hurt you. They forced your fear. They took your body. The things I want to do to you are just as depraved and monstrous. But I couldn’t live with myself if you ever looked at me like you looked at them.”

“The difference is you would never hurt me, Kain. I know that.”

He shakes his head, untangling my legs from his hips, the moment coming apart. He holds me until my feet hit the ground, and then he takes a step back, running his fingers through his wet hair.

“But I fucking want to. At the sudden snick of my blade slipping free, I want the fear thick in your eyes so that your pupils swallow those bright green orbs, not knowing what I’ll do. I want to run my blade over your body, drawing shivers of anticipation from you, wondering where I’ll nick you, making you bleed. I want to marvel at the thick red liquid as it pools through the cut, trickles down your collarbone, and through the valley of your breasts. I want to taste the sweet metallic nectar on my tongue as I lick you clean, drawing new shivers through you for a whole different reason. All the while, I want you writhing on the hilt of my knife until you come, coating every inch of steel in your scent, so every time I wield it, I’ll remember I belong to you. I want your tears of frustration. I want your anger and your fire. I want to know that when I’ve gone too far, you won’t hide behind fear of me but that you’ll push back and rein me in. And the really fucked up part is that I desire your trust in all this.”

He crowds me back into the side of the SUV, the rain falling heavier as though a bottomless bucket has been flipped and is pouring down on us. “I’m not a good man, Eden. I’m fucked up in the head, and I’ll only bring you to ruin if you stay near me.”

He rocks back on one foot as though to retreat, but I reach out and snag his arms, gripping them tight in my hold. “You

can't ruin what's already been ruined, Kain.”

I take his hand in mine and place the hilt of the knife in his palm. Lifting his hand, I position the blade on my collarbone. Kain tries to pull away, and I know if I let him go now this will be it, so I tighten my hold on him and whisper, “Let me.”

His expression flits between pain, desire, grief, and understanding.

I press against his hand, holding the blade. The sharp edge sinks into my pale wet skin. Warmth, so dissimilar to the chill of the rain, flows freely down my chest, mingling with the rivulets of water.

Hunger takes root in Kain's gaze as his eyes track the red liquid. I place a hand on the back of his head and pull him closer. “Taste it,” I whisper.

The tip of his tongue ghosts over the top swell of my breasts and up along my collarbone before stealing my breath with a searing kiss that demands more. He walks me back to the rear of the SUV, never breaking the kiss. A beeping noise echoes in the night and the tailgate opens.

He pulls back, picks me up, and sits me inside. Keeping eye contact, he hooks his fingers in the waistband of my pants and tugs them down. I lift my hips, silently telling him yes.

When the wet material of my yoga pants sticks to my legs, refusing to come off, the bubble of laughter that leaves us both cuts through the tension like a knife through butter.

“Is this a sign that we shouldn't be doing this?” Kain asks, a hint of seriousness in his voice.

I pick up the knife he dropped to the side of the trunk door and hold it out to him. “Fuck no. Cut the damn things off.”

Kain takes the knife and kisses me again, biting down on my lower lip. A hint of copper hits my tongue, and I moan. He smiles down at me when he pulls back and places his hand in the center of my chest. He pushes against me gently, urging me back.

I follow his lead and lean back. Knife in hand, he lifts the waistband of my pants and slices through the material but stops when he reaches the apex of my thighs. “Oh, little killer. You naughty girl,” he growls when he finds me bare, and traces the cool metal handle of his knife over my heated skin.

He kneels on the parking lot and pulls me to the edge of the trunk, arranging my legs over his shoulders. The material rips a little further, and I shiver at the sound. He licks from the base of my slit to my clit.

“Kain,” I moan, turned on, with my clit so overly sensitive, I might explode if he keeps that up.

“What do you want, little killer?” he asks softly against my mound between kissing, licking, and biting at my flesh.

My legs tighten around his head, my body shamelessly grinding against his face of its own volition, seeking a much-needed release.

“I—” I say, my words dying on my tongue when he bites down on my clit and slides a finger inside of me. “Shit, I need you inside of me.”

“You are so fucking wet for me. I bet I’ll slide right in.”

“Then stop talking, and get up here,” I growl, reaching down and grabbing a fist full of his hair.

Kain stands with a wide grin and makes quick work of undoing his pants enough to spring his cock free. His very impressive, very pierced, cock with a five bar Jacob’s ladder and Prince Albert.

“Wow,” I whisper, unable to tear my eyes away from the monster pointing at me.

“Do you like what you see, little killer?” Kain’s voice drips with amusement.

I lick my lips and nod. Finally tearing my gaze away from his body, I meet his eyes and hold out my hands, beckoning him inside.

As he climbs inside on his hands and knees, I lean back, welcoming, but panic spikes inside of me at having him over

me, and I sit up some, placing a hand on his chest. “Wait,” I pant.

“Eden? What’s wrong?” he asks frantically.

“I need a minute. It’s just—” I lick my lips, trying to shove the unwanted feelings back down and gather my thoughts. “Having you over top of me like that. It just—”

Kain jumps off me and scoops me up, cutting off my words. He sits down in the trunk and places me on his lap so I’m straddling him. “Say no more. If having you on top means you’re comfortable, then I’ll happily sit back and watch you writhe on top of me as you take what you want from me.”

He reclines as far as the back seat will allow, resting on his elbow.

“Condom?” I ask, lifting a brow.

“Why are you looking at me? You’re the one that started this. I assumed you had protection.” The grin that splits his face is boyish and light. It’s a sight to behold, and one I want to see again.

“Seriously?”

He lifts his hips with me still sitting on him, and I brace myself with my hands on his chest. He reaches into his back pocket and pulls out his wallet, handing it to me. “Inside back pocket,” he says.

Waving the foil in the air, I drop his wallet and tear open the foil. Reaching up, he holds his cock straight up so I can roll the condom on and position him at my entrance.

Two hands on his chest, I slowly lower my hips and slip the head of his cock inside of me, freezing for a moment to relish in the feel of him and the control I have. He’s inside of me because I want him there, not because he’s forcing himself on me.

“Go slow,” he says, his eyes locked on where he’s disappearing inside of me.

Teasingly slow, I lower my hips, pushing him deeper until he’s fully seated inside of me. I moan at the feeling of him

stretching my walls and filling me up. Eyes closed, I breathe in the new sensations these feelings stir in me. A tear slides down my cheek, and Kain wipes another from under my eyes.

“Are you okay?” he asks, concern thick in his voice. I nod, unable to speak.

“Can you move?”

I nod again, and Kain’s hands find my hips. Without forcing me, he encourages me to rock back and forth, the movement grinding my clit along his pelvis. The act driving my need for release higher.

He lifts me. I follow the guiding move, raising my hips until only the head of his cock remains inside of me and lowering back down slowly. Repeating the motion, a slow glide of his cock in and out of my body.

The muscles of my inner walls flutter as an ache forms low in my belly, one I’ve never felt so strongly before.

“Kain,” I whimper and lift my hips, letting myself fall faster, harder. Up and down. Faster and harder. “Oh, god, Kain.”

“That’s it, baby. Ride my cock. Take what you need.”

Sudden pressure against my clit causes my muscles to squeeze around his cock and my hips to jerk. Kain groans, his head falling against the back of the seat. I look down at Kain’s hand, at his thumb on my clit. He presses against the bundle of nerves with just the right pressure and rubs small circles as I continue to ride him.

A cresting wave washes through me from the base of my spine, creating a haze over my mind. My muscles clench and freeze, my knees draw up close to my chest, and my body convulses. Stars explode behind my closed eyelids. All sounds beyond those of my heart pounding to the beat of the hard rain on the roof are lost.

Kain’s hips jerk up twice, and he grunts something incoherent as his cock twitches inside of me, his hand, still on my hip, holds me down against his body in a punishing grip,

one I'm sure will bruise tomorrow. Not that I really care all that much right now.

When our bodies finally still, Kain wraps his arms around me and pulls me close, kissing the small cut along my collarbone one more time.

"Eden, I don't really know what to say. I'm no good at this relationship stuff." Kain's confession breaks something inside of me, and I look at him.

"Good, then we'll figure this out together," I tell him and place a soft kiss on his lips.

He gives me a squeeze before lifting me and sitting me beside him. My walls flutter at the sudden emptiness without him inside of me. He rips off the condom, ties it off, and drops it into a plastic bag he pulls out of a duffle bag stored in the corner of the trunk. Then he tucks himself away, and I pout, eliciting a laugh from him.

"Don't worry, little killer. You can have him back later."

"Good," I say with all the seriousness I can muster before breaking into a fit of laughter.

He pulls out a pair of grey sweatpants and holds them out for me. I tear off the remnants of my yoga pants and slip into his sweats, rolling the waistband to keep them in place.

"Stay here, I'm going to turn off the lights and lock up," Kain says, kissing me hard and running back to the warehouse.

Touching my lips as though I can hold the feel of Kain on them, I pull Kain's jacket tight around me and sit with what feels like a stupid grin on my face and heat filling my cheeks.





“WHAT ARE YOU STARING AT?” Kain asks, snapping his gaze quickly to me and back to the road.

“Nothing,” I singsong with a smile, facing forward and watching out the front window.

“You were staring at me, why? Do I have something on my face?”

I lean over the center console and inspect the side of his face. “Yes, you do have a little something right here.” I lean in closer and drop a kiss on his cheek. “There it is, right there,” I say and poke his cheek where I kissed him.

Kain’s face and neck redden with a feverish blush, and I kiss him again.

“You’re so cute when you blush,” I say, grinning. I haven’t felt this lighthearted in, well, forever.

“I am not blushing,” Kain jovially snaps.

A halo of white light brightens his face from the side. He looks in my direction, and the look of terror that fills his expression sends confusion and trepidation coursing through me.

“Wha—” I start, unable to finish when Kain’s arms wrap around my head, and he pulls me roughly down to the center console and covers me with his upper body.

A sharp pain slams into my hip, and the SUV tips to the side. Kain’s arms tighten around me, pinning me in place. I squeeze my eyes shut as the world spins around me. A cacophony of sounds and smells assault me. Crashing and

metal scraping on metal, glass shattering, horns blaring. The smell of maple syrup, gasoline, and smoky chemicals.

Cool liquid drips on my face from above me, jarring me awake.

*What? When did I fall asleep?*

My head hangs awkwardly to the side, and my body is draped over the center console. Bracing myself against the solid plastic, I force my aching body to a semi-upright position and wince when a sharp stabbing pain in my side flares to life. Razors slice into my neck and arms. And numbness travels down my right leg.

“Kain,” I croak, my throat blazing with fire as though I’ve swallowed acid with a dusting of glass.

I reach for my seatbelt, needing to get upright better, and a scream escapes me, the pain in my side freezing me in place. Tentatively, I reach for my right side, but find something smooth and sharp instead. I twist, reaching further, and slice my finger on a large shard of glass.

The low hum in my ears since I opened my eyes morphs into a ringing that continues to intensify. I attempt to focus on what’s around me, but with each movement of my head, my vision blurs around the edges.

*Where is Kain?*

Scanning the SUV, it all finally clicks. The SUV is on its side, and I’m basically sitting on the center console with a large piece of glass sticking out of my side. But where the fuck is Kain?

“Kain,” I cry, fear and pain riding me hard.

I suck in a deep breath and reach for the glass in my side again. I wrap my hand around it and count to three.

“One. Two. Three.” I pull quick and hard with a cry. “Fucking. Son-of-a—mm.” I bite down on my bottom lip and try to control my breathing and heart rate. I need to get out of this car and find Kain.

*Pain is your friend, Eden. Remember, it tells you you're alive. Now, breathe dammit.*

I breathe deep and slow my heart, not wanting to bleed out from the hole in my side before I find Kain.

*Breathe.*

The windshield is mostly gone. I cover my hands with the sleeves of Kain's jacket and carefully crawl through the open space. I fall on my ass once I get out of the truck and gag as I inhale a lungful of gas fumes.

Standing, I scan the area and throw a hand over my mouth and limp as I attempt to run to Kain's unmoving body lying in the middle of the road.

"Kain. Kain." I drop down beside him and tap him on the cheek, trying to wake him up. "For fuck's sake, Kain, wake the hell up."

Pain shoots through my side, reminding me I have a hole there. I slip my arms out of Kain's jacket and tie the sleeves tight around my waist to apply pressure to the laceration.

Headlights click on one by one in front of me and a large, imposing figure steps out in front of them. I lift a hand, trying to shield my eyes and get a better look at the man.

"It's time to come back, Eden."

*Sid. Shit.*

Kain coughs and rolls to the side. A sigh escapes me, a brief moment of relief. He gets to his hands and knees and looks up at the light of cars and silhouette in front of us. "Get behind me," he rasps, spitting a mouth full of blood on the ground.

"Kain—"

"Get behind me, Eden," he growls and stands. "What do you want, Sid?" he shouts to the other man.

"I'm here for her. Hand her over, and I'll consider not killing you." Sid walks in our direction, three men following close behind him.

One of Kain's arms dangles from his shoulder. Blood runs down his face from a gash in his head. His body is littered in cuts and scrapes, and a long cut runs from his left hip to his knee. He reaches into his pocket and pulls out the switchblade from earlier. The same one that's attached to one of the happiest moments in my life.

"You better kill me then, because you're not getting to her otherwise," Kain says and takes a step forward, thrusting the blade in Sid's direction.

"As you wish," Sid states, and meets Kain's attack with his own. He grabs Kain's injured arm. Kain roars in pain, momentarily distracted. Sid takes the blade from Kain's hand and thrusts it into his abdomen.

Time slows to a crawl, and the world grows silent. Shock freezes me in place. Shaky breaths and inaudible sobs rack my body, and ice fills my veins once more.

Kain's sorrowful gaze meets mine as he sinks to the ground at Sid's feet. Light from the overhead streetlamp reflects off the hilt of the knife sticking out of his stomach.

I take a step forward, but Kain stops me with a shake of his head and bloodied mouthed, *no*.

