



INVICTUS

Brotherhood of Saints #1

MARIAN ANDREW

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Dedication

*To all those wishing Laura's dream of Massimo and Nacho
was real, and she didn't have to choose.*



Everyone deserves a happily ever after.

Acknowledgments

A humungous thank you to my brilliant and witty **Alpha**, who has read every book I've written and will comment on all the cringe-worthy parts I need to fix.

A million thanks to my incredible **Beta reading team**, to who I've pushed my half-written chapters & fully finished books and have dedicated a weekend of their lives to read my stuff and tell me exactly what they think. FYI, I will continue to use both American & British spelling, and you can continue to tell me I can't spell to save my arse.

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A special thank you to all my **readers** who have supported my books by rating and reviewing them. These books are written for you guys, so enjoy!

About the Author

MARIAN ANDREW IS AN original New Yorker with a British education and currently lives in Germany with her incredibly supportive husband, son, and two cats.

Her fashion design career spans over two decades, working for several big names in New York and London. It has taken her across many corners of the globe to search for new ideas and inspiration, and she often uses her experiences to write stories she loves to tell.

Fluent in three languages, Marian grew up in a multicultural environment, and writing has always been her greatest passion.

If she's not in her writing cave creating a new hot story, she might be ballroom dancing with her husband. She also loves binge-reading Ebooks and trying recipes from her favorite celebrity chefs' culinary books.

A list of all her novels can be found at the end of this book.

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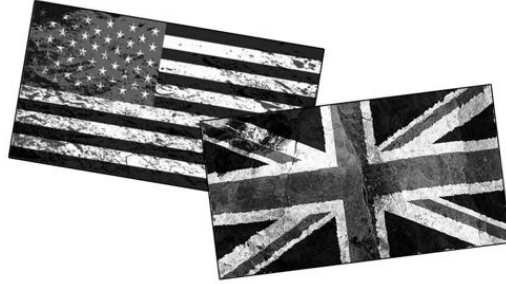
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Book Notes



The locations of this trilogy are various but primarily crossed over between America and England. The female lead is American, while the male leads in book 1 are British, with additional male characters coming into books 2 and 3 who are American.

The book, however, is written in American English. However, depending on the POV, language remains as authentic as possible according to the character's background.

Everything, including the people, names, gangs, places, and events, is purely fictional.

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Prologue



10 years ago

Jacksonville, Oregon

I'm just some kid lackey running stupid errands for the Arrows, eager to climb up the ladder. One day though, things will change because I was born for leadership. I feel it in my bones.

Regardless of what I crave, a fourteen-year-old won't even qualify for the junior chapter of this MC, even though I've been riding my motorcycle since I was nine.

Okay, fine. I admit it's just a dirt bike, but it gets me where I need to go, and I'm looking forward to the day I'll earn that right to have a one-percenter inked on my skin to wear with pride.

Entering this run-down city house on BSR's territory, I'm keen to get in, make the delivery, get out as fast as possible, and be off their fucking turf.

I leg it up the old wooden staircase, skipping every other step up to grab the usual pound of weed I'm supposed to deliver to Ryan, the leader of the Arrows' junior chapter. Right now, I'm his shitty courier, but ultimately the time will come when I'll lead his self-righteous ass.

I reach the top floor, and the grubby-looking woman leads me through the second steel security door.

“You got the cash, kid?”

Her eyes are bloodshot, probably high on whatever the fuck she's on. But she eyes me like I'm a massive solid dick she'd like to get her filthy ugly hands on.

I'll fucking kill her if she tries any shit with me. I see the way she licks her ugly, dry lips with keen desperation every time I'm here to make a collection.

Without removing my eye lock on the fucking pedophile ass of a hag, I open my jacket and take out the envelope with cash.

Slamming it down on the table, I eye her angrily.

"You know I do. This ain't the first time, woman," I say, flicking my knife out as a warning.

She leans her head back and laughs as if my threat means nothing to her. I glare at her fucking ugly scared throat, and I'm keen to add to that collection of marks.

The laughter turns into a loud hacking cough that goes on for almost a minute. I can hear some godforsaken phlegm caught up, and she spits it out on the floor. Bile forms in my throat, and my patience is wearing thin.

"Get down to business, you old hag," I snarl. "I don't have time to waste here."

"Impatient brat," she mutters, unlocking a metal closet and passing me two blocks of vacuum-sealed bags of dark green weed.

Fucking dumb bitch.

I watch as she weighs each one and looks at me as I eye the scales. I nod, remove a brown paper bag from my jacket pocket, reach over to the scales, and take the products to put them in the bag as if I've just been grocery shopping.

Having what I came for, I head out of the room as fast as possible. The woman mumbles something garbled, but I have no interest in whatever she has to say and ignore her.

I go down the stairs, skipping two at a time, eager to see that girl again and wonder if she'll be around today.

The first time I laid my eyes on her, the bedroom door was open, and she lay there dead asleep. At first, she was so still, her skin so pasty white, I thought she was a corpse. I snuck in, and her presence drew me closer to her bed.

There's no doubt in my mind that she was the most beautiful creature I had ever laid my eyes on.

Almost like Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* but surrounded by ugliness in this bare, filthy house. She stood a sharp contrast to everything here, and something was odd about her entire presence. She didn't belong in this kind of environment.

Who is she?

Where does she come from?

Is she sick?

Will she ever wake up?

So many questions formed in my mind at the time, but none were answered. I stayed there for a minute, observing her

pretty pink lips open slightly as she breathed lightly. A short plastic tube stuck to her inner wrist connected to an intravenous sack filled with fluid hung over the bedpost.

Her delicate features highlighted her astonishing beauty and almost doll-like appearance. Her dark blonde hair, milky white complexion, and sense of simplicity and innocence stood out from the worn-out bed and hideous room she was in.

A certain mysticism radiated from her presence, and I could have stood there all day watching this stunning creature, but a noise on the old wooden staircase brought me out of the trance I was in with this girl and made me think twice about sticking around. I quickly slipped out of the room and out of this house, eager to learn who she was.

The need to see this girl again was a craving that was stronger than I ever had before. My brain and insides longed for it. Her image invaded every free space in my head for weeks. That's why I was eager to volunteer for this job again, and I sure as hell didn't explain why to Ryan, either.

But this time I don't need to look for her on the second floor of the house. Just as I approach her bedroom, she suddenly storms out. Her eyes are shot red with tears. We both stand facing each other, partially in shock. She hadn't expected to find anyone, and I hadn't anticipated seeing her standing, awake and alive before me.

Her deep blue eyes scan me for any sign of danger, but quickly relax, realizing I'm probably not much older than her.

“Who hurt you?” I say, observing her teary face and feeling the deep protective anger rip through me, unable to understand how her pain suddenly affects my consciousness. I’m ready to kill the bastard who dared hurt her.

“Who are you?” she asks warily, using the back of her hand to wipe the last tear away. I suppress the urge to lift my own hand and wipe it for her.

“Ughh...” I’m suddenly tongue-tied.

What the fuck?

The corner of her mouth twitches before bursting into giggles, and suddenly the most beautiful smile brightens up her face.

“You forgot your name?”

Her smile is contagious, “Dyl...” I stutter, and words just die on my lips.

What the fuck is wrong with me?

She’s doing this to me, controlling me, making me forget everything I know.

But I see how amused she’s become, and I don’t feel embarrassed about the fool I’ve turned into if it’s making her happy.

“Dill? Like the herb?” she asks, amused with interest as her brow flicks up with curiosity.

“Dylan,” I finally say and sigh with relief. “I’m fucking Dylan. Just Dylan,” and I want to smack myself.

She offers her hand, “I like Dyl better. I’m Revna.”

I take her hand in mine, and it’s so soft and delicate. I watch as a shiver passes through her body, and her eyes lock onto mine.

Keeping hold of her hand, realizing something has passed between us, I remain transfixed.

A familiarity.

Even though this is only the first time she’s met me and the second time I see her, there’s a subconscious awareness that I know she feels as well.

“Are we kindred spirits?” she asks, drawing me out of the daydream I seem to have gotten stuck in, and finally let go of her hand.

“I don’t know what that means,” I say innocently, wishing I wasn’t so ignorant.

I stopped going to school regularly, and no one seemed to give a shit anyway. My father’s hardly home, and I run errands to make a quick buck to live on, but I’m sometimes stiffed by Ryan. More often than not. One day I will beat that son of bitch in ranking.

“It means my soul recognized yours. I felt it, and I know you did as well.”

I look at her and realize I’ve fallen in love. Is this what she means? Because I know from this day onwards, Revna will forever hold my soul prisoner.

Rather than replying, I lean in and kiss her cheek. I've kissed girls before, on the lips too, but I don't want to scare her, so I go in slow, and she doesn't flinch with my touch. When I pull away, I catch her gazing up at me, eyes soft and warm.

Biting my lip, I control the urge to kiss her again because there is no way I can stop at just her cheek when she looks this sweet.

Instead of telling her goodbye, I turn around and sprint off down the stairs and out of the house.

Taking out the two bags of weed from the grocery bag, I shove them down the inside of my leather biker jacket and zip it up. Tossing the brown paper bag on the dried-up, dead lawn of this ugly house, I get on my dirt bike and speed off.

It doesn't matter who Revna is or where she comes from because I've just laid my claim on her. She's mine forever, and judging how she gazed at me after that kiss, she's accepted my rights to her without a second thought.

The girl that will invade my senses and haunt my dreams for years to come.

Chapter 1



Present Day

London, England

LIKE EVERY MORNING, I was up at the crack of dawn and had my early run around Hyde Park with a sprinkle of hope that I might run into Archer St John, the painfully attractive occasional resident of the hotel where I'm currently interning in London. Regrettably, I wasn't on night duty to check him in last night, but I knew from the list of guests we were expecting yesterday that he would be staying with us this week.

It's not that I'm looking for anything to happen with Archer. I have my own spicy boyfriend back in New York. But Archer is a different kind of sexy. His exotic dark looks, combined with the sort of lethal charm he possesses, could almost make him a hypnotist because I doubt there's a person on this planet who could ever say no to him.

Except me.

He's asked me out for drinks on more than one occasion, and I've always politely declined his invites. If I were single, maybe I would've considered it, but I'm a one-man kind of woman.

I'm a practitioner of loyalty and commitment in a productive way, and I've been dating Hayden Aspinalls for almost two

years. If his name doesn't ring a bell, then his IG profile will. Everyone within the Manhattan social scene knows who he is. On the other hand, I have shied away from the public eye for personal reasons.

I'm not a naturally disposed introvert, I just choose to be so.

My online social account is under my nickname, Ven Queen. Actually, only those close to me have such a luxury to call me Ven, which is short for Raven. Right now, Hayden is the only one who has that privilege. When we began dating, he insisted I start my own online profile, and with a lot of reluctance, I agreed.

My profile is set to private. That way, my followers remain down to a necessary minimum.

Keeping a low profile status that goes under the world's radar suits me perfectly. Hayden just thinks I'm shy and reserved. My lifestyle fits him perfectly because he doesn't need a society girlfriend who wants to be in a popularity contest with him. I'm his background girlfriend, the woman who joins him everywhere but stays in the shadows.

On the other hand of the spectrum, Hayden loves to shine in the limelight, and I'm able to fulfill that need for him by allowing him to have it. When you're in such circles that he belongs to, popularity and online likes are necessary for social success. I don't share such needs; I like Hayden because he's intelligent and fucking hot.

I don't need to look at my watch to check the time, it's still early morning, and I love this time of day in London.

It's as if every morning feels like a whole new city rises with the sun. The roads are almost soundless, with very few cars out, and people are minimal. Newspaper bundles sit outside the green locked-up vendor street stands and the mini news shops waiting for the workers to open shop and take them inside. The occasional delivery truck and the buzzing hum of the electric engine of a double-decker red bus might be heard in the distance on the main streets. The street lights are now off, and I imagine most people are only just getting out of bed.

I pick up pace and jog back into what is undoubtedly the poshest district in London, with the iconic red brick mansions home to some of the most affluent individuals in the city. With its upscale swish restaurants serving Instagram-worthy gourmet cuisine, member-only casino clubs, and high-end designer boutiques, Mayfair is an instant playground for the rich and famous.

Ironically, once upon a time, this neighborhood was full of public scandal with a gritty red-light district past, but now it plays host to the most prestigious spot on a Monopoly game board. Because to live here is like being part of London's most exclusive private member's club. You can either afford it, or you are part of its staff.

I finally reach Aspinalls Mayfair London, the boutique hotel I've been interning at for the last four months. I'm on the company's hospitality management training course, which I started over a year ago in New York, and it's how I indirectly met Hayden. He and his brother are the heirs to Aspinalls Hotels and Resorts.

The first time I applied for this management course, Hayden rejected my application but asked me out on a date, then pointed me in the right direction regarding how to get into the program. Dating Hayden helped get me accepted, but not because I was his girlfriend, he just knew what qualifications I needed to get on their acceptance list.

Rather than give up hope, I applied for financial aid and a study grant and got accepted at Monroe College. I'm still a part-time undergraduate student there, but my degree course in hotel and hospitality was worth its weight in gold to get me into the Aspinalls training program. A few months after getting rejected, I reapplied and succeeded in getting my placement. They've even taken over part of my study grant in exchange for a work contract.

London was one of their training location options, and I jumped at the opportunity when it presented itself. I don't know if I'll stay with the Aspinalls group forever, but I have a five-year commitment contract with them, so who knows where the wind will blow after that. It's not like I have much of a past to cling to, so I have only one goal: to move forward.

I run down the steps to the basement entrance of the building and type in the code on the door lock to enter. I've got thirty minutes left until my morning duty at the front desk starts. Enough time to shower, change, and grab a coffee.



“Good morning, Mr. St John,” I hear Claire suck in a sharp breath, and I look up from the computer screen to find the man I hoped to see on my run earlier this morning.

I smirk at my colleague because gawking doesn't quite describe her state. She's mesmerized and wonderstruck by him. I don't blame her in the slightest. And judging by his current outfit and the light sheen of sweat on his dark, honeyed skin, he's just returned from his mid-morning run.

His loose sports vest does everything to show off his drool-worthy body. His broad shoulders and perfect cuts on his chest and arms would give the real Adonis a run for his money.

But it's his face that makes my heart beat faster, and my stomach magically flips somersaults into cartwheels. That chiseled jaw, those high cheekbones, perfect full lips, and light amber tantalizing eyes that can draw everyone in and mess with their brain.

“Missed you at the park this morning,” his lips raise in a sexy, amused smile as he addresses me directly after greeting Claire with a brief nod.

His accent isn't like the King's; it's different, more rhythmic, and reminds me of a deep, rougher version of the actor Tom Hardy. But it's one of the hottest ones I've encountered and brings out all kinds of fuzzies in me.

I shake my head, giving him the lop-sided smirk I cannot control.

“I prefer early mornings,” I reply, trying hard to stop that damn smirk from becoming wider on my lips.

As if he contemplates my answer, he nods and accepts it.

“I’ll keep that in mind.”

He leans against the counter and rests his inked arm on it.
“Any post for me?”

Claire jumps at the opportunity as if she has ants in her pants, and I bet he has the power to have almost anyone at his beck and call without barely trying.

“I’ll have a check,” she eagerly volunteers and runs inside towards the back office.

While Archer glances over to where she disappeared, my eyes study those hot tribal tattoos that track up his left arm and shoulder. But it’s the dagger and viper design on his hand resting on the counter that my eyes end up focusing on. It doesn’t quite fit with the African warrior artwork he has on his skin.

IGNIS is inked right next to the dagger’s handle, and I wonder what it means.

As if reading my mind, he pulls his hand away and silently observes me as I return my attention to the computer screen.

“If my ink fascinates you that much, I’d invite you for a personal tour.”

My head jerks up fast to find him eying me like a panther stalking its prey, sending tingles down my spine, and I’m not

sure whether they are positive, negative, or purely sexual in nature.

“It’s against hotel policy to date the guests.” I must have already reminded him of this at least twice so far since I started working here.

Claire mentioned earlier his usual suite was reserved for six days. It’s probably one of his shorter stays. I’ve been in London for the last four months, and he’s visited three times, usually staying anywhere from ten to twenty days.

Out of curiosity, I checked the details we have for him in the system, but it doesn’t give out much, just that he is a business entrepreneur, and his corporate address is listed in Enfield, which is in North London. I have no idea why he stays in a hotel, but it’s not my business to ask guests such questions.

“So you keep reminding me,” he says, leaning back as a smile curls up on his luscious lips. “But your eyes tell me a different story.”

His gaze suddenly turns heated, and that intense rush of heat licks flames all over my body. But I try to convince myself that it doesn’t excite me that I’ve become this man’s latest target. It doesn’t take a genius to guess that he will not stop at *no* because he’s used to getting what he wants. Except, I’m at the advantage because he doesn’t know me enough to realize how persistent I can also be.

Shut him down. My inner voice is loud and clear, and I know I must remain calm despite the urge to rebuke him.

“That would be your imagination, Sir.” It’s hard to avoid the sarcasm, but I’m trying to keep this discussion professional because I know he’s playing me, edging me to break out of character.

I don’t dare look up at him and keep my face plastered on the computer screen, but I know he’s leaning closer toward me over the counter. My nasal senses pre-warn me. Even after a sweaty run, the man’s scent is phenomenal.

“So let me try and understand this policy of yours,” he pauses. I sigh silently because he’s not going to let this one go. “You don’t date guests, only the staff.”

“I certainly don’t—“ I stop mid-sentence and whip my head up at him.

He’s done his research and knows about Hayden.

Archer cocks his head at me, and the sexy smirk he wears on his face should be illegal, and at the same time, it’s grating on my nerves.

“You don’t, what?” he grins curiously at me. “Cat got your tongue, Ms. King?”

And that sly grin remains on his face because he knows my surname. The metal tag on my uniform just has my first name. He’s been researching or stalking me, most likely the latter, and I’m more appalled than flattered. My jaw twitches because I’m forcing my mouth to remain silent from all the unprofessional things I want to say.

“He’s my boyfriend of two years. Well done for stalking me. I’d applaud you for your efforts, but I don’t want to startle other guests here,” I snap irritably at him, realizing I owe him no explanation of my current status.

None of this sits well with me, and I have genuine reasons for it. None of which I care about enlightening him with.

Sure, Archer is a hotel guest and a guy I’ve been lusting after for months. Regardless of my attraction to the man, I have no plans to act on my feelings, but to learn he’s been looking me up for information to use against me irritates the shit out of me.

Just who exactly does he think he is? Secret service?

There should be a rule about hotel guests pestering staff. But of course, there isn’t, not for men like Archer St John, who is so self-privileged I bet he’s got an ego the size of Texas to make up for his small dick. A corporation like Aspinalls will always side with the customer.

Internally, I couldn’t be more irritated with this man. And then to slyly accuse me of sleeping with the boss is just a cheap shot because his damn pride is deflated by my constant rejections.

Here’s a news flash, buddy; I was fucking the boss way before he became my employer.

“Firefly,” he blurts out quietly. It’s so out of nowhere. I’m not sure if I was meant to hear it, but I’m way past angry to care enough to ask what the hell he means by that.

I grit my teeth but stop short of the snarl forming on my lips.

As if suddenly realizing my abrupt change in attitude, he raises his hands in defense and steps back from the counter.

“I didn’t mean to offend,” he looks at me with those mesmerizing eyes, but I’m avoiding eye contact with him because he’s dangerous. Once he gets me locked with those beauties, he will stir my core in such a manner that I’ll throw all my morals to the wind and beg him to dominate me while I bow and curtsy for him.

“Just call me curious,” he tries to excuse himself. “A beautiful American woman in London who refuses to date got me intrigued. That’s all.”

I look at him suspiciously.

“I mean it, Raven, that was it. I have no hidden agenda.”

“What exactly did you think you would achieve?” I ask furiously. “That I’d be impressed with your discovery of digging up my personal life and telling me that you’re aware of who I’m dating? How exactly will this help you?”

Before I allow him to answer, I need to clarify the situation.

“You don’t stand a chance, Archer St John. Especially not after stalking me and coming clean about it as if there’s nothing offensive about doing so.”

I’ve never used his first name before, and as soon as it rolls off my tongue, I regret it. He knows he’s ruffled my feathers and got under my skin. It doesn’t take an idiot to realize that

my wandering eyes are nothing but lust and intense curiosity every time he's within my vicinity.

My damn body needs to stop betraying me, and as soon as I feel my cheeks go warm, I silently curse myself for being so weak.

There's a lot more to this sinfully attractive man than just his exotic hotness. Perhaps there's something very dangerously powerful about him. I get that feeling in the manner he observes people. The way his eyes focus on his prey, analyzing and watching, waiting to challenge and destroy his target.

Archer St John is a predator.

My gut instinct tells me to stay away from him, and it has more to do with my past than the mystery surrounding who he is.

"I think you've just invited me for a challenge," he meets my eyes with a severe, intense gaze, and I have no idea how to respond to that. Only that I was right on target about him.

I once read that if you encounter a lion, stare him down, but if you encounter a panther, avoid his gaze at all costs. I'm not sure which one I would identify Archer as, but in both cases, I know I should back away slowly and, for the love of my sanity, don't run.

The deafening silence between us is interrupted by a bustling noise coming from behind me as Claire makes her way back from the office. I quickly avert my gaze to the computer screen

and sense Archer pull himself further away from my counter and maintain his professional distance.

“This letter arrived early this morning by courier. The overnight staff had signed for it on your behalf.” Claire interrupts us, utterly ignorant of what transpired between the hotel guest and me. She hands him the letter, and he thanks her.

I don't dare lift my head again to observe him.

“Corr...! That man has one fine arse on him,” I hear her saying a second later as she nears me, and I whip my head up from the screen once more to watch Archer walk away. We both breathe out a long sigh.

He's built like a God, and judging how he admitted to being challenged by my constant rejection, he's probably just as temperamental as one.

Archer raises his hand in acknowledgment of her comment.

“Oh shite!” she gasps, realizing he's heard her, and returns to her post.

She doesn't see him turn around when he reaches the elevator. But I do, and to my despair, this is the second time I get caught gaping at him this morning. Our eyes lock with each other, and there's a sly wolfish grin on his face that's purposely for me. I can't help but remain there like I'm stuck on pause, gazing back at him as if he has this magnetic draw I have no control over.

Regardless of how upset I am and want to resist this man, I'm taken to him like a moth to a flame. And I know any involvement with him would result in getting seriously burnt.

"Raven," My gaze is appreciatively pulled away as the elevator doors slide to close, and I turn toward Louise's voice in the back office.

I observe my boss, the hotel manager, standing by the back door.

"Mind having a word?"

I nod and put my computer screen on lock.

"Let's go get a coffee in the staff kitchen."

Her tone indicates this isn't a request. She's telling me we are going to have this talk, and there's no choice in the matter.

I wonder if it has anything to do with my current temporary work visa status.

"Claire, please mind the front desk," she directs. "Call me on the remote phone if it gets too heavy."

Chapter 2



THE IMMEDIATE FEELING AFTER Louise breaks the news to me is completely mind-numbing. Perhaps there's a slight disbelief too, but somehow in the back of my mind, I always knew it wouldn't last forever. This was probably more in the making than I cared to believe, so I turned an oblivious blind eye to it.

"I'm really sorry, luv. But I thought you should know before the news breaks out."

Of course, I'm not a dead fish. I have feelings, and that heaviness of disappointment inside me begins weighing me down as I flip through Hayden's online page.

As much as I want it all to be a big joke, I know deep inside it's not. Done with flipping through his online IG profile, desperate to find something that might say otherwise, I hand the phone back to Louise. I look at my coffee, now gone cold, and bite my lower lip in thought. Hayden removed every trace of me from his profile, like I never even existed, and replaced me with Manhattan's society girl, Tara Lynn Lark.

The only reason why I know of her is because of him. She's the beautiful, legged blonde *Serena van der Woodsen* of real-life adulthood. I'm probably more *Jenny Humphrey*, the nobody who attempts to reinvent herself as a sophisticated city girl in Hayden's society world.

Except I never needed to prove myself to anyone, nor did I seek society stardom.

I don't know Tara on a personal level; Hayden rarely ever brought me into his circle. I was always kept as part of his private life, the girlfriend living in his shadow. And I preferred it that way, but I guess that backfired big time on me because while I was his little hidden gem, it gave him the opportunity to remain a player in the hedonistic lifestyle I thought he gave up after we got together.

“How stupid am I?” I say aloud to no one in particular.

“Luv, don't say that. It's his loss,” Louise tries to console me. “Look at it in a positive light; at least your relationship wasn't like front page news. I wouldn't have even known if you hadn't told me, and it wasn't until I heard you two Facetime each other that I believed you were dating *The Hayden Aspinalls*. At least you don't have to suffer the humiliation or become *that pathetically sad girlfriend* he dumped over Instagram.”

I glance up at Louise and know she's trying her best to make the most out of nothing.

She's technically my boss here in London, and while she's a good decade older than me, we clicked from the moment we met. I've spent a fair amount of time with her outside the workplace. In a way, we've become friends, but I still have to respect the fact that she manages me here while I'm on this internship.

“So what will you do?” she asks while I remain nonresponsive and quiet. I look up and meet her curious face, a little confused.

Should I have a plan? Hayden's more or less been the lengthiest long-time boyfriend I've ever had.

"It's obvious, isn't it?" I observe her pale blue eyes and notice the sincerity in them.

Louise is one of the good ones.

"I will confront him, of course. I at least deserve an explanation."

Louise purses her lips as if not satisfied with my reply.

"I meant with the management program. Of course, I expect you to demand an explanation; you guys have been together for two years. I meant, since Hayden's your direct line manager, how will you deal with that fact?"

I haven't thought that far. I'm still reeling about my failed relationship. But truth be told, apart from my studies, I don't have anything else. Training under Aspinalls' management also pays for part of my grant at Monroe, and I'm not even near completing my degree.