Sid reaches down and wraps his hand around the handle of the blade. He looks up at me and the smirk plastered to his face fills me with a mix of hatred and horror. Everything in me is pushing me to run to him, to stop him from what he's about to do. Only the look in Kain's eyes keeps me rooted in place.

The thunder of approaching engines cuts the silence, echoing off the surrounding buildings and growing louder with each passing second.

"Shit," Sid grates out through clenched teeth, tearing the blade from Kain's stomach violently and drops to the ground beside him. "Grab the girl, and let's go."

New headlights illuminate the area, and Sid's men all take a step back.

"Leave her, we'll get her next time," Sid shouts over the roar of motorcycles surrounding Kain's overturned SUV. They

pile back into their cars and take off.

I race to Kain's side and kneel beside him, covering the opening in his stomach with my hands and pressing down. His eyes are shut, and blood pools around him. I touch his cheek, flinching at how cold he is. "Shit. Shit. Shit."

A man approaches. He reminds me a lot of Xavion with his dark complexion and large eyes, but with a teardrop tattoo under the outside corners of both eyes.

"Hey, chica, what happened here?" he asks, getting closer.

Frantically, I look around for anything I can use as a weapon. A glint of light under Kain's hip catches my eye. I pull the gun out from beneath him and point it at the approaching man.

"Stop," I say quickly and a little too wobbly.

The man throws up his hands. "Hey, it's okay. I'm a friend. My name is Darnell, and Kain there is a friend of mine."

"I can't know that. How do I know you're telling the truth?" My mind goes fuzzy, and the world starts to tilt. My arm holding up my hand with the gun grows heavier until it starts to give, but I hold steady and force it to stay up. I have to protect Kain.

"I'm going to slide you my phone. Call Lucifer. He'll tell you that you can trust me." Darnell crouches down and slides a phone across the lot. Already lit up on the screen is Lucifer's name and his phone number.

Without picking it up, I quickly hit the call symbol and tap the speaker button.

The phone rings—once, twice—and doubt fills my mind.

*What if he doesn't answer? What do I do then?*

*Do I trust this man I don't know? How do I get Kain help?*

I stare down at Kain, his ghostly white complexion, the bright red stain growing on his white shirt under my bloody fingers. A soft click echoes from the speaker of the phone.

Lucifer's voice crackles down the line and I nearly fall apart in relief.

"Darnell, what's going on?"

"Lucifer," I cry. "Kain—" I swallow, trying to regain my composure.

"Eden? What are you doing with Darnell's phone? Where's Kain?"

I cough and start again. "We were on our way back, but Donovan's men caused us to crash. Kain was stabbed, he's hurt bad. Darnell scared them off, and he's here now, but I don't know them, he told me to call you."

"You can trust him," he says. "I'll call Wyatt and get him here. Let me talk to Darnell."

"I can hear you, man," Darnell says, having walked closer while I was distracted.

"Bring them to me." Lucifer's voice breaks, and a long pause crackles along the open line. "Please."

"We're on our way." Darnell bends down and picks up the phone, and I lower the gun, almost dropping it.

"Boss, get up here," Darnell shouts, and an older man with a salt and pepper beard on a bike with a sidecar pulls up close to where we are. Darnell slides his hands under Kain's shoulders and knees, scooping him up like he weighs nothing at all and carries him over to the sidecar, carefully placing him inside of it. He takes off his jacket and ties it around Kain's middle, stemming some of the bleeding.

I'm still sitting in the same position when he walks back over, my body trying to shut down, and my mind trying to throw up walls to block out the trauma.

Strong hands grab me by my biceps and haul me to my feet. "Not yet, chica. We need to get your man home quickly, and I need you to stay present so you can ride with me. Understand?"

I nod and walk towards the only vacant bike, assuming it's his.

The rain finally stops, and I climb on the back of his bike, not caring about the wet seat. He drops a helmet on my head and explains what he wants from me as his passenger.

“Lean into the turns, not against them, okay?” I nod along with each new instruction he gives me until he climbs on in front of me, kicking the bike to life. He takes my hands and tucks them into his jacket pockets. “Since I don’t have gloves for you, leave them there so you don’t lose a finger,” he shouts over the roar of the engine, and we lurch forward.



“PUT HIM ON THE TABLE,” Wyatt commands, grabbing his bag from next to the sink on the far wall.

Darnell carefully lays Kain on the exam table, seeming reluctant to move away. “He regained consciousness for a few seconds before blacking out again when I picked him up out of the sidecar.”

“You did good, Darnell. Now, take a step back, and let me do my thing,” Wyatt tells him, trying to keep his tone light and professional but also conveying the seriousness of the situation.

Wyatt places monitor leads on Kain’s chest and side near his heart and studies the output for a second. A part of me wants to demand he stop standing there and get to work fixing my brother, but a more rational side knows he’s in control, that he’s doing what he needs to in order to properly treat Kain.

“He’s in hypovolemic shock, we need to get the IV hooked up, and he needs oxygen. If you’re not either injured or here helping, I need you to leave the room. Lucifer, did you bring those blood bags up I asked for?” Wyatt blurs around the room barking orders and hooking Kain up with an IV and oxygen.

“Yeah, they’re in the cooler under the window,” I reply.

*“With the lives you two lead, I’m sure one of these days, this will come in handy,” Wyatt says, hooking Kain and I up to blood donation kits. “Starting your own personal blood bank is a smart idea.”*

He was right all those years ago after we almost lost Kain to a gunshot wound that required a transfusion of three units of



blood. Today, I'm grateful we listened and maintained that supply downstairs.

“Great, let's get one bag set up, and I need you to monitor his vitals while I close up these major wounds and stop the bleeding.” He carefully unties the sleeves of Darnell's jacket, replacing it with a handful of gauze. “I'll say this now, Darnell just might have saved his life by tying this jacket around his abdomen the way he did.”

I hook a blood bag up to the IV Wyatt put in place and stand to the side. For the first time, I notice Eden standing in the corner, her face white as a sheet, her eyes red rimmed. Her body is covered in small cuts and scrapes, but otherwise she appears to be okay, just in shock.

“Eden,” I whisper and get no response, not even the smallest of reactions to her name.

Wyatt sets to work in silence, cleaning and closing the worst of the wounds before dismissing me.

I walk to Eden, stopping directly in front of her. Her eyes are fixed on Kain, blind to everything else. I place my hand on her side to silently guide her to a seat. A cry of pain tears from her and she doubles in on herself, clutching at her side.

“Eden, what the hell happened?” I ask a bit too brusquely, pulling my hand away quickly.

“I'm fine,” she whimpers, wrapping an arm protectively around her waist while using the other to brace herself against the wall. “Kain's the one we need to be worried about.”

“You're obviously not fine. Tell me what the fuck happened to you.” My anger rises the longer I'm left in the dark. The longer she defies my order.

“Lucifer,” Wyatt says in a calming manner from behind me. “Why don't you let me take a look at her? One of us will be out to update you as soon as we're done.” He places a hand on my shoulder and not so gently guides me out the door. “Trust me,” he whispers before shutting it in my face.

---

“EXPLAIN IT TO ME AGAIN,” I command Darnell as I pace the hall outside of the room. Knowing my brother and girl are injured on the other side of the door and there isn’t a fucking thing I can do to help is driving me insane.

“I’m not sure how many other ways I can explain this to you, man. We rode up, spotted the flipped SUV, caught sight of your girl being surrounded by a bunch of thugs. We got closer, and the guys bolted. I saw your brother unconscious on the ground. I approached them and—”

“This was Donovan’s doing,” Eden chimes in, cutting off Darnell.

“What are you doing? You should be lying down,” I growl at her, pointing back to the medical room.

“I’m done sitting on the sidelines, Lucifer. I’m not some damsel in need of fucking saving. Not anymore.” She stands taller, holding her head high and shoulders back, despite her injuries.

“No, you’re a butterfly caught in the spider’s web full of dangerous men who will stop at nothing to make you theirs.” I know she’s not a damsel, she’s so much stronger than she knows. The willpower this woman has to survive, to push through anything thrown at her, is unfathomable.

“And does that include you?” she asks, a glimmer of what I can only describe as hope in her eyes.

I must study her a moment too long, because once she breaks eye contact with me, she doesn’t look back. “Besides, I have information you guys need.”

“She’s not wrong. Other than Kain, she’s the only other person who was present for the whole interaction. You want the full story? There it is,” Darnell states, gesturing to Eden. “Besides, as I was about to say, when I approached your little hellcat here, she pulled a mother-fucking gun on me. She’s a fierce one, this girl. She wouldn’t let me get close until you

spoke directly to me, and she heard you ask me to bring them here.”

I look from Darnell to Eden, surprised by what he’s tell me. “Really?”

“Of course, if I wanted to get close, I could have without a problem. She had the safety on the whole time,” he says with a chuckle.

Darnell’s words take a moment to penetrate the haze of concern for my brother and the woman in question covering my mind. “Wait, what?” I look at Eden, and she shrugs.

“What? I never held a gun before, let alone shot one. I had no fucking clue what I was doing.”

Laughter from all three of us fills the corridor at her pronouncement.

“God, I needed that,” I say, holding my side that’s now aching.

“He’s going to be okay,” Eden says, standing beside me, although the tears filling her eyes and the quiver of her chin tell me she’s trying to convince herself as much as she is me. “He has to be.” She looks down at her hands. Clutched tight in her right hand is a silver handled switchblade.

I study her body language, her expression, looking for what she’s not telling me, and something in the back of my mind clicks. He finally cracked and let her in; she made it past his walls. I can’t stop the sad smile that spreads across my face for Kain.

*Fucker, you better pull this off, or I’ll bring your ass back from the hereafter, kick it, and send you back.*

“Oh, butterfly.” I pull her into my arms, careful of her side, kissing the top of her head, and hold her to me. “Of course, he is. Wyatt’s the best, and Kain’s been in worse scrapes than this before.”

She nods into my chest, her free hand fisting my shirt, and sniffs back tears.

“All right. Tell me what happened today.”

Eden releases my shirt and takes a step back. The loss I feel when she's not in my arms is palpable, and an ache forms in the center of my chest. I rub my fist over the spot, attempting to ease some of the pain I feel.

“Kain took me out to his warehouse, and on the way back, Sid and his men caused us to crash. Kain must have been thrown from the truck because I found him lying unconscious in the road when I managed to get free. He came to in time for Sid to approach, but he was really weak, and one of his arms was dislocated.”

He took her to the warehouse? He never takes anyone there, at least not a willing person. Kain's warehouse has always been his safe place. One he never shared with anyone. I've only been there a handful of times over the years. The fact that he took her there shows how much he wants to trust her ... Or how much he already does.

I pinch my thigh, the shock of pain helping me to leave my minefield of questions and refocus on Eden and her story.

“Sid managed to overpower him and take his knife.” She shuts her eyes as she squeezes the blade in her hand. “He stabbed him with it, with this blade. Shortly after that, you,” she says then looks to Darnell, “and your crew showed up. He would have taken me if you hadn't been there. Thank you doesn't seem like enough.”

“Hellcat, I'm sure you would have put up one hell of a fight. You've got fire inside of you.”

Eden smiles under Darnell's words. The look lightens a little of the darkness swimming inside my mind.

*Why the fuck would he take her to his warehouse?*

*What the hell happened between them?*

*Was this Virgil or Donovan's hit?*

*Who was the real target?*

“Were they after you or was this a hit on Kain?” I ask bluntly, my mind whirling with unanswered questions.

“He was there for me. But I don’t know how they knew we would be on that road or that I was even with him.”

“I don’t know, but I’m wondering the same thing. They might know about Kain’s warehouse. We need to deal with it just in case.”

“Shit. Lucifer ... In the warehouse ... If they know—”

“I know what he does at the warehouse, butterfly. Don’t worry, I’ll take care of it,” I tell her, turning to walk away.

A small hand grabs my arm in a rough hold, stopping me in my tracks. “No.” Eden takes a shaky breath, and her thumb rubs nervously over the mechanism to release the blade of the knife in her hand. It’s apparent she’s warring with how much information she should share about whatever took place tonight with Kain. “I did it.” Her voice is small, shy. “There’s a man there at the warehouse. He’s dead. I’m the one that, well Kain finished it, he wouldn’t let me, but I’m the one that did everything else.”

“Who was it?” I ask her, trying to understand her trepidation.

Her eyes meet mine; rage and shame fill her gaze, and I understand her hesitation. Whoever it is had hurt her deeply, but the side of her holding tightly to hope and light makes her feel guilty for whatever retaliation she inflicted on them.

“Paul,” she growls, venom dripping with his name.

“Baby, he deserves everything you gave him and more. If it makes you feel any better, I’d bet he got off easy.”

Her eyes narrow and her mouth twists into an expression of wrath and irritation. “He did, and that’s my fault. I wanted to do so much more to him. I wanted him to experience everything he put me through, including when he forced himself on me. I wanted to take one of the poles lying around and ram it up his ass.”

I bite the inside of my cheek to keep from laughing at the image her last declaration sparks in me. The poetic justice would have been a sight to behold.

She closes her eyes and takes a deep breath. “In the moment, though, everything came rushing to the surface, all the pain, anger, sadness, just—everything, and I got lost inside my head, unable to focus on him and what he put me through. Kain pulled me out and stopped me from killing him.”

I step closer to her and place my hands on her shoulders. She looks up at me with watery green eyes. “I’m glad Kain did that for you. It’s one thing to wish a man dead, it’s another to be the one to pull the trigger.”

She nods and gives herself a full body shake, schooling her expression into one that reads no-nonsense again. “So, what do we do now?”

I drop my arms and stand to the side so I can speak to them both. “First, I deal with Kain’s warehouse. Then, I call a meeting of the network leaders. I want you,” I look at Eden, “to speak with them. Bring Virgil’s crimes into the light. We need to gain their support against him and Donovan. I also want them to know what happened today. If, and that is a small if, Kain doesn’t survive, I will kill Donovan and anyone that gets in my way. They need to understand that. Once we have their support, we storm the club and take out Donovan and Virgil.”

“You make it sound so easy,” Eden says, shaking her head.

“Unless the network wants their dirty laundry aired for all the world to sniff, they won’t have a choice but to side with us this time. This time, I’m not taking no as an option.”

A chuckle escapes me at the expression of confusion that crosses Eden’s face. “Sometimes it pays to be hired to clean up others’ messes.”

“So, you have a little black book of your own, do you?” A wicked, satisfying grin passes her face and I offer her one of my own with a nod.

“There’s too much at stake now.”



PICKING UP MY PHONE, I press the side button to illuminate the screen. No missed calls. No new messages.

“Dammit,” I whisper shout, nearly slamming my phone back down on my desk.

“Anything?” Jax asks, filing the last of our most recent closed case notes.

“Nothing, it’s been four hours since he called.” A maelstrom of emotions war inside me. Worry for Kain, not knowing if he’s all right is killing me. But a stronger feeling of frustration with Lucifer for not keeping me updated, drowns out some of my concern.

“I can finish up here if you wanna take off and go check on them,” Jax offers, waving towards the exit.

“Are you sure?” I ask, already standing from my desk and gathering my things.

“Yeah, man. Go check on your brother and girl. I got this.”

“She’s not my girl but thanks, I owe you one,” I say, slapping him on the back and rushing from the precinct.

I sit in a daze, staring up at the old Victorian house. *How did I get here?* I don’t remember stopping at red lights or stop signs. *Did I hear any horns or sirens?* Isn’t there a name for this feeling? *Highway hypnosis, that’s it.*

I give my face a little smack to knock some the fuzz from my mind and convince myself to get out of the car.

Walking through the front door, I’m hit with the ominous *beep ... beep ... beep* of a heart monitor echoing through the large foyer from down the hall to the left. I follow the sound to

the room they use as a makeshift emergency room and come to an abrupt stop, frozen in the doorway. A sinking hole of regret and apprehension form in the pit of my stomach at seeing Kain lying in a hospital bed, pale and lifeless.

“You can sit with him if you’d like.”

I startle, not expecting anyone else to be in here. Though, I’m not sure why. It’s not like they’d leave him alone in his condition.

Standing at the foot of the bed, Wyatt glances up at the monitor screens and jots notes on a chart housed in a metal clipboard.

“Just tell me, is he going to be okay?” My voice is colder than I mean it to be. A sad attempt to hold my composure, refusing to let the confusing emotions whirling around in my chest out. I rub a fist over the ache forming behind my sternum.

“That’s really up to him. If he wakes up in the next twenty-four hours, I’m hopeful he’ll make a full recovery, of course, that doesn’t mean he won’t have a long difficult road ahead of him.”

“And if he doesn’t?”

“He lost a lot of blood, and there’s no telling how much damage it did to his organs, especially his brain.” Wyatt hangs the chart back on the end of the bed. “But Kain’s one tough son of a bitch,” he says, walking over to me and places a hand on my shoulder. “Have faith in him.”

I nod, and step to the side, allowing him to exit the room. Alone, I take the vacant seat next to Kain’s bed. Leaning forward, I rest my elbows on my knees and stare at his bruised and battered face.

“Shit, Kain. I never thought I’d ever be sitting in a position like this. Of the three of us, you were always the strong one. Lucifer was the leader, always seeming to have the answers, but it was your strength that always pulled us through any situation we found ourselves in.”



My hands shake where they hang between my knees, and I ball them into fists. “How the fuck did we get here? We were supposed to be brothers until the end. We chose each other. Loyalty to the bond, right?”

I stand, running my fingers through the rat’s nest of hair at the top of my head, closing my fist around it and giving it a tug. I drop my hands and walk around the chair, gripping the back and leaning over it. “Dammit, I can’t do this anymore.”

“Can’t do what anymore?”

I glance up to the doorway, Edward leans against the frame. His knowing gaze cutting through me and seeing way too much.

“I don’t fucking know.”

“Who are you trying to lie to? Me? Or yourself?”

I stare at the man who practically raised me, and the walls I’ve held tightly in place for years crumble at my feet. “I miss my brothers. Life isn’t the same without them in it. But I don’t know how to move past my anger.”

“It’s not anger you feel, Son, it’s grief.” Edward pushes off the frame and takes the seat on the other side of the bed.

“You cared for that girl, and you took her to the one place you thought she’d be safe; to your brothers because you knew you could trust them. But the unthinkable happened instead; she paid the price, and you were left behind to mourn her loss.”

“How do I forgive a betrayal of trust?”

He leans forward and takes Kain’s hand, holding it between both of his. “Was it really betrayal though?”

“What do you mean? He went behind my back to the network?”

“Why did he go to them?”

“To take out Donovan without retaliation.”

“No, Son. Why did he tell you he did it?”

The old conversation and the look on Gemma's face rush to the forefront of my memory.

*“Daemon, I know you want to take down Donovan. You want him arrested. You want him to stand trial and answer for the crimes he's committed against this city, and not only Gemma, but all the other women in his employ. I understand that, and I'm all for it. But let me ask you this. Do you truly believe that he's going to let her,” Lucifer nods in Gemma's direction, “and the other girls go after they put themselves front and center to testify against him? Do you really think he can't reach them from behind bars?”*

“He didn't really say why. He just asked if I thought Donovan would let her and the girls go after they testified against him. The fear in Gemma after he asked that question ... For the first time since joining the police force, I truly considered blurring the lines of right and wrong.”

“This isn't news to you, Daemon, you already knew all this. Anger has a way of morphing our outlook on situations though.”

“No ... No, Lucifer's only ever wanted power. Ever since we were kids, he wanted to lord over us, he wanted to be in charge. He wanted Donovan's position then, and he's still vying for it now.”

“After everything the three of you have been through, do you truly believe your brother is that selfish? Do you not believe he wants you to be happy, to find peace in this world? Or Kain?”

I look down at Kain. “I don't know.”

“Lucifer has always walked the morally grey line, but one thing that has always been at the top of his priority list is the wellbeing of his family. He always put you before himself. He has since you were kids.”

“But—”

“No,” Edward growls, standing from his seat, looking every bit the stern father he had to be when raising three boys with dark pasts and poor attitudes. “You need to understand

Lucifer. He will only ever look out for you and the ones you love, no matter the cost to himself. He put himself on the line to protect her.”

He walks around the bed to stand in front of me and places a hand on my shoulder. “I’m sorry she’s dead, I understand you cared for her deeply. But forgive your brother and put the blame where it actually belongs.”

He slides his hand up to the back of my neck and pulls me down into a hug. The big bear hugs he used to give us after every outburst, every nightmare, every time we rebelled. He somehow always knew what was going on inside our heads even if we didn’t fully understand it ourselves. He never got mad, rather he loved us through the hard times while we learned to trust someone again.

“Blood doesn’t always mean family, Daemon. Sometimes family are the people we choose to love, people who stand beside us regardless of our faults.” He places a kiss on my cheek and leaves me alone again with an unconscious Kain.

I grab Kain’s hand, giving it a squeeze. “I need you to fight, brother, so I can fix this.”

---

“WE’VE ALREADY BEEN over this. You need to take time to heal. If you jump back into training now, you’re liable to do more harm to yourself than good. For two weeks, no lifting, no strenuous exercise, nothing more than light walking to stay active. Four weeks out, I can give you some stretches to get your abdominal muscles loose again. Six weeks from now we’ll reevaluate your side and see where you are in the healing process.”

I stand in the doorway of Lucifer’s office taking in the scene before me. Wyatt is trying to quell the anger mounting in the little slip of a woman who looks like she might just tear his eyes out if he doesn’t back down.

“Eden you’ve heard what Wyatt has to say on the matter. There will be no more training right now. I will lock the

basement if I must to ensure you obey orders.”

Eden’s eyes blaze with fury, and if looks could kill, Lucifer would be dead six times over with the look she’s shooting him at that pronouncement.

“Excuse me,” I say taking a step into the room.

“Daemon, I didn’t hear you come in,” Lucifer says, coming around his desk and holding out a hand to me.

I accept his hand and pull him in for a quick hug. *Time to mend some bridges and extend a more permanent olive branch.*

Releasing him, I take a small step back and tuck my hands into my jean pockets. “I came to check on Kain and Eden. I hadn’t heard from you since your first call, and I was concerned.”

“I’m glad you’re here. I’m sorry I haven’t been able to update you yet, I’ve been dealing with a lot.” He gestures to Eden, and she huffs, crossing her arms over her chest.

“I might be able to help here,” I tell them, stepping closer to Eden. “Wyatt, if you’re okay with it, maybe I could work with Eden while Kain recovers. I suffered a similar injury a few years ago. A stabbing in my side. I still remember the physical therapy routines and maybe for the first few weeks, we can go over other safety tips that don’t require a lot of physical strain.”

Wyatt looks me over and I give him a nod, silently asking him to trust me. He looks to Lucifer, who also nods. “Okay, but please take it easy.”

“I promise to be gentle with her.”

“Hey, I’m standing right here, you know,” Eden chimes in, waving a hand in the air.

“Yes, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to ignore you. I need to finish up a case, and then I can take some time off. I’ve never taken a vacation so it might be nice to get away for a little while. Give me a week to close this case, and yourself a week to allow the skin to heal so you’re less likely to rip open your

stitches, and then we'll get started. In the meantime, I'll give you some things to research and study up on. When we do them together, we'll see how fast you can master them. Sound like a deal?"

Eden offers me a wide, genuine smile and sticks out her hand. I place mine in hers, and she gives it a firm shake. "Deal," she says. Looking back to Lucifer, she continues, "See how he just manipulated me into resting with promises of research for future training. That's how it's done."

Wyatt and I laugh, watching Eden's back retreat out of Lucifer's office, an extra bounce in her step and sway in her hips. His jaw hangs open, and I give it a tap.

"So let me make sure I understand this correctly. She knew you were manipulating her, and yet, she's okay with it? Women, I truly don't understand them."

"I've got to head to the hospital and restock some supplies. I shouldn't be too long. Edward is going to sit with Kain, but call me if anything changes," Wyatt says, picking up a large black duffle bag sitting next to the door.

"Will do," Lucifer says, waving Wyatt off. Turning back to me he asks, "So what brings you by?"

"You know she only wants to jump back into training as a distraction from Kain, right?" I inform Lucifer.

Lucifer gives me a solemn nod but doesn't say anything, waiting for me to answer his question.

"Can we sit?" I ask, buying a few extra seconds to gather my thoughts.

Lucifer gestures to the leather chairs in front of his desk. Rather than taking his normal seat behind his desk, he opts to sit in the chair beside me. He sits on the edge of his seat, leaning forward. "What's going on, Daemon?" he asks, his tone softer than before.

"I was wrong to blame you for Gemma's death," I start, holding up my hand when he takes a deep breath to speak. "Let me finish, please."

He nods and sits back in his seat. A conscious effort to seem relaxed. One I truly appreciate.

“I was wrong. I understand why you did what you did, going to the network. You were trying to protect me by protecting her. You’ve always looked out for us. But a part of me felt betrayed by what you did. You didn’t trust me to handle it, and you didn’t trust me enough to come to me with your plan. So, when Gemma died, that betrayal I felt turned to anger, and I just blamed you for her death. I’m sorry for that.”

“I do trust you, Daemon. I didn’t want to put you in a position where you had to choose the law or us. I’m sorry my actions made it seem as though I didn’t trust you and that they hurt you. I never wanted any of this to happen.”

“Can we move past this? If we’re going to keep Eden safe and take down Donovan, there can’t be any mistrust between us.”

“Agreed,” Lucifer says, standing and holding out a hand to me. I take it, and this time he pulls me in for a back slapping hug.

“It’s good to have you back, Daemon. It’s killed me to stay away all these years.” Lucifer continues to hold me, squeezing tighter.

“It’s ... only been ... two years,” I croak out, breathlessly. “You’re ... choking me.”

He lets me go, and I lean my hands on my knees while a rush of oxygen fills my lungs making me cough. Lucifer pats my back. “Damn, kid, did you go weak on me sitting behind a desk all day?”

I stand quickly, my left fist connecting with his lower abdomen. He doubles over with a groan and chuckle. “Okay, you got me,” he says with a moan.

“I thought so.” I walk out, a grin firmly in place. Damn, it’s good to be back.



“TELL me what you learned about zip ties.”

It’s been a week since the attack that nearly claimed Kain’s life and had me almost kidnapped. Since then, Daemon took a leave from work and practically moved into the house—he claimed it was for added security while Kain’s on the mend, I’m not buying it. Kain is recovering, slowly, and hating every second of Wyatt’s physical therapy.

“Listen here, fucker, if you poke me one more time—”

“You’ll what? Chase me down and beat me with your walker? I’m pretty sure I can outrun you, Kain.”

Being witness to the Kain and Wyatt show is rather entertaining and the highlight of my mornings. But in reality, it’s just nice to see Kain with his eyes open and to listen to him grumble. Two days of not knowing what was going to happen was terrifying, the longest forty-eight hours of my life.

Lucifer is gone most days, garnering support for the meeting with the network leaders that has been set for tomorrow. When he is around, he’s locked up in his office, unapproachable, miles away inside his head.

As promised, Daemon and I started training. It’s been a welcome distraction from everything else going on. The research he had me do while I waited included different kinds of rooms you could find yourself locked in and how to escape from them. Lucifer didn’t much appreciate it when Daemon taught me how to overload the electrical outlets, tripping the breakers to short an electrical lock, but I sure did. Talk about holding power in the palm of your hand.

Practicing getting out of being tied up was a harder lesson to get through, but just like with Kain, I worked my way through the panic, and the downward spiral that comes with it. Once I was able to control my body's physical and mental responses, training was actually very ... educational and, well, sensual. Who knew getting tied up could actually be fun if done with the right person?

Here we are, Daemon sitting across from me at a small round coffee table with two white zip ties in his hand. "How would you break free?" he asks, looking at me expectantly. Little does he realize; I know this one.

A smile crosses my face. "There are two ways to get free that don't require assistance or other objects. One is to shimmy out of the bindings, which requires specific hand placements before the ties are tightened into place. The other is breaking the locking mechanism."