"I have a year's contract to intern here in London," I say, pulling myself together because there is no point crying over spilled milk. As devastating as it is getting dumped so cruelly, I can't afford to mourn it.

"And, I have a five-year contract with Aspinalls, which I intend to keep. I need this name on my resume for my next job."

"I admire your perseverance for the job, but what about being around Hayden?" She pauses briefly before continuing.

“I say this with all due respect to you as my friend and staff member and Hayden as my superior, but he seriously fucked you over big time. You might need to make that clear to him.”

If only Louise knew my background, how deep my scars run to understand what fucked up means. Sure, I liked Hayden and cared for him a great deal, but he’s not the love of my life. I need to get it together and move on and look at what’s most important, and this program is what I need to keep. Even if it will probably hurt me when I return to New York this summer and likely witness him give me the cold shoulder as if I meant nothing to him these past two years.

People like me don’t get that opportunity to fall in love and suffer broken hearts. I was never fortunate enough to be born into such privilege. We fall down, and we get back up and keep on fucking moving until we die.

“Take the rest of the day off,” I hear Louise saying in the background, slowly bringing me out of my inner thoughts. “If you’d like, feel free to message me. I get off at seven; we can grab a bottle of vino from the off-license and head to my place. Talking is always good. Or having a rant about what a tosser our boss is.”

She gives me a supportive grin, and I smile at her, thankful I have a friend here in England. But it’s not exactly ideal, considering my ex-boyfriend is her superior. I always avoided talking about Hayden to her, and it’s not like I’m going to start opening up about him now.

“Thanks, Louise. If you don’t mind, I just need time to myself. Think stuff through.”

“Of course,” she nods with understanding and gets up.

“Hey,” she looks back at me on her way out of the kitchen. “Things will get better. They always do.”

I force a smile, and as soon as she’s gone, my face turns to a full frown. Unsure what to do next is probably my biggest undoing in life. I’ve lost count of how many walls I’ve hit in the last decade, but I always got up, dusted myself off, and found another way to move around in this hell called life.

Sighing hard, I swipe both hands over my face and fix the few strands of hair that have come undone in my tight bun.

The need to do something prevails, so I get up and make my way to my room. A few semi-basement rooms in the hotel are reserved for staff, mainly visiting staff and interns who come from abroad. My room here is guaranteed until the end of the internship; after that, I have no idea where I’ll live. All my life possessions traveled with me from New York in the one luggage I keep stored in my room.

I look at the clock on the wall; it’s only 4am in New York. It’s too early to give anyone a ring. Hayden’s a morning person like me, probably waking up in a couple of hours for his daily morning run through Central Park.

I deserve an answer from him. I’m a person, goddamit, not some throw-away human toy.

Without wasting another minute, I swipe my key card and unlock my room. My cell phone is charging exactly where I left it by the bedside table earlier. I pick it up, and before I change my mind, I select the first contact on my favorite list to call.

“Ven,” Hayden answers on the second ring.

“Is it true about you and Tara?” I’m not wasting my time on pleasantries.

There’s a split-second hesitance, and I swear I hear a woman’s sigh in the background and him quickly shuffling out of bed. Was he just in bed with her? I feel sick to my stomach.

“Hayden, is she there with you now?”

I hear a door close and the sound of him moving.

“Calm down, babe. I need to explain.”

Did he just call me, *babe*? Bile rises in my throat.

How fucking dare he!

“Calm down?” I want to kill him.

“Fuck you, Hayden. Whatever you have to say won’t excuse you for lying and cheating on me.”

“You’re right, Ven, and you deserve the truth. Tara is just...” he hesitates, and there’s an uncomfortable silence between us as if he expects me to read his mind.

We’ve been together for almost two years. It’s the longest relationship I’ve ever had, and it’s amounted to complete radio silence from him.

He doesn't even have the balls to give me an explanation.

I'm sad for sure, but maybe more irritated. My street-smart survival suddenly kicks in, and I need to protect myself. I bolt up whatever emotional pain of betrayal I might be experiencing and replace it with a strong armor of controlled anger.

"Your fiance, Hayden. She's your fiance," I say firmly, finishing his sentence. "Get used to saying it. It's over between us, but I'll only say this once, so listen carefully."

Damn right, I'll be laying out the law of the land between us now.

"I'm staying in the management program, and as soon as I graduate from Monroe, you'll transfer me out of New York to another city."

Aspinalls' hotels and resorts are all luxury locations, it doesn't matter where the fuck I go, but I can't return back where I came from. It's not even an option.

"Is that what you really want?" his voice seems pained. I don't even know why; I'm the victim here.

"I'm doing this for me. You know how hard I worked to get this placement. If you're going to dump my ass out on the street, the least you can do is let me graduate so I can move on."

"Ven, I don't want this with Tara. I want you, but my family...."

I cut him off, "Stop."

I don't want to hear it.

I was never made to feel welcome in his family. I never connected with anyone because I come from obscurity, the girl from East Harlem with no family or background other than growing up in a home for abandoned teenagers. I rarely talk about my past, but he knows enough to not even begin to understand my life from the elitist one he grew up in. We were always going to be the couple from opposite ends of the spectrum. But between us, the sex was good, and my career ambition matched his.

“You cheated on me,” I continue. “You couldn't even give me a heads up. On top of it all, you removed every trace of me online as if I had never existed. That's a line drawn for me. Have a happy life with Tara. Whatever. Next time we talk, it'll be about work. Nothing more.”

“I'm sorry, Ven. I really am.”

“My name is Raven. Raven King. Address me by my birth name. You lost the privilege to call me anything other than that.”

I end the call and throw my phone across the bed.



There wasn't anywhere in particular I wanted to go to in this city. I just needed to get out of Mayfair and away from these privileged rich assholes who live in this area of London.

I need to stop thinking about what happened with my doomed relationship.

Concerning my relationship with Hayden, I'm not stupid to think there was a real future for us. My background and circumstances had no business playing in Hayden's world. But the truth fucking hurts when it slaps you hard across the cheek.

It's not until I realize I'm two stops away from reaching the end of the Picadilly line that I question where the fuck I am going on this train.

I look out the window at the approaching train station.

Oakwood.

Damn, did my subconscious curiosity bring me on purpose to Enfield?

This is where Archer supposedly has his business address listed on his hotel customer file.

The doors open as soon as the train pulls to a stop, and I jump out, not giving it a second thought.

The truth is I need a distraction from what's plagued my mind all morning with Hayden's infidelity and the future of my career.

Archer's been stalking me, and while I don't know to what depth, I bet the bastard knew about Hayden's fiance this morning when he mentioned it. He was probably curious to see my reaction, and my stupid, oblivious, naïve self knew nothing.

God, how embarrassing!

My hatred for Hayden continues to grow. In my mind, I imagine him pinned to a wooden spin board, and I'm throwing sharp daggers at him, primarily aiming at his crotch.

Cheating bastard.

I look at the train station's sign again. I've got nothing else to do today, so call me curious, but I want to know why Archer St John has a London business address but always stays in a hotel. I take the bus towards Enfield Town Center, which is only a short ten-minute ride.

The bus stop is just a couple hundred yards from the address on my phone's GPS, but I find myself staring at a church when I get there.

This can't be right.

Number twenty-five Gentleman's Row, Enfield.

It wasn't a difficult address to memorize. And unless Archer works in the religious sector and is a Methodist, I hardly doubt this address has anything to do with him. Taking a deep breath, I let out a long, frustrated sigh and shake my head at the building.

This is like a wild goose chase that's so far led me nowhere.

And now, call me intrigued to discover who this mysterious, painfully attractive man is. Well, *slap my ass and call me Sally* because I needed a distraction from the Hayden fiasco, and now I've found it.

Whipping my phone out of my bag, I find Louise's number.

Me: *Hey, can I have tomorrow off? I need some time to think things through.*

I don't like lying, but I've done so much of it most of my life that it's become almost second nature to me.

Louise: *Take the rest of the week off. I just noticed you have some overtime due.*

I know I don't have that many over-hours, but Louise has been both incredible and loyal since I first stepped foot in England. Some people are born leaders, and others are born to screw their employees and humiliate them as expendable trash. She's the former.

One day, I'll get over Hayden.

Today, I need to hate on him. I deserve this moment.

Chapter 3



LIKE THE FREAKISH STALKER I've become, I wait by the service stairs on the same floor as Archer's room. There are only three executive suites on this floor, and his is the only one currently occupied this morning. I dare not wait in the hallway because I know there's a security camera by the elevators.

Geez, I really feel like a creep now that I think about it. But last night, I tried to find him online, and the man hasn't got a trace of himself on social media; no profile, no tags, nothing. Who the heck under sixty doesn't have an online presence these days?

So call me a creepo, a snoop, or whatever, but the more I dig, the more I find nothing attached to Archer St John, and my curiosity remains insatiable. I'm desperate to find something on the man who dug around in my private business.

I left the stairwell door slightly ajar to hear him exit his room. Not only do I catch him leaving his suite, but he's talking on the phone.

"I don't give a flippin' arse fuck, you lazy sod. You answer to me, not Prophet. Or I'll show you how fucked off I can become. Don't let that tosser, Sergei fuck you over."

Charming.

I don't think I've ever heard *Mr. Suave* St John curse or lose his cool like that. But who the heck is Prophet? Sounds more like a nickname than a real one. Does this have anything to do with the Methodist Church in Enfield? He certainly hasn't got the mouth of someone who works in the religious sector.

“Elephant and Castle Pub,” I hear his voice trail off towards the elevators, so I leg it down towards the basement and follow outside up the staff stairwell that leads to the main street.

Making sure I’m not in full view, I lift my head up just a peek from the top of the staircase, making it just in time to see him get into a black cab. There’s no way I’ll be able to catch up to follow him.

I recall the last place I heard him mention on the phone. I’ve been in London only a few months, but even I know Elephant and Castle, just south of the River Thames, is not among the nicest neighborhoods of this British capital.

What the hell?!

It’s not as if I’ve got anything else planned for today. I could sit in my room and wallow in misery about the end of my relationship, or I could go on a mission to find out who this mysterious British man is, who also falsifies info on his guest registration and lives mostly in a hotel.

One might call me sad, but is it worse than him stalking a girl working at the front desk of the hotel he resides in?

Two can play that game, Mr. St John, and I intend to find out who you are.

I walk over to the nearest tube station and travel toward the direction he may or may not be heading.



I swear I'm so pathetic.

I've sat in this pub for the last few hours, and Archer's a complete no-show. What the hell was I expecting, really?

Well, looking on the bright side, I've spent my morning doing nothing but drinking a couple of pints of beer, munching on a plate of fries, and didn't think once about my ex. Except now I've reverted to being a day drinker, and that's not really a positive trait to own.

Leaving the pub, I head towards the underground to catch the subway back to the hotel. My temporary home for the time being. I have no life. This is it, just my job at the hotel. I'm not really looking forward to returning to New York and facing Hayden. Any other sane person would have quit.

But when I mean I've got nothing else in my life, I mean it. This job is all I have, and whatever else I own in my bedroom. That's it. All twenty-two years of my life can be packed up in one luggage.

Following Archer today was merely an adventure, something to take my mind off trying to figure out what future I have left. I don't think I'll be forced off the Aspinalls management program, but knowing I have to report to my ex-boyfriend, who literally treated me like trash is pitiful.

“Raven!”

I stop abruptly, and an older, hefty woman almost crashes into me.

“Watch where you’re walking, you daft cow,” she hisses at me and continues on her way.

Ignoring her, I search across the busy street from where I hear my name called.

And then I see him among the crowds.

He’s dashing across the busy street, tall, dark, and handsome. How cliché is that?

I observe him carefully and notice the dark grey suit he’s wearing. He definitely wasn’t wearing one earlier this morning. I caught him only moments after entering the cab, and I’m sure he was wearing grey jeans and a black leather jacket.

“Archer,” I breathe out as he approaches closer.

Damn, he looks freaking hot in this obviously tailored-to-fit suit. He’s not wearing a tie and has the first two buttons of his white dress shirt open, and I spot the ink artwork peeking out from his smooth chest. Just that little bit of skin reveal has my core doing somersaults with excitement.

“What are you doing here?” he asks, his eyes darting all over my face with curiosity.

He’s a good few inches taller than me, maybe a whole foot. I’m pretty sure he’s well over six feet, without a doubt. I stare up at his sharp-edged face and thick lashes. He wears his dark

black hair clean and short with a low and dark fade cut, perfectly fitting his overall style.

“I could ask you the same question,” I reply with a smirk, staring at him fascinated and maybe holding a little bit of a crush, which I try my best to hide.

It’s none of his business why I’m here, even if it’s because of him. I need to maintain a cool composure.

“Luv, you’re a bit far out from your usual comfort zone, don’t you think?” he looks at me all serious, and I can’t even trace any of his usual witty smugness.

“Really? And what might be my usual comfort zone?” I cock my head up at him, staring him straight in the eye.

Beautiful amber eyes. Fuck.

Perhaps he didn’t dig very far and hasn’t a clue where I come from or partially grew up. Mayfair is a far cry from where I originate.

Maybe I was wrong the entire time, and Archer didn’t actually go out of his way to find out anything about me. Damn, I must be an utter fool for stalking him like this.

“You live and work in Mayfair. This is hardly the kind of neighborhood....”

I interrupt him by raising my hand.

“Just hold it right there. You don’t know me. In fact, you know nothing about the kind of person I am. Don’t insult me with the kind of woman you’ve painted of me in your pretty

head,” I scoff at him and turn around to walk down the steps to the underground tube station.

“That’s not fair, Raven,” he calls out. “You know I’ve tried to get to know you, but you’ve shut me down several times.”

I grip the rail of the staircase and abruptly turn to him, ignoring the people walking around us to get down the stairs to the trains.

“Life isn’t fair, Archer. Get used to rejection.”

“Life is how you make it.” His usual arrogance seems to have suddenly disappeared. He’s not smiling, but there’s an expression on his face that almost looks as if he’s inviting me to get to know him.

Rather than reply, I deliberate whether I should act on what he’s offering me.

“Listen,” he looks left and right and steps closer to me. “I’ve got a couple of things I need to do today. But my offer’s still open for having that drink. If you say no, then I won’t bother you again. We can revert back to Ms. King and Mr. St John and pretend to not like each other, and you can continue with your colleague to stare and comment on my amazing arse every time I collect my post and walk off from the front desk.”

A chuckle escapes me, and the slightest hint of an amused smile appears on his face.

“You think a lot of your ass, don’t you?”

He finally grins wide at my brazen attitude and rolls his eyes at the same time. He’s got the most gorgeous smile; it’s as if I

can almost feel it reach out and touch me.

“I’ve had some pretty decent compliments time and again.”

Suddenly our eyes lock, and I realize it’s now or never. I’m a free woman as of yesterday. Hayden is out of the picture. Why am I procrastinating?

“Just drinks?” I finally ask, and his face lights up. Was he expecting me to decline again?

“I’d like to take you for dinner, but I’m afraid you might flee if I dare suggest it.”

“I’m not scared of you,” I catch his light amber eyes and dare myself to lock onto them again.

Damn, I could get lost forever staring at those eyes.

“I’m glad to hear that. So dinner and drinks, or drinks and then dinner?”

“Let’s see how far we get with dinner first. You might turn into a werewolf as soon as the moon shines through, and then I really might have to flee for my life.”

“Ah. Smart. At least it won’t be on an empty stomach,” he grins and winks at me, and I think I’m going to melt.

Could this man get any more gorgeous?

I suddenly realize we’re on a busy sidewalk and completely forgot about an entire city whizzing by us.

“I have to go,” I finally say.

“You live at the hotel, right?” he asks, but it’s not a secret. He knows I go jogging nearby, return to change, and have

breakfast there, so it's assumed I must also sleep there.

I nod at him and refrain from giving too many details.

"I'm guessing the no fraternizing with the guests is a real rule for the staff."

"It is."

"Then meet me at seven tonight on the south side of Grosvenor Square."

It's only a minute's walk from the hotel. I agree to meet him there and head back down to the underground. It's only been twenty-four hours since my breakup, and here I am, already about to break my employer's rules, who, as luck would have it, is the ex that shitted on me.

So what? I've made a date with a hotel guest who just happens to be one of the most handsome men I've ever laid my eyes on.

Bite me, Hayden Aspinalls. I'm moving on to more exciting pastures.



"Raven, you look stunning," Archer's eyes open wide, and he's not lying with his words. I watch his enthralled eyes dart around all over me, seriously checking me out with a grin that tells me he's impressed.

Sure, I probably outdid myself for a first date, but considering I had no idea where we were going, I decided to wear the only sexy black dress I own.

It's a thigh-length black lace spaghetti dress where the lining is even shorter. Even though it's still winter and the weather is cold, no one looks sexy dressed up in pantyhose and a coat. I'm out to impress tonight, considering Archer has only seen me in three drabby outfits. My black pantsuit hotel uniform, my jogging gear, yesterday's outfit, a pair of old skinny jeans, and a chunky knit sweater hidden by my coat.

So tonight, my legs are super moisturized and bare with black strappy stiletto-high sandals, and I've put myself further at risk of suffering from hypothermia by ditching my coat for my black leather biker jacket.

Archer ditched the suit he wore earlier today and is now wearing fitted-back tailored pants with a tight black turtle neck sweater that's probably cashmere. He's wearing his black tailored wool coat unbuttoned to show off those noticeable chiseled abs that sit under that body-hugging top.

"I don't think I've ever seen you wear your hair down. You should wear it more often like this," he says after we get into a black cab and head toward the destination.

Now that we're sitting closer, I can smell how perfect he is. I have no idea what cologne he uses, but he smells divine. I've also noticed he's left a little bit of a stubble tonight, and it looks so damn rough in a sexy kind of way.

“Another one of the hotel’s quirky policies. Men have to be clean-shaven with short hair, while women need to have their hair off their face, preferably up and sleek. Minimal makeup and nail color to be nude.”

“You still look pretty even behind the front desk,” he says; his voice is low and sexy, giving me the chills.

I scoff at his comment, ignoring what his voice is doing to my core.

“Pretty?”

“Actually, gorgeously hot and insanely sexy would be a better description, but judging how this is the fourth time I’ve asked you out and you’re finally accepting, I don’t want to make you bolt off without giving me a chance.”

I laugh lightly. Archer is a sly one. I watch that cocky signature grin appear on his lips.

“Giving you a chance? Where exactly do you see this going?”

I know nothing about you, for starters.

This is nothing but two people, obviously attracted to each other on a date, and if things go well, we’ll probably fuck each other crazy, and tomorrow, pretend when we see each other in the lobby that nothing happened.

“How about we have dinner first before rushing to any conclusion,” he replies. “You never know, by the end of the night, you might end up fancying the socks off me.”

If he only knew about my illicit fantasies of him from the moment I first saw him. Unlike my asshole ex, I have more control over my actions and less of an inclination to do the dirty on someone I actually care about, even when the need to do so is strong.

Did I always find Archer sexier than Hayden?

I did, but I was never going to act on those feelings because I have moral values despite having told Hayden a lot of fibs about my life.

I lie as a survival mechanism. So, I'm excused for it.

Chapter 4



A DINNER AND SEVERAL drinks later, we're back at the hotel, and Archer's insisting on walking me to my door.

"A gentleman will always deliver his date safely back to her house. In your case, your room. But no one's judging. I dwell in a hotel too."

I take him in via the staff entrance because there aren't any cameras in this part of the hotel.

"We're two different people with similar living circumstances but come from different universes and are moving on different life paths," I say, reminding him that we probably have no future after tonight.

I silently sigh with that thought because I really did have a nice time with him this evening.

"But somehow, we managed to meet and realize that maybe there might be something worth stopping for."

His deep, rough voice almost cuts through my core, sending illicit thoughts to my brain. I need to ground myself because we have no realistic future despite what he might be suggesting.

Archer steps closer, reaches up, and wraps a strand of my hair around his fingers, his gaze is heated, and it doesn't take a genius to see where this will eventually lead.

"You have beautiful hair, Raven," he breathes out almost in a whisper. "So why does a light blonde woman with porcelain skin end up with such a name?"

I shrug my shoulders, having dodged personal questions all night, and I know he's done the same with me. We both have secrets we don't want to reveal, and that's fine with me. Instead, I grab the lapels of his coat and pull him over to me to avoid a reply.

He doesn't resist and reacts by grabbing the back of my neck and pulling me right up against him. There's nothing sweet or cute about the kiss he claims on my lips. He fully attacks me like a starved man, and I match his onslaught.

As soon as our tongues touch, electricity explodes through my body, my muscles tighten, and my pussy clenches. He moans into my mouth as I suck on his tongue and release it back to him.

“Damn firefly, if you don't let me in your room, I'm going to take you and fuck you right here against the door in this corridor.”

I fumble for the room card in my purse and swipe the key over the lock. Upon hearing the buzz, I push the door open, and Archer is right behind me, literally, with his hands up my dress, gripping my upper thighs.

I don't even bother with the light switch. Having left the curtains open earlier today, there's just enough brightness coming in from the window.

As soon as we reach the double bed, it's clear that we have one mission to get naked and in it. I don't delay achieving this task as I open his coat and slide it down his arms. Archer releases it from his body and does the same with my jacket.

He's quick to find the back zipper of my dress and spins me around to unzip it. I feel his warm fingers stroke my back with every reveal of my skin and then push the straps down my arms, and the dress falls to my ankles. I've got on my fancier black lace strapless bra and panty set that I use for such occasions.

Not that I've had any one-night stands in the last year, but I had hoped that Hayden would have visited me one weekend. His loss is Archer's gain.

"Turn around, Raven. I want to see you," he murmurs softly with need.

I do as told. He takes a step back and bites his lower lip.

"I've had a million thoughts about you, but none are as incredible as the real deal."

He's been full of compliments this evening, but looking at how bright his face is, he's genuine, and this excites me even more.

Archer pulls up the hem of his sweater and tosses it aside, revealing exactly what I knew he was packing under it. The swoops and swells of his biceps and corded forearms have me almost panting, but it's his torso.

That goddamn torso has made my heart skip a beat, and my lungs forget to breathe.

He's beautifully inked with one massive, intricate tribal design covering his entire left arm, continuing all the way up

his shoulder and chest. My eyes are glued to his toned, dark-skinned, perfectly formed abs.

I'm calling it orgasmic perfection.

Archer St John is hotter than hell, and I can't wait to see the rest of him.

He wraps his arm around my waist and pulls me to him, claiming my mouth again. His kiss warms me up like a fire. I want more from him, and as if reading my thoughts, he pushes his tongue through, and every nerve ending in my body is about to rewire itself. I feel him winding his fingers through my hair, firmly clasping the back of my head.

The kiss goes from rough to soft, and he makes love to my mouth in a way nobody has ever done before. The rawness of emotion pouring from me scares me, and I rip my lips from him before he sucks me to the point of no return.

I cannot fall for him, yet he is making it very difficult to prevent this from happening. He presses his forehead to mine, holding me in place at the back of my head.

"I like you, firefly. I like you a lot. I want to fuck you first and then make love to you after."

Oh, fuckety fuck!

I'm completely tongue-tied. Instead, I finally blink, let go of the breath I must have held for the last five seconds, and simply nod.

"Then do so. You have my permission," finally finding my tongue.

I lean into him and feel my stomach tighten as his lips move over mine, slowly releasing himself from me. He unfastens my bra at the back and pulls it away from my body. My breasts jut out, and I hear him hiss deep with satisfaction.

“Beautiful,” he mumbles, and a deep growl unfurls inside his chest as he continues to attack my lips.

His hand works its way up my body to find my breast and massages it, while his lower body moves right up against mine as his lips continue to draw my focus on my mouth. Although I think my attention is going berserk because this man seems to be working everywhere on my body.

A moan escapes me as his fingers roll my nipple, pinching its peak and pulling.

He coaxes me gently to lie down on the bed. I clamp my teeth down on my lip and nod. Unsure of what to do, feeling too turned on to move further, I stay there until Archer leans down, hooks his thumbs in my panties, and starts pulling them down.

I lift my ass and close my legs so he can take them off, and he goes to his knees in front of me, braces his hands on the edge of the bed on either side of my thighs, and pulls me closer.

“Spread these perfect fucking thighs and feed me what I’ve been craving from the moment I ever laid my eyes on you.”

Fuck.

I sit upright, unsure why. Maybe it’s nerves.

Breathe, Raven. I remind myself that I'm far from being a virgin. But if I'm going to be honest, this is the hottest man I've ever gone to bed with.

I open them on command, and he growls as he settles his broad shoulders between my thighs and looks up at me.

Perhaps he senses my tension and smiles momentarily before pressing his hand to my chest, encouraging me to lie back. He hooks my knees over his shoulders, and I press my hands to the bed, my pulse racing as I wait. But I don't have to wait long as I feel Archer lean forward and lick the entire line of my core. I gasp loudly and grip the bedding as soon as he presses his tongue deeper and strokes me from top to bottom.

Omigod, at this rate, I'm going to fucking come like it's nobody's business. I try and hold off because it would be damn embarrassing if I did so fast. But this man is fantastic.

Most men are lazy; they throw in a tongue, use a couple of fingers and expect you to come on demand.

Not this man. This one has a system. He's taking pride in his work and paying close attention to my groans.

My back is arching like I'm a freaking contortionist.

Archer stiffens his tongue and then drives it deep into me, fucking me with it. His growls vibrate through me, and when he centers his hot mouth over my clit and sucks, I think heaven opened up and granted me access. I scream and yank harder at the bed cover.

He ignores me and goes back to licking me, pretending he hasn't a clue what he's doing to me. Instead, he pays special attention to my clit, twirling his tongue over it, and I need to know what the fuck he's doing to me because, damn, I've never had a man lick me as if I was a goddamn popsicle.

I bring myself up on my elbows to watch him as soon as he sucks down on my clit again, flicking his tongue over it at the same time.

Goddamn....

The sight of his head between my thighs.

My orgasm hits me out of nowhere, and I flop my head back on the bed, my hands gripping his shoulders, digging my nails into his skin. I start bucking my hips and ride his face. He doesn't stop and continues to fuck me with the whole of his mouth. The blissful tremors tear through my body, and I scream and whimper all at once.