"Good, when your side is healed more, we'll practice these." He tucks the ties into his pocket and places his hands on the table, squeezing them together. His face pales, and his eyes twitch. Anxiety pours off of him in waves, and the air around us fills with a nervous energy that causes the hairs on my arms to stand on end.

Leaning forward, I place my hand on his, gaining his attention. Wide, beautiful, honey brown orbs with gold flecks stare back at me. "Daemon, is everything okay?" I ask, and he quickly pulls his hands back.

"Yeah," he croaks and coughs, clearing his throat.

"Why did you choose to be a cop?" I blurt out. The look of shock that passes over Daemon's face is fleeting, quickly replaced with a sigh of relief and a brilliant smile.

He sits back in his seat and seems to ponder a moment before he dives into the story of a youthful man who bounced from foster home to foster home, always getting into trouble, and the kindhearted yet stern police officer who rode him hard to straighten his life out.



“Officer McAllen never gave up on me. No matter how hard I pushed or how often he’d pick me up for stupid little shit, he would just hold on that much tighter.

“How old were you when he first picked you up?”

“I was six. He picked me up for shoplifting a loaf of bread, peanut butter, and a six pack of beer.”

“Are you serious? You were six years old.”

“Sure was. The beer was for my foster mom, the bread and peanut butter were for me. I hadn’t eaten in two days, and I was starving. He went to Edward and asked him to take me in. He’s the reason I found a family. He saw through everything. He got me into sports and attended all my games. When I got to high school, and they asked us what we wanted to do when we graduated, I just knew I wanted to help troubled kids like me. I wanted to be a police officer.”

The pride that radiates from the smile rooted to his face as he talks about the man who helped him become the man he is today, is breathtaking. I can’t stop the answering smile that forms on my lips.

He looks out over the garden in the backyard and stands. “Will you go for a walk with me?” The uncertainty on his face as he looks down at me, waiting for my answer, fills me with warmth.

“I would love to.” I stand and, together, we walk in a comfortable silence.

Daemon leads me deeper into the property to a line of trees leading into a small patch of woods. He stops in front of a tall tree with small pink flowers blooming on its branches and places a hand on the trunk, his finger playing over a carving.

“My first night in Vegas after moving, the three of us walked out here. We’d celebrated a little hard that night, and in a drunken stupor, we came out here and carved our family name into this tree, at least the one we picked for ourselves.”

Stepping closer, I place my hand over his and gently guide it down. “Kinkade. Why did you pick Kinkade?” I ask.

Daemon lifts our hands, turning his over, he slowly glides his fingers between mine, linking our hands together. It's an odd sensation, no one has ever held my hand the way he is, and if I'm being honest with myself—I love the feel of his hand in mine. It feels ... right.

Daemon continues walking, tugging me along beside him. “Kinkade means battle leader. Since the day I moved into Edward's home, years after Lucifer and Kain, they were looking out for me. They welcomed me immediately as if I'd always been there. As I got older, I'd stand beside them to face our battles. Kids at school. Outside forces that were trying to split us apart. Whatever it was, we faced it together.”

I squeeze his hand and smile. “It sounds like you were thick as thieves back in the day. I'm glad you all had each other to lean on.”

“Do you have any siblings? Anyone you consider a brother or sister?”

A small, sad smile crosses my face. “There is one person. She's not blood, but I cared about her like she was my sister. I looked out for her, shielded her from Virgil's ire—or at least I thought I was. Virgil raised her, he doted on her, she could do no wrong. He truly loved her like she was his own. Who knows, maybe she is. Or maybe it's that he's as fucked up as the rest of us, and he had one daughter to feed to his darkness and another to cherish in his light.”

A sudden wave of guilt hits me in the center of my chest, causing me to trip over my own feet. “Oh god, what-if without me there to feed the darkness, he lets it out on her instead? What-if—”

Image after horrid image of everything I've endured at Virgil's hands over the years flashes through my mind like a timeless old movie reel.

“Eden.” The name sounds so unfamiliar and far away.

An invisible force rocks through me, shaking me to the core. Large hands cup my face, and warmth coats my lips. It's a brief touch, there and gone in a second, but long enough to

draw my mind away from the hall of doom it had traveled down.

“Eden.” Daemon’s voice is closer this time. I force my eyelids to open and am immediately drawn into the endless galaxy of browns, coppers, and gold. But it’s the pain I find behind the beauty that roots me back into the present.

“I’m sorry,” I whisper and reach up to wrap my hands around his wrists, slowly drawing his hands away from my face.

“For what?” he asks, the pain that hovered so close to the surface ebbing away.

“I just ... well ... you kissed me, and I—” Heat flares to life in my cheeks, and my tongue forgets how to work.

Daemon laughs. A true, genuine belly laugh. “You’re apologizing because I kissed you. I figured the shock of a kiss was better than the pain of a slap to draw you back.”

An embarrassed-filled chuckle wrenches out of me. “Well, thank you for that.”

“Where did you go just then?”

“I was thinking about what might be happening now that I’m not around to take the brunt of Virgil’s anger.”

“You had to leave. You have to save yourself if you’re going to be any good anyone else. Soon enough Virgil won’t be a problem for anyone. You believe that, right?”

I nod and smile. With my hand in his, Daemon continues walking, leading me off the path to a grassy area under a large tree with branches that seem to weep, creating a canopy. It’s a place I can see myself reading a good book and enjoying the beauty of nature. He sits down and tugs me down to join him.

“Can you tell me what happened during the time between when you lost contact with my brothers and when they rescued you from the party?”

I knew this day was coming, even though a part of me hoped he’d never ask. I pull my hand free of Daemon’s and rub my sweaty palms over my thighs. A faint tremble takes

root in my hands, and an invisible band squeezes around my lungs. Panic wells inside of me, but I refuse it control.

“Donovan forced me to move in with him and made me sleep in his bed. He never touched me, but I always feared he would, so I never slept. During the day, he’d keep me chained in the corner of his office. In the evening, I danced and serviced the VIPs that paid for time with me. But I refused to let Donovan break me, I held onto hope that the guys were coming.

“After the first week, Donovan started letting his men, like Sid, play with me. They’d either come one at a time, or a few times they came as a group. They’d ...” My throat thickens. Hands all over me, in me, violating. Putrid breath making me gag. Laughing, cruel words—

Strong arms wrap around me, and Daemon pulls me into his lap. He holds me tight until the band around my lungs snaps, and all the fight inside of me shatters. I break in his arms, and the tears flow from my eyes. He holds me while I slit open every vein and bleed the horrific memories.

“During the day, it was Sid. Sid and his men that tormented me, and when ... when the sun went down, it was the VIPs.” I dig my hands into the back of his shirt. “Donovan stopped repressing their hunger, and they became more ruthless, more violent. I’d lost all hope of surviving and just wanted it to end. Just let it end.” I shudder. “I stopped eating and started on heavier drugs and alcohol.”

I take a deep breath, drawing strength from Daemon and dive into my hellish nightmare. “I don’t really remember much from the party. I can’t-I-I don’t. In my nightmares of that night, I’m locked in an empty room with a man ... a man with a scar over his right eye. I’m held down. I can’t breathe. I can’t think. Just held to the floor as he r—he r-apes,” I clear my throat, but it’s still dry, “me while cutting on me.”

The cool breeze ghosting over my heated skin, serves to ground my traumatic memories, pulling me from the terror that plagues my nights. I take a deep breath and finish. “The

first true memory I have after leaving for the party is waking up here ... in the medical room with Wyatt.”

Daemon is silent for a long time after I finish my story. As I try to move off his lap, his arms around me tighten. He spreads his legs and allows me to slide to the ground between them, my back resting against his chest and my head on his shoulder.

“Stay with me like this for a moment, please,” he whispers. There’s a roughness in his voice when he speaks. Vibrations travel through his body and into me. His arms tighten, and his fingers twitch where they rest on my hip and stomach.

“Daemon?” I say hesitantly, worried by the mix of emotions I sense from him. Anger and pain being the strongest of them.

“I just need a minute,” he grates out through clenched teeth.

Snuggling deeper into his embrace, I place a hand on his where it rests on my stomach and grip his arm with the other, holding him in place. “We can stay here as long as you need.”

We watch in silence as the sun dips behind the trees in the distance, painting the sky in beautiful shades of yellows, oranges, pinks, and blues. When almost all of the light has faded, and the sky is a deep red and purple, Daemon takes a deep breath. “You know, Sid killed Gemma. To hear what he and his men did to you ... Eden, I’ll—”

“I know.” I tighten my hold on his arm, grounding him. “I am okay. Is it hard to talk about? Yes, of course it is. I had a mini panic attack just thinking about it. Do I still want my pound of flesh from them? Fuck yes, I do, and I’ll have it sooner or later. But am I going to allow them to rule my life, to have control over what I do, how I feel? Not a chance in hell. I’m stronger now, and I’m in control.”

Daemon presses a kiss to my hair. “I know you are. But I still want to kill the man. I want justice for Gemma and revenge for you.”

I lace our fingers together, lifting his hand and place a kiss to each of his knuckles. “That’s sweet of you, and I promise, you’ll have justice for Gemma. I’ll help you get it.”

We fall back into a comfortable silence, watching as the stars blink awake in the night sky. One, then three, then a blanket of dancing light under the bright full moon. A calmness washes over me, wrapped in Daemon’s arms, staring up at the night sky. It’s a feeling I’ve never experienced before.

---

I’M THROWN to the floor, landing on my hip. When I open my mouth to cry out in pain, nothing comes out. I’m shoved to my back and invisible hands grab my wrists and ankles, pinning me in place.

This isn’t right. Where’s Daemon? We were just in the garden gazing at the stars and watching the fireflies dance in the night. How did I get here?

The bite of cold steel skims along the exposed skin of my neck, following the line of my collarbone.

*Not again. Fight back, dammit, fight back.* I scream at myself inside my head, still unable to find my voice.

I will my arms and legs to move, to pull against the hands holding me in place, but my body refuses to obey my commands.

A shiver of cold dread travels down my spine. The fabric of my tank top splits at the collar under the force of the blade. Two large hands grip the neck of my top and yank forcefully, ripping the knitted material in two.

Then my shorts, panties, and bra until I’m lying naked on the cool floor.

*Get up and move your ass, Eden. What the fuck is wrong with you?*

A faint light illuminates the monster with a scar, that bisects his right brow, one I know I've seen before, as he looms over me. Eyes as dark as night holding pure evil in their depths stare down at me. A smirk ticks up one side of his face, and a scream builds in the back of my throat, cutting off my airway.

*No. No. No. Stop. Please, stop.*

The world around me quakes, throwing the man off me.  
*This is new.*

“Eden. Wake up, butterfly. It’s just a nightmare, it’s not real.” Lucifer’s voice is a welcomed light, cutting through the darkness.

“Lucifer,” I whisper, my voice finally coming back to me.

The world goes dark, and I’m thrust down a long tunnel of bright light. Emerging suddenly, panting for air, and sweat cooling on my skin. Disorientation assails me, my vision blurring, and my head spinning.

Lucifer sits beside me, his hands gripping my shoulders. The look on his face is full of concern.

“I’m sorry,” I say shakily between ragged inhalations. “Thank you for waking me.”

He cups my neck and ducks his head to catch my eyes. “Don’t be sorry. I’d be worried if you really were perfectly okay already.”

Tears fill my eyes, a well of mixed emotions clogging my throat. “I’m really not. I want to be, more than anything. In the light, I can control it, but when the darkness comes, and I close my eyes, my mind can’t hold it back, and it all comes rushing forward.”

“Tell me what you need. What can I do to help you rest?” The vulnerability in Lucifer’s eyes, the sincere concern, and desire to help, cracks me wide open. A deep sigh flows out of me, carrying with it a mountain of tension. Leaving behind a bone deep fatigue.

“Will you stay with me, at least until I fall back to sleep?”

Silently, Lucifer stands and lifts the covers. I snuggle in, and he pulls the blankets up over my shoulders. He walks to the door and closes it. Flipping the light switch off, he returns to bed and crawls under the covers beside me. I curl into his side, resting my cheek on his chest. He wraps an arm around me, pulling me in closer.

I breathe deep the warm scents of amber and sunshine, allowing it to fill me from head to toe with a calming energy. I pull myself closer, my body flush against his side, hooking a leg over his. His arm around my back tightens, and his other hand grips mine on his chest. His lips press against the top of my head, and comfort passes through me.

“Sleep, butterfly. You’re not alone anymore. You never will be again. You’re safe here with me.” The deep timbre of his voice lulls me into a state of peace, and I know two things. First, every word he spoke is true, and second, I’ve fallen undeniably in love with the Kinkade brothers.





CANE IN ONE HAND, gift box in the other, I lean against Eden's doorway, watching as she moves with grace around her room. Despite her recent injuries, with the regular training exercises and new diet containing actual food, her body has begun to heal, evident in the way she carries herself and in the smoothness of her movements.

She slips on a black leather jacket over her blood-red tank top, pairing it with the black leather pants that hug her hips in all the right ways, and black combat boots. The complete attire screams sin and seduction, though I'm sure that's not how she sees it. No, with the high blonde ponytail, black eyeliner, and fingerless riding gloves, I'm sure she's aiming for the badass, *don't fuck with me* vibe.

Every cell in my body craves to be near her. To touch her. To strip her down and do wicked things to her until she's crying out my name.

"Knock, knock," I say, and she whips around. Her eyes wide and mouth hanging open. I grin at how utterly adorable she looks. "Surprise."

"Kain," she nearly shouts and speed walks in my direction.

I stand up, leaning into the cane and open my other arm wide to her. "Easy, I'm still recovering."

She slides to a stop and gently wraps her arms around me. "You're up," she exclaims.

"Much to Wyatt's protests. I couldn't let you go to the meeting without me. And I brought you presents." I hold up the gift box, giving it a little shake.