He looks up at me between my thighs. His face is all glistening with my juices. He's smirking, a self-satisfied kind of grin, as if he knows how much control he's just gained over my body.

When a man can go down on me like he has, he can take my body, my soul, my everything. Just give me head like that for the remaining years of my life and call me sated and satisfied.

"I'm not done with you, firefly," he kisses my inner thigh and pulls away to stand up. "This was just an appetizer. Now I'm going fuck you."

He takes a foiled-wrapped item from his wallet and tosses it on the bed before unfastening his pants and pulling them down. He's wearing black boxer briefs, and I have to suck in my gasp as soon as my eyes travel down his wonderful torso to his defined V muscle, and I'm dying to see what he's packing under those tight shorts.

As soon as he's stepped out of his shoes, socks, and pants, he looks at me with this intense eye lock as he pulls down the last remaining item and frees his cock. My eyes unlock themselves from his face, trail down his chest and stomach, and finally settle on the monster between his thighs. A pearl of precum beads at the tip and a moan escapes me.

He takes my hand and pulls me to sit up, and the need to hold this massive cock in my hand prevails. I flick my tongue out, dragging the tip over his pre-cum, and taste him.

Without a second thought, I form my lips around him and suck hard as I pull back and then bob my head over him. I can feel his thick veins on my tongue and want to take more of his length with each stroke.

Suddenly he pulls out, and I look up at him with wide eyes and swollen lips.

"I need to fuck your pussy first," he says, climbing the bed, gripping my hips, and pulling me to straddle him. He pulls his back up against the headboard and shuffles me a little down as he takes the silver foil item and tears it open.

"Can I?" I ask because I want the excuse to touch his velvety shaft again. I've never seen a cock so huge and beautiful

before.

He looks at me, smiles, “You may,” and hands it to me.

He watches my face with interest as I first stroke my hand along his length, admiring his cock. I know he’s not observing what I’m doing; he seems more fascinated with my face.

I finally roll the condom down his shaft and lift my hips. My eyes focus on his, and we lock sight on each other as I slowly ease him into me, feeling my walls stretch to accommodate his size.

He pulls me down to his lips as I begin to rock my hips against him. His tongue darts over mine, and I groan into his mouth as he wraps his hands over my ass and grips me hard.

As soon as his mouth releases me, I lean my body upwards, throwing my head back, and messy waves of my long blonde hair fall down my sweat-dampened back as I continue to ride him.

His hands slowly travel to my hips as he grasps them, watching me, admiring me as I rock against his pelvis.

“You are so fucking gorgeous,” he whispers, his voice so deep. I open my eyes and smile at him, watching him watch me pleasure myself over his body, taking what I want from him.

His hand reaches out and caresses my breasts, gradually moving downwards towards my slit, where his thumb finds my clit and rubs circles over it. I feel my body tighten and then suddenly burst free all at once. Everything goes dark for a

couple of seconds, and I groan loudly, and lights flash behind my eyes as I go straight over the edge to paradise.

Seconds later, I feel him grip my hips, and he lifts me off him and flips me onto all fours, brushing my hair to one side and planting a soft kiss on my neck. He skims his lips down my spine, and I'm still quivering from my last orgasm, but his touch excites me so. His cock teases my entrance from behind, but he doesn't venture there. Instead, he thrusts into me hard, slamming in and out of my pussy, destroying me in all the most sinfully arousing ways.

"You feel so good, so perfect," he whispers, but his voice is so deep it almost resonates throughout my body.

Minutes later, he hits that precise spot inside me, and my orgasm starts to crash over me. All my muscles lock up as he continues to thrust into that one area, and I scream it out. He follows the same path as me and roars out his release moments later, and I feel his cock convulse inside me.

He continues to ride it out, not wanting to separate himself from me. His thrusts slowly come to a stop as he gradually pulls out, and I feel empty.

I flop onto the bed beside him and watch him remove the condom.

"You are amazing, firefly," he gets up from the bed, and I watch his sexy ass saunter around the corner to the bathroom. "And your pussy is the holy divinity of mankind." He laughs lightly, and I hear him turn on the light and flip open the garbage pail.

He pees but doesn't close the door. Seconds later, I hear the water in the sink run, and I wonder if he'll get dressed and leave or come back and keep me warm. I hope the latter, but it's clear that this was dinner and a fuck, and I shouldn't expect anything more. Even though my heart wants something more from just tonight.

I shouldn't. I really should not assume anything more than what just occurred between us. This was just two attractive people, horny for each other and wanted this experience. The sooner he leaves, the quicker I can get over this fact and go back to my boring, mundane life. The one I chose for myself.

But he doesn't. Instead, he returns and stands there, admiring my naked form as his tongue swipes over his bottom lip. He looks so damn sexy doing that.

I get up from the bed and stride over to him. His arm wraps around my waist and pulls me closer to him. Our bodies feel so great against each other. He feels hard, masculine, and smells wonderful too.

“Don't plan on getting any sleep tonight, Raven. I plan to deliver on my promise of making love to you.”

I gulp a breath as excitement flows through me. Archer wants to stay longer, and I'm taking whatever he gives.

He hooks his finger under my chin and brings me to his lips as he takes me slowly this time. His lips explore every inch of my mouth, and the sound of pleasure he makes vibrates from his chest and weakens my knees.

As if realizing what he's doing to me, he pulls back and grins. Taking my hand and leading us to the bed.

“Come, firefly, we have a long night ahead of us, and I plan on taking this real slow. I want to explore every inch of your body.”

I tilt my head slightly and observe him carefully.

“Why do you keep calling me firefly?” I ask curiously.

He grins wide and swipes his tongue over his lower lip as he thoughtfully gazes at me.

“There's an unwavering fire in you, a little bit of a natural femme fatale. I've seen it in you. There's a type of firefly species that lures unsuspecting males to their deaths. They literally feast on them, drawing their strength from them. You embody beauty, mystery, seduction, and danger. It's not easy to bring a man to his knees without even breaking a sweat, and I believe you can lure in any male and destroy him.”

“Are you looking to be destroyed then?” I snort with a chuckle, finding Archer's explanation hilarious. “I'm nothing of the sort.”

Our eyes meet, and he draws me in almost immediately, locking my soul down with those light amber eyes of his that suddenly darken. I feel my heart skip a beat with that one single stare, and I'm beginning to believe he's got it all wrong. I'm the one he could probably control and devour so easily.

“On the contrary. You're the type of woman men would rage war for, destroy kingdoms, and obliterate legacies. Don't ever

underestimate the power and control you possess. You are a queen that doesn't need a throne to rule her kingdom.”

I stay silent because as much as I try hard to find a punchline in my head, I don't.

“But right now,” He takes my waist and wraps his arm around me, pulling me right up against his rock hard body. “I'd love to explore every part of that sexy body of yours because the deeper I dive with you, the more intrigued I become, and before this date, I thought it wasn't possible for me to obsess over a woman as much as I want to do with you.”

Oh!

Oh, fuckety fuck!

Chapter 5



I LOST TRACK OF time ages ago as we both rolled on our backs, panting with sweat glistening on our bodies.

Wow, this is hands down the best sexual adventure I've had in ages, and I thought sex with Hayden was pretty hot, but something about Archer allows me to have no inhibitions. It's as if he draws it out of me. Maybe it's the way he's been obsessing about my body and how he wants me to experience pleasure to the point that I give in to him, trust him completely, to do what he needs to make that happen.

Archer brings the bedcovers to our waists and opens his arm across the pillow, expecting me to curl up beside him. As I do, I feel him wrap his arm protectively around my body, drawing me closer to him.

My hand is magnetically lured across his hard, chiseled, tattooed chest, swirling my fingers across his ink as I follow the design that leads up his shoulder and down his arm. I never noticed it before, even when I saw him in his running vest the other day, but he has scars.

Lots of them.

Perhaps that's why he's inked his body, to hide them.

We all have internal and external scars, and I would never criticize anyone who wants to cover the external ones so they're not reminded of the trauma; because it's those internal ones that remain haunting us. These are the scars that, no matter how hard we try and cover them, will always be there in the back of our minds, just floating around, waiting for us

every time we glance at them, taunting us with memories of what we'd been through and continuing to keep us there.

“I grew up in a girls' home. I've seen what abuse looks like up close,” I say as I rub my fingers over the old cigarette burns on his tattooed forearm.

“Who did this to you?” I ask, and as soon as it leaves my lips, I instantly regret it.

Tonight isn't about this. It's none of my goddamn business to ask Archer such a question when I know I could never tell him anything about me. What a stupid question to ask.

I feel him twitch against my body, and I know I put a foot out of place. He probably never expected such a question. It was so out of order from me I'm almost compelled to apologize, except I won't.

“When I was a young girl, I was abducted,” I suddenly blurt out. I don't know why I tell him this. Maybe I feel guilty for invading his personal trauma.

“They, my abductors, had a woman looking after me during the evenings, like a babysitter, but I use that term loosely. At night, she would enter the room they kept me in and molest me. She said she would kill me and my family if I told anyone.

“I was scared, and at the same time, I hated her. I would tell her how much I despised her, and she would just laugh at me. I hated her with so much venom that one day, I took a fork and stabbed her thigh with it, telling her I wished her dead. Of course, the fork didn't do much damage, but she made me pay

for it and beat me up good. I never wanted someone dead as much as I did for her.

“The next day, she died in a horrific car accident. For a long time, I believed I was responsible for her death, which gave me nightmares. I thought I had some kind of power to will someone to die, and I was scared of myself.”

I feel Archer squeeze me closer to him and breathe deeply.

“What happened?” he asks.

“She died, I don’t know.”

“I mean with your abductors. Why did they take you from your family? You mentioned before you grew up in a girls’ home. Isn’t that a place for children with no home or parents?”

I realize I’ve said too much and regret telling him about my abduction. Too many questions surrounding it. None I could ever tell him about. Not truthfully, anyway.

I shrug my shoulder.

“I never met my father. I just know who the man is. At least my mother claims him to be the one who provided the sperm.”

“Where’s your mother now?”

I shrug my shoulder again.

“She doesn’t deserve that title,” I retort.

Looking up, I see anger in his eyes; that predatory look I once saw in him suddenly makes its appearance on his face. His dark eyes glisten with desire to hunt, but it’s not me this time. It’s towards everyone who once hurt me.

“I’ve been on my own for a while now. I’ve learned to take care of myself,” I explain, because he needs to know that I fight my own battles.

Archer’s fingers dip between us, just under my breasts on the side of my ribcage to that mark, the only scar on my body that runs deep inside and will still taunt me with nightmares eight years on. But it also serves as a crucial reminder that no one must ever know the truth.

“And this?” he asks, his thumb caressing the rippled skin that healed badly.

“You’ve discovered a couple of them on my shoulder but didn’t ask me about those similar to your scar. It’s because you know what they are and know I’d ask about yours?”

I stay quiet because I’ve already said too much about myself.

“Was it your abductors? Did they shoot you?”

I swallow the ball that seems lodged in my throat, and a tear escapes my eye. I go to wipe it away before he sees it, but he moves too fast and swipes his thumb over it.

For so many years, I’ve carried these agonizing secrets. Tonight I let a few slip, and while I know Archer would never tell a soul, he can never learn more. And that’s the reminder I need to set my heart in place. After tonight I hope to never see him again because if there was one person who would have the power to break me and see my damaged soul, it would be him.

No one has ever come close to how Archer has managed to open me up like he has.

Instead of asking more questions, he draws me closer to him as if realizing I'm holding my pain inwards and won't reveal further.

He presses his lips to my head in a soft, tender way and holds me tight in a more protective manner. There's no need to tell him further; his actions signify that I don't have to explain why, either.

"Those scars you asked about were given to me by my father," he suddenly announces, and I did not expect him to tell me anything. I stay quiet so he can expand should he want to.

"He used his cigarette butts to burn me, wanting to make a point about who was in control regardless of the fact that I was his son. He spared no mercy on my upbringing," his voice is clinically cold, and I'm sad for what he must have gone through, but there's no doubt about the abhorrence he feels about it.

"How old were you when he started?"

"Six, maybe younger."

My heart aches for him.

"That's horrid. And your mother?"

"I never got to know her; she died when I was a baby," there's venom in his voice. It's not directed at me but more at the situation, and I believe something awful happened to his mother. I won't press him about it, though. He's expelled so

many different emotions in the last few moments; it makes me realize his past is just as traumatic as mine.

“Is your father still alive?”

Judging by the scorned expression, I’m going to guess that there are a lot of open wounds inside him that never healed. It takes one to know one to identify such pain.

“Unfortunately, yes. One day I’ll kill the bastard, but I’ll watch him like a hawk for now, and his time will eventually come. And when it does, I’ll meet him in the pits of hell and make sure he suffers a long, slow death.”

I stop the gasp that almost escapes me, nor do I look up at him because I’m too afraid I’ll see my true reflection in him. Someone who holds so much hate inside them that it suffocates them.

Instead, I blink.

“We’re both victims,” I manage to say, “and survivors.”

He hesitates, and there’s a long pause between us. Complete silence. Other than the noises of the hotel and the city outside, we don’t utter a word.

“Maybe we’re twin flames or some shit like that,” he pauses briefly.

I guess he’s gathering his thoughts, so I remain silent and wait for him to continue.

“But, Raven, there’s no doubt on my mind that I’m fucking attracted to you.” He finally says, and I smile.

Maybe there is a tomorrow for us.

Liking the sound of what he's just declared, I kiss his pecs lightly and snuggle deeper into his chest, feeling his warmth and, above all, feeling safe in his arms. Something I haven't felt in a very long time.

I need this. Him.

Chapter 6



TYPICAL BRITISH GREY MORNING light filters through the window of my semi-basement room as I slowly wake up. I don't feel Archer on my back anymore, even though he clung to me all night.

It was sweet while it lasted, so I assume whatever he declared last night was all part of the one-night-stand act to make me feel less cheap than feeling like a slut having slept with some random hotel guest.

It worked because I've never had a more incredible time and connected on such a level with another man than what I shared with Archer last night. He would make an unbelievable lover to whichever lucky girl manages to land his ass. But that woman won't be me, and his leaving without even a goodbye confirms that he'll never be mine, nor will I ever get that chance again.

Probably for the better.

I told him too much, and I know I shouldn't have, but just imagine having all this shit bolted up inside you and suddenly finding an outlet to release some of that crap to someone you know won't judge you.

Archer was perfect, even for as short as it lasted. We were like two ships that sailed past each other in the night and shared an intimate moment, never to relive it again.

In reality, I'm a gypsy, a nomad. I don't have any grounding. I'm in this world on my own. That's why I'll never have anything steady, not a job, nor a relationship, and let's face

it...as hard as it is for me to admit it, I'll never have a place to call home.

My fate is set.

I take it for face value, turn on my back, and look up at the ceiling.

“It was really fun while it lasted,” I say aloud, accepting my defeat, feeling somewhat empty inside, and turn my head over to the empty side of my bed.

I nearly jump out of my skin and dash to the opposite end of the bed.

What the heck is that?

I stare wide-eyed at the massive blood stain on the mattress lying next to me.

Where Archer should have been.

Is that from me?

I jump out of bed and take a look at my naked form in the hallway mirror. Other than the numerous dark red lovebites and hickeys that have already turned purple, I don't have any open wounds.

My eyes slowly move back to the bed with dread. That big bright red stain contrasts with the white sheet is screaming loud at me. Something happened here.

Where the heck is Archer?

The door to the bathroom is shut, and the light is off.

“Archer?” my voice is weak and ragged. I’m scared of what I might find.

Has something happened to him, and I was so out of it I didn’t hear him?

Slowly, I squeeze the door handle and open it as I switch the light on.

It’s empty, and the damp towels from our joint shower last night remain where we dumped them over the bathroom counter. Suddenly illicit thoughts of what we got up to in here invade my mind, and I cast them out to stay focused on what the hell is happening this morning.

I grab an oversized t-shirt from the closet and pull it over me. The main door to the bedroom is shut, and with everything that happened last night, I didn’t put on the extra security bolt I usually do because, being with Archer, it never occurred to me that I was unsafe. But even if my usual extra scrupulous security was lacking, the room was still locked from the outside. No one can enter without a key card.

I creep back into the main room and notice his clothes are all gone. There isn’t a trace of the man I spent the entire night fucking and making love to.

Other than that massive red stain where he slept.

“What the fuck is going on?” I whisper out loud.

I look around the room, searching to see if there are any hidden cameras. This has got to be one sick, perverted joke. I bet I’m probably being recorded for some warped online

game. People do that kind of shit. We live in a sick fucked up world, and nothing surprises me anymore.

“Okay, the joke’s over. Ha, ha,” I say aloud, gritting my teeth.

I think, or rather, I hope, this is a gag even if I end up seething with rage because the other situation of what could have happened to Archer is very sinister.

Is the red stain on the bed even real? I approach the edge of the bed and bend down closer to examine it. It’s a bright red color, which means this isn’t old. I lean down and sniff it. It’s metallic, which means this isn’t fake.

It’s freaking real blood, and I can still smell Archer’s musky chocolatey scent of his cologne on the bed sheets.

Stepping away in horror, my first instinct is to phone the cops. Or maybe I should get Louise up here and ask her opinion.

Shit.

I swipe a shakey hand through my forehead and hair. Trouble just seems to follow me.

I’m already running on thin ice on this management training regarding my recent breakup with Hayden. If they discover I slept with a hotel guest and put Aspinalls in the public eye with negative news, I might as well go live in some shelter for women and kiss my degree at Monroe goodbye.

Regardless of whatever feelings I may have developed for Archer last night, today is another day, and I need to protect

myself because there isn't another person in this universe who will ever give two fucks about me.

Putting my feelings aside, I act on instinct and grab all the sheets and bedcovers off the bed. Damn, the mattress cover is soaked through too. Remembering the towels and the garbage in the bathroom, I grab those and bundle up everything into a massive pile, making sure no visible red stains are showing through when I carry everything through the staff section of the hotel.

I hastily put on a pair of running shorts and grab my slides.

Suddenly my phone vibrates loudly, sending my nerves halfway across the Atlantic. This whole incident has me fraying at the seams. I hastily pick up my phone from the desk.

Hayden: *Ven, babe. Please let me explain. I never wanted this. I wasn't given a choice.*

He is the last issue I need to deal with right now. I have bigger, dirtier fish to sort out, like a possible dead man somewhere in his hotel.

Raven: *Fuck off, Hayden. You don't get to act the balls-less victim in this. Get over us and move the fuck on with your fiancée, Tara. Leave me out of your perverted love triangle.*

I turn my phone off because I know he won't stop pursuing me until I quit my job. And no matter how much he hurt me, I'm certainly not going to be anyone's side piece if that's what he's hoping for.

Thankfully there are no security cameras in the main staff sections of the hotel. It's a typical Aspinalls' way of saving money. Staff are expendable and can be replaced. Guests are not. The bulk of the budget will always go to the guests' comfort and security. But today, I'm thoroughly grateful for that cost-effective measure.

I head down towards the second basement level and toss the bundle of bedcover sheets in the garbage dumpster. The hotel gets a daily pickup, and that will be in less than fifteen minutes from now. No one will discover the bloodied sheets, and everything they collect gets incinerated.

On my way back to my room, I stop by the housekeeping and laundry facility room and pick up a new set of bed linens, a couple of towels, a bottle of cleaning bleach, some gloves, and a few sponges.

After spending the next hour scrubbing the mattress and every part of the room that Archer may have used with bleach and disinfectant, I'm satisfied that there is no trace of him left here.

As sad as that fucking sounds.

I really liked him. But I can't let my feelings get in the way of survival. Whatever happened to the man, I hope he lived. I just cannot get involved in this kind of weird shit.

The fumes in here are awful. I open the window for some fresh air, but I doubt I'll get much. This is central London, and my room faces the back of three other buildings, and all the heating and a/c central units are on the same level as mine.

I leave the windows open, hoping that whatever cold air comes in, it drags out the dizzying fumes that are bordering on giving me a damn migraine. I take a shower, scrubbing every last trace of the man I spent with last night off my skin and hair, get dressed into my uniform, and head upstairs.

Chapter 7



“I DON’T KNOW ANYONE who’s given a week of free time off would return to work the very next day,” Louise says, as I hear her strolling towards the front desk of the hotel lobby and interrupting my review of today’s planned reservations.

I look up from the screen and see her waiting for a reply with an arched brow and an air of disbelief.

A forced smile fills my face.

“I love my job, Louise. Count yourself lucky that you have such dedicated staff,” I say, biting my lip and hoping she quits the third degree.

I don’t know what happened to Archer, if anything at all, but I simply cannot have this kind of thing in my life. There’s no way I can sit in my room, especially not after what the hell transpired this morning. In fact, I might ask to see if I could get a room change but now isn’t the time.

Sometimes we need to make life choices, and I could be the girl who does the right thing and confesses everything to my boss and the police, lose my job, become homeless, and be a possible murder suspect in a disappearance case. Or I can play stupid, cover my tracks, get on with life, and hope Archer is alive and well.

“Suit yourself. I’m definitely not complaining,” Louise hands me another sheet of faxes to file. “But my offer for time off remains on the table if you still need it.”

Without waiting for a reply, she turns away, and I watch her walk towards the back office, handing Claire a sheet of her

daily duties before completely disappearing inside.

Yep, I made the right decision to stay under the radar with this little secret of mine.

“Hey, Claire. Has suite 449 already checked out? I see on the system that it’s reserved for another four days.”

She drops the sheet on the counter next to her, types something on the keyboard, and looks at her computer screen.

“That’s Archer St John’s room. He’s reserved it for six days. Why do you ask?”

“I thought he may have already checked out, and it wasn’t in the system yet.”

My curiosity will probably get me into trouble one day, but it won’t be today, and I didn’t make it this far in life without seeking certain answers. I might want to know what happened to Archer, but I sure as hell won’t be asking for official outside assistance.

“Nope,” Claire looks up at me. “Mr. St Sexy is still a guest here. Hopefully, he’ll be back from his jog any minute, and we’ll get another glimpse of that hot arse of his.” She grins at me, and I give her a forced smile. I’ve seen that incredible drool-worthy ass up close and personal, and now I fear the man is probably dead.

As I have the suite’s data file open, I inconspicuously make an additional keycard copy because only Louise has the master card that opens all guest rooms, and I’m not about to request that from her.

If Archer doesn't turn up this morning, I'll need to get into his room this evening when I know Louise is gone, and I'll be able to tamper with the security cameras on his floor. Living in this hotel is pretty convenient, actually.



The night desk manager rarely uses Louise's basement office. As her direct report and second in command when she's on duty, I have access to her office, where the central camera security system is kept in one of the purposely built cupboards.

I freeze the current recording on the floor of Archer's suite and head upstairs via the staff elevator, ensuring no one else lurks in the hallways because today, the other two suites on this floor are occupied.

I knock on the door and wait a few moments before unlocking it and entering a pitch-black room. I hook the key into the card slot, and the room lights up.

"Hello?" I call out, making sure he isn't in here asleep in the bedroom.

I walk through the living room primarily looking for a body, even though I checked the housekeeping roster today and know this suite was cleaned. If there was a dead body or any evidence of massive blood stains to raise red flags, we would have been alerted.

The only trace that Archer was here at some point is his luggage on the rack; everything else is neatly put away.

Looking quickly through the closets and drawers, I realize he hasn't even got any pajamas. But that doesn't surprise me. I only had one night with him, but I bet he's the kind of man who always sleeps in the nude.

Damn just thinking that is hot.

I shake my head to get rid of illicit thoughts of a sexy naked Archer and rummage more thoroughly around the closet area. There's a suit bag and several black tailored suits hanging. Checking the labels, I curse. All by Stuart Hughes and Brioni, and I'm sure these are made to measure too. These suits are worth more than most cars.

There are a couple of crisp-looking dress shirts in black and white colors, again all luxury Italian designer brands.

Everything in this man's closet screams expensive and exclusive, and I doubt he walks into actual stores. I bet designers go to him. I have no idea what this man does for a living or who he is, but his taste in the finer things is beyond anything I've ever seen.

The drawers in the dresser say no better other than he prefers black Armani boxer briefs. And I've seen him in them briefly, and he looks godlike.

Again, I need to stop lusting after some man who might actually be dead.

I head next to inspect the bathroom, and it's pretty bare of personal items. There's a black shower bag on the counter, a toothbrush in the glass tumbler, and a bottle of what I assume is cologne. I look inside the bag, and there's nothing that stands out other than he prefers aftershave balsam rather than liquid stuff.

I pick up the cologne. I've never heard of this particular Gucci cologne, *The Last Day of Summer*. What a strange name for a man's cologne.

Bringing it close to my nose, I realize this scent is so Archer, nutmeg, and cedarwood with a touch of chocolate. Suddenly the thought of what we did last night enters my head, and a tantalizing excitement travels along my nerve endings.

I shut those feelings down fast. The man is dead or is playing a seriously fucked up game with me.

Nothing in this room can provide me any evidence of what happened to Archer, but there is enough to tell me about his personal taste. He is a man who truly lives or *lived* in luxury with a tremendous amount of style and suave. But there's zero indication here to point in a direction to what may have occurred to him. No phone, laptop, paperwork, or documents.

The safe.

I open the closet door again and see it's in use. Fuck. Only Louise has the master copy of this safe. And whatever is in there is going to tell me who Archer St. John is.

Somehow I need to gain access to that master key and figure out this puzzle.

Chapter 8



IT'S THE FOLLOWING DAY, and there is no change in Archer's disappearance. I've been purposely working the front desk all morning, and there hasn't been a sign of him since he disappeared from my room.

I curse at myself. I should be fucking careful with what I wish for.

I wanted a distraction from Hayden, and I certainly got one.

It's an unwanted distraction that's invaded my mind every second of the day and night. I hardly slept last night. How could I?

If I'm not thinking about the beautiful time we spent together, it'll be the dreadful morning after, and I've been running hundreds of scenarios in my head.

How the heck did this all happen in my bedroom, and I didn't even wake up? The only conclusion I can come up with is that he drugged me while I slept or I was drugged back at the restaurant. Something happened to me that I was so far out of it I hadn't noticed anything.

For fuck's sake, there wasn't even any sign of struggle! Just a large blood stain and every trace of the man was gone!

Nada! Zero!

I've got absolutely nothing to go on.

“Raven!”

I jerk my head up and turn to see Claire with her hand on her hip, giving me a death stare.

“Jesus, girl! I’ve called you like three times!”

“Sorry, my mind drifted,” I say apologetically.

I need to act normal, or my colleagues will suspect something because if Archer doesn’t return to collect his stuff after his reserved time slot for the suite ends, our policy is to try and contact him. I’ve already tried phoning the cell phone on his guest file, and all I get is some automated answering service. His hotel bill is just for the suite; he hasn’t ordered anything extra, so the hotel will automatically charge the card on hold.

His credit card is probably the only authentic thing about him.

Is Archer even his real name?

“I have an errand to run and taking an early lunch. Louise is with a supplier, but it’s fairly quiet today. We’re expecting a group to come in at four, so until then, we’re pretty set. Can you handle it until then?”

“Go,” I say. “I can cover this. Easy peasy,” I smile at Claire, and she nods with appreciation and takes off.

It’s not until an hour later when the hotel front entrance glass doors slide open, and the asshole of the hour suddenly walks in like he owns the damn hotel. I’m so fucking vexed with this blazing idiot.

I’m dying to find out what excuse he has for me.

He deserves a slap.

A really hot burning slap across his fucking face.

Maybe he should have stayed dead because I'm seething like a blazing volcano, about to go all violent and eruptive.

"You fucking asswipe!" I blurt out, almost foaming at the mouth, but keep my voice down in case other guests are around.

"I could fucking smack that smug face right off your body." I'm exasperated; he has a lot of balls showing up here, all cocky-like. "What the fuck happened?"

He looks at me, surprised but curious.

"What? Cat got your goddamn tongue?" I glare at him. "Do you know the extent I went to cover up whatever the fuck you left on my bed? You think this is a fucking game? Faking your death or whatever the fuck game you're playing! What the hell is wrong with you?"

He cocks his head to the side, his eyebrows raise in a question but remains silent. My eyes cast daggers at him as my glare intensifies.

"Do you think this was some game?" I say, repeating myself, breaking the silence between us.

"What game is that?" he finally says with a grin that makes me want to kill him.

"To think I was actually worried about you! Fuck you, Archer!" I glower at him.

"I believe I already did that."

I want to smack that cocky grin from his face. All that suave charm I fell for is completely gone from him.

I shake my head, and my teeth sink into my bottom lip with anger as I gaze at him, flabbergasted.

“Never going to happen again. You know damn well you were nothing but a rebound.”

I intend to stop talking, but I’m reeling with anger.

“Plus, my mattress is still stained with whoever’s blood you left, so I’m expecting a replacement from you because I’m already on the line with Hayden. You, of all people, should know what shit I’m going through.”

He cocks another upwards brow at me.

“Blood on your mattress? Do you mind showing me where exactly?” He leans over the desk, and I observe him more closely as he swipes his tongue over his lower lip, and I spot the metal. That renders me speechless.

My eyes travel upwards. His left eyebrow has a bar in it, and I know for sure the man I slept with didn’t have any piercings, not on his tongue, brow, or anywhere on his body. My gaze moves down to the hand on my desk; the same dagger and snake with the letters IGNIS on his hand, but this man’s knuckles are tattooed with Roman numerals.

Archer’s fingers weren’t inked. Nor did he have a tattoo that ran up the side of his neck. I’m sure of it and observe the man before me in more detail.

“You’re not Archer St John, are you?” I swallow that ball that seems to have gotten lodged quite fast up my throat.

“Oh, he’s a St. John, alright. Just, he ain’t Archer, lass.”

I look behind Archer’s doppelganger; two other big goons are flanking the back of either side of this impersonator. I’m not sure which one talked, but my money’s on the strikingly attractive blond Viking-looking guy with shoulder-length hair, metal bars in both brows and a neck full of ink.

“Archer’s not here,” I say, hoping these guys disappear fast.

“Evidently, and it looks like you were the last to see him.” The guy I thought was Archer slides his arm off the counter, staring straight at me.

Suddenly the energy changes in the lobby of this boutique hotel, and it’s not towards a positive one.

“You can’t confirm that,” I say, recognizing these men for what they are.

Street thugs. Gangsters. I should have guessed that was what Archer was involved in.

Suddenly the elevator door slides open, and an older couple walks out. I smile at them, and they stare at the three men. Obviously, their ink and demeanor are nothing short of the kind of hoodlums I imagine they are. I watch the couple quicken their steps as they leave the hotel.

“I think we need to have a private chat with you,” the blond one says, and it’s not a suggestion. These men mean business, and they’ve just made me part of it.

Cold white fear slides up my spine, and my heart has tripled in its beat.

What fuck have I landed myself into?

“I’m the only person here on duty. I can’t.”

As if that will make them march on out and be on their way.

“I don’t give a fuck...Raven.” Archer’s doppelganger spits out vehemently. I watch his eyes move from the silver nametag on my chest to my face. Gone is that cocky smirk on his face and replaced with a stone-cold expression. His eyes narrow as he observes me, almost silently dismissing me as he sizes me up.

Archer and this man might be twins and look identical, but this guy hasn’t got the same smooth suaveness as his brother. Archer’s beautiful smile is also replaced by this permanent stoic and cold glare that sends me shivers every time his eyes meet mine.

This man is dangerous, callous, and deadly. He doesn’t hide behind a façade; he shows his true nature within seconds of realizing who he is.

“Where did you last see him?” The blond guy suddenly makes his way to the counter, and the doppelganger steps back, allowing him to take over the questioning.

“My bedroom,” I answer because there is no point pissing them off.

“Where’s that?”

I bite my tongue because maybe I shouldn't comply with them. I don't owe Archer or these thugs any explanation. I'm not going to get myself tangled up in their webs.

Drawing a sharp breath, I glare at him.

“None of your goddamn business. I don't even know who you are.”

“Our man *IS* my goddamn business!” The blond man slams his hand down on the desk, and I notice the same hand tattoo.

Fuck this is a gang, and that design is their insignia.

The third guy, the attractive Asian-looking dude who seems the youngest of the three but is almost as big and brawny as his two friends, steps up beside the blond one. I could have been seriously attracted to him if it weren't for the fact that he's not here to chat me up.

I try and pretend I'm not even slightly intimidated, but who the fuck am I kidding? I'm seriously fucked. How the hell will I get out of this mess?

“I guess there's no chance you can come back in a couple of hours?”

I look at them with a hopeful grin, but all three remain stoic and give me the death stare instead.

“We'll need access to his room and yours.”

I nod and remember the extra keycard I made for his room is in the desk drawer. The Asian guy watches my every move as I retrieve it while the blond one scans the lobby, and I make

sure to not make any sudden movements. I'm sure they're packing a little more than muscle under their jackets. I'm not stupid; I know how gangs operate.

British, American, all the same fucking thing. Hardened criminals with no regard for human life.

"Follow me," I say as I lead them via the service door, down the hallway, and through the stairwell. Our feet echo heavily down the tiled steps.

As soon as I swipe my door unlocked, I open it for them, but they insist I go in first, and I roll my eyes as I enter. The pungent chlorine-like scent hits us almost immediately. There's no hiding the smell of the cleaning bleach I used yesterday. This isn't good, they'll think I murdered him and cleaned up afterward.

"Honestly, I don't know what happened to Archer," I try to diffuse the obvious first thoughts they might have. "He's a guest of the hotel. That's all I know about him, really."

"Is it common that staff shag their guests?" The blond man asks, suspiciously looking around the room, but I ignore the sarcasm in his voice.

I sigh heavily. How much do I regret doing that despite it being the most memorable evening I ever had with a man.

"Archer asked me out a few times in the past. I declined his invitations flat out. Then we ran into each other in Elephant and Castle, and he asked me again, catching me off guard. Maybe because I wasn't working, or the idea that we were

outside work—“ I pause mid-sentence and shrug my shoulder. “I don’t know. I wanted to give him a chance.”

The men look at each other, and I know they aren’t buying it.

Over the years, I’ve learned compulsive lying is necessary to survive the harsh streets, but this is one time I’m not actually lying. The asshole-looking doppelganger deserves to know what happened to his brother. In a strange way, I think I can relate to that, especially when I know how my family ended up.

“You saying he asked you out several times, and you rejected him?” The doppelganger asks and looks at me disbelievingly, observing me carefully for any signs of bullshit.

That annoys the shit out of me. Why would I lie about that?

“Several times, yeah. He asked me out for drinks, and I always declined. On the last time, I accepted, and he took me for dinner and then drinks.”

The three men are now staring at me, taking me in, or checking me out; judges are still debating that.

Their pause has given me the opportunity to look at either of them more closely. Considering the circumstances, I’m not sure if my opinion is a little off, but I’m finding all three men pretty hot.

How could I think of such a thing in a time like this?! I should be focused on the current freaking mess I’m in and coming up with an escape plan.

“Why is that so hard to believe?” I glare at each of them, trying my best to remain stoic, just as they are.

“You’re definitely not his type,” one of them mutters, and it annoys me to shit.

“Yeah, well, maybe she is,” the blond one smirks. “Blonde and dumb.”

“Fuck you, asshole,” I snap. “Some babies were dropped on their heads. You were clearly thrown at a wall. You’re the reason this country has to put directions on a shampoo bottle. You are blond as fuck!” I stare at the asshole who had the nerve to call me that and weigh him in.

Yeah, all looks and muscle, but probably fucking brain-dead. I know the type really well.

“You have a lot of nerve attempting to insult three men who you.....”

“If you’re expecting me to cry in a corner and be scared shitless,” I interject angrily, “take a fucking ticket, asshole. I’ve seen enough in a lifetime to know there is no God, and my fate lies in the guns you’re packing under your jackets and inside the back waistband of your pants.”

The doppelganger arches a brow, and I realize I may have said something I shouldn’t have. Most women like me would be scared. If they only knew how fast my heart really is beating. Realistically, I should be in some kind of catatonic state among these three very obvious street thugs. So I get their skepticism.

“You’ve been cleaning in here, blondie?” I swear, what is with this guy’s bullshit about blondes? Does he even recognize the color of his own hair?

“What exactly was she cleaning up would be the better question,” the doppelganger says, and with a quick move out of nowhere, he grabs my neck, drags me over to the wall, and takes out a gun from his inside rib holster, and points it under my chin.

“I’ve just had about enough of your blathering trap. Stop yakking and start talking, bitch.” He says, and now I’m about to explode into full panic mode.

“Show them fear, Revie, and they’ll own you. It’ll be game over.”

That voice in my head switches to a frequency I hadn’t thought about in a long time. I can’t control my heart beating like crazy, but I can try and control the current situation if I try.

“Take that piece of metal shit out of my face and get your dirty hands off me, and maybe I’ll tell you what happened to your brother. Kill me now, and you kill your only lead.”

I know it’s a massive risk because, unlike Archer, these three seem like mental headcases. Well, at least the two do because the Asian one seems the quietest of the bunch.

“You’re in no position to bargain,” the twin glowers at me.

“Then shoot me, and my secret goes to the grave. You’ll never solve this on your own. Something bad happened to

Archer, and you need me to find him. I'm the only goddamn hope you have here."

I don't know what the fuck I'm saying, but I need to buy myself some time. These men wouldn't hesitate shooting me dead in the head.

"Who the fuck are you working for?" He hasn't lowered the gun, but I can tell he won't shoot me just yet.

"I'm the Lone Ranger," I say with sarcasm, which quickly changes to gravely serious.

"You need me. Kill me now, and you'll never find Archer."

He finally releases me, grabbing my shoulder and pushing me hard to sit on the bed. For sure, I'm probably going to be bruised by his manhandling.

I glare up at him.

Asshole.

"Start talking then, Lone Ranger." He doesn't put his gun away but holds it close to his side.

"You think I'm stupid? If I tell you, you'll kill me."

He sighs as if I'm testing his patience.

"I will kill you anyway. What's your point here?"

I swallow hard. He's not kidding around, and I need to come up with a fast plan to survive the next ten minutes.

"You do realize there isn't anyone manning the front desk? At some point, someone's going to call management; they will go looking for me. What are you going to do? Shoot everyone

down? Massacre the entire hotel guests and its staff? Then what? Your brother will still be missing, and you've achieved nothing but killed a ton of innocent people.”

He leans against the dresser, crosses his hands over his body with his gun pointing downwards, and stares at me. I'm sure some amusement passes over his face, but my focus is mainly drawn to what he casually holds in his hand.

“You're missing one important element,” he says, regarding me with an expression that's almost telling me he's not just amused but will keep me alive. At least for a little while to discover the truth behind who I am.

I cock my head at him, trying to keep my internal emotions positive so my brain can focus on a better plan to get me out of this mess.

“You've just confirmed he's alive, which means I don't need you anymore.”

“Nope,” I pop the p, doing my best rendition of remaining confident. “He's missing. You never asked me if he was missing, alive, or dead. Kill me now, and you'll never find HIS BODY!”

“Are you saying he's dead?” Blond guy blurts out.

I look at all three staring at me as if their lives depended on my answer. It occurs to me immediately that Archer means a lot more to these men than just being fellow gang members.

I look at my watch and grin at all three men as I sit up straight on the bed. Just because they are standing over me

doesn't mean they have the upper hand.

“Tik-Tok, time is running out,” I say with a cocky attitude. “My colleague will soon be back from her lunch. Time isn't on your side, boys. I've eliminated every trace of Archer here; that's what this bleach was for. You smelled it, so you know what it was used for. But there's a safe in his room, and he's using it. Whatever's in there might give you a lead, but you still need me for further clues.”

If they take me with them, I can prolong my life and figure out how to escape. But if I tell them everything now, they'll eliminate me immediately. I'll take the former plan for now.

The twin's brows furrow as he looks up at the Asian guy. He's not at all amused with me anymore.

“Go to the front desk. If her colleague returns, tell them,” he pauses and looks at the gold name tag on my blouse, “that *Raven* was taken ill. She phoned a friend who took her to the ER.”

“We're not taking her with us,” the blonde guy objects. He looks at the twin, completely ignoring me.

“We don't have a choice,” he mutters angrily. He'd eliminate me in a second but knows I might be some kind of clue as to who took his brother.

“The other alternative is we use our usual methods,” the Asian guy who was seemingly quiet suddenly has a voice, and it's as British as the other two.

It's always the silent ones that are the most lethal. He looks innocent and cute, but I bet he's the biggest motherfucker of the bunch, and I'm aware of what kind of usual *extortion* methods gangs use.

“Archer will kill you if he finds out you touched me,” I add, knowing precisely what he is probably suggesting they do to me.

“Are you having a laugh?” The twin replies, and all three men have a chuckle.

“It was a one-night fuck, darlin'. Archer doesn't do feelings.”

Maybe everything I thought Archer told me about himself was just lies, but the more I think about it, the more I believe it wasn't.

What would he have gained by making up such stories? Sure, some women fall for sob stories, but he had already fucked me senseless, and he knew I was up for more sex. Whatever happened between Archer and me that night was real, but whatever happened afterward, well, that's just fucked up and a massive mystery to everyone here in this room. But I won't let them know anything for now. I trusted Archer; these guys give me no reason to trust them at all.

“Yeah? You sure about that?” I smirk at them. “That's why it took him several tries to get me to have dinner with him? Let alone chasing me down one of London's busiest streets while he was in a meeting just so he could try one more time? Or how about how he would wake up extra early every morning

to go jogging in Hyde Park in the hope that he might run into me?”

I look at the twin, giving him a full once over and then expressively dismissing him.

He’s not going to get under my skin, but I’ll make sure to get under his and fuck with him.

“Archer will kill you if you hurt one hair on me,” I continue. “He might be your brother, but I’ve had him as a lover. No one goes down on a woman like he did if there wasn’t anything there.”

“So Archer went down on you. Who gives a fuck?” The blond guy is grating on my nerves.

“Were you there?” I glower at him. “All five times? Nine if you count orgasms.”

All three men stare at me open-mouthed and wide-eyed. If I knew that’s all it took to shock them, I would have started off with that and maybe avoided a freaking gun pointed at my face to scare the shit out of me.

No one appreciates a gun held at them.

“You talking flippin’ fantasies, lass.”

“Ask him yourself when you see him. Archer is a fucking great lover.” I say with genuine confidence this time because it’s the truth.

“No one has nine orgasms in one night.”

“That would be your loss,” I say, my eyes darting directly to his dick.

Fucking hell.

Blond guy here is pretty fit, actually. He might be annoying as fuck, but there’s something scorching hot and sexy about him. He’s so big; he could snap me in two and hurt me so easily. Yet he hasn’t laid a hand on me.

My eyes divert to the Asian guy with dark hair and eyes and a perfect facial bone structure. He’s wearing all black with ripped skinny-fit jeans that ride his hips perfectly low. The cold, calculating gaze lets me know he’s not just a pretty face.

I don’t need to look at the twin. They are carbon copies of each other, minus the tats, piercings, and arrogant attitude.

“Something’s not right with you three,” I say quietly, thinking out loud.

These guys are all models, not gangsters. I carefully observe all three. The same tats on their hands confirm their gang affiliation, but they seem almost too perfect. Beautiful faces with tall, strong, athletic bodies.

Street thugs and gangsters are usually fat, with pot bellies, hairy, and ugly as fuck. Take the Sopranos, for instance, which is a more realistic rendition of what these men should look like. These men are more contemporary Peaky Blinders and Tommy Shelby types. Even blond guy here seems more like a sexier version of Jax Teller riding a Harley, minus the beard. These types of gangsters don’t exist in real life.

“We don’t have time for this,” the twin’s voice borders on acerbic. He looks at the Asian guy, and they nod in understanding. He takes off, swiping my phone from the charger on the desk and pocketing it.

“Hey, asshole. That’s mine!” I glare daggers at him.

“Not anymore,” he gives me a side glance and quickly leaves the room.

The twin addresses the blond guy. “Find her passport. We’re taking her with us.”

“Where are we going?”

With a panic running riot inside me, I quickly realize that this might not end well for me if I leave with these men to travel abroad.

“I never agreed to go anywhere with you!”

My eyes divert to the blond guy going through my stuff. He doesn’t have to look very far; my passport is where anyone would keep it.

In the desk drawer.

“Which room is Archer’s?” he asks, ignoring my comment, his eyes darting to my hand, and snatches the two cards from me.

“You’re testing my patience, Lone Ranger,” the twin scowls at me.

There’s a camera in every public area of the hotel, and I need to be seen on it. Whatever happens, this is my only alibi

proving that they kidnapped or killed me. I highly doubt Hayden will give a shit or show much interest in my disappearance, but I know Louise will breathe down the cops' throat to do something.

“I'm coming up with you upstairs,” I say.

“The hell you're not!” the twin exclaims. “Take her to the car and shoot her if she tries anything funny.”

“I'd like to shoot this mad cow right now!” I hear blond guy say behind me.

Asshole.

“Ugh! You're the human version of a migraine. Keep that fucking twelve-inch ribbed dildo stuck up your ass!” I exclaim. “You're a little blond boy who resembles more Dennis the Menace than the Jax Teller you were going for. Archer will shred your little wiener if you kill me.”

“You know what? At this point, I don't give a rat's arse what he does. You're proving to be an annoying little twat,” he retorts.

Except I keep my back to him, ignoring him as I glare at the twin. I know who's the alpha in this boy band, and I'm staring right at him.

He's looking at me with interest as his pierced tongue swipes over his lower lip, trying to figure me out.

“I'm keeping you as collateral,” he finally breaks his silence.

“Against what?” I ask curiously. He must be the first person in a very long time who thinks I’m worth something.

Should I be flattered or horrified?

“Can I at least pack a bag?” I ask, hopeful.

“No!” both men barked.

I grab my purse and quickly shove some undies in it as we pass the dresser. I don’t know why I grabbed them; just instinct. I have a feeling I won’t be coming back here for a while.

“No bags.”

Blond guy goes to snatch my purse, but I cling to it.

“Are you hard of hearing?”

“I’ve got my period.” It’s a lie, but men don’t question these things. “My tampons are in there, and I need extra panties because I bleed a lot.”

“A permanent bullet in your head wouldn’t make you bleed anymore.” Blond asshole chuckles under his breath.

Sick bastard, I snarl at him. I don’t care how good-looking this asshole is. If I had a gun in my hand, I would have shot him cold.

“Let her keep the bag,” the twin says as he opens the door for me, and I walk out.

I watch both men pocket their guns, and I lead them down the hall to the service elevator. We go up the floors in complete silence, and I stare out both men, but none of them

say anything. For some odd reason, I'm beginning to see some visual differences between Archer and his brother.

“You're not identical. And I'm not referring to the ink, piercings, or ugly arrogant attitude that drips off you.”

“Are you sure it was Archer you fucked because everything you've said so far about him doesn't sound like him.” Both men grunt in amusement.

“Oh yeah, sure. He tried that big-headed bullshit on me when he admitted to stalking me, but I shut him down real fast.”

I watch both men eye each other but continue to face me with stoned expressions.

“Fine. Don't believe me,” I huff, rolling my eyes. “It's your asses on the line when Archer finds out about this,” I shrug my shoulder with pretend indifference about what happens to them.

As soon as we hit the hallway of Archer's suite, where I know the security camera is, I freeze.

“I can't do it,” I say, hoping one of them pulls out a gun. “I'm out of here.” I head towards the main elevator.

An arm yanks on my shoulder to pull me back, but I break free and make a run for it.

“Come back here, you daft woman.”

I'm tackled down relatively fast, pulled up harshly from the floor, and thrown face forward against the wall. One of the

men holds the back of my neck forcefully against it cursing his mouth off.

“Where the fuck do you think you’re going?” I’m almost sure it’s the blond guy now.

I’m confident that the camera is recording all of this, so when Louise discovers I have disappeared, it was because I was kidnapped and not because I decided to walk off from my job due to stress.

“I changed my mind and decided I’m not going to help you. I don’t want any part of whatever gang bullshit you’re all in.”

“You don’t have a flippin’ choice, Lone Ranger,” I hear the twin saying with vexation. I can’t see anything because the other idiot has my neck ruthlessly forced down, and my face is smashed against the wall.

“His suite is 449. Can I leave now?” I mutter, satisfied this scene will help my innocence.

Of course, they won’t free me. Instead, I’m dragged with them into the suite and forced down into one of the armchairs in the living room.

As soon as I see the twin attach the silencer to his gun, I panic. But I keep all that anxious shit inside me because one false move and I’m toast.

Is this where they are going to kill me?

My nerves are so shot, and I think I might suffer heart failure even before he gets that chance to kill me.

“He had a meeting at Elephant and Castle Pub two days ago, except he never made that meeting,” I say fast, but the twin ignores me and enters the bedroom area.

Within seconds I hear a muzzled gunshot. And then he reappears, shoving some documents into the inside pocket of his jacket.

Guns. Silencers. And who knows what else they will produce? These male model-like gangsters come prepared, and they are dangerous and lethal fucks.

I can't get mixed up in whatever this is.

Fuck Hayden and his selfish fucked up ego. Had he not dumped me, I would never have slept with Archer, and I would never have been mixed up in this shit. Why does fate have to fuck it up for me every damn time?

“Get up, blondie. You're coming with us.” The blond guy taps the tip of his gun on my thigh, and I again spot the same tattoo they all have in common on his hand.

“I don't even know why you're taking me with you,” I say, feeling queasy.

“We could just kill you here if that's what you prefer.”

“Or not kill me at all and just let me get on with my life.”

He looks at me, and if I didn't know any better, I would have missed the two-second empathy that appears on his face, which throws me off.

“Sorry, luv, but until Archer is found, you are the link to his whereabouts.”

The blond guy nudges me hard to stand and move towards the door. The twin completely ignores me and already heads out towards the service stairs.

At least they’ll keep me alive, but there’s no guarantee that even after Archer somehow makes a miracle appearance, he’ll want to keep me alive. Compared to these three men, he seems like a completely different person than what I witnessed the other night.

But then again, I did know there was something very predatory about him, a character trait all three men seem to have. I should have trusted my gut instinct and stayed away from Archer, but my pussy is an asshole for convincing me to accept his dinner invitation.

We meet the Asian guy outside by the service doors in the back section of the hotel where delivery trucks usually park. I notice the blonde guy silently disappearing around the corner.

“All good?” The twin asks him, keeping a watchful eye on me.

“Archer’s file was deleted from the central system. There shouldn’t be any trace of his reservations here.”

I huff, and the two men turn to me.

“His details were total bullshit anyway,” I admit. “Business address was a church in Enfield.”

They silently look at me with blank faces, and I glare back at them.

“What? Obviously, all of you are dodgy as fuck!”

The twin shakes his head, ignoring me further as if what I said bears no significant importance.

“Cameras?” he asks the Asian, but then he turns his head towards me as if his question is addressed to me.

“Cameras all reset,” his colleague replies with a grin. “Like we weren’t there.”

The twin’s lips twitch into a smirk, and he must have guessed my little drama act outside the suite was exactly what it was. He’s going to make sure no one goes looking for me.

Asshole is smart, but now I’m seething.

“You know people will eventually wonder where I’ve gone,” I say, wanting to wipe that smug look off Archer’s doppelganger’s face.

“Not my issue. Where you’re going, they’ll never find you.” He replies, and there’s something sinister in his voice that frightens the shit out of me. My hand grips my handbag tight until my knuckles become deathly white.

Blond guy pulls up seconds later in a black SUV with tinted windows, and the twin opens the back door.

“After you, Lone Ranger,” he says, stepping aside and holding the door for me.

I have to wonder why this dickhead is grinning at me.

What's so fucking funny, asshole?