She pulls back and looks up at me with narrow eyes. I bark a laugh, followed by a groan of pain. “Is it a box of nuts from Sid and his men?” she asks, her tone serious and maybe even a little hopeful.

“Not yet, but those will be coming soon enough. I have my own vengeance to seek on them. I was just starting to love that SUV. I finally had it perfumed to perfection with your delicious scent. And they went and crashed it,” I growl the last part, pulling Eden back into me and kissing her hard, biting and sucking on her lower lip until she’s moaning into my mouth.

I drop my forehead to rest on hers and whisper between gasps of breath, “Open. The. Box.”

Obediently, she takes the top off the box. “Oh, Kain. These are beautiful.” She reaches into the box and pulls out the twin boot knives in one hand and the twin daggers in the other. “I don’t know what to say.”

I take the daggers from her hand and place them back in the box. “Let’s get you dressed. Those two,” I point to the knives still in her hand, “are boot knives. You clip them inside your boot, either on the inside or outside of your ankle. For ease of access, I’d clip them to the outside.”

I start to lower myself to the floor, but I don’t make it too far before Eden grips my elbows.

“Kain, stop. What are you doing? You’re still hurt. Besides, I can do it,” she says quickly, an incredulous look on her face

“I just wanted to present my Cinderella with boot knives the way she deserves. With her suitor down on one knee.”

Eden chuckles, shaking her head, and rolls her eyes. She drops to one knee and secures the knives in place. “So, being down here, does that make me both Cinderella and the suitor? Or am I the suitor and you my Cinderella?”

“You’re not funny,” I say straight faced.

She stands and places a hand on my cheek. “Come now, princess, that was hilarious.”

I drop the box and grab Eden around her waist and pull her back into me. “I’ll show you hilarious, princess,” I growl low and bite her just below her ear, where she’s more sensitive. Not hard enough to break the skin, but just enough to edge her into pain before soothing the area with soft licks and kisses.

“Kain,” she moans as I suck deeply on the side of her neck, tasting that sweet metallic tang as blood rushes to the surface.

I release her neck and examine the livid bruise left behind. A marble of purples and blues in a near perfect circle. Eden’s hand flies up, covering my mark, and a possessiveness rolls through me, underlined with anger at her for daring to deny my claim.

“Do not fucking cover that up. Do you understand me?” I growl, snatching her hand away from her neck and biting her inner wrist. “Everyone will know you’re mine by it, or I can have it tattooed to your forehead. Whichever you prefer.”

The irate look she shoots me has me in stitches. Well, trying to pull them at least.

“I thought only your brother was this big of a possessive alpha-hole. I can’t have two of you acting like this, Kain. I’m a human being, not a fucking dog.”

“But the idea of us both wanting to own and possess you—that doesn’t seem to bother you,” Lucifer says, stepping into the room and coming to stand behind Eden, pinning her between our bodies. He leans down and kisses the side of her neck opposite my mark.

Her eyes slip shut, and she swallows hard as her knees give for the barest second. Lucifer pulls away with a wide grin. Clearly satisfied with her reaction.

Eden blinks and pushes back against him, forcing him to take a step back, and puts space between us all. “I—” she stutters, shaking her head. “I grew up on a compound where there weren’t a lot of women. Virgil would group the guys and marry them to a woman to share.”

“Sounds miserable, not having a chance at making a real connection with someone,” I say, and Eden moves further away from Lucifer and me.

“I think it would be, but everyone put on happy faces when they were out and about. Behind closed doors ... who knows what it was like. So no, this,” she gestures between the three of us, “doesn’t feel odd to me. It’s familiar.”

Red hues bloom on her cheeks, and she looks down at the floor. “What about you? Are you okay with where things seem to be heading?” Her voice is timid and shy, the turn of the conversation obviously making her uncomfortable or nervous.

A smile crosses my face, and the beast inside of me purrs with delight at her making a connection between us all. “Little killer, we’ve been heading down this road since we saw you that first day at the bus stop. We were just a little slow on the uptake. For that, I’m sorry.”

“We do things our own way here, and that’s all that matters,” she says, taking one of our hands in hers.

She drops our hands and picks up the gift box with the twin daggers inside. Pulling them out, she drops the box on her bed and holds them out to me. “Show me where these go, please. We have a meeting to attend, and by your choice of gifts this morning, I’m guessing I need to be ready for a fight.”

I hook my fingers into her belt and pull her closer. “It’s a real possibility. But I’m hoping it won’t come to that.”

Her eyes search mine; a pleading look, and I know what she’s going to ask before the question ever tumbles past her lips. “Don’t ask it, little killer. I won’t stay behind. This is far more important than my own safety.”

“He’s right, butterfly. We have to show a united front in this request. If we all don’t go, even with him injured, it’ll look as if we’re divided.”

I unhook her belt and look at Lucifer. He pulls half of her belt free, and I take the daggers—still in their sheath—from Eden and hand them to him. He threads the belt through the loops on the sheath and threads it back through her pant loops.

I refasten her belt and give her a tug for good measure. “All set,” I say, and kiss her once more.

She steps back and reaches behind her, then gives the daggers a light tug, but nothing happens. She pulls again, harder this time, and the audible click of them slipping past their locking mechanism echoes in the room, and she pulls them free.

About the length of her forearms, the light glints off the newly polished metal as she twists them in the air. Her eyes trail over the engravings I had carved into the blades. “What do these say?” she asks, not looking away from the deadly gifts in her hands.

“Maybe I’ll tell you one day after you’ve had more training in how to properly use them. In the meantime, you understand which side to stab the bad guys with, right?”

She rolls her eyes up to me, an unamused expression firmly in place. “Oh, I don’t know. Can I test my theory on you?”

Lucifer laughs and places a hand on my shoulder. “Maybe you should quit while you’re behind, brother. Come on, you two. It’s time to go,” he says and exits the room.

Eden shoves the daggers back into their sheaths, only poking herself twice before slipping them home.

I hold out an elbow, and she accepts the gesture with a smile, wrapping her arm around mine and walking slowly with me towards the garage. “Are you nervous?” I ask her, sensing the tension rolling through her body.

“No. I have you three to protect me. I’m just not looking forward to having to relive the most horrid years of my life ... again. And—”

Silence hangs in the air as we walk. We make it to the door leading to the cars, and Eden stops. I look down and wait.

“You’re going to hear a part of the story you’ve never heard, and you’re not going to like it. I need you to promise me you’ll keep your cool.”

Not knowing the right words to say, I sling my arm around her shoulders and give her a squeeze. She looks up, and I nod. For her, I'd give the moon if she asked. She offers me a sad smile, and I place a kiss on her temple.

---

“THE NETWORK HEADQUARTERS IS A BAR?” Daemon asks as we pull up outside of the local pub.

“No, they're just meeting here today. The network moves, never meeting in the same place twice in a row,” Lucifer explains, exiting the SUV and coming around to open Eden's door. She accepts his hand to help her down, and I slide out after her. A groan of pain escapes me as my feet hit the hard pavement.

“Come on.” Lucifer walks inside, still holding hands with Eden. “We're only two minutes early, and if one of their watches isn't in sync with mine and says we're late, they could refuse to see us.”

I follow Lucifer and Eden with Daemon at my back through the pub to a large solid wooden door. Lucifer raps on the hard surface in a pattern of sequential knocks and the door opens with an ominous squeal.

“Kinkade party and guest, come inside. They're ready for you,” says an older gentleman with frosty hair and weathered eyes that have seen too much.

Walking through the door, I'm immediately hit with a shift in the air. Tensions are high in the room, and my awareness of our surroundings heightens. I count all the possible exits from the room, the number of men I saw in the bar that could be armed, and the number of guards in this room. I know my brothers are both doing the same. Always on guard, always one step ahead of the possible threat.

Don MacBride looks down his nose at us all as we enter but doesn't deign to speak. That 'honor' goes to Marco Alderman. “Lucifer Cole, Kain Hansen, Daemon Wright.

What can the council of leaders do for you this evening?" Alderman asks.

MacBride has been the head of the network for nearly thirty years. He is the longest reigning head and has killed anyone who has dared to challenge him.

Lucifer lets go of Eden's hand, giving her a tiny nudge in my direction. She steps back, and I place a hand on her hip. Lucifer steps forward and places a closed fist over his heart and bows his head.

"Honored council members. I thank you for seeing us tonight. We come to you with an urgent request."

"We know of your request to remove Donovan from power. We have heard your proof of his misdeeds and are ready to give a ruling on that matter. Is there another matter you wish to bring before us today?" Lady Loral asks after cutting Lucifer off.

"There is, my lady. Victor Larson. The same Victor Larson who oversaw the Las Vegas area before Donovan. He's alive and back in town."

The council's whispered murmurs as they play *whisper down the lane* sound like screams in the small space.

"How can you be so sure?" a new council member asks. "He's been dead for years." His eyes wide with fear, but his lips are twisted in hate.

"Dead but not gone. He killed his twin, Virgil, and assumed his identity. He's been reigning over this area by way of Donovan and gaining supporters to overthrow the network."

"What proof have you brought to back up your claims?" council member Smith asks.

Lucifer reaches a hand back for Eden. She steps forward until she's side by side with Lucifer. Her back is straight, her shoulders back, and her head held high. She's so fucking brave. I have to bite my cheeks to keep from grinning with pride at her show of bravery right now.

“Who are you?” Marco asks, and I want to rail. He should know who the fuck she is, he was fucking there.

“My name is Eden, however, for twenty-two years I went by another name, Angelica Larson. Virgil, as I know him, is my stepfather or uncle. It’s all rather confusing. Eighteen years ago, Virgil became a different person because he was. He went from being warm and loving to cold and distant. He beat on me, pimped me out to his second in command, tortured me.

“I escaped and ended up here in Las Vegas under the employment of Donovan, unaware that I’d be forced into sexual slavery. Virgil found out and ordered Donovan to break me. He tried.”

She stares at Marco—a little tip from Lucifer. “He tried so hard, I almost died at a party where he catered entertainment, a little over a month ago. If it hadn’t been for the Kinkade’s finding me there, I would be dead. They saved my life.”

Marco’s breaks her stare and looks down at the table. His face pales. *Fucker.*

“During my time as a captive, Donovan divulged secrets about his time as Virgil’s right hand before he left. He told me about how Virgil killed my father and forced my mother to renew her vows so he could easily slip into the role of his brother. I’m sure he has a lot more to spill.”

“I know the party she speaks of,” Marco says, his voice is flat and a mile away. “You were the girl. The girl who they found bleeding out on my floor.”

She nods. Her right hand shakes at her side, and she closes her fingers into a fist. Her other hand slides behind her back, her fingers playing over the handle of the dagger.

Lucifer places a hand on her back between her shoulders, and her body visibly relaxes.

Lucifer stands tall, his shoulders square. When he speaks, power radiates from him, and all heads turn in his direction. “Leaders, you’ve heard what Eden had to share. We’re here today to ask you to support our request to remove Virgil Larson, Donovan Thorn, and their loyal men who are not



going to take their removal from power well. And after dealing with them, I am formally submitting myself as leader of the Las Vegas area.”

Don MacBride looks over at the other leaders before turning back to Lucifer. “We will review the facts and evidence submitted and get back to you.”

“Kinkade party, please follow me,” the elderly man who showed us in speaks from behind us, effectively telling us it’s time go and shutting down anything else we would want to say.

Lucifer grabs Eden’s hand and follows after the man, not looking back. Daemon steps up beside me, and we fall in line behind Lucifer and Eden.

The ride back to the house is silent, everyone stuck inside their own thoughts. Once inside, Eden heads towards the basement.

“Where’s she going?” Daemon asks, pointing in the direction Eden just went.

“Therapy.”



“OF COURSE, we’ll hold him here until you have a secure location. I’d just appreciate some time with him after you’re finished. And as for—”

“We need him alive, Lucifer. He has a lot to answer for, but when we’re done questioning him, they’re both yours to do with what you will,” Marco assures me, the sound of paper rustling in the background carries over the old landline phone. “Look, I need to go, but you boys be safe, and happy hunting.”

“Thank you, Marco. I’ll let you know when the job is done,” I tell him, and a resounding click tells me he hung up. I place the receiver back on the base and drop my hands to my desk. Hanging my head, I close my eyes and take a deep centering breath.

*It’s fucking happening.* I lift my head, catching Kain’s eyes as he pokes his head through my open door.

“By the vindictive grin on your face, I’m assuming that was good news,” Kain says, walking into my office and taking the seat across from me. His limp is mostly gone, though he still favors his right side when he moves. But damn if it doesn’t feel good to have the weight I felt at almost losing him gone. Having him up and moving is like Christmas morning every time I see him now.

“It was. That was Marco. The council approved all of our requests with one condition.” I tap my fingers on my desk, wondering how he’ll feel about their demands.

“What was their condition?” he asks, fisting his cane harder. For a brief moment, I wonder how I can convince him to stay behind.

“They want Donovan and Virgil alive. At least to start with. Once they’ve extracted the information they need, they’re ours again to finish off.”

He sits back in his chair, his lips pinched in contemplation. “Okay,” he says with a nod. “And they’re willing to name you head of the Las Vegas territory?”

“We take down Donovan and Virgil, and it’s a done deal.”

Kain stands, “Let’s go find Eden and Daemon and fill them in.”

“They’re in the gun range,” I tell him and grin at the shocked look on his face.

“What the fuck are they doing in there?”

“Eden wanted to learn how to shoot a gun. She wants to make sure the next time she points a gun at a stranger on the street that the safety is off.”

Kain busts into a roll of laughter, understanding where the joke comes from having heard the story of her protectiveness over him that night with Darnell.

---

“WHAT AM I DOING WRONG?” Eden’s frustrated voice carries through the hall leading us to the indoor practice range.

“Nothing.” I can practically see Daemon’s amused smile by the jovial tone in his voice. “This is a new gun, and you’re just not used to the recoil yet.”

“But I had no problem with the other gun, why this one?” The slight whine that accompanies the last part of her question sends a bolt of laughter through me. A light breaking through the darkness that always seems to be lurking over my head.