I hesitate and suddenly feel a prick in the back of my neck. Turning to look at the twin, his expression is stoic, and that smugness disappears into a more serious expression.

My hand goes to where I felt the puncture, and I look around to find the Asian guy standing right behind me. His arms pull forward, and he pushes me inside the car.

Everything starts to become heavy, almost nauseating. It's as if I'm here but not really alive or in control of myself.

“What did you do to me?” I ask, but not sure if the words came out of my mouth or if they were spoken in my head.

I feel two strong hands on my hips, lifting me effortlessly into the back seat, and I lay down on it. My body feels weightless as it slowly moves, and I become weaker. I feel useless as if I'm watching my life slowly slip away.

“I can't....” I call out. I don't want to die. It's not my time. “Please...” I beg, but I know pleading for my life with these three thugs is useless. They're trained killers, and I mean nothing to them.

I try to fight whatever they've injected me with and try to open the door, but the Asian guy gets in and grabs my arms holding me down firmly. I'm thrashing and kicking in his firm grip.

The twin turns and says something, but I can no longer register what anyone says. My fight is slowly weakening, but

I'm resolved to battle them to the end. I'm a warrior, not a quitter....

Chapter 9



I GLANCE AT THE woman hunched over the armchair as the plane ascends into the sky. Her light blonde, almost white hair was tied up into a tight knot earlier, but after that mad fight in the car with Kazz, it's become frayed and pokes out everywhere.

At least now she'll be properly zonked out for another few hours.

Better. I don't want to hear her voice a minute longer. There's no doubt she's a looker, but she's annoying as fuck.

One thing hangs around my head about my brother that annoys the shite out of me.

Shagging the hotel staff!

What the bloody hell was Archer thinking, fucking around with hotel staff?

He had several missions in London, and she wasn't supposed to be one of them. I could cast doubt that such even happened, considering there was no trace of him in her room nor of her in his. But the way she spoke to me, thinking I was Archer as soon as she saw me enter the hotel, and then the look on her face realizing I wasn't him was either truly genuine or Oscar-worthy acting skills.

But the stench of bleach in her room gave her cause to make sure there was no trace of him. Why would she have done that if she didn't have something to hide?

Something is way off with her.

“This is a mistake bringing her with us,” Killian mutters, brushing his hand through his blonde hair and his blue eyes glare straight at me, indicating how serious he is about this.

My eyes dart to the ink on his hand. The same design all four of us have serves as a reminder of who we are and the oath we took. Not that we need reminding, but only four people in this world are privileged to have it, and one of them is currently MIA.

“She knows he was supposed to meet with Dimitri in Elephant and Castle Pub and that it didn’t happen there. We don’t even know how much she knows, but it’s enough to justify my suspicions about her.”

“You think she took Archer out?” he asks with a calm curiosity that annoys the shit out of me. Fury wavers inside me as I cast him a death look.

Within seconds, I’m out of my chair and yank his collar, the tip of my knife points under his chin.

“Fucking suggest that again and I’ll fucking gut you up like a flippin’ humpback on a whaler.”

“Whoa, cuz!” his eyes widen, and he waves his hands upwards in surrender.

“Killian isn’t the enemy, West,” Kazz says casually. “Calm the fuck down. It’s not like it hasn’t passed our minds after she said her side of the bed was covered in blood.” He turns his head and attention back to his laptop, knowing full well I wouldn’t kill my cousin even if my life depended on it.

“Archer is fucking alive, and we’ll find him,” I insist, pushing Killian back into his chair. Like me, he’s got a low trigger tolerance, but he doesn’t retaliate against my attack on him. Instead, he pulls his shirt back in place as if I had never threatened his life.

“So far, everything checks about her,” Kazz continues talking without looking away from his screen. “We know Dimitri changed the meeting location last minute. She thinks the business address is fake up in Enfield. So she doesn’t know everything.”

“Yeah, that also had me thinking,” Killian adds. “She doesn’t know about the basement in the church. This could mean she may have been merely stalking Archer and not be his secret girlfriend.”

The idea that she could be his hidden lover seems unfathomable. Archer wouldn’t hide stuff from me, ever.

“Bollocks, and you know it,” I scoff. “Archer doesn’t do girlfriends or relationships.”

None of us do, for that matter, not in our line of work. Sure, the casual fuck when warranted, and we have a few girls in different cities for that. We might call them regulars and available when we want to see them, but monogamous dating and relationships have never been something we could provide a female.

“He always stays in the same hotel and insists on it. He could easily stay at any of the residences, but he doesn’t.”

“That means nothing. We’d all avoid Prophet if we could. The less contact we have with the bastard, the better.”

“If the old bastard wants to see us, you know damn well, some chavvy hotel isn’t going to stop him.”

I raise my brow at Kazz.

“And this is why I don’t understand why we are jeopardizing Ignis by bringing her with us,” he adds.

“She knows too much,” I explain. “We handled Archer’s missed meeting with Alexei, but if that shit got to Prophet’s ears, he would have traced his last movements down and found that all roads lead to her. He wouldn’t have even considered that she might be a lead to finding him; he would have her eliminated without a second thought.”

“Never took you for a pity-fool.”

“Wanker,” I scoff, narrowing my eyes at my cousin. “I don’t give a fucking toss about her welfare. But she’s better to us alive than dead. We’ll get rid of her when she’s of no use to us, but something tells me she knows more than she’s letting up. You smelled her bloody room; she eliminated every trace of him. Why would she do that? She’s a flippin’ receptionist in a hotel and bleaching out her room? Any normal woman would have been a blubbering mess, calling the *Old Bill* and reporting a crime. She’s hiding her tracks and has her own agenda.”

“You think she’s one of those pussy hitmen?”

“Female contract killer, you plonker,” I correct Killian.

I'm still pissed off with my cousin daring to suggest that my brother's fucking dead.

"I wouldn't put it past it. It's not the first time VOSTech has assigned one of their *Nikita* agents to us, and they never succeeded in their mission. Usually, these agents' cover stories are watertight. But her story is all over the place, completely uncoordinated. Either her handler abandoned her, or like she said, she's acting alone."

I don't miss the sly glance Kazz gives Killian to ignore my current fury. Maybe it's better they do that.

We'll find Archer if it's the last thing I do.

"I think abandoned," Killian ignores my insults and focuses on the issue at hand.

Smart move, considering my current level of patience is wearing thin, but these men know me better than anyone.

"But these women tend to be resourceful," Killian continues. "You're right with your theory about her working behind a hotel front desk. These women are groomed to smile and look pretty for guests, not bleach their rooms and hide criminal evidence. She didn't even flinch when you pulled a gun on her."

"She didn't flinch, but my hand wrapped around her neck allowed me to feel her pulse. Her heart was pumping mad crazy. She was in fear but smart enough not to show it. She's been around guns before. Trained to remain calm in such a

situation but somehow not trained enough. A VOSTech agent would know how to lower their pulse.”

“Maybe from another agency,” Killian draws a sharp breath and looks at her. “I wouldn’t put it past her; you could be her second assignment.”

“That’s another reason we’re bringing her with us. I want to keep an eye on her. Hold her in one of the cells when we arrive at the island. This isn’t going to be a vacation for her.”

Earlier, Kazz did an electronic check of her purse contents and phone. There weren’t any trackers or devices. She also had no tampons in her bag, so she lied about having her period. Other than her need for her knickers, I can’t think of another reason why she’d need her purse. It’s not like she needs her wallet and credit cards to go shopping where she’s going.

“I need my equipment to do a better search, but while we were still on the ground, I did some rummaging around online,” Kazz looks up from his screen at Killian and me.

“Her passport checks out. It was issued at one of those agency offices in Manhattan, New York. She’s a US citizen. Twenty-two years old. Raven King is on her passport and driver’s license, and she has an online alias *Ven Queen* which her IG profile is set to private. Once we get to the island, I’ll pass her photo through the system to see if she has any other official alias.”

“What’s her story for being in London?”

If anyone can get info on someone in minutes, it'll be Kazz. The guy is the youngest of us but a whizz hacker and our very own resident cyberbug.

“She’s on a management training course and transferred to London from the Manhattan hotel four months ago. I crossed-checked customs, and it matches her entry date into England. She’s on a student visa in England and enrolled at Monroe College on a hospitality degree course in New York. She’s got a government-issued financial aid, and the hotel is sponsoring her grant.”

“Sounds too good,” Killian says, and I agree with him. She seemed too uncoordinated earlier, but her background looks way too spotless compared to her ramblings.

“There’s more,” Kazz keeps our attention. “When she thought you were Archer, she mentioned a name, Hayden. She said, *‘I’m already on the line with Hayden.’*”

Not only is he an IT specialist, but he’s got a perfect photographic memory.

“So, call me curious as to who this person is,” Kazz continues, “Hayden Aspinalls. The multi-million dollar heir and international playboy. And our little captured fox over there was dating him.”

Personally, I don’t give two fucks who she’s dating, but for Kazz to mention it must be something significant, so I remain silent, waiting for him to expand.

“Aspinalls is the name of the hotel we were at,” Killian says, connecting the dots.

“So she was shagging the playboy. So fucking, what? She must have been his side piece,” I say, looking at the woman. She’s hardly moved, but I don’t expect her to; these drugs are designed to knock someone out, not put them into a light nap.

There’s no denying it; she’s attractive. Those athletic legs and curves, high cheekbones, pouty lips, pale flawless skin, and light hair are all ingredients for an insanely hot woman. I can also see how she might make a good fuck for some, like my gormless twin brother, who would shag any pretty thing with legs.

But she’s definitely not my type in the slightest. Too blonde, too pale, too much of that America’s wholesome bullshit they like to produce.

I bet she’s a cuddler. That’s the kind of shit that makes me cringe.

This could also be a front for her undercover character.

The fact remains that we know nothing about her, and she refuses to supply us with anything.

“As of two days ago, this Hayden geezer got engaged to some socialite from New York.”

I look at him, wondering where exactly he plans to go with this info. I’m not a patient man.

“Kazz, I don’t give a fuck. Do you have a point for all this K-drama?”

“The fact that you know K-drama is questionable,” Killian quips with a shit-eating annoying-as-fuck smile.

I glower and briefly consider throwing him out of this plane because he’s been grating on my nerves since we arrived in England.

“Well, I cracked Raven’s IG account, and she’s got a few photos of him and her together while he eliminated all traces of her three days ago and untagged himself from her photos. It’s like she never existed in his world.”

“So she shags a playboy, and he dumps her for another dumb socialite bimbo. Why the fuck do I care?” I look at Kazz wide-eyed, and he glances up and regards me with that same shit-eating, condescending expression I’ve seen on his and Killian’s faces countless times. That one grin that makes it clear they know they can get away with whatever they want.

“He’s her direct manager on her training program. And I went through her mobile. This relationship doesn’t seem as straightforward. They’ve been together for at least a year, maybe more. She has a couple of relationship photos and text messages. Yet the latest texts seem all to come from him. He’s asking her to talk with him, and she’s coldly rejecting his cheating arse.”

“Okay, so he fucked her over, and she wants nothing to do with the asshole. I still don’t see why the fuck we’re discussing this?” I rub the back of my neck as I speak. The tension has already seeped down my shoulders.

“Because she’s got a twelve-month or more investment into this relationship. Sure, any tech hacker working for VOSTech can add her details to any system like IDs, school transcripts, and work but long-term relationships with high-profile playboys? Seems pretty far-fetched for an assassin.”

“He could also be an agent working the agency, and this is their cover.”

“Nah, his profile is too public, and he seems like a genuine git.”

“So, how long has she and Archer been fucking?” Killian asks, and I’m surprised he even gives a toss about who Archer shags.

“No idea,” Kazz replies. “Maybe for as long as she arrived in England. She claims it was just one night. I think it was longer than that.”

“I doubt Archer even gave a shit she had a boyfriend. He saw a blonde pussy and ran towards it.”

“Let me look up more stuff about her background. Once I have something more solid, I’ll let you know.”

The three of us turn to the woman as soon as she stirs in her sleep.

“She’ll probably be awake in a few hours. What should we do with her in Dubai?”

“I’ll go with Killian to meet with Omar. You stay on board with her; we’ll only be a few hours anyway. Keep her sedated until we get to Ignis.”

“That long?” he looks at me worried. “You’ll know she’ll be sick for a good couple of days when she wakes up.”

“Good, it’ll keep her busy in the cell,” I say, not giving two fucks.

Until Kazz has more info on her, I haven’t got any desire to converse with the bitch who’s holding information about my brother hostage. I’d love to shake it out of her if I could.

There’s something about Raven King that’s off about her story. I think the other two notice it too, but none of us can figure out what context it is. There’s a dangerous kind of innocence about her, and I’d prefer to keep my distance from her until we find out what it is that tells me she’s bad news.

“What about him?” Killian asks, and we turn to look at the zonked-out wanker whose arms and legs are bound together as he sits crouched up and tied to the armchair at the back of the plane.

His head is shaved, tattoos cover him from head to toe, and his clothes look as if they haven’t been washed for weeks. His one eye is ballooned shut, his lip split, and his cheek bruised from the punches Killian gave him for refusing to provide us with the info we needed, so we drugged and kidnapped him and will use our own form of methods to extract what we need.

“Miroslav remains unconscious like her. We’ll deal with him later. Have there been any alerts by the Russians yet?”

“No,” Kazz replies. “Ivan will wonder where his third in command went, but I doubt he’ll be calling the calvary for another forty-eight hours.”

“They’ll demand the firm comb through London.”

Killian chuckles, “As if Prophet would ever humor them and oblige.”

“Cows will fly first,” I mutter and return my gaze to the two men. “We need to know which shipment will contain the girls when the vessel docks in Felixstowe. As soon as we find out, we should send the mercenaries to handle the rescue and bring the victims to the safe house.”

It’s not the first time we’ve orchestrated the kidnapping of important gang members from their affiliated inner circle to extract the info we need in order to hijack human shipments bound for the slave and sex trade.

London is known for attracting the international underworld to come and play in the city under the control of Norwood Saints. Most of the gang and mafia member snatchings we orchestrate will happen in London right under Prophet’s nose.

Sooner or later, the syndicates will start questioning Norwood Saints’ capabilities to hold neutral ground with their business crime partners on their home territory. There’s not an ounce of me that gives a fuck. We are creating an opening in the firm’s heart to make them vulnerable, and when we hit, they won’t see us coming.

Chapter 10



AS I ATTEMPT TO open my eyes, the throbbing pain that hits my entire head and face feels like nothing I've ever experienced before. My whole body is stiff from being in one position for too long. My head is seriously killing me, almost as if I've had one too many drinks, and my intestines seem to agree with that theory.

Groaning, I keep my eyes shut to try and let the pain fade away as I rack my brain, trying to figure out what happened. Everything seems a complete blur, and the more I try to think, the more my head feels like it wants to explode.

There's something about my surroundings that's not right. It smells musty, and there are echo-like movement sounds in the distance. This isn't my usual bedding either; it feels crappy, which is probably why my body feels so stiff. I have no idea what the hell I'm lying on, but I'm sure I'm not back in the comfort of my hotel room.

Then it all comes rushing back. Archer St John. Those men, the street thugs. The pinprick in the back of my neck.

"Fuck!" I say out loud, almost sure I'm alone, and snap my eyes open to make sure. I stare up at the grey concrete ceiling and breathe heavily. Pushing myself up on my elbows, I panic as I take in my surroundings.

My heart slams heavily in my chest upon realizing I'm in a small cell with no window, a metal door that's probably locked, and some mediocre fluorescent light in the high ceiling which seems to make this excruciating headache even worse.

I'm lying on some shitty thin mattress on a stone slab with no sheets.

At least I'm still clothed in my hotel uniform. It's the only thing that gives me any peace of mind as if such is even remotely possible right now in this wildly fucked up situation.

Realizing my predicament, I prod my aching head.

Those bastards.

They drugged and kidnapped me.

I'm sure it was that Asian guy, but it's all fuzzy in my head as to what exactly happened. The twin brother and his two sidekick pricks took me hostage, and I must be in this cell because of them.

I lift my aching head off the mattress and search around. There's nothing in here besides a plastic bucket which I assume they must expect me to use as a toilet. Then I spot the tiny camera high up in the corner of the room. It's working because the blue light indication is on.

"Fucking perverts!" I mutter and bring my back down to the mattress. I need to get this ugly uniform off me; I feel constricted. It's as if my entire body is squeezed into a tight tube, and I'm struggling to move.

Suddenly an overwhelming, nauseating rush hits me fast, and I snatch the bucket, hold my face over, and my guts explode into it. Moaning, I wipe my hand over my mouth, and my eyes spot the small plastic bottle of water next to the stone platform.

I fall back down on the mattress with this suicide headache that feels as if someone is stabbing me inside my skull. Whatever the fuck they injected me with must have been something awful enough to make me sick.

These fuckers must have known I'd be ill.

Assholes. They caused this.

All because I had one fuck with their guy. I'd like to say it was a lousy fuck, but on the contrary, it was the best time I ever experienced with a man. Not that I've had a ton of experiences, but enough to know none will ever live up to what I experienced the other day.

What day is it anyway? The way I feel, I'm sure they've had me drugged for at least twelve or more hours.

I could do with the water bottle, but I feel so weak and sick I don't have the energy to move.

My eyes dart over to that camera.

Are they expecting me to turn into an alien or something? I'm in a tiny cell with no windows, sick to my stomach, and there's a locked door. What exactly is the purpose of watching me?

Actually, I'm presuming the door is locked, but why wouldn't it not be?

With whatever energy I don't have, I manage to pull myself to sit up, and that swoosh feeling in my head hits me hard. I force the black tailored jacket off my body, casting it aside.

It would have been better to remove all my clothes and get down to my panties to feel less constricted, but there's no way I'm giving those pervs a show. Instead, I open a couple of buttons of my white blouse, pull it out of my pants and grab the bottle of water.

Eyeing the door in front of me, I'm sure it's locked. What the hell ... I've got nothing to lose other than my patience. I'll try anyway and make my way towards it. Pushing the handle, I curse.

Of fucking course, it's locked. It was just a little wishful thinking. I glare with irritation around the room and move closer to the camera. Standing directly under it, I take the water bottle, hurl it up, and it hits the target but doesn't do any damage. I leave the bottle on the floor where it's fallen, stick my middle finger up at it and go lie back down on the stinking mattress.

There's no way I will allow them to intimidate me; instead, I turn my head at the camera and stare at it. My mind drifts to the hotel, wondering what Louise might be thinking about my sudden disappearance. My clothes and luggage are still in my room, but my passport is missing. Most likely, she thinks I'm probably heading toward a meltdown with all that shit about Hayden. Or she thinks I decided to take her advice and use the rest of the week off to think things through. Either way, those assholes removed every trace they were there, which means no one at work will be in any great panic about my disappearance.

There isn't another person alive who will notice or even question it. That's how freaking pathetic my twenty-two years of existence is. Despite being in a relationship with a man for two years, I've lived a solitary life, closed up from the world, worried that something just like this could happen.

The irony of my situation couldn't be more pitiful when I think about it. All I've achieved is making sure no one is around when something like this does happen. Because I'm a shadow in this world, making sure I go unnoticed. That was why my relationship with Hayden was ideal; all the attention was focused on him rather than on me.

I sigh heavily at how I fucked up my life.



No idea how long I've been lying down here just staring at the ugly grey ceiling, looking at the cracks in the concrete, and trying to make a visual pattern with them in my head. They took my watch from my wrist when I was unconscious, and I have no concept of time without a window here. I long gave up staring at the camera; I'm just wondering when someone will show up here.

At some point, I figure they'll get bored staring at a sick body on a mattress and need to question where their teammate is.

My mind drifts to Archer's brother.

There's no doubt in my mind that his sibling lacks any kind of refined skill he has...or had. God, for my own life, I do hope he's still alive. But going back to his twin, I don't like him in the slightest, yet there's something deep, dark, and dangerous that I'm strangely intrigued by. I wouldn't use the term *attracted* because I'm not. Why on earth would I be attracted to an asshole whose eye glare makes my spine shiver? There's no doubt in my mind that the man is capable of a lot of cruelty without remorse.

He's probably the devil reincarnate.

I settle my mind on that conclusion and refocus on how I'm going to get out of this apparent cell they put me in. I'm almost convinced these walls and that door are soundproof; the echoes I hear are just my mind playing games.

My thoughts are abruptly drawn to the door, and there is someone unlocking it. I get up and grab my shoe from the floor.

I have no idea how the heck my shoes can be used as a weapon, but I feel useless without anything. Perhaps the chunky heel could do something. Aiming and hitting the person's head or eye might be enough to give me the leverage I need to scramble out of here.

It's the Asian guy, and he's holding a hot bowl of something with steam jetting out the top of it. I could just quickly flip it over his face and make a runner. But if they have a camera in here, I'm sure there are more, and I'm not anywhere near as fit to fight these guys. I've seen a lot of badass women in films

and books who can karate-chop or swing a lethal kick and take down an army. But let's be honest here, I'm not one of them, even if I can cuss my mouth off and be as rude as fuck. That's as far as I can expand my intimidating character traits.

Instead, I stare at the guy as he approaches me, leaving the cell door wide open. I stretch my neck out, but all I see is an empty hallway with similar fluorescent lighting.

There's a reason he left the door open, and I won't play into whatever games these assholes are trying with me. I'm not easily provoked, I may not be a badass kick-boxing femme fatale, but I have a brain in my head and know how to use it.

Fuck, I should have used it before I slept with Archer. I knew there was something off about him the moment I came across his fake business address. I just never imagined this scenario.

"Stop thinking so hard," he says, and there's a hint of a smirk on his face.

I narrow my eyes at him.

"Fuck you. What are you, Big Brother, and the Thought Police? I can think as much as I like."

He chuckles, "You mean Thinkpol in Newspeak."

I ignore him. Smart ass knows his literature. Surprising for a street thug.

"Here," he goes to hand me the bowl, and I just stare at it.

“It’s chicken soup,” he confirms as if I’m too dumb to figure out that hot liquid steaming from a bowl is soup.

I ignore his offer, still glaring at him.

“It’s homemade. I think you might prefer it for your stomach.” Ignoring my glower, he puts it on the concrete slab next to the mattress and takes out a spoon and another bottle of water from the back pocket of his jeans.

“Did you think because this is homemade, it’s supposed to bring me some kind of fucking nostalgic comfort?” I say with heavy sarcasm, staring at him as if he’s a cracking idiot.

Sure, I’m freaking scared to death, but I know showing them fear will give them the advantage. So I’d rather give him a bitchy death stare than look like some damsel in distress who’s about to become a sobering catatonic mess.

Although I think I am one step from becoming precisely that.

“If I told you it’s just cuppa soup powder from a sachet, would you eat it?” He asks and sits down at the end of the mattress.

Who the fuck does he think he is making himself comfortable in here? What is this? Visiting times for prisoners? He should don a red and white striped pinafore and call himself a candy stripper since he wants to pretend to be a caring volunteer. I see straight through him; this asshole is nothing but a wolf dressed in a pretty boy costume.

I narrow my eyes at him as he observes the hell out of me.

“You drugged me. Why the hell would I eat anything you give me?”

“I’m sorry about that, but bringing you here and in an unconscious state was necessary.”

“Why?”

“No one knows about this place, and you were the last person to see Archer. We couldn’t just let you go.”

“You don’t know that. I am the last person you know of that saw him last.”

“Who are you working for?” He looks at me curiously, carefully watching my face, analyzing my every twitch and expression.

“Ah! I get it!” I say sarcastically. “Bring the cute one in to try and get me to talk. Nice one!”

He grins. “You think I’m cute,” he says as a matter of fact. “That’ll be a first.”

“Cute but probably deadly. You drugged me. It’s not something I’ll forgive you easily for.”

“Once again, I’m sorry about that, but it was necessary. Do you work for an agency, or are you freelance?”

Ignoring his questions, “Do you have a name? In my head, I refer to you as *Asian guy*.”

He flickers his dark brown eyes up at me as I refuse to sit beside him and remain standing.

“That’s a little lazy,” he scoffs.

“Is cute *Asian guy* better?”

He throws in a half smile.

“No.”

“Hot *Asian guy*?”

His eyes open wide with amusement.

“So now you think I’m hot?”

“What does IGNIS stand for?” I change tactics and start asking questions.

“All four of you have it on your hand. Is that your gang tag or something?”

“Or something.” He says, leaving his answer pretty vague.

“Is Archer’s doppelganger your boss? Did he send you in here to try and get stuff out of me?”

“There are other ways to extract information. Just because I sit casually next to you doesn’t make us friends.” He looks up at the camera, “I’m just hoping you could tell us without going to such extents.”

“It doesn’t matter what I tell you,” I look up at the camera because I know we’re being watched. “You’ve got it in your thick heads that I work for someone, and that’s all you’re prepared to listen to. The three of you are utter dickheads. Stupid ones too.”

“Okay, then,” I see him adjusting his train of thought.” Let’s start with who you were prior to being a fourteen-year-old

teenager walking into a police station in New Rochelle, New York, and declaring your parents abandoned you.”

Now it’s my turn for my eyes to go wide, and it’s not with any amusement.

They’ve been digging.

Of course, they would. They have my wallet, driver’s license, and passport. They probably have access to all kinds of government databases. What kind of street thugs are they?

Because they’re not. They must be some mini-crime gang.

“Since you seem to be a Mr. Smarty Pants, why don’t you tell me, Asian *boy*.” I won’t be giving him jack shit and fold my arms against my chest to confirm that fact.

He gives me a stern look.

“Now that’s a little derogatory.”

“Just a little?” I’m so angry at my situation and these idiots that I just want him out of here and to leave me alone. “I can get more racist if you prefer.”

He stands up and glances at the untouched bowl. “Have your soup before it goes cold.”

“I need the bathroom,” I say, which I do, but I hope to get a chance to get out of this place.

His eyes glance at the bucket, and I look up at him in horror.

“Are you freaking kidding me? It’s full of my vomit!”

“No one said this would be a five-star resort.”

“So is this some kind of kinky coprophilia poop fetish you three have? You kidnap women and then watch them pee and shit in front of you? Do you stand behind the camera and jerk off to shitting porn?”

“You have a sick mind,” his face remains stoic, and he goes to leave.

“Hey, *Asian dude!*“ I call out, but he doesn’t turn around. “I really have to pee.”

“When you remember your story, let me know.” I watch as his chin raises up towards the camera.

“My parents were junkies,” I blurt out, pacing myself so I don’t sound desperate.

“I lived in a crackhouse for as long as I can remember. I might have been born in one because I didn’t have a birth certificate. At least, that’s what I know. I told the authorities I was fourteen because my parents told me that. But I could be older or younger. That’s the truth.”

It’s a story I perfected for the last eight years. He has no reason to doubt it.

I’m a professional liar and able to make up a story and tell it in such a way with false supporting details to make people believe it’s true. Regardless of my bad habits, I’m not a pathological liar, I’ve had to adopt this character trait without any choice in the matter, and I’m very aware of why I must do it. But in this instance, I bear no guilt in lying to him, considering what he is and where he’s keeping me.

“What were your parents’ names?” He’s listening carefully, and I bet he’s trained to decipher frauds like me by asking such off-topic questions.

“Melody King and Rob Wilks. They weren’t married, and I suspect there’s a chance he’s not my father either.”

His hand remains on the door handle, and his back faces me as he absorbs what I tell him. He’s not going to turn to see my face to check whether I’m bullshitting him. That camera is watching me the whole time, and I suspect whoever is behind it is analyzing my facial and body expressions.

“Kazz,” he says. “My name is Kazz.”

I watch his back leave the room; he opens the door and closes it behind him. The bolt on the other side signifies our meeting has ended.

And I’m back again alone in this cell.

I look up at the camera, wondering who it is behind it, watching me. The blond guy or Archer’s brother?



The loud banging startles me, and I jump off the mattress onto my feet quite fast, realizing someone is banging on the door. I must have drifted off to sleep, counting the cracks in the ceiling, considering there isn’t much else to do here.

This time it's the blond asshole who stands by the entrance. He's so tall and big that his entire body takes up the door frame.

He's wearing a black t-shirt, and I'm sure it's purposely one size too small to show off every ridge and valley of his chiseled torso. His oval face shape is almost symmetrically perfect; his strong nose sets off his deep-set blue, nearly grey eyes.

My eyes quickly travel to the two black spiked barbell piercings in his brows and realize they match the two industrial ones he has in either ear. I hadn't noticed them at the hotel because he wore his thick shoulder-length hair down, but now everything is held into a messy top knot, and I can see he's got a low undercut.

"You plan on gawking there all day, or do you want to use the loo?" he says sharply, snapping me out of my thoughts.

I grab my shoes and jacket and walk to the door.

"I wasn't gawking, dickhead." I say as I pass him through the open door into the empty hallway.

There's a smug look on his face, and I want to smack him, but my eyes fall on those powerful arms on him, and think twice about physically attacking this giant. One slap from him, and I'll probably go flying down the end of this hallway like a bowling ball on a mission.

"Look who's gaping now," I say, my voice laced with venom.

I'm not sure who I hate more, him or the doppelganger. Somehow Kazz seems the quieter of the three, but he's probably the most lethal fucker from this trio.

“If you think I find you remotely attractive, I don't. You mistook my expression because I was cringing. You stink of vomit.”

“Fuck you. I'd tell you to go to hell, but I don't want to see you there,” I growl at him angrily. “After what the three of you pulled over me, you deserve to bathe in my vomit.”

He smirks once more and leads the way down the hallway.

“You have a big mouth for such a little person.”

“Asshole, I'm average height,” I snap at him. “Five foot six is not small.”

He's got to be at least an entire foot taller than me. So, in that case, I might be small to him, but that doesn't mean I'm a short person.

“And what happened to that smooth-talking hotel receptionist? This is almost like a Jekyll and Hyde scene.” He chuckles at his own joke, and I hope he chokes on it.

“Shut up. I was never polite to you, thugs. You drugged, kidnapped, and kept me hostage in this godforsaken hell. You don't deserve any civility.”

“Maybe this wouldn't have happened if you just gave us the info we requested from the start.”

I stare at him with great wonder, throwing obscene imaginary metal daggers toward his head.

“Do you think I’m an idiot? You were one step from killing me.”

“Maybe. But that doesn’t mean we can’t do it now. At least on our turf, your body would be easy to dispose of.”

That renders me quiet. He’s right, there’s still that chance I could be killed, and right now, through all the twists and corners we’re taking, he might be leading me to some extermination room.

“So, where exactly is your turf?”

His mouth goes into one straight line. In fact, his entire face goes stiff.

“None of your bloody business.”

He presses a numberless button on the elevator, the door slides open, and leads me inside.

“Where are we going?” I ask, stepping in.

Do I really need to know? It’s probably somewhere worse than the cell they kept me in. With gangs, there’s always something worse. Once you become their captive on their turf, you hardly ever leave alive unless you’re worth something to bargain or exchange for.

I have no value to these men. I’m probably dead meat.

“You should know that I voted to dispose of you instead of bringing you here. I know you’ll bring nothing but bad news

to us like you did for Archer.”

Bad news? Did I ask for any of this? They’re the ones that brought all this on me. I could have just continued my boring, lonely life without any of this. My blood is two degrees from boiling because of this man’s insolence.

“Has anyone ever said you’re one ugly motherfucker?”

His stiff face softens as he lightly chuckles, “That would be a first. But considering you shagged my arse-ugly cousin. I guess you like the darker smoldering types.”

Cousin?

“Archer is your cousin,” I say as a matter of fact, staring at him and unable to see a figment of any resemblance, starting with the color of their skin and hair.

“Obviously, only one of our parents needs to be siblings,” he says, second-guessing my thoughts.

“I’m sure both your parents must be proud of the assholes you’ve all become.”

I’m sure I hear a snarl from him. Something rattles him, and I’ll give my left foot that it’s Archer’s father he’s related to. Archer was very verbal about hating his father. If those cigarette burns on his arm were indeed from his father, I bet he got the gunshot wounds from some gang turf warfare.

How could I not foresee this?

For Christ’s sake, I fucked a man with several gunshot wounds; he was very obviously not from the law enforcement

side!

I feel like a total idiot. I should have kicked Archer's ass out of my room after the first fuck session was over. Instead, I pathetically wished to connect with another person and feed my lonely desperation for human contact.

The elevator stops on a floor, and I realize we must have gone up around three flights from where we started. There are no numbers on the walls to indicate any levels, so I just have to assume it. But how far away is this fucking bathroom?

As soon as the elevator door slides open, I'm taken aback by the immediate natural light that hits me. Let alone the scent. Clean and fresh, not in a clinical way, but more like a luxury hotel freshness with cool artificial air.

I follow him out, and my eyes dart everywhere. Super reflective white marble floors, so shiny that I can probably see my reflection in them. There are a couple of glitzy gold and glass console tables with white and gold flowers in vases.

"This way," he commands.

Ignoring him, I'm too busy staring at the splendor around me. On the left, a massive floating spiral stone and glass staircase leads downstairs to the open-spaced living room, similarly dressed in this opulent white marble and gold accented décor.

And those massive glass walls of windows. These windows are frameless and gigantic, almost as if there is no separation between inside and outside.

But it's not the size of the windows that has caused my lungs to forget to breathe for a second. The view stops me entirely in my tracks and almost makes me go into cardiac arrest.

This isn't London.

Nor is it England.

Probably not anywhere in Europe either.

"Where are we?" I gulp a breath, suddenly feeling weak and pale.

These guys aren't street thugs. Sure, they've got tats, carry guns on their bodies, and drug and kidnap people, but this isn't what a street gang's residence should look like.

It hits me big time.

They're a gang, alright. This is some kind of wealthy mafia land or gangster's paradise.

He cocks his head and meets my eyes with a smirk.

"I won't tell you. But here's a lead; it's somewhere no one will ever look for you."

Then dread finally sinks in.

"How many days have passed since you arrived at the hotel?"

"It's the second day, blondie," he crosses his hands over his chest, wearing an amused grin aimed at my expense, and waits for the shocking realization to sink into me.

Oh, it has, buddy. The shockwave hit about ten seconds ago.

I look out the windows to the exotic garden scene with palm trees and the massive view spread out incredulously in front of me. The miles of white sand and the colossal yacht docked in the bay of the sun-glistening crystal blue ocean bring both dismay and disbelief.

There's nothing but the ocean beyond the sandy beach. Just water that seems to go on forever.

“Listen, luv, I haven't got all day, and considering you haven't used the loo since you arrived here, my guess is that your bladder is one step from exploding.”

It had to be the anxiety, but that sudden need to pee vanished as soon as I realized we must be somewhere exceptionally far away from civilization.

I follow him past a few doors down the hallway and through an open one. We enter an extremely large white bedroom with dark wood furniture and white textiles. The view is exactly the same as I saw earlier down the hallway.

He opens a door which I assume is an attached bathroom, and I follow him through.

Holy crap, if I thought earlier was something exceptional, this bathroom is the mother of all of them. A large tub sits in the middle, and when I say large, it's enormous, like six people massive, and the floor-to-ceiling window has the same ocean view as the bedroom. And next to it, an equally impressive shower with multiple water jets sticking out from the walls, and there's a freaking sunroof in the ceiling over it.

A long two-sink countertop is on one side of the wall, and the toilet is on the other.

I turn to see the blond guy leaning against the door frame staring at me.

“Do you mind? I’d like to use the toilet.”

“Knock yourself out,” he says, crossing his arms over his chest but not budging an inch.

“In private,” I say deadpan. “Or do you have a pee fetish?”

My bladder is one second away from bursting. Fuck it, I look away from the perverted bastard and pull up the toilet seat, unfasten my pants, pull them down and just make it in time, seconds before my pee explodes.

“I was right about you and your sick minds...” I say, my voice trailing off as I hear a door shut and a lock turn from the main bedroom. I raise my head to where I saw the guy last, and he’s gone.

Chapter 11



AS SOON AS RAVEN looked away, I left. There is no way I'm giving her the satisfaction of thinking I'm some kind of piss-and-shit perv.

Because I'm not. I was just trying to ruffle her feathers. She's kind of cute when she gets all hot and bothered. Her expressive deep blue eyes narrow, her nose flares while her plump lips pout all sexy when irritated.

Raven also drools when she sleeps. I observed her passed out on the plane and briefly when I watched her on the screen as she slept on the filthy mattress. There is something innocent about her in her unconscious state, especially when compared to her ranting mouth when conscious.

Regardless of the fact that I find her attractive, I stand by my opinion that it was a mistake to bring her here. The fact that she's suddenly involved in our circle is beyond belief. Archer went and shagged her, which I can believe. She is the kind of woman he wouldn't pass up an opportunity for, but I don't believe a word of all that malarky about him dating her.

None of us date women, and it's not because we can't snatch one up. We don't have the time for it. I don't even want to imagine coordinating our work schedules with our partners. Too much bloody unnecessary work.

If we need women, we have them at our disposal.

But Raven is the first woman, who is not a staff member, brought to this island. And there is a perfect reason for keeping this place a secret from the outside world.

Let alone the fact that she might be an assassin, but the more I talk with her, the less I believe she is. The woman is literally all over the place. If she is, she's a very clumsy one.

It was West's idea to bring her here, and Kazz agreed with him in the end that it's better to keep an eye on her than let her run free because if she knew about Archer's meeting with Dimitri, then there has to be a lot more info in that head of hers than can never leave her lips. Even if it means killing her to keep our secrets from falling into the wrong hands.

The four of us worked and sacrificed way too much to let some bird unravel everything for us.

No. Fucking. Way.

Knowing Raven is locked in her room, I make my way down to the level below where the cells are kept. This is our control center, and no one would ever think to look below prison level.

We've had one prison guest escape before, but this place is a maze. There are three basement levels, and the corridors are designed to look like a labyrinth.

Ever tried to escape a hedge maze in panic mode before?

This particular one has cameras and concrete walls, and the term human blood sports has a whole new meaning when you throw a prisoner and a few hunters into it. The twins and I competed against each other to hunt an escaped prisoner down, and Kazz watched us from the screens to keep an eye on him and play with the lights and sound.

The four of us know the maze like the back of our hand, but to anyone else, it becomes their worst nightmare. At the end of the hunt, West caught the prisoner, we already had what info we needed from him, so the winner could decide on the final ending the prisoner got. West first extracted all his teeth and made a necklace with them, strung it around the prisoner's neck before burning him alive.

The prisoner was a well-known accomplice within the underworld of child sex trafficking. Initially, our informant led us to him, and we only planned to interrogate him about another case. Except we found him in his house with three young boys tied up, naked, and bent over some wooden bench. Evil people have their tastes, and some prefer their victims to be children and young adolescents. I won't go into the gory details of what we found him doing to those children; the human mind isn't equipped to handle it. It wasn't a scene we appreciated coming across, and the asshole paid for his sins by giving him a taste of what it's like to be in hell with us.

We reunited the boys with their families, got them all UK passports, and shipped them to England to start new lives. The perverted asshole eventually met his fate with his grim reaper, West St John.

Both twins are lethal fucks, but West possesses something a lot more dark. Most people see me as the psycho, *the extractor*, so to speak. It's true to a certain extent, but the four of us are deadly in our own way because we were brought up in a world that molded us to be just that.

We are four different individuals who have our own methods and work seamlessly well together. One team with the same end goal, and one day we'll reach it. Right now, we are building towards it.

I'm probably more the muscle in the group, the one who will go charging into battle confident that we'll win it. I like a good fight as much as the next blood-hungry arsehole.

Within our small group, however, West and I are *the extractors*. If we need info about something, we sometimes work together or separately. We use less-than-rosy methods, but you don't get to our position by being some prancing Mary. You grow a pair and dive into getting your hands dirty, so to speak.

Some days even the devil sits back and admires my work. I take pride in what I do and play my part in this merry band of criminals.

Archer is the cunning negotiator and is better known as *the enforcer*. He not only deals with the contracts but makes sure they are followed through. He's brutal and straightforward and always gets results. With contacts in every crack and under every rock of the criminal world, he's like the lethal PR guy. But Archer doesn't trust anyone outside this four-person circle.

Dealing with human trafficking is a kind of side business for us, and one venture, Norwood Saints, the parent organization, does not know about. We definitely are not the Robin Hoods of the skin trade world. We get rewarded immensely for the

rescue work we do. And there is a lot of money in such a position.

There are billionaires who support sex trafficking and provide finance to organizations that support the traffickers, and there are the ones who fight it. There is a silent war going on in the streets that the public doesn't know about, and we choose which side to be on.

Just because we dip our feet in other criminal activities doesn't mean we don't have morals. My mother and the twin's mother were both victims of trafficking, sold at the age of twelve and bought by our minge-bag fathers.

I don't know much about the twins' mother other than she had them at thirteen and hung herself two years later.

My mother, who also had me at a similar age, disappeared one evening and never returned. I was eight years old at the time my father said she abandoned us. There's no way I can ever believe that blatant lie.

The twins are two years older than me and took me under their wing at the time. The three of us made a blood pact that no matter what happens in our lives, we will always be loyal to each other, and one day, we'll send the two bastards who created us to their graves.

That's how the Brotherhood of Saints was formed. It's our name, after all. Except very few know what it represents. But these three men are the only beings in this world that their word means precisely as such.

Loyalty.

Our word made in blood is our bond, and we swore allegiance to each other. Nothing can break that. It's as tight as my fist, and you never want to find yourself in the position to find out how impenetrable that is.

This is exactly what our old men failed in every way possible to bestow upon us with the firm. But they made damn sure we loath everything they are and represent.

Despite that, each of us has our own little specialty, we are all skilled marksmen, and that comes from being born into the mob. By 16, each of us became a member of Norwood Saints Junior Crew. The twins moved up the ranks fast to lead the division, but that's no surprise considering they are the sons of Leo St John, notoriously known as Prophet. As the leader of the firm, he is the supremely powerful boss in the British crime syndicate.

Prophet is also my uncle, but I've never referred to him as such, not that he ever acknowledges me as anything but the son of the bitch my father slipped his knob into. My father, Shaw St John, also known as Butcher, is his right-hand man. There's a reason why he has that name, and it's not because he enjoys a good donar kebab. Although there's a rumor that he once created a human version of it and forced another poor sod to eat it.

It's rare that any of us will refer to our fathers as such. We use their gang names to address them like everyone else does. Of course, everyone knows who we are and who our fathers

are, especially the twins. How can one not? Their physical features and presence are striking enough to make an impression. But there's no love lost with the bastards who fathered us.

Fathered us. That's a fucking massive stretch of word usage!

Back in the gang's junior division, we dealt mainly with the usual grand theft auto and drug trafficking within our assigned regions. Then under the twins' leadership, we started dipping our activities into the arms trade and taking over trade territories that weren't covered or didn't initially belong to the Norwood Saints.

This was an area Prophet wasn't keen to venture but seeing that we were expanding his empire and after seeing the monetary figures we brought in, the greedy old man gave us our own sector to conquer soon after the twins' accession to the inner circle of the Norwood Saints.

The only reason we invested so much energy into this trade industry was to keep our distance from Prophet after joining the adult ranks of the main gang. As long as business is excellent, he won't send anyone to watch over us, poke their nose in our business, and discover our other side ventures.

No one other than us within the Norwood Saints is experienced with trading arms, which gives us considerable leverage against him when he'll insist the twins work by his side.

At some point, it's clear that one day he'll call them to start grooming them to take over his role, but currently, the bastard

thinks he's invincible. He would rather keep them at arm's distance because the truth is, he hates them to the core, and I think it has to do more with his own blood running through them and their mother's suicide than anything else.

But everyone dies eventually. Prophet's death was fixed the day we swore our eternal loyalty to the Brotherhood of Saints.

We created our organization from the ground up. For every successor we groomed for leadership in the junior chapter, we mentored them in a rather different direction than what was expected of us. Thus each new leader will select the best soldiers and associates and prep them to join our sector of the firm.

I'm two years younger than Archer and West. Kazz is four years younger than me, and we took advantage of this. The Brotherhood of Saints indirectly controls most of the Norwood Saints Junior Crew, and we induct the top performers into our sector under the guise of the arms division.

Kazz is the primary connection between the Brotherhood and the leaders of the junior sector. He's also the brains and the cyber-whizz of our group, but I wouldn't let his geekiness and pretty boy looks confuse you into thinking he's any less lethal than us. Get on the wrong side of that lad, and he'll destroy you within a nanosecond without sparing a drop of mercy. Prophet overlooked Kazz's competency when he was inducted into the Norwood Saints, and we brought him into our realm.

One day I will discover what happened to my mother and her mysterious disappearance, but until that happens, I will make sure my father and uncle pay for their sins. We never knew the truth about our mothers until we discovered Prophet's shady business acquisition to his string of many criminal enterprises.

The bastard has partners deep within in a trafficking ring with two other syndicates in the US, one in Albania, Russia, and another one in China. His go to is sex trafficking, and we can thank him for the drug addicted hookers who line the streets of London and other big cities in England like a plague.

It was by pure chance that a pre-teenage Archer was snooping in his father's home office that he came across something and realized it was the import papers of his mother. He had discovered a file that contained her ownership documents. She was purchased at an auction in Zimbabwe, and he found photos of unclothed women in shackles with numbers painted in white on their shoulders standing on some platform like bloody cattle at an auction. A vision similar to what one would have seen over three hundred years ago, yet this horrific shit was happening in the twenty-first century.

Thinking of this makes me one seriously hacked-off individual, and I need to calm the fuck down.

I am going to repeat this till I'm blue in the face: the two arseholes that made us will one day die, and we will make sure to witness the last drop of blood that drains out from their bodies.

“Alright?” I say as I enter Kazz’s den and leave a cuppa next to him on the table he’s working on.

“Ta, mate,” he raises his chin to acknowledge me and takes the mug.

“Any luck?” I ask with some grain of hope.

Kazz is dangerous regarding cyber security and the deep dark web. Since we arrived back on Ignis, he’s been hacking into London security cameras with his magical machines, trying to capture Archer’s last footsteps to trace what happened to him.

Dozens of computers and illegal technology fill his workspace. I look up at the multitude of screens above us, running different clips of streets around the hotel and Archer’s known whereabouts the day he disappeared. It’s like looking for a needle in a haystack, but if someone can find him, Kazz will.

“I’m running his facial profile through the system. If there’s a hit, we’ll be alerted.”

There’s a reason why Kazz is the technological brain in this unit. His abilities are nothing to joke about. Prophet skipped over his genius skills and passed him over to us rather than groom him into the core of the organization.

I sit down in one of the rolling chairs and observe the screens.

“Need any help?” I ask.

“Nah. I’m good.” He leans over to a second keyboard, types something, and then brings up a clip on the screen. “You might find this interesting. The cameras outside the Enfield location caught Raven.”

My attention is drawn towards the screen as I lean forward to watch the beautiful blonde put on pause in front of me.

“So she was speaking the truth about finding the Enfield location.”

Kazz reaches out to the keyboard and starts to play the clip in slow motion. “There’s more to it; watch her body language and facial expressions.”

My eyes focus on the woman.

Soft, loose long tendrils of blonde hair frame her pretty face, and her blue eyes shine even though the day looks dull and grey, typical for English weather. I try to keep focus, but the curves of her body, hugged tight by those skinny black jeans and cropped jacket, take my attention.

Raven might be attractive, but it’s not worth losing my cousin over. I can get pretty pussy anywhere, so I focus on the task at hand.

“She looks confused, maybe even angry,” I watch her hands on her hips, shaking her head in disbelief.

“Watch this.” He fast forwards to a part where she rests one hand on her hip, and the other nervously runs through her hair and stays there briefly. She looks around her and then back up at the building, shrugs her shoulder, and walks away.

“Disappointment and confusion. Do you think she was stalking him?” I look at Kazz as he sips his tea.

“I don’t think she’s an assassin,” he says, freezing the screen. “I think when Archer asked her out, she was seeing that playboy from New York. I checked the timeline of when Hayden Aspinalls removed all traces of her from his IG account and crossed them with her phone calls and messages from him. Her going up to Enfield was the same day she and the playboy broke up, and I think she went to check out Archer’s registered business address he has on the hotel records.”

“But that isn’t normal behavior, is it? Who goes to check out the business address of a guy who asks you out?” I say, and the look on Kazz’s face spells it out for me.

“A flippin’ gold digger,” I say quietly, answering my own question, and my mouth goes dry.

These are the kind of women I loathe. They make easy fucks but are clingy and annoying as hell.

Bloody paid whores.

“Do you still have her bag?” I ask, having now somewhat a much lower opinion of our prisoner guest. We should have left her in the cell so she gets to know how it feels to have nothing.

Kazz looks at me curiously.

“It’s over there by the shelf unit. I scanned it, the contents and her watch. Everything came out clean.”

“Credit cards?”

He nods. “Destroyed before we even got on the plane.”

“Good.”

Credit card chips can act as trackers with the right type of chip. We can't take any chances.

I get up and collect her bag and wristwatch from the shelf to personally deliver them to her. Looks like this gold digger got her greed caught up with the wrong guy.

“Her credit cards were mostly maxed out, and her credit history is shocking,” Kazz says, and I'm sure he investigated her bank information too.

“So a broke gold-digger, desperate for someone to fix her financial issues.”

“It still doesn't solve what happened to Archer,” Kazz watches me as I walk to the door.

“I'll talk with West on the plane ride to Soon Yee.”

I hesitate a moment because I know what happened the last time I said it. “In the meantime, you're in charge here.” I chuckle with amusement.

I almost duck because the last time he threw a tactical out of nowhere, and it landed literally an inch from my upper left shoulder. And it's a fact that Kazz never misses.

He rolls his eyes at me, “Fuck off, wanker, as if I need some kind of pep talk or whatever the hell you're trying to push.”

“I know, mate, but I'm referring to the blonde gold digger upstairs. If you decide to let her loose roaming around the

island, just try not to kill her if she gets on your nerves.”

This island is smack in the middle of an ocean. It’s not even on Google Maps. It’s so remote here there’s nowhere for her to run off to.

“If she begins to piss me off, she’s going back to her cell,” Kazz mutters, and I huff a laugh.

Taking her back to her cell might teach her a lesson or two about appreciating what she has and not what she could assume to have that’s way out of her class range.

Chapter 12



HAVING ALREADY APPROACHED THE door only to find it locked, I pace around this rather large room, finding it hard to understand why I was upgraded to here. It's not just the size that has me baffled, but this room looks like it came straight out of some exotic luxury hotel room catalog, and the scent is similar to what I smelled earlier in the hallway.

Almost everything is bright white, simple, and clean, with contemporary decor in light nude. There are contrasting black elements in the black oversized floor lamps, slim metal frames of the furniture, and minimalist picture frames that grace the bare white walls.

But the view of the huge windows with sheer white curtains provides the unique exotic backdrop color to this room. Outside is similar to what I saw earlier, and I realize the yacht docked in the bay is a mega-catamaran.

I'm no stranger to yachts. When you date someone like Hayden, you spend a lot of time in the Hamptons during the summer, and he and his older brother are yacht enthusiasts. I'm not an expert, but I've always been a fast learner, and I know how to read the wind, especially when it's on the wrong side of the sails and most of the equipment between the forward and the aft.

Can I single-handedly navigate a yacht with sails?

Probably not. And definitely not one the size of that catamaran. But I can navigate the motors, and I file this for later when I figure out how to open these goddamn windows that don't have any handles or instruments to open them.

I groan with frustration at my current situation and lack of understanding.

This luxury room might be an upgrade from the small, disgusting cell they had me in earlier, but this is no guest room. It's just a fancy prison.

Suddenly there's a knock on the door, and I hear the door unlocking. I search the room for some kind of weapon. I don't trust the assholes; they think I'm some kind of assassin, but I'm just as baffled by Archer's disappearance as they are.