Eden grumbles something too low for me to make out, but Daemon’s answering chuckle and response tell me it’s self-doubt. “Baby, trust me. I’ve never seen anyone pick up a firearm and take to it like you have. Your control is something

to be admired. And this little beauty is just like its owner, it's feisty and powerful and has a bit of bite to it."

I round the corner in time to take in the close scene of Daemon and Eden. In her hand is a new white and silver pistol. Daemon holds her hand with the gun with one hand and, with the other, he runs a knuckle down her cheek. The mounting tension between them is so thick in the air you could almost cut it with a knife.

Eden huffs out a lungful of air. "Give me some pointers to make this thing work."

"Keep practicing, try different stances until you find the one that works for you. Some prefer standing at a slight angle with their shooting foot back and their elbows loose, others like a more boxed stance with locked shoulders and elbows. There is no one way of doing this."

Kain stops a step behind me and takes in the intimate closeness of our brother and girl. "Well, they seem to be bonding quickly," he remarks quietly, but there's no hint of jealousy or animosity in his words, just facts.

"Are you okay with that?" I ask him, keeping my volume low.

"He's our brother, and I want him to be happy. If Eden can help him heal and move on, who am I to try and stop it?" His eyes never leave the pair as they turn and prepare to fire again.

He's right. Eden is strong, stronger than any woman I've ever known. If she can handle all three of us, who am I to stand in the way of what's happening here?

Daemon stands behind Eden and uses his foot to nudge her left one forward. His hands cup her elbows, guiding her arms out straight. She sights the target at the end of the shooting range.

Daemon drops his hands, taking a step back to give her space and directs, "Breathe and squeeze—don't pull—the trigger when you're ready."

I watch the slow rise and fall of her shoulders as she takes a deep breath and squeezes the trigger. The bullet in the

chamber sails through the air, slicing through the paper target that jerks under the force of the hit.

Kain and I walk deeper into the range, coming to a stop behind the couple. “How’d you do?” I ask, and a startled yelp shoots out of Eden.

“Fucking, hell, Lucifer. I could have shot you. What the fuck were you thinking?” Eden slaps a shaky hand over her heart and takes two deep breaths. “Kain, you’re closer. Slap him, please.”

“Kain,” I growl right before a hand connects with the back of my head. “Ouch,” I say, rubbing at the tender spot. “I thought the saying was bros before—”

My feet disappear from under me, and my back slams into the floor with an audible thump. Eden pins me in place, straddling my hips, and pressing one of her gifted daggers against my neck. *Not that I’m complaining.*

“Finish that sentence, and you’ll never speak again,” Eden threatens, bending low, her upper body pressing against me, her breast rubbing against my chest with every breath, and her nose nearly touching mine.

“I wouldn’t dream of it, butterfly,” I reply, a smile plastered on my face.

She tilts her head to the side, a contemplative expression on her face as though she’s not sure she really trusts me. She pulls the dagger away and slips it into its sheath at the small of her back.

“I don’t know if I believe you, but I’ll give you one chance. Just know, I hate that word and all words similar to it,” she says and moves to get up.

Gripping her hips, I sit up, and pull her down into my lap. My desire for this woman ratchets up a notch as the feel of her hot center pressing so close to my own. With a groan, I place a light kiss on her cheek and force away the urge to flip her on her back and press inside her.

“I’m sorry, butterfly. You do know I’d never do anything to intentionally hurt you, right?” It’s more than a question, it’s

my solemn vow to the soul that's stolen my heart without even trying.

"I do," she whispers with a smile.

With a hand tangled in her long golden ponytail, I drag her face to mine and seal my promise with an earth-shattering kiss. "I'll never hurt you, Eden." I whisper against her lips between kisses.

"I hate to break up this tender moment, but I assume you both came down here for a reason other than interrupting our training," Daemon says, standing over us with a forced look of boredom covering the desire burning in his eyes for the woman sitting in my lap.

"Marco called," Kain replies, reaching a hand down to help Eden to her feet. She takes his hand and hops to her feet quickly.

The cool air that fills the space where she just sat burns against my desire.

Daemon's attention snaps to Kain. "What did he say?"

I stand and brush the dust from the back of my pants. "They've approved our requests—all of them—but they want Donovan and Virgil before we end them. Hence, we need them alive, at least to start."

"Fine, so when do we do this? I assume we start with Donovan," Eden mutters as she places the new pistol she was shooting into a dark wooden box sitting on the table along the back wall.

"Nice piece," Kain comments, tracking her every move with his eyes.

A blush tints Eden's cheeks, and she peers back at Daemon. "Thanks. It was a gift from Daemon."

"What do you mean we? You're not getting involved," Daemon protests, his expression firm, with his arms crossed over his chest.

"Listen here, buddy," Eden says, storming over to Daemon and poking him in the arm. "I'll tell you the same damn thing I

told your brother. I'm not some fucking damsel in distress in need of your saving. I'm involved in this, have been since the day I was born. So, whether you like it or not, mister, I will be a part of taking them down."

She takes a step back and inhales a large breath, letting it out slowly. "That being said, I understand your reservations, Daemon. You're afraid history will repeat itself. I respect your feelings on this but understand something—I'm not Gemma. I've been training with Kain and with you. I'm stronger and faster, and I'm not afraid. Not because I think I'm invincible or anything, but because I've already stared death in the face, and he said he didn't want me."

Daemon stares into Eden's eyes, a silent conversation passing between them. He reaches out and grips her shoulders. "Promise me you'll follow our directions and will always stay with one of us."

She reaches up and places her hands over his. "I promise," she says, and steps back. Clapping her hands loudly, she jogs towards the stairs and barks, "Let's go boys, time to get this show on the road."

"Where are you going?" I call out as she takes the stairs two at a time. You'd never know she was still healing with the way she moves.

Stopping mid-step, she spins around and calls back, "To the war room."

"Where the fuck is the war room?" Kain grumbles from beside me, watching Eden's ass as she steps onto the landing at the top of the stairs.

"Fuck if I know," I reply and shake my head, starting up the stairs.

"If I had to guess, I'd say your office, Lucifer," Daemon adds with a laugh.

"God dammit, she better not touch anything." I bound up the stairs after my fluttering butterfly.

Bustling through the open door of my office, I nearly trip over my own damn feet at the sight in front of me. Eden sits—

a glass of whiskey in hand—leaning back in my chair, her feet up on the desk, ankles crossed, and an unlit cigar in her mouth. “What took you so long?” she asks, holding the cigar between her teeth.

“What do you think you’re doing?” I snarl, a little winded and a lot turned on. I tap my fingers against my thighs, the rhythmic action grounding me. “You don’t know the dangerous game you’re playing right now, butterfly.”

“You better run, little rabbit. It sounds like the big bad wolf wants to eat you,” Harley’s voice echoes through the room from my desk.

“Are you on a call?” I ask, walking deeper into my office, my gaze narrowing on my desk.

“Hello, Lucifer,” Harley says with a laugh. “Yes, she called me.”

Eden’s cheeky grin only grows as she shrugs one shoulder. “We need information about Donovan and Virgil’s schedules, and no one is better placed to give us that than Harley. He’s the perfect contact.”

“Well, little killer, aren’t you becoming the master strategist? Pretty soon poor Lucifer here won’t have a job anymore,” Kain states as he and Daemon enter the room and take the only two vacant seats across the desk from Eden.

I stand off to the side, eyeing the woman who thinks she’s in charge. A part of me is proud of the strength she’s grown into and the fact that she’s comfortable enough in my home to play with us, but the other part wants to bend her over that desk and spank her ass a deep cherry red for being so goddamn cheeky. *The little minx.*

“What do you know about their schedules, Harley?” I ask instead as I pick Eden up out of my chair, take my seat back, and place her in my lap. All while she fucking giggles. That high, pure fairy laugh that sends tingles of excitement straight to my fucking cock which twitches under her ass.

“I had actually planned to call you this evening. Virgil and Vincent took off this morning, I’m not sure why or when



they'll be back. But if you're looking for a window of opportunity to take down Donovan without the extra backup, now's your chance."

"Shit, talk about making things move quickly. Any chance you can get your hands on some blueprints of the building?" Daemon asks, sliding to the edge of his seat. "I could get them from the police station but that would garner some attention that we really do not want right now."

"I think so, give me a day, and I'll get back to you."

"Thanks, Harley. We'll wait for your call," I say and Eden leans forward to disconnect the call.

Silents sits heavy in the air, realization that this all really happening filling the space. Absently, I skim my fingers up and down Eden's thigh, inching closer to her inner thigh and a shiver travels up her spine. The dominator in me, loves how her body continues to respond to my touch.

Kain's pocket sings a maddening tone, breaking the spell my linger fingers put over Eden. I glare at my brother, annoyed. He shrugs a shoulder in a *I didn't do it* gesture and fishes the irritating contraption out of his pocket.

"Ollie, what's—what?" A long pause fills with silence, and an angry tension descends on the room. Kain's expression turns cold and calculated, one I've seen hundreds of times in the mirror. One that tells me blood is about to be spilled. "Are you sure? All right, listen, don't do anything stupid, and wait for me." Another brief pause as he listens to the other end. "No. Fucking hell, Ollie. You called me, remember?" he barks in the commanding voice you feel compelled to obey. "If you go in there half-cocked and guns drawn, you *are* going to get yourself, or worse—her—killed. We're on our way, wait for us."

Kain tucks his phone back into his pocket and stands, schooling the pain from his face. "We've got to go."

"What's happening?" Eden asks, concern in her tone.

"Kitty's in trouble, and Ollie's going to get himself killed."



“WHAT THE FUCK do you mean Kitty’s in trouble?” I shoot from Lucifer’s lap, and he groans in protest, his hands still on my hips, refusing to let me go far. My stance is ready for a fight, hands twitching at my sides and itching to wrap around the handles of the twin daggers at my back.

“Ollie got a call from one of the girls. She said Donovan forced her into a VIP room with a guy who took a fancy to her. She can hear Kitty screaming and crying for help. Ollie’s headed there now, and if I don’t get there in time to stop him from doing something stupid, he’s going to get himself killed.”

“What the hell are we doing standing around here then? We need to go.” Fire licks through my body, fueling my muscles and urging me to move.

But what if they didn’t leave? What if it’s Vincent in that room? What if he does to her what he did to me? What if—

The world around me spins and a quake vibrates through me. A strong grip on my shoulders steadies me in place.

*Shit. Shit. Shit. Not now. Not here. Get a fucking grip, Eden.*

“Breathe for me, Eden, everything is going to be okay,” Lucifer says, giving me a little shake to pull me out of my inner ramblings. “I sent a message to Darnell. He’s going to cut Ollie off and hold him until we get there.”

Relief washes over me like a tidal wave crashing over the sand and washing back out to sea, taking all my worries and fears with it. I drop, leaning against the edge of the desk, close my eyes, and breathe through the adrenaline drain.

A hand grips the back of my neck, another rubs up and down my spine. Opening my eyes, a new feeling of warmth and affection fills me. Kain stands beside me, gripping the back of my neck, while Daemon stands on my other side, rubbing soothing circles over my spine. Lucifer's hands move from my shoulders to cup my face, bringing my gaze back to his.

“Kitty *is* going to be okay. Ollie's *not* going to die. And we *are* going to take down Donovan, Virgil, *and* Vincent. We're putting an end to all of this,” Lucifer says, the conviction in his voice settles some of the restlessness inside of me and softens the sharp edges slicing through me. I nod and rest my forehead against his.

Lips press against my temples, and Lucifer pulls back to press his against the top of my head. For just a moment, all the fucked-up shit we have to deal with fades away and it's just the four of us. No cares. No worries. Just us.

The chime of an incoming message breaks through the serene moment, and Lucifer picks up his phone from the desk. “It's Darnell. He's waiting with an extremely pissed off bartender around the block from the club. He'll stay with him until we get there. Harley is on his way as well. Apparently, it was his day off.”

“Should we call Wyatt? What if Kitty needs medical attention?” I ask, standing up and giving myself a full body shake.

Daemon eyes me from head to toe, an assessing gaze that screams his inner thoughts of wanting to lock me away and protect me from harm.

“I'm not staying behind, Daemon. So, get that thought out of your head.”

He blinks and reaches into his back pocket. Pulling out a black wallet, he flips it open to reveal a detective badge and places it on the desk. He looks around the room at his brothers and me. “I know, Eden. That's why I'm not a cop on this one. Donovan doesn't walk away from this. And yes, I think we should call Wyatt in.”

“We should head out before Ollie revolts and tries to take on the whole 402 gang and Darnell kills him,” Kain says, slipping on a black leather jacket.

---

A ROW of metallic chrome and shiny black motorcycles line the side of the road as we crest the hill, coming up behind the club. Darnell, Harley, and Ollie stand surrounded by the 402 gang, the crew Darnell leads.

We park beside the last bike and exit the SUV. I nearly run to Ollie and throw my arms around him. “She’s going to be okay,” I whisper.

Tentatively, his arms come up and wrap around me. For just a second, I infuse all the peace and assurance I can muster into that hold.

Ollie pulls back, and his stony expression returns. “Now that we’re all here, can we get moving? The longer we’re standing around out here twiddling our thumbs, the longer that fucker has to hurt my Kitty.”

*His Kitty? I wish I had gotten that on tape for Kitty to hear.*

“Darnell, are you staying for this?” Lucifer asks, stepping through the circle of men. His cleanly pressed grey suit and shiny black shoes are so at odds with everyone around him dressed in riding boots, jeans, and leather jackets.

“We have one golden rule in the 402. No women—no children. We leave them out of our shit. If you’re about taking down some asshole hurting women to make a buck, then count us in.” Around Darnell, his crew roars in a chorus of agreements.

“Harley, give us the basic layout with all the exits,” Lucifer continues, taking a step back as Harley approaches the center of the group.

Harley’s deep tan, messy black hair, and bad boy persona are still firmly in place. The chain hanging from his hip to the

back pocket of his ripped jeans jangles as he walks into full view.