My eyes land on the black metal bedside table lamp, and I quickly slide over to grab it, violently pulling it out of its socket. Maybe I should try and escape, get down to that catamaran, and sail off.

As the door opens, I wait by the entrance to hit whoever it is coming in, except *blond guy* is fast and grabs the lamp before I get to bash it over him. He snatches it violently from my grip, pushes me away, and the force causes me to stumble to the floor. I watch him place the lamp on the dresser together with my purse and watch, which he had been holding to bring back to me.

Surprisingly he leaves the room door open.

“What the fuck are you trying to achieve?” he looks at me angrily.

I get up from the floor with a busted ego. Perhaps I miscalculated the guy's physical strength.

Yeah, right! I noticed his muscles from the moment I laid eyes on him. He's just got better reflexes than me, and I assume with the kind of thug lifestyle he leads, it comes with the territory.

"You drugged and kidnapped me!" I snap at him, which seems to come naturally to me regarding *blond boy*.

"How else do you expect me to be? I don't trust you. I don't know what you plan to do to me!" I exclaim, holding my wrist seething with pain, which must have twisted when he snatched the lamp from my grip.

His eyes go to my wrist, and he watches me rub it but doesn't approach me. Better that way because I don't need his sympathy or pity.

"You were seen with Archer, and we know enough about you to render you dangerous."

My mind swirls with these men's ridiculous logic. How can they come to such a conclusion? I can't even hit his head with a lamp successfully.

"To whom exactly?" I'm about to fall into a fit of hysterical, nervous laughter any minute. It's either that or burst out crying. It's long overdue.

He looks at me and scoffs. "Dangerous to us."

Is he fucking serious? I think my mental pain has just transferred to anger.

"I have a life, a career!" I shout angrily, ignoring his disregard for my livelihood. "You can't just pluck me out of

my life just like that!”

He shakes his head and gives me a long once over, but his final expression is one of disgust.

“Gold panning is not a career.”

I look at him, perplexed.

Wait, what?

“I won’t have a job to return to,” I say calmly. “I’ll lose my college grant. What am I supposed to do when I go back?”

He looks at me, but he doesn’t need to answer. His stoic face tells me everything.

It sinks in hard as I realize the truth of his silent words.

I won’t be going back.

Tears fill my eyes, knowing that my fate is fixed in their hands.

“You’re not a prisoner, Raven,” he explains calmly. “But you’re not leaving us until Archer is found, and he can give us some answers as to who you are.”

My tears suddenly dry up fast as my eyes narrow to pinpricks and glare at him.

“In case you didn’t get the memo, buddy, that’s exactly what you are doing to me. Holding me here against my will.”

“You’re free to roam around, but you’re on an island that’s miles from land or civilization with no means of escaping. The staff here have been instructed not to talk to you, so don’t harass them. One step out of line, and you will be sent back to

the cell for the remainder of the time. This bedroom here is yours for as long as your stay is here. There should be everything you need, including a change of clothes in the closet.”

He looks at me, meeting my eyes, “Not that we expected to host a woman here, so you’ll find just some sports items there. Just make the best of it.”

“Will you at least tell me which ocean this is?”

He shakes his head.

“How about your name?”

“Killian.”

“Killian,” I repeat, taking his name in. “Why did you call me a gold panner?” I ask curiously.

It’s his turn to narrow his brows at me with another clear dismissal. He silently leaves the room and closes the door but doesn’t lock it.

I have no idea what that was about, but the urge to open the door to try and escape prevails. But he knows I can’t leave this island, and that’s why I’ve been let free to roam around. This is probably a test. I bet they have cameras everywhere and will know my location the minute I leave this room.

If I’m going to make a runner, I need to plan this. Running off without knowing how this place is run and where my location is, is utter nonsense.

A rumble in my stomach reminds me I'm not fully recovered from whatever bugged me earlier. I open the closet and find towels, some white t-shirts, and a grey heather sweat-short that looks way too big but has a drawstring that I can probably use to fasten it to stay put.

I grab a towel and rummage through my purse. Everything but my cell phone, driver's license, and passport was returned. Upon checking my wallet, I discover my bank and credit cards are gone too. They have no idea how hard it is to get new cards and the extra charges my bank will add for replacements.

Assholes.

I grab a pair of panties and head to the bathroom, desperate for a wash.



Thirty minutes later, my bedroom door still remains unlocked. Feeling fresh from one of the best showers I've had in ages and having shed my uniform, I decide to roam around this house or palace. I have no idea what this is, but there are dungeons below level, so I imagine it could be a castle. A castle in the middle of an ocean!

No one said not to look around, and I'm curious to know who else lives here.

As soon as I step out, I notice doors to my left and right, and I wonder just how big this place is. I take one side and

casually stroll down the hallway, peeping into the half-open doors. The first two are designed almost like the one I'm staying in, except there doesn't seem to be any sign of life.

The third one, however, is different. The floor is dark, with an almost black-colored parquet. The walls are textured dark grey, and a large black plush carpet is in the middle of the relatively large room. Long black sheer curtains drape the massive floor-to-ceiling windows. There is a large, probably super king-size low bed with a black leather tufted headboard. The dresser and bedside tables are black wood too.

The bed is made almost too perfect, as if no one actually sleeps in it.

While everything is very dark and masculine, the sleek lines give it more of a contemporary feel than a dark gothic one. I open the door to the walk-in closet, and there isn't one item in there that isn't black. From black shirts to t-shirts, pants, jeans, and boots. I notice the black ripped designer jeans casually thrown to the side, the only thing that looks unmade in this perfectly kept room.

The ripped jeans remind me of the ones Kazz was wearing earlier, and I suspect this might be his bedroom. As I walk out of the closet, the bookcase I must have missed is right before me. It's filled with hardback books but without sleeves. What stands out the most from these large, thick books is that all the spines have Japanese fonts. There isn't one English-written book in this bookcase. I pull a random one out, and it's a right-to-left cover; the vertical font confirms its Japanese.

This has to be Kaz's room, for sure. I put the book back. I don't want to be caught snooping, so my eyes quickly scan over at the attached bathroom without seeing anything significant to note and make my way out.

I head toward the opposite end of the hallway and find several closed doors. I push the handle of one, and it's unlocked.

This bedroom is similar and, at the same time, not so similar to Kaz's bedroom. Again, it has a dark, sexy theme with grey walls and dark flooring. But there's a ton of black framed photographs mounted on white mat board everywhere. Primarily black and white pictures, and some frames hold black ink sketches. The large bed and the textiles on it are dark charcoal colors. The furniture is glossy black, and the lamps are classic contemporary with light orange shades with black bases. There are two leather square-shaped armchairs with a black coffee table between them.

In addition to the ornamental stuff and lamp on the table, there's a book and a notepad.

I pick up the pen and read the brand.

Of course, Mont Blanc.

I put it down and look at the handwritten notes on the pad, which are almost illegible, mostly scribbles of words I cannot make out. I look at the hardback book, and there's a leather bookmark in it.

Reborn.

I turn it to the back and quickly read the blurb.

Interesting.

It's a diary-type story about a woman from the 2030s who goes into a coma and takes over the body of a woman thousands of years into the future.

Curiosity drives me to find out who would read such a book. So, I continue further and open a door that leads to a walk-in closet. As soon as I walk in, light automatically illuminates the room and shelves. This closet is more significant than Kazz's, and there's no doubt whose space this belongs to.

Among the black wood shelves and drawers are at least a dozen, probably more, black and grey tailored suits. Almost all Brioni, Stuart Hughes, and several more Saville Row tailors. There are numerous more hanging suit bags with the designers' logo.

In another section of the closet, hang perfectly pressed white, grey, and black dress shirts. Cashmere sweaters and cotton t-shirts sit on the shelves in different colors, but black and grey are the dominant colors. A couple of leather and suede jackets and black and camel coats also hang in their specific section of this extremely meticulous, organized closet.

It's apparent that this man's clothing isn't purchased off the rack, almost everything is bespoke and personalized to his taste.

But there is also a wall with shelves filled with shoes. Archer must have a shoe obsession or something because there must

be at least thirty or forty pairs of shoes, boots, and on the bottom shelf layers, black sneakers.

I open a thin tray-style drawer with several pairs of cufflinks and watches. Pulling out another similarly styled drawer, there are twelve pairs of glasses and sunglasses. I've never seen Archer wear glasses, and I don't recall seeing any disposable contact lenses in his hotel bathroom, either.

Picking up one of the dark-rimmed frames, I try it on.

These aren't prescription glasses. I try on a second pair, and again it's the same. Props, maybe?

When I go to put it away, I see the clue. Holding it under the light to see it better, there's a small chip that looks like a designer logo on the inside rim. It makes sense because these seemed a little heavy for regular glasses.

These are smart glasses, or in simple English, wearable computers, probably voice-controlled. I've seen them in science fiction movies and had some idea that they exist, but I don't think anyone can get their hands on such a pair so easily.

I wonder what it is that Archer does that requires such an item. He's got twelve pairs, including sunglasses. I don't think these are cheap, either.

But then again, looking at the two bedrooms I've been in so far, these guys are wealthy and super loaded. I can't believe I took them for regular street thugs.

Well....okay, not Archer. He's a different kind of man, smooth and suave, and doesn't seem to have anything in

common with these guys.

Other than the hand tattoo, all four men have, which is obviously their gang affiliation.

IGNIS

What does it mean?

I quickly walk into the attached bathroom. It's massive, like the one in my room. I notice the same cologne I saw in Archer's hotel sitting on the marble counter next to the sink. The one with the strange name. I pick it up, hold it to my nostrils, and memories of him fill my scents.

Nutmeg, cedarwood, and chocolate.

It's engraved in my memory and not one I can forget, either.

Nor is that one evening I had with him.

I really hope he's alive, not just because I don't want to be killed by these men thinking I did it, but because he doesn't deserve to die.

After putting the cologne back in its place, I quickly leg it out because I'm eager to find the bedrooms of the other two assholes. I didn't get a decent impression of Archer's brother.

Actually, I think he's awful, and I bet I won't like his room either.

The room next seems to be a storage room, but the one over is another black and grey bedroom. Instead of grey walls, they're black. Solid black.

What the hell is up with this color?

Considering the rest of the house is so light, white, and fresh looking, their rooms are dark and cold.

Probably reflects their souls.

Maybe they're vampires.

I chuckle at the thought as I enter the third darkened room. It's reminiscent of the other two rooms, and strolling into the bathroom, it's smaller than Archer's. But it seems like it's been recently used. There's a used towel on the floor, and the shower is still damp.

Hanging on the shower door is an empty black Brioni suit bag. It could have come from Archer's closet, or there's another fan of this tailor-made high-end suit brand.

On the white marble sink sits a black tray with several personal items, including several items of black metal and silver body jewelry. Both Archer's twin and Killian have facial piercings.

The light silver metal bottle standing in the tray catches my eye, and I pick it up.

Creed, Himalaya. I know this cologne because I wanted to get it for Hayden last Christmas, but then I saw the three-hundred-dollar price tag and opted for a Christian Dior one. I fell in love with its scent regardless of its extreme price tag. I open the bottle, and the fresh, woody scent invades my nostrils.

Still love it.

I put it back because maybe it's not so appealing anymore, considering it probably belongs to one of the two biggest assholes in this boy crew.

I walk over to the king-sized bed and open the table drawer. There are a bunch of nick-nacks inside and a couple of gold bullets. No gun, of course. But there's a black box, and I pull it out. It's sealed, and I have no idea how it opens. There's a tiny black pad. It must be fingerprint activated. Not wanting to set off any alarms, I put it back and exit the room.

I have no idea whose room that last one belongs to, but I didn't see any other suits hanging in the closet other than the empty bag in the bathroom. If I were to make an estimated guess, Archer's brother might be on some mission to convince someone he's him by dressing up in his clothes and removing his facial piercings.

As I enter the fourth bedroom, I breathe a sigh of relief. While it's still grey, the walls are light cream, the floor is walnut, and one wall reflects the same wooden panel flooring. A black platform-style bed with a large mattress sits against the parquet wood wall, and two black lights protrude from the wall over the bed. The bedding is slate grey, and a massive white faux fur animal-style skin rug is on the floor.

Unlike the other three anally looking neat bedrooms, this is the messiest. But not really dirty or unkempt. Just the only one that seems mostly lived in. The bed is unmade, and some throw pillows are on the floor. I peep my head into the closet and see a bunch of blue denim jeans, black cargo shorts and

pants, and various t-shirts casually draping over a hamper. The bathroom seems to have been recently used.

There's a large mirror cabinet which I don't open. As I walk out of the bathroom, I notice a little extended den-type area and a used-looking black punch bag hanging at one end.

My guess is this is Killian's bedroom. I want to snoop further, but at the same time, I don't want to see his smug face when he discovers me sneaking around his bedroom.

No freaking way.

I quickly exit and make my way down the glass staircase because I notice the elevator only has a pad, which I imagine is handprint activated.

The style downstairs is very similar to the guest bedrooms, with lots of white marble and white walls with black and gold accents. It's all very open, with a massive light grey corner sofa that looks like it could fit sixteen people. Glass windows take up almost the entire space of the walls with the view of the ocean and a large swimming pool.

Outside, the gardens look exotic and well cared for. Inside, the living room opens to a large-spaced kitchen and dining area. A white and grey marbled island with six black stools surrounds it.

Everything is so clean, fresh, and in order as if this is more of a show home than a place where four grown men are supposed to live.

And then there's the sound of silence.

I can hear the ocean and waves crashing to the shore, but I haven't seen any form of life yet. In a place like this, shouldn't there be staff taking care of it?

And where are the three banes of my existence? The assholes who kidnapped me, brought me here to god only knows where and then abandoned me?

All the while, my life in London, my career, and my studies in New York are probably for the garbage disposal.

All of this makes no sense. Am I here alone in this massive place?

Sure, this place is beautiful, and it seems I have access to roam around, but let's not sugar coat the fact that these are very dangerous men with guns, an entire cell block in their basement, and they'll probably massacre me if Archer turns up dead.

Fuck my life.

Maybe I should try and find a way to get outside, roam the area, and try and make out where the hell I am.

Once again, I am at a loss with these windows. I thought the windows in the bedroom upstairs were sealed shut on purpose. But down here?

I look around, taking everything in.

Is this just an upgraded prison? This seriously has got to be a joke.

A tablet sits on the square-shaped coffee table, and I grab it fast as if it might magically disappear if I don't. Most likely, it's password protected, but maybe not, and I can go online.

My hopes of contacting someone quickly fade as I realize this tablet's only connection is to the house's electronics. It's a remote control for the a/c, the TV, the lights, sound, and finally, I figure out how to work the windows too.

I find the app that slides the glass wall of the living room open. I can feel the room's temperature suddenly become warmer as the air outside wafts through, and the smell of the salty ocean scent comes breezing through.

"Lowering the air condition temperature in the south wing." A female computerized voice comes up in the room. I have no idea from where, as I look for wall speakers and cannot find any.

"The temperature in the pool is 23 degrees Celsius. Would you prefer it cool, Mr. St John?" she asks.

Geez, I heard of these kinds of computerized homes. These guys have upped their living convenience to the max.

"Sure, why not?" I say.

"I'm sorry, Mr. St John, I didn't quite catch that. Could you please repeat that, sir?"

"Sure, you can," I say, but the computer only seems to recognize the St John she's been programmed to.

That's weird. So, two out of four people cannot activate the house controls? Or is Killian related to the twins' father, which

will make him a St John. That makes Kazz the odd one out.

I walk outside to the tropical warmth of wherever I am and take the path through the luscious exotic greenery that leads me to the beach, particularly the catamaran.

The powdery, pale-colored sand is so soft that it feels as if my bare feet are walking on clouds. And as soon as the green jungle ends and the beach starts, it's nothing but pure beach paradise. It's pure serenity and a perfect contrast to the noisy waves dancing up the shore and crawling back out. To my left stands a wooden jetty, but the catamaran is anchored a little further out into the clear blue water. I look to the right, and the beach spans for miles, the sand shimmering like diamonds scattered on the beach.

I can't see any sign of land ahead of us. Beyond the horizon is nothing but crystal blue and deep aquamarine waters that seem to become darker the further my eyes set forward. A vast expanse of sea, as if civilization ends past this island.

An island.

Just as Killian said, this was, and my heart plummets.

I could be anywhere, Bora Bora, the Cayman Islands, Bali, Tahiti, Maldives, or any place with white sandy beaches and lush tropical forests. But an island just makes it all the harder to escape.

Perhaps I'll find answers when I get on board the catamaran. Maybe there's a sailing log of where it's been. It might give me some idea of where I'm now. And if I find keys to the

motor, even better. But I think to take off now without any planning would be suicidal. I could be on the sea for days without food or drinking water.

There's a covered motorized boat tied to the wooden dock, which I imagine is how they get to the catamaran, but I don't want to attract attention with the motor's loud noise, so I skip that idea and decide to swim to it instead.

I unfasten the tie on my shorts, slip them down, and step out of them. Then the T-shirt comes off. There are a couple of pairs of panties left in my bag that I brought with me, but just the one bra that I'm currently wearing.

While my nudity is not something I'm ashamed of, I just don't want to cavort around braless the next day or so while around three men I hardly know. I look around, and there's no sign of life. I don't want to know what salty seawater will do to lace, so I take it off and drop it on top of my other clothes.

I walk to the water's edge and test the temperature on my toes. It feels cool and refreshing, so I carry on walking until I reach a level and dive in, swimming straight for the catamaran.

I'm a fast swimmer, so I reach it in no time, but this thing is a freaking monster in size. I grab onto the ladder, climb up the swim platform, and go up the white steps to the main deck, where there's outdoor cushioned seating, a long dining table, sun lounges, and an entire barbeque area.

The main control area is inside, and the door is locked. These fuckers made sure no one could escape this damn place. I climb the top deck and look around towards the land. I'm not

so far out in the ocean that I can see the entire shoreline, but if I'm not mistaken, I was right about guessing that this might actually be an island.

I could be anywhere. Nothing so far has given me any inclination of where I am.

Damn, these fuckers to hell.

How do I escape from this remote place in the middle of nowhere?

Chapter 13



OTHER THAN THE BASEMENT levels and areas surrounding the property and most of the island shores, there are no cameras on the two living levels of the main house. But there are sensors around certain areas of the house, and our little guest has been making her way around the property.

I tracked Raven roaming in and out of our bedrooms, but other than my books, I don't have anything worthwhile in my room. Although the hidden safe at the top of the closet shelf carries some personal stuff, she'll never be able to access it. She didn't spend enough time in any of the other rooms to warrant much concern about her nosiness.

When the alert came on that the living room doors slid open, I switched to the cameras and watched her follow the main path to the beach. I left the work I had been focused on earlier on to concentrate on Raven, who suddenly looked more than curious about her surroundings as her attention focused on the catamaran. At first, she studied the vessel, probably trying to figure out how to use it to her advantage to escape the island. To be honest, I already had an inclination she might have an invested interest in it before she even arrived at the shoreline.

She quickly undressed, and while I had deduced that she hid a fit body under her hotel uniform, I wasn't prepared to see her standing in just her lingerie. There's no argument from me; I admit Raven has a stunning body, but I tried to remain focused on what she was planning because I doubted it was just for a swim. The curves of her body kept drawing my attention rather than concentrating on what she was planning.

And then she took her bra off, and my knob decided to spring to attention.

Damn.

Like the bloody perv that I am, I switched the camera to view her front. Call me whatever the fuck one likes, but I'm a straight male attracted to pretty women with curves. I don't know why I breathed a sigh of relief when I realized her tits were all natural without any enhancements. It's not as if I plan on acting what my knob is craving.

I watched her head out to the ocean, practically naked, her curvaceous legs and hips, beautiful round arse complemented by her tiny waist, and long messy blonde hair against her pale skin. She dived head first into the water and swam gracefully and quick towards the catamaran.

Everything is always locked on board. She realized soon enough this was a wasted trip.

I watched as she roamed around the vessel, looking for the hidden area where the key could be stored, and I shook my head. She wouldn't find them there.

Unfortunately for her, there is no way off this island without our assistance.

So now, I decide to lock up what I'm doing here and meet her by her pile of clothes.



“You wouldn’t have found anything on board,” I call out to Raven as soon as she sees me sitting on the sand by her clothes.

Maybe I sat here on purpose. Curious to see how she’ll react coming out of the water. She hesitates a little but decides to play it blasé as if she couldn’t give a toss about her nudity. Even the tiny black patch over her pussy doesn’t do much to conceal anything.

While my mind keeps telling my knob to stay put, my eyes can’t, and I gaze at her round pale tits as they bounce with every step she takes in the deep powdery sand. Her fair skin contrasts her deep rosy-colored nipples that pebbled from the cold water she just came out of. Trickle of water run down her body, but the drops falling between her breasts keep me captivated.

Raven is a beautiful woman, probably a fantasy for many men. I can see how Hayden Aspinalls may have fallen for her beauty. But that wasn’t enough for him to want to settle down with her, and instead, he chose someone else. Judging by his text messages on her mobile, he’s still keen to keep her as a lover, but it’s relatively apparent Raven doesn’t like to share. She wanted the entire Aspinalls package, name, and fortune, and since she couldn’t get it, she moved on.

Little does she know that bringing herself to Archer’s attention was probably the second worst mistake she could have made.

The first mistake was creating a false career in the hospitality industry to try and lure the infamous hotelier heir. That must have taken a lot of planning and time to go to such an extent as to create an interest in his business in order to conveniently date and eventually marry the man.

Her choice of men is pretty poor, considering both attempts failed miserably. The second one led us to her. We're not exactly the kind of group you want to fall under our attention. Nothing good would ever come out of it.

"I just went for a swim in whatever name this ocean has, and an enormous shipping vessel happened to be there. Call me curious," she says, making no attempt to cover her body for me.

I had a good look at her earlier, I won't give her the satisfaction of her calling me out by looking at her tits. As beautiful as they are and staring straight at me, I avert my eyes to the ocean ahead.

"And did you satisfy your interest?"

She grabs the white t-shirt and puts it on but leaves the bra and grey shorts where they are. The shirt looks comically massive on her much smaller frame, and if it weren't stuck to her wet body like a wet t-shirt and tit competition, she could wear it as a dress.

It belongs to Killian. I only own black items and prefer it if she doesn't wear my clothes. So I took a few things from his closet as I knew he wouldn't give a shit. West would probably burn her and the shirt with her in it if he saw her in his gear.

Even though none of us have spoken about how long we intend to keep her here, I think the decent thing would be to order a couple of things online and inform the other two to collect the packages from our usual pick-up point on the mainland.

“Why does this place seem empty? There seems to be no sign of staff or even people. Is this a private beach?” she asks, ignoring my question, knowing full well that I am aware of her attempt to find a way to escape via the Catamaran.

“There’s staff here every day. But they arrive early morning, do their job, and leave several hours later and are instructed to keep an under-the-radar presence.”

“Surely, they must know that the four of you are dubious as shit.”

I chuckle, “Sure, but they get paid way too much to ask stupid questions that’ll get them killed. They prefer to remain silent about who their employer is.”

The staff lives in a small accommodation village on the other side of the island. There’s a thirty-day rotation where they go home for a week to visit their family. We do an alternating rotation of who gets off the island to attract less attention to the mainlanders.

We have fifteen soldiers permanently stationed on the island, and they usually patrol the perimeter, but we’ve told them to keep a low profile due to a visitor we currently have. These are soldiers groomed from the Norwood Saint Junior Crew, and several dozen more are situated in various locations

worldwide. They know they are only Norwood Saint members by association, but their loyalty remains with the Brotherhood of Saints.

Two of the fifteen men are currently with West and Killian on their latest venture representing Prophet's business in China on his behalf. Except this is usually Archer's area, and West is acting in his place, impersonating him. I'm sure he can pull it off with the Chinese but with Prophet? I hardly doubt it, and it's not because they have some close-knit relationship that the old bastard can tell them apart, but more due to the fact that West's hatred for the man is deadly. He'll spot the wolf in sheep's clothing just by looking at the son's facial expression filled with loathing hate.

No one hates Prophet more than West, and he has justified reasons for it

“And I'm guessing you've had your staff vetted to the point of knowing everything about them.” She waits for my confirmation.

I don't want to sit talking about how the island is run. I've given her enough info that should satisfy her curiosity for now.

“Your background doesn't exactly fit Hayden Aspinalls' lifestyle. What made you want to date this type of guy?”

She tilts her at me pensively, obviously realizing I dug up her history. Rather than make an issue of it, she sucks in whatever immediate thoughts she has with a soft sigh.

“Are you asking out of curiosity, or is this some kind of unofficial interrogation?”

I smile at her, which I realize is something I just did earlier, and it’s a facial expression that I hardly ever use. Smirking, sure, but a genuine, happy grin? It’s just not my thing.

Raven has this strange invisible magnetism that draws me to want to know more about her.

She’s mysterious and intriguing, for sure, but I don’t buy her family story in the slightest. We initially suspected she might be a hired agent, but none of us believe that anymore. She’s way too messy with her stories, and I didn’t miss the puckered scar on the side of her upper ribs. Having grown up in an environment where children have no business to grow up in, I recognize an old gunshot wound when I see it.

There are no reports from her social service file that accounts for her being shot while under their care. It looks way too old to have had it after, so I imagine it must be something that happened prior to her entering the child welfare system.

“I guess you’ve gone back to silent Kazz again,” she shakes her head. “You asked the damn question, and now you’ve gone all quiet on me.”

“I’m asking out of curiosity,” I say, realizing I was thinking too hard.

“Why is this so important?”

“You went from Hayden to Archer literally within twenty-four hours. Call me curious, but I want to get to know the woman my brother chased and then disappeared after shagging her.”

I see the surprised expression on her face as her mouth drops. It dropped on her lap very conveniently and for good reason.

“Brother? You and...?” She doesn’t finish her sentence.

“Answer my question, Raven, and I’ll answer yours.”

She realizes what I’ve done here and scoffs.

“Are you pulling my leg?”

“While you have two very nice legs, neither are ones I care to pull.”

“Are you gay?” she asks with a serious but curious tone.

I draw my mouth to a straight line and deadpan her.

“Back to my question, Raven.”

She sighs, “Fine.”

Instead of starting to talk immediately, I watch her stare into the ocean as she draws her knees to her chest. We’re sitting under the shade of a palm tree, but her cold blue eyes shine like mini titillations in the bright light and colors surrounding us.

She rests her chin over her forearm.

“I never had an easy life. Things happened to me while I was under state care. I don’t want to relive them, but even if I go

further back to before I became a ward of the state, I never felt safe. Many bad things happened to me throughout my life, and I never fully got over them. It's an everyday struggle. I try to block out the thoughts during my waking hours, but those nasty events will occasionally relive themselves in my head. When I turned 18, I was no longer a minor; I was let go. I went to live in a women's home run by volunteers. I met a woman there, and we decided to chance it and move in together. We were close friends, but I wouldn't say we were that close that I ever shared my past with her.

“Hayden came onto the scene at a time when I wanted to take control of my life. He knew my background about growing up in foster care, but he never felt it necessary to dwell on the past or take a huge interest in it. He always said that life is about moving forward. Maybe my childhood and teenage life was something he couldn't relate to, and it mottled his conscience, so he preferred to focus on me in the present time rather than who I was before.”

She sighs deeply, taking a moment to gather her thoughts, and I wonder if she feels any remorse for targeting the hotel heir. It's obvious she was looking for a way out through him.

“I had signed up for a job ad I found online. It was a management training program the Aspinalls were offering. I didn't get it and was told so at the interview. Hayden was on the panel of judges. I was rejected for stuff my whole life, but this I wanted badly. It was a job to take me above the slums I lived in for so long, a way out of my old life and into

something I could be proud of and call my own. So I waited for him outside the hotel the entire day.

“That evening, I eventually hunted him down as he was leaving and asked him why I was turned down for the role. He was pretty impressed that I stood there all day waiting for him to appear. His driver was waiting for him in front of the hotel. He said he’d tell me if I joined him in the car ride. I learned from that ride I needed to show initiative, which started with enrolling myself in a hospitality course, among other pointers and tips he gave me. By the end of our discussion, he filled my mind with so much information I was genuinely impressed with him and his knowledge of his family business.

“Hayden does have this playboy image he keeps, but when it comes to his business, he is passionate about it. That’s what I fell for.”

She laughs lightly, and I notice she has two little dimples on either side of her cheeks every time she laughs in that girly manner.

“Of course, I’m not blind. Hayden’s good-looking and has a body like a Greek god. But back then, he had to put his foot in it and invited me upstairs to his apartment. So I stepped out of the car, thanked him for the tips, and headed towards the subway without looking back. The next day I started looking at college courses. Two weeks later, he phoned my cell to ask me out as an apology for his behavior. Two wonderful years later, he removed every last trace of my existence from his social media profile, and I have to be told I was dumped by

my boss, who informed me my boyfriend was engaged to a woman who I was once introduced to as his childhood friend.

“If you asked me a week ago why I would date someone like Hayden, I would tell you he’s a smart businessman, handsome to the core, and cares immensely for me. But now I think he’s weak, caved into his parents’ demands, and an asshole to the core. I’m not bitter; in fact, during the brief time I spent with Archer, I realized what I was missing in my life. I never talked about the bad things that happened to me when I was a little girl to Hayden, but I opened up with Archer. I had never opened up to anyone before. Archer was the exception, and he made it so easy. I shared a connection with him, one I never had with anyone. He shared some stuff with me, too—“

Raven suddenly bites her lip and realizes she had let that last bit slip.

“I need to know what he shared with you,” I can see her hesitation. “Better me than West or Killian. Trust me when I say that.”

“West,” she says in acknowledgment, “That’s Archer’s brother’s name.”

I remain silent, waiting for her to expand.

“I had sex with Archer. You know about his scars; it was inevitable that I would discover them. He covers the cigarette burn marks on his arms and chest with ink.”

“Did he tell you how he got them?”

She nods her head.

That's a first. None of us ever talk about our childhoods to each other, let alone some bird we've just shagged. I tilt my head at Raven with intense interest.

Why did Archer share this with her?

"Did he tell you anything else?"

"I'm sorry, I can't tell you. It might endanger him. I can't trust you as much as you can't trust me."

I huff a laugh at the irony.

What, for fuck's sake, could he have told her that she would think if she released such information to us might harm him?

"I get it," I say. "I do. But this place belongs to us four. Archer, West, and Killian were bonded before I was born. After some shit happened in our families, the three of them became a unit. Our fathers are what relates us four; the twins are my half-brothers. Well, for obvious reasons, our mothers are different women, but I'm sure you've worked that out.

"It's a bizarre situation. The racial differences, for starters," Raven looks at me, and I know she's trying to find any similarities between me and my brothers. There isn't a lot, but if you look closely enough there are some.

"Being the younger one, I entered this unit a little later, but I noticed stuff, things that were happening to my brothers. That's why we probably already know whatever Archer told you. This place is only known by us. It's our safe haven. We've made sure of it for a few years now. We have residences everywhere, but this place is where we call home."

“So why did you bring me here then?”

I can keep telling West it was a mistake to bring her here till I’m blue in the face, but what’s the point? She’s here now, and we have to deal with it.

“Because whatever knowledge you have, whether you realize it or not, could cause complications for us.” She opens her mouth to say something, but I don’t let her, “and endanger you. There are many people who would love to bring us down. You might be their Pandora’s box to do so.”

I also don’t know how deep Archer is with this woman. Obviously, more than any of us could have predicted.

“How close are you with your father?”

That’s a question she should know if she’s aware of where Archer’s scars come from.

“How close do you think Archer is with him?”

“Enough to know he didn’t have a decent childhood,” she replies.

Ha!

Define decent.

Compared to their life, mine was a touch better, but that was because my mother is well protected under the Yakuza crime syndicate in Japan. Her marriage to Prophet was a business transaction, and he knows he could never lay a hand on her without declaring a full-out war with most of the crime syndicates in Asia.

Instead, she lives her life separated from him in a five-bedroom home in Hertfordshire, and regardless that they are still married, she hasn't seen him in years. He entertains himself in London with one of his many exotic-looking whores. My blue-eyed, white-skinned arse of a wanking father has a penchant for exotic skins. *Exotic* meaning anything that's not classified as Caucasian.

I grew up mostly with my mum. Prophet barely recognizes me as his. I can probably guess she's been with the asshole just once to get pregnant and move on from him. But West and Archer lived with him and suffered the brunt of his paternal force. I saw enough of it through them, having witnessed their external and internal scarring.

“And now you can understand why until Archer is found, you will never be able to return to your life.”

I omit from telling her that keeping her away from society is probably permanent.

Not that Raven told me anything about her life, but I believe she was thrown some unfortunate circumstances that she had to deal with the best way she could. Whether she's that gold digger Killian thinks she is or the lousy agent West seems determined she is, I hold my own opinion and don't believe she's either of them.

Suddenly a stomach grumbles pretty loud, and it's definitely not mine.

She puts her hand over her abdomen but says nothing.

“The guys are away for a short while. So it’s just you and me on the island, so if—“

“Island?” she interrupts. “So it really is one? Killian wasn’t just kidding?”

To save her the time and pain, I had purposely added that so she knows she can’t go anywhere in case she goes roaming. The last thing we need is for her to find the staff village with the fishing boats.

“Killian wasn’t lying,” I reply as a matter of fact.

“You own this island?”

I nod at her shocked face.

“As I said, it’s just us, so I’ll prepare dinner in an hour. You’re welcome to join me.”

I don’t wait for a response. Instead, I gaze at her briefly as I stand up and turn to walk away. I know her eyes follow me down the path back to the house, and somehow a part of me is chuffed she’s doing so.

Archer saw something in this woman, enough to release certain private things about his life, but unfortunately, because of it, she’s entered a world that she will never be able to escape from.

Chapter 14



THAT WONDERFUL BROTHER OF mine had better be dead in a fucking gutter somewhere because when I find him, and he's not, I'll make sure he is.

Being almost identical was fun when we were kids at school and would play games to confuse our teachers, classmates, and even girlfriends, but having to swap into my brother's role as an adult is as annoying as stepping into dog shit.

There's a reason why he's the enforcer in our sector of Norwood Saints. He negotiates all the trade contracts and treaty dealings with our partners and ensures the rules are followed. Archer has a unique way of carrying out his business; he's smooth, neat, and at the same time, stone-cold calculating.

On the other hand, I'm harsh and direct and use whatever force is necessary to get results. Even kill or wound if necessary, and contrary to my name, I do not have the patience of a saint. None of us do, but Archer has a uniqueness that imposes the obedience of laws and submission.

"They're hijacking our shipments before they reach the harbor, and it's causing a wave of havoc through the business," I say to Killian as we leave Soon Yee's office and make our way up the building's roof to the helipad.

"A hindrance that I don't like," he replies, curling his upper lip with a snarl. "We need to crush this problem before it gets to Prophet's attention."

I look at my cousin and shake my head. “Most likely, it already has. We need to fix this problem before he decides to get involved. The last thing we want is him getting up our arses.”

“We need to find Archer ASAP,” Killian retorts, and then I notice him hesitating.

“Say it,” I purse my lips. “Obviously, something eating you. Spit it out then.”

“Do you think Prophet took him to shake shit up with us?”

I consider the validity of Killian’s question.

“At the last meeting with him, I recall him asking a lot of questions,” he explains. “Normally, he doesn’t give a shit other than seeing figures increasing. He doesn’t know anything about the Brotherhood, but perhaps we’re too quiet, and he’s growing curious about what we might be up to.”

Killian has a point, but I remain silent, contemplating those thoughts. If Prophet is growing curious about what we’re up to, he has good reason to be. He knows there’s no love lost between him and us, and Archer and I are next in line to take his position as soon as his heart is pulled out from his chest.

Prophet’s confidence is his greatest weakness, the bastard thinks he’s invincible, and he’ll make sure of it even if he has to remove one of us from the picture to lessen our strength. But between me and my brother, it’s not Archer who Prophet would select for elimination. He hates us both, but his

revulsion for me is a lot more because I remind him too much of himself.

A ruthless, egotistical, cold bastard.

It's also something I despise about myself. Archer, Killian, and Kazz are the ones who will reign me in and bring me under control when things become a little mental. My biggest fear is I turn into the bastard who fathered me, and there's a strong possibility of that because of my abhorrence for him. I could turn into having every despicable character trait he has. If anyone has the balls to single-handedly take Prophet down without giving a shit about the consequences they'll face afterward, that would be me.

I want him un-alive. My ultimate ambition would be to squeeze that last drop of blood out of him and catch the last breath he takes in this world. Then when my time comes, I'll find him in the pits of hell, claim that throne and make sure he suffers an eternity of pain and torture.

And the bastard knows I fantasize about his painful death. I'm too dangerous for him. That's how I know he wouldn't have taken Archer, even though it does make a lot of sense. It would be the wrong twin.

Prophet is a lot of things but utterly stupid is not one of them. He's cunning, and if he's playing a game, my money isn't on my brother. If indeed he's planning something, it will be epic, and it probably includes taking me down in the most dramatic way.

We reach the top, and Killian opens the heavy metal door ahead to the roof, and make our way through the force of wind from our helicopter, jump in, and take our seats. The sound diminishes once the doors are closed and take to the air toward our next destination.

“Soon Yee is covering for the Triads; we’ll send them a message to remind them who is ruling the west coast territory. He’s got twenty-four hours to send them notice. If they stop the next shipment, they get a taste of what it means to test our patience.”

“Missiles or physical presence?”

I raise a brow at his question, which is more of a suggestion. Of course, better to create a diversion on their end so their focus is elsewhere until our shipment gets through to our customers.

“Good idea,” I say, smirking. “Missiles will work better in this case. When they try and clean up the mess, we sneak in and wipe them out of California.”

“We’ll need a conference with BSR to let them know.”

BSR, aka Black Stone Roses, our west-coast American partner. They’re influential in their region, but I wouldn’t put them in the top ten of international power crime syndicates. They can’t compete with Norwood Saints on the worldwide spectrum. They do what we ask of them, and they get a cut of whatever deals we make in their territories, but if we wanted to squash them, we could do so with the drop of a hat.

But there are other factors to consider about them.

Their loyalty.

“If they refuse to allow us to clean up the US from the nuisance that blocks our shipments, it means they’re working with them.” This is what I’m dreading because no one wants to start a gang war on American soil.

“We’re seriously fucked if they secretly partnered with the Triads. But what will they gain by doing that? Everyone knows Triads are risky as hell, they don’t honor treaties.”

“Triads probably offered some daft, cheap dolled-up bullshit that they will never follow up on, and the Americans bought that shite,” another reason why I hate working with the Americans. They want everything shiny and pretty and get pissed off when it’s not. We deliver what we offer; if you require extra trimmings, go get it with your turkey on Thanksgiving.

“This will involve the entire Norwood Saints if they are secretly partnering up with someone else.”

“Fuck,” I say, rubbing my temple. “We need to find Archer first, then solve the BSR and Triads issue. Getting Prophet involved will only bring Genesis X’s projects to his attention, considering how we smuggle both shipments into the country and then separate them.”

“This is taking us deeper than we need it to go. Do you think she’ll talk?”

“No, but he’ll want to know who’s behind the Brotherhood. We’ve covered every track, but nothing goes over Prophet’s radar. He’ll make it his purpose to uncover who is fucking with his skin business.”

“We need a meeting with the BSR to get some answers before we decide if and how to bring Norwood Saints into the American issue.”

I nod my head, agreeing with him.

Meanwhile, I need answers from our guest, Raven King. We spoke with Kazz earlier today, and he’s convinced she isn’t lying about her relationship with Archer. He must have been keeping her separate from this life. I have no idea why the fuck he would lead two different lives from us. Hasn’t the knobhead got enough on his plate between the Brotherhood and Norwood Saints? The woman has to be eliminated from the equation, but that’ll be his job to do; I’m not doing his dirty work for him.

Archer told Raven things that she won’t disclose to anyone because she thinks it will put him at risk. I have no fucking clue what my arse of a brother told her, but I bet it has something to do with his disappearance, and it’s a clue to where he might be.



As an extractor, I do whatever is necessary to get information to achieve results. The main goal is to project my authority on the suspect to control them and psychologically manipulate the detainee's view of the options. The physical aspect is that I do this with whatever means required.

Physical and mental torture seems to do the trick with most. If the only way to get info out of Raven King is to fuck her, then I will do so because my patience with her is wearing out.

Killian and I returned from China earlier this evening, and the meeting with Soon Yee made me realize our luck is running on thin ice before Prophet finds out about my brother's disappearance. We've got issues with the Triads, and if that hasn't reached the leader of the Norwood Saints ears yet, it will happen soon, and he'll ask for a meeting with the four of us.

We'll be made to look like utter fools by the bastard, even if I'm supposed to be his replacement. He won't miss an opportunity to remind us how incompetent he thinks we are and make an example of us in front of the entire firm. Because that's what he does. He loves anything to do with blood sports, dog fights, cock fights, and human fights. The bloodier, the better.

The old bastard loves an audience, and he knows people are drawn to the drama, the gossip, and the community of such events. One is a bloody fool if they think people have evolved from the excitement and popularity of town gatherings in medieval times to watch a hanging.

Those public executions were celebratory events. People would bring picnic lunches, the kids would come along, vendors would sell snacks and souvenirs, and all would have a jolly time. Modern times just progressed to people with simple minds now enjoying watching characters get shot, beaten up, pushed off buildings, and incinerated in the movies or on TV.

I cringe thinking of the last time Prophet created such an event that was unbeknownst to me at the time. He later dedicated the event in my honor, and I didn't have a fucking clue I would become his leading entertainment. I had taken the fall for a drastic cock-up, much to Archer and Killian's objections, and suffered the wrath of that bastard who fathered us. It took a long time to recover from it, and it shaped me into the damned heartless bastard I am today.

But something grave came out of the result of my father's bloody event.

My blood runs with hate and vengeance. I made it my life mission to kill that bastard and destroy Norwood Saints by burning it to the ground along with all its loyal members and supporters.

One day that time will come, and every day is a step closer to destroying Prophet's empire.

There's no light under Raven's door, and being 2am, I doubt she'll be awake. Slowly, I crack open the door wearing just my boxer briefs, and look around. There she is, looking tiny in that big bed under the bedcovers.

Light filters in through the windows, and it's a cloudless sky and full moon tonight. Its reflection over the vast empty ocean illuminates the entire area.

Everything is deathly quiet; the best time to die, actually. No one would hear her scream if done in one swift and precise motion. Standing beside the bed, I gaze at her as she sleeps on her back, her light blonde hair splayed over the pillow, her plump pink lips slightly open as she breathes evenly.

She'd look ultimately phenomenal, with her neck slit and the bright red blood flowing out onto her pale skin and angelic hair.

A necessary sacrifice.

As much as I would love to see my brother's beautiful lover dead, I won't do it. I need information from her first.

Kazz will kill me if I lay a harmful hand on her. That bastard thinks she should live and let Archer decide her fate. So I leave him with Raven, alone for a bit, and she's managed to worm her way under his skin.

Even Killian is now siding with Kazz's opinion, and he's barely spent two minutes with that woman.

Bloody driving me up the pissing wall with this new twist of the bitch's fate.

Both my cousin and little brother made a strict resolve that we wouldn't cause any injury to her body, so I will try another method if I can't use my usual extraction methods. Fucking isn't pain when in the throes of ecstasy.

I hear her light breathing as I shut the door and approach the bed again. I carefully pull down the duvet, leaving just the sheet pulled down to her waist, and I watch her chest rise and fall, the smooth skin of her neck. I'd love to watch it bleed out.

She's wearing a white vest. It's probably something Kazz gave her because it's several sizes too large, and it's semi-sheer enough to see the shape of her round breasts and dark nipples.

Earlier, Kazz told us to do a pick-up at the mainland before returning. Had I known the bastard went on an online shopping spree for her, I would have told him to fuck off and collect the shit himself. I was tempted to throw the bags out of the helicopter, but Killian stopped me by reminding me that if I did, we'd have to provide her with some of our own clothes to wear if I do such.

No fucking way do I want her parading around wearing their clothes. Nor in mine, either. I would have suggested she go naked for all I care, but then I'd have to live with Killian following her around like a dog with a constant stiffy.

I watch her stir in her sleep, and it's now or never. I carefully lift the bed sheet and slide under it, my hand over her waist, drawing her close to me. She shifts quickly, and I shush her.

"Shhhh...baby, it's me. Keep it low," I whisper, doing my best impersonation of my brother. "The others can't hear me."

"Archer?" she abruptly freezes in my arms, and I kiss her bare shoulder, drawing her back to me.

She raises her hand over my cheek and strokes it gently, “Is it really you?”

“Shhhh, we need to be quiet. Yeah, baby, it’s me, but they can’t know. I have to take off again. Are you safe? Did you tell them anything?” I caress her back, and my hand slowly moves downward to her arse. She’s only wearing knickers, so I dip my hand inside and squeeze the smooth, soft skin. She moves her pelvis closer to mine, and I know I’ve been suffering a stiffy since I entered this room.

“Please stay the night with me. I miss you so much, Archer.” I feel her move closer to my chest as she leans in and crushes her lips against mine, making a cooing noise that makes my knob twitch into action.

I find myself hurtling into her demand and match her assault on my lips with one of my own as I squeeze her ass harder, making her moan more into my mouth.

“Tell me, babe, it’s important to know how much you’ve told them,” I say between kisses and hot breaths.

Fuck, I did not expect to discover how addictive she tastes. I need more, but I also need answers. I’m here on a mission, not to satisfy what my knob craves.

She slides one delicate hand upward to curl around the back of my neck and reclaims my lips. Her tongue searches for mine, and I give it, knowing I removed all my piercings for my last meeting.

I'll have to get my tongue redone as it's already closed up after two days. But for now, it suits me because there's no reason for her to doubt that this isn't Archer. It's too dark in the room to see my inked torso, and if I keep her entertained enough, her eyes won't roam.

"Babe?" I ask again. "I need to know. I'm jeopardizing our safety by just being here." I manage to say just before my hand slips under her top to grope her breast.

Damn, her skin is like silk, so soft and supple. I squeeze, yank and roll her nipples between my fingers. Listening to her moaning into my mouth and feeling that vibration of her sound going down my throat is pure ecstasy. Her hand moves down my sides and slips into my shorts, grabbing my arse.

I need more and lift the hem of the vest, and she obliges by raising her arms above her head. I pull her top off, toss it aside, and lean back down to roll my tongue over the slit of her mouth, making her open it to me. I attack it like a frenzied man, my pelvis shamelessly grinding over hers as I rest my elbows on either side of her.

Slowly I swipe my tongue down her neck, across her collarbone, tasting her deliciously addictive pale, sweet skin as I finally reach those two rosy peaks, hard and begging for me to take them.

I circle one with my tongue, slowly and gently take it between my teeth and tug it, causing her to groan, arch her back, and thrust her pelvis into mine. I do the same with the

other one, lingering on slightly longer and then gradually move down her abdomen.

Her velvety white skin stands out in contrast to mine. It's a beautiful juxtaposition of light and dark.

I feel her hand reaching around my head as her body writhes under mine, spreading her legs and inviting me in.

In a swift move, I grab her hips and flip her over to her stomach, pulling down her knickers to remove them altogether. Running my hand down her spine, I take a moment to admire this perky white arse that my brother must be so fond of.

The urge to slap it persists, so I do it, resulting in a sharp groan from her. I raise an eyebrow with a thought. Curious how far she'll go, I grab a pillow and wedge it under her pelvis to lift it a little.

Spreading her legs open, I lower my head and use my hands to open her cheeks to view her puckered hole. There's something very beautiful about hers, it's tight-looking but at the same time almost welcoming, and I take a moment to admire it.

I swipe my tongue along her entire slit, front to back. She moans hard, raising her ass slightly to give me better access.

Moving my tongue further down, I taste her arousal; she's drenched with need. I can't help but like her taste; it's different from all the women I've been with. There's a certain sweetness to this woman's juices. Sweeping my tongue once

more, but this time my tongue stops to center on her back entrance, and she suddenly tenses up.

Interesting.

So she's a virgin back here, or Archer hasn't yet explored this territory.

For my own amusement, I keep my tongue focused on her hole and begin to fuck her slowly. She's so tight here, and her initial gasp tells me she's probably never had any kind of play in this area. This makes me want to take her on a back-entry joyride even more. My fingers move to her core and push three fingers inside her pussy, curling them up to run against that magical spot. I know it's the one as soon as she clinches onto my fingers, holding them there, and cries out.

"Omigod, fuck, fuck, fuck!" she cries out, and I don't show her any mercy in stopping as I feel her body convulse wave after wave, and she screams into her pillow to muffle her sounds.

Good girl. She's good at following orders and stays quiet. I don't need the others alerted to what I'm up to.

Now that I have her where I need her to be mentally, it's a good time than any to get info.

"You want me to stop, baby?" I ask with my face still in her ass.

"I want you to fuck me," she whispers, her voice tinged with a desperate need for my dick inside her.

"Tell me, baby, do you remember what I told you?"

She hesitates a moment, “About your father?”

What the fuck?

“Go on.” I get up on my knees, keeping one hand firmly on her lower back to prevent her from turning around. I continue to torture her, pinching her clit. My own arousal is killing me, but I maintain self-control over my knob.

Her body tightens almost painfully.

“More,” she murmurs, almost as if it’s a demand, and I grin, hiding that chuckle that wants to escape my mouth.

I’m in control here, darling.

“You know what he is to you, Archer,” she says, her voice ragged. “You want him dead. I’m not opening up old wounds. Not here, not now. This is about you and me. Leave the past and live right now.”

How much did that arse of a brother disclose with her? Did he go into detail about our plans? Fuck him to hell if he had. I’m so tempted to twist her neck and snap it, and when I do, I look for my piss ass of an excuse of a sibling and murder him too.

“Fuck me, goddammit,” she demands, or rather commands, and to my surprise, it’s strangely arousing.

But I’m gravely bothered by what she’s just declared.

My mind goes back to wondering how much has my precious brother divulged to this woman? The four of us swore

an oath of secrecy, and Archer knows better than to disclose our missions to the first woman who strokes his dick.

I look at the body withering below me. The urge to unalive her, take her into the ocean, and dump her body prevails. I could pretend with the other two my surprise that she escaped. Except those two plonkers know me well enough to guess I would have something to do with her disappearance.

Kazz has somehow become attached to this woman, and tonight he managed to sway Killian's opinion too. I know both wouldn't hesitate to kill her if she becomes a compromise to the Brotherhood, but right now, she hasn't posed any threat other than fucking my brother.

Lifting my hand off her back, I get up from the bed. I know I'm an asshole for starting something I cannot finish, but as much as she wants this fuck, it's my brother she desires.

This isn't consensual. Not that I'm known for having any scruples, but I'm not fucking her. She's my brother's whore.

This is fucked up, and I'm disgusted with her, me, and Archer. I turn to leave before she registers what's going on.

"Archer?" she mutters.

Continuing towards the door, I hear rustling in the bed and probably her turning to find me leaving.

Except I won't look at her, the need to get out of this room prevails. It's suffocating.

Thankfully she doesn't follow me. She's probably still trying to figure out what that was all about. As soon as I get to my

room and close the door, I head to the shower and slip off my shorts, cursing at the fucking painful hard-on.

Turning on the water, I step behind the glass. My knob has a flippin' mind of its own, and it doesn't matter how much I will it to fuck off because my mind is still trapped on that milky white skin, those perky round tits with the peachy nipples, that delicious arse of hers and those filthy moans that came out of her mouth.

Looking down, my hand is jerking my dick, her naked image and moans replay again and again until I've spilled my load onto the shower wall.

She got under my skin this one time. It won't happen again.

Chapter 15



WEST CAME