As he makes his way past me, Harley meets my eyes for the briefest of moments, long enough for me to catch a glimpse of the sadness hidden in their depths. I can't keep my mind from wondering what really happened between him and Virgil the other week. Is he okay? Did something happen to his daughter?

“There are three exits we need to cover. The main entrance. One at the end of the VIP hall that leads into the alley. Finally, one through the back room that exits into the back lot. The main floor is your basic layout, bar, tables, and stage. Across the room from the main entrance is the VIP hall. If Kitty is still in a room, it'll be down that hall. If she's done, she'll either be in the back room or in Donovan's office.

“To the left of the main door is a staircase. There's a short hall at the top of the stairs. At the end is Donovan's office.”

“How many guards?” Darnell asks, cracking his knuckles and rocking from foot to foot.

“Two on the main door, one on each of the others, and on a typical night—five walking the floor. Considering the level of paranoia pulsing through that place lately, I'd expect a few extra men.”

“Not ideal for a crowded place full of patrons on a Friday night, but we can work with that,” Kain states, a meditative and disturbed look on his face. He leans a hip against the SUV and stuffs his hands into the pockets of his dark-wash jeans. For the first time since arriving, I notice he's without the cane.

I walk over and stand beside him. Leaning in, I whisper, “Where's the cane?”

He doesn't look at me, doesn't acknowledge my presence. Purposefully ignoring me.

I huff a heavy breath, laced with frustration, and push off the SUV to walk away from the jerk who can't be bothered to even acknowledge me. I take one step forward, and an arm encircles my waist, pulling me into a hard surface at my back.

“Don’t, little killer,” Kain rasps in my ear, low enough for only me to hear.

“Don’t what?” I whisper back.

“Don’t you dare walk away from me.”

“You ignored—” My words are cut short by teeth closing around my earlobe. My head tilts to the side and my eyes drift shut. The sound of men talking around me fades into the background. My focus wholly zoomed in on Kain’s teeth, his warm breaths ghosting over my rapidly heating skin, and his warm lips now skimming over the column of my exposed neck.

“You’re going to stay beside me the whole time, aren’t you, little killer?” Kain asks, a whisper in my ear before he kisses his way from my ear to my shoulder.

“Yes,” I say breathlessly, my hand sliding along the length of his arm wrapped around my middle.

“Good girl,” he growls, pulling my jacket to the side and biting down on my shoulder.

My eyes pop open and realization dawns. *The fucker just played me.* “Goddamn you, Kain,” I say, shrugging my jacket back in place and taking a step forward. “You can’t manipulate me like that.” Tears threaten the back of my eyes. Pain slices through my chest. An old wound tearing open as someone uses my body against me ... again.

I walk away from Kain and stand beside Daemon. I keep my expression neutral, now is so not the time to deal with this shit.

Daemon looks down at me and over to Kain. He doesn’t say anything, but I can hear the gears turning in his head and taste the question dying to escape his lips.

He slings an arm around my shoulders and leans in. “Stay with me, okay?” I nod my compliance; afraid my voice will crack with the overwhelming gratitude welling up inside of me for this man.

“Daemon,” Lucifer calls out, turning to spot the two of us standing together, “and Eden. You two take Donovan’s office.” Lucifer holds my gaze a second longer before continuing to bark orders.

“Let’s go.” The battle cry goes up, and a chorus of hoots and hollers echo off the red and brown brick buildings surrounding us. Scowls and grumbles of passersby roll off us as we hype ourselves up to take down Donovan.

It’s finally happening. In just a few short minutes, one of my biggest tormentors will finally get what’s coming to him. Doubt creeps in and the what-ifs start anew.

*What if he’s not there?*

*What if the council lets him go after they question him?*

*What if he breaks free?*

*Will he come after me?*

*Would he come after the guys?*

I squeeze my eyes shut and force all doubt and insecurity back into the steel trap of my mind. I will not allow them to take control. This is my mind.

Walking side by side with Daemon, we follow Harley to the main entrance. The pulse of my blood echoes in my ears, drowning all other noises out. Sweat trickles down my back and beads at my temples. My body flashes from hot to cold. Cold to hot.

*Dammit. I am not panicking. I’m not under his control anymore. I’m here to take him down.* I lace my fingers with Daemon’s and give his hand a squeeze. He squeezes back, seeming to understand without words what’s going on. The act grounds me, magnified by the comfort of his nearness.

Harley breaches the front door and quickly takes down the two bouncers. Daemon and I bypass the fray of fighting with Donovan’s other men, hang a left, and make for the stairs, taking them two at a time, and freeze on the landing at the top.

“You can do this,” Daemon says at my back, placing a hand on my hip and giving me a little nudge in the direction of

Donovan's office.

"You're right. I can do this." I swallow and pull my daggers free of their sheaths. *One step at a time, Eden*, I tell myself, picking up my feet and moving along the hall.

Donovan's office door is hanging open, lights on, and blinds drawn looking over the main club floor. "It's clear," Daemon says after inspecting every corner of the room for anyone who might be hiding.

I flip through the papers on the desk, looking for anything that could be incriminating. Finding what looks like a ledger of payments made to Donovan, I slam it shut. They always said, *follow the money*, right? As the cover flops shut, an envelope flies free of the book. Bending down, I pick it up and gasp.

*Little Dove*, is scrolled on the outside in a delicate print.

Daemon walks over and stands behind me. "What is it?" he asks, placing a hand on my shoulder.

I sheathe my daggers and take the envelope in both hands. Dread fills my mind; I know whatever I find here is going to change everything. Steeling my spine, I slide my thumb under the seal. Inside is a single picture of a seventeen-year-old girl with raven hair and large golden eyes sitting in the corner of a small broom closet with a slanted ceiling.

I take a deep centering breath and flip the picture over. "The little raven will pay for your sins," I read out loud then turn the picture back over and trace my finger absently over the marks carved into the wall beside her. "The closet under the stairs," I say in a vacant voice.

"Eden?" Daemon's concern rises as he repeats my name. "Eden. Talk to me."

"A mark for every time I was locked inside this closet."

"Shit," Daemon whispers behind me, punching the wall. "Eden, who's the girl in the photo?"

"C-Charlie," I manage, carefully tucking the photo back inside. "Where are Donovan and Sid?"



I attempt a subject change, but I'm stuck in the center of Daemon's focus, and he's not letting this go.

He glances at this phone and tucks it back into his pocket. "Kain and Darnell got Sid and his men locked down in the back room. Lucifer and Harley caught Donovan trying to escape through the VIP exit. Ollie got Kitty, she's alive. Wyatt will meet them at Ollie's apartment above the bar."

He cups my face and waits for me to meet his eyes. "Who's Charlie, Eden?"

I lick my lips, biting back my guilt. "My sister."



“THANK YOU, all of you, for your assistance today. This would have gone very differently without your help.” Lucifer reappears from the basement with Darnell and his men in tow after locking up Donovan, Sid, and company.

Lucifer offers courteous handshakes and words of thanks to the 402 crew as they leave.

“Are they all locked up and comfortable?” I ask Lucifer, drawing a menacing laugh from him. One of those laughs that send chills of fear skittering down your spine.

“Locked up, yes. Comfortable, not Sid or Donovan.” Shrugging out of his grey suit jacket, he hangs it by the door and undoes the top few buttons of his shirt.

“Did Marco tell you when they’d be ready to transport them to their holding facilities?” I walk into the parlor where Edward sits on the couch, raptly watching Eden and Daemon, who sit curled together on the floor in front of the fireplace. With Eden lounging between Daemon’s legs, her back against his chest. His arms are wrapped protectively around her shaking form.

I sit down on the chair closest to Eden. Anger and concern war inside my mind at the sight of her pale complexion and vacant eyes. I look up and shake my head at Lucifer, conveying the seriousness of the situation.

“What happened in there?” Lucifer asks, taking a seat beside Edward on the arm of the couch so he can be close to Eden.

“Virgil set the whole fucking thing up. He wanted Eden there,” Daemon informs us, his tone hostile. Once again, that

fucker is a step ahead and pulling our strings. I fist my hands in my lap, attempting to hide my anger.

“How do you know this?” Lucifer, once again in leader mode, remains clear headed and asks the questions that need to be asked when all I want to know is who I need to kill.

“He left her a note in a ledger book that contains proof of Donovan’s side dealings,” Daemon continues to replay the events of tonight with Lucifer.

Eden’s expression remains far away, her eyes glued to the dancing orange and blue flames burning in the stone fireplace. Her fingers curl, her nails digging into Daemon’s arm where she grips him as though she’s a feather tossing in the wind and he’s the only tether holding her to this plane.

“Eden,” I whisper, reaching out and running a knuckle down her cheek. She blinks and slowly turns her wide frightened doe eyes on me. “What was the note about, little killer?”

She swallows and shakes her head.

“I can’t help you if I don’t know. Can you show me the note at least?” I try to keep my tone soft and soothing.

She nods, and Daemon hands me an envelope with *Little Dove* scrolled in the same penmanship as Daemon’s black box and Lucifer’s threat. *Fucking Virgil*. I pull a picture from inside and flip it over, reading the back silently to myself.

“Who is this, Eden?” I ask, confused by what her relationship to the girl might be. They look nothing alike.

“My sister, Charlie,” she finally speaks, pulling her knees up and curling in on herself. “I didn’t think. I didn’t know. He’d never—”

I share a look with my brothers and father, unsure what we should do. Consoling guilt is not where my strengths lie.

Edward stands and pulls a foot stool over to sit in front of Eden. He takes her reluctant hands in his and gives them a squeeze. “Eden, my girl, look at me.”

She follows his directions, but the pain and guilt pouring from her is thick and suffocating. “I didn’t know. Didn’t think. He’s never touched her before.”

“I know, darling. Take a deep breath and start at the beginning for me so I can help you figure this out. Can you do that for me?”

Without argument, without question, she follows his lead, mimicking the deep breaths he takes. “Good,” he croons, offering her a sad smile. “Feel better, more focused?”

“Yes, thank you.”

“Now, can you tell us about the girl in the photo?” Edward asks, maintaining a physical connection with her by holding her hands, grounding her in this moment.

“About thirteen years ago, Virgil brought home this little girl and told me it was my job to look after her. She was only four years old, and her parents had been killed—probably by Virgil himself. Anyways, I shielded Charlie from Virgil’s wrath. Always took the blame for anything he found offensive, like crying that was too loud or toys left on the floor. After the first year, something shifted in Virgil, and he started doting on her, treating her like she hung the moon. He’d take her places, buy her pretty dresses. He adored Charlie. I never thought ... I never thought he’d do anything to hurt Charlie.”

She releases Edward’s hands and wraps her arms around her legs. “This is all my fault. I did this to her.”

“No,” Daemon growls from behind her, pulling her back flush against his front. “Don’t you fucking say that. You left to survive; you were no good to her if you were dead. Whatever Virgil had done or will do is on him, not you. He’s only doing this to lure you back there, don’t fall for his games.”

“He’s right, Eden,” I jump in, needing her to hear what Daemon said and understand we’re in agreement.

“Eden,” Lucifer says and waits for her to look over her shoulder at him. “We will take down Virgil and get your sister out of there. If you want, she can come stay with you here.”

Silence fills the air around us, a quiet moment of reflection on the series of events that took place today. The only sounds are the crackling fire and Eden's heavy sigh as her eyes drift shut and she visibly relaxes back into Daemon's hold.

An incoming message notification on Daemon's phone breaks through the comfortable silence. He shifts Eden in his arms and digs his phone out of the front pocket of his jeans. "I've got to go out for a little while," he says, stuffing his phone back into his pocket.

Eden sits up and turns to face Daemon. "Thank you for being here today," she says softly.

Daemon cups her face and pulls her towards him, placing a lingering kiss on her forehead. "We have a lot to talk about, you and I, but not today—soon. Just know there's nowhere else I'd rather be than by your side." He places a kiss on Eden's lips, just a quick peck. Enough to cause a wide smile to cross Eden's face and bring some of the light back into her eyes.

"I'll be back as soon as I can," Daemon says, getting to his feet and heading out the front door.

A long yawn passes through Eden, and her gaze turns faraway. "It's been a long, exhausting day for all of us. Why don't I walk you to your room?" I ask, standing and offering her a hand up. Absently, she takes it, and I give her a tug.

She whispers a sleepy goodnight to Lucifer and Edward, who stand waiting for their turn to embrace her.

Edward places a sweet kiss on her cheek and squeezes her tight. She offers him that sad smile she's come close to perfecting.

Lucifer wraps her up in his arms and devours her mouth with his before pulling away. "Sweet dreams, butterfly."

A high blush forms on her cheeks, and she turns, wordlessly walking to her room and lying on top of the covers. I climb in front of her and pull her to my side. She snuggles closer, burrowing her face in my chest. Tremors of silent sobs vibrate their way through her body.

I wrap my arms around her and hold her tight.

“I’m sorry,” she cries into my chest. Her guilt is palpable in the air.

“Tell me what you’re feeling,” I tell her, and she sniffs back more tears wanting to escape.

“Guilt.”

Glancing down, my heart breaks in two. Eden’s eyes are closed, and a pained expression sits on her face. “For leaving your sister?” I ask quietly.

Her hands in my shirt fist the material tight. “Yes, and for being happy. Donovan is finally out of commission. I’ve found people who actually care about me, and for the first time in my life, I can look forward to tomorrow.” The last few words are said on a sleepy yawn.

As I run my fingers through her hair, a soft moan slips through her lips. Her body grows heavier against mine, and gradually her breathing evens out.

Lucifer cracks open the door, the low light from the hall illuminating Eden’s sleeping form. The pained expression from earlier has mostly smoothed away, and her breathing is relaxed. Lucifer eyes the empty space on the bed behind Eden. He lies down, tucking in close to her back, effectively pinning her between our bodies then rests a hand on her hip, and his chin on the top of her head.

A moan slips past Eden’s lips, her leg finds the space between mine, and she rolls until she’s half lying on top of me. Lucifer sleepily shifts closer. I relax into the pile of limbs and bodies and close my eyes. Allowing the darkness to draw me under.



*“LET ME OUT OF YOUR POCKET.”*

*“Let me out of your pocket.”*

I force tired, swollen, heavy eyelids to crack open. Squeezing them shut again with a groan. I grab the pillow from under my head and hide my face from the bright sunlight filtering in from my open window.

*“Let me out of your pocket.”* The happy, light notification voice calls from my nightstand. Who on earth is texting me so damn early?

Wait, weren't there two other bodies in my bed last night? I sit up quickly and immediately regret that move. My head swims, and my stomach lurches. I pull my legs up, rest my elbows on my knees, and hold my head, giving my temples a gentle squeeze in an attempt to relieve some of the pain.

I glance around my room, looking for any hint of the guys. Nothing, not even a sock is left behind. An ache at waking up alone roots itself in my heart. Did they regret sleeping in here with me? Did I misread everything between us? Maybe they don't like the idea of sharing, and they want me to choose?

*“Let me out of your pocket.”*

Shoving the insecure thoughts to the back of my mind, I grab my phone and check the new messages.

Two messages from an unknown number sit in my inbox.

**UNKNOWN**

*Come home or she'll take your place.*

I click on the second message with an attached image.

A broken sob has my hand flying over my mouth to stifle the sound.

An image of Charlie fills my screen. One where she's lying on a bed with her hands tied to a very familiar iron headboard. Tears track down her temples, soaking into her hair. But it's the wide golden eyes filled with true fear that tears my chest open and obliterates my soul.

A new message notification pops up, hiding the picture.

### UNKNOWN

*Tell no one that you're leaving, or she dies.*

I drop the phone on my bed as if it just burned me and bury my face in a pillow, silently crying.

*Why now?*

*Why is he doing this now?*

*What does he want from me?*

*Is this ever going to end?*

*What if I can't get to her in time?*

Fuck this. I'm not some damsel, I'm the fucking heroine of this story. A renewed determination fills my chest. Goosebumps flash down my arms, and my nerves vibrate with terror and adrenaline. I throw on a pair of dark jeans, combat boots, a white tank top, and the leather jacket Kain gifted me.

I stuff the note from Virgil in my back pocket and grab my duffle bag, the one I ran with only four months ago. Quickly, I throw in a couple changes of clothes, a few toiletries, my favorite towel, and my weapons—the blades from Kain and the gun from Daemon. I don't plan on sticking around, just long enough to get Charlie and get the fuck out.

Reaching under my mattress, near the headboard, I slide my hand through the small slit I made and pull out the baggie of cash. A couple weeks after the guys found me at the party, they went back to my apartment and gathered the few belongings left after Donovan forced me to move in with him.



Hiding in the tampon box in the bathroom was my stash of cash. I immediately hid it when they gave it back to me.

I sneak out of my room towards the foyer. Voices carry down the corridor from Lucifer's open office.

“Do we know how they plan to transport them? I'd like to avoid roadblocks or checkpoints that will require explanations,” Daemon says. Ever the tactical one, stay one step ahead, and you won't be caught off guard. *I mean to be, Daemon. I hope I'll make you proud.*

“Or better than how, what about when?” Kain interrupts impatiently. “Did they say anything about Sid? I want him to remain here. I'm sure he has some information on the club dealings, members of the police department, and politicians that are on the take that could use some extraction.” I hear the wicked grin that's adorning his face right now, and I can see it vividly in my mind. *I'll channel that wickedness soon enough myself. And I'll think of you in the moment.*

“Maybe Eden would want to help me,” Kain adds, and the crack in my chest widens with his invitation. I have to go. If I continue to stand here listening to them, I'll never have the strength—or will—to leave.

I pull the envelope from Virgil with the picture of Charlie inside out of my back pocket. On the back of the envelope, I write a quick note to the guys. Removing the gifts from Kain and Daemon from my bag, I stare at them in my trembling hands. Trepidation fills my mind, and the ache in the center of my chest threatens to swallow me whole. I'll never get close to Virgil if I show up with these. He'd take them, and I'd never see them again. And I *have* to get close to him if I'm going to get to Charlie.

Mind made up; I place them gently on the table with the note. “Please, forgive me,” I whisper into the open space.

I glance around the foyer one more time. One tear. One moment. That's all I'm allowed to give.



I LEAVE Kain and Lucifer to their argument about how best to extract information from Sid. Kain voting for the bloodiest and most painful of options, or maybe take a page out of Eden's book and leave him with permanent reminders of the kind of man he is.

“What would be the point? We're just going to kill him in the end,” Lucifer kindly reminds Kain.

“Eden found it rather therapeutic,” Kain says. “And right now, I'm holding a lot of anger towards the man and could use some active therapy.”

Mindlessly, I walk the marble halls to the foyer. Turning the last corner, I'm hit by a cool breeze. I narrow my eyes on the open front door.

*I know I closed that when I got back this morning.*

*Didn't I?*

I push the door, waiting for the audible click telling me the locking mechanism is fully engaged. *That's working.*

“Lucifer. Kain. You might want to get out here,” I call out as I walk to the small table in the center of the foyer.

Eden's weapons, her boot knives, and daggers from Kain, along with the pistol I gave her, sit in the middle on top of a white envelope, the same one that was left for her in the Scarlet Bush Club by Virgil.

Dread fills me, and my heart pounds wildly in my chest. I swallow and turn the paper over. On the back, in a new handwriting are words I wish I'd never read ...

*I'd say don't be mad, but I know you are.*

*You'd never let me go on my own and she'd pay the price. But I'm leaving you this, so come and find me because I know I can't do this on my own.*

I pull out the photo from inside, it's the same photo of Charlie that Virgil left for Eden to find. Dizziness assails me and my vision hazes over for only a second as my heart pounds harder, and the blood rushing through my system freezes in terror. I catch sight of a dark silhouette in the archway leading to the kitchen, but he doesn't come any closer.

I pull my phone from my pocket and hit Eden's name.

*Hi, you've reached me but I'm not available to talk right now. Hopefully, I'm learning some new kickass moves. Either way, you know what to do.*

Kain stops beside me and pulls the envelope from between my fingers. He inspects it front and back, and growls, "She fucking went after her, on her own."

I stare at my phone, my vision blurring around the edge wholly focused on her name.

Lucifer joins us, and seeing the envelope and weapons, he adds, "I'll drag her back here and spank her ass until it's cherry red."

I tuck my phone back in my pocket and slam my hands on the table and breathe heavily. "Why don't you stop talking about what you'll do when you find her and worry about fucking finding her?"

Edward picks that moment to join in the conversation. "As concerned as we are over Eden taking off on her own, don't forget about the men in your basement. You need to deal with them, too. It'll take her time to get back to Cambridge if she's going by bus again."

"Fuck, he's right," Kain says, running his fingers through his hair. "I'll call Darnell to come stay with Sid and the others. Lucifer—"

"I'll call Marco. If they want Donovan, he'll have to come get him now. Otherwise, he dies before we leave. I'm not

taking any chances.” Lucifer’s hands shake at his sides. I’ve never seen my brother this close to cracking.

Pulling my phone from my pocket, I call Jax.

“Daemon, what’s up, partner?” Jax’s normal upbeat attitude carries loudly through the call.

“I need you to do me a favor, but you can’t tell the captain what you’re doing.”

“No questions asked. That’s what we agreed to. So, what do you need?”

I bite my lip and really think this through. I trust Jax completely, I know I can count on him. But do I want to get him involved any deeper in this shit than I already have?

“I need you to go to the bus stop and look for Eden for me. I’ll tell you everything when I see you.”

“Done. I’m on my way now. And Daemon, whatever’s going on, it’s gonna be all right. Whatever you guys need; you just ask.”

I turn, facing my brothers, who finally clue into my talk about our girl. “Thank you, Jax. I owe you one for this.”

“You know I’ll collect,” he says and disconnects the call.

I tuck my phone back into my pocket along with my hands, finding a casual, less stressed posture and say, “Jax is going to the bus station to look for Eden.”

“Fast thinking. Thank you, Daemon,” Lucifer comments and walks off in the direction of his office. “I’ll be back in a few minutes. I’m going to call Marco.”

My attention shifts to Kain, who has his phone in his hands. His thumbs skate over the screen furiously before he drops his hands and tucks it back into his pocket. “Darnell and the 402 crew will be here in a little while.”

I turn to Edward, who’s standing off in the far arch taking in the scene before him. “In case we have to go after Eden, do you want to stay with Jax until we get back? Or would you rather stay here?”

“I’ll stay put, make sure nothing untoward happens in your absence.” He nods—regardless of the danger—it’s clear that he’s not going to change his mind.

“Okay, but keep Jax on speed dial. If you need him, he’ll be here.” I shoot off a text to Jax, so I don’t forget, asking him to check in on Edward if we have to go after Eden.

“You can trust Darnell, Daemon. He won’t let anything happen to him.”

A retort about trusting a gang of criminals burns on the tip of my tongue, but I swallow it back. My brothers are criminals, some of the worst, and I trust them explicitly.

“Marco is on his way with a cargo van to pick up Donovan,” Lucifer informs us as he joins us in the foyer again.

My phone rings in my hand and I answer on the second ring. “Jax, tell me good news.”

I tap the speaker icon, and Jax’s troubled voice echoes through the small device. “I can’t. She was here, and she did buy a ticket. One way to a small town south of Cambridge. That bus is boarding now, but she’s not on it. I tried pinging her phone, but it’s turned off and we can’t remotely turn it back on. She’s not anywhere to be found.”

“Did you check the station surveillance?” I ask. Nervous energy coursing through my body causes the hand holding the phone to shake, so I place it on the table next to Eden’s gun.

Jax takes a deep breath, and you can hear his cursed whispers deep in the background as if he pulled the phone away from his mouth. “Fuck. Yeah, man. I checked the surveillance. She was picked up, but she didn’t go willingly, she fought back.”

“Who?” Kain growls, and from the corner of my eyes, I catch the twitch of his trigger finger on his thigh.

“Vincent,” Jax says solemnly.



**UNKNOWN**

*You chose well.*

*See you soon, little dove.*

---

*Finis ... For Now*

To find out what happens next in Avenged, Lost Soul Series |  
Book Three and join my readers group, B Livingstone's  
Bibliophiles, on Facebook to stay up-to-date on all things book  
related including sneak peeks, teasers, and behind-the-scenes  
news.

# A Special Note

## To Say Thank You

There are so many amazing people I'd like to say thank you to.

*In no particular order ...*

**My Readers and ARC Readers** : I know you hear this a lot from authors, but it's so true. Your support means the world. Without you, all of this wouldn't be possible. Thank you for taking a chance and reading my book baby.

**My Alphas** : I say it a lot and I'll continue to say it until you get sick of me. You are all amazing and incredible individuals. Thank you for traveling through the storms with me.

**My Betas** : I couldn't ask for more from you three! I love all the excitement you share while you read and all of your input in the slow moments. Thank you for sticking with me!

**My Editor**—Charlotte : I couldn't be more grateful for you. This has been so stressful, but you never once gave up on me. For everything you do and everything you teach me—Thank You!

**My Soul Sister Twin Indie** : Thank you for pulling me through this one. All of the late night talks and coffee deliveries when things really started to look like they weren't coming together made this a reality.

**To E. Corona**, the amazing author of the dedication quote : Your words are truly inspiring! Thank you for allowing me to spotlight your words in this book. Check him out on Instagram @ecorona24

**To Everyone Who Has Stood Beside Me**

*Thank you!!!*



# About the Author

B. Livingstone is a Northern Native turned Southern Bell. A coffee addict, chocolate fanatic, and book lover. She's been a part of the indie author community since October 2020 when she published her first book baby, *Beautifully Shattered*. Since then, she's released even more books in genres ranging from dark contemporary to paranormal reverse harem romance. Regardless of what genres she's writing in, her one goal is to create characters you can connect with.

# Also by B Livingstone

## **Solo Releases**

### **LOST SOUL**

*Dark Contemporary RH Romance*

[Bound](#) | [Book One](#)

[Ruined](#) | [Book Two](#)

[Avenged](#) | [Book Three](#) (*Spring 2023*)

[Freed](#) | [Book Four](#) (*Late Spring 2023*)

### **SHADOWCREST PACK**

*Paranormal RH Romance*

*Complete series*

[Beautifully Shattered](#) | [Book One](#)

[Shattered Strength](#) | [Book Two](#)

[Shattered Pack](#) | [Book Three](#)

[A Shadowcrest Christmas](#) | [Bonus Novella](#)

### **NORSE BLESSED**

*Paranormal RH Romance*

[Death's Gift](#) | [Book One](#)

[Life's Wage](#) | [Book Two](#) (*TBD*)

## **Co-Writes**

### **FAIRLY TWISTED CHRONICLES**

*Paranormal RH Romance*

[Her Three Bears](#) | [Part One](#)

[Her Three Bears](#) | [Part Two](#)

*Complete Duet*

### **JOKER'S WILD SERIES**

*Contemporary RH Romance*

[Unseen](#) | [Novella](#)

[Midnight Shadows](#) | [Book One](#) (*Spring 2023*)

## **Anthologies and Shared Worlds**

### **VICES & HEDONISM**

[A Night of Sin and Corruption](#)

*Dark Contemporary Romance Anthology*

[A Night of Lust and Temptation](#) (*April 2023*)

[A Night of Flesh an Gluttony](#) (*May 2023*)

# Stalk Me

B. Livingstone would love to hear from you.

Stalking is her thing.

Stay up to-date with all the happenings and connect with her on:

Facebook Group | [B Livingstone's Bibliophiles](#)

Facebook Page | [B.LivingstoneWrites](#)

Instagram | [blivingstoneauthor](#)

Goodreads | [B. Livingstone](#)

TikTok | [livingstonewrites](#)

Amazon | [B. Livingstone](#)

BookBub | [B. Livingstone](#)

Website | [blivingstonewrites.com](#)

Monthly Newsletter | [Sign up today.](#)

**BUT THAT'S NOT ALL.**

Click the link below to find out where else B. likes to hang out.

<https://linktr.ee/blivingstone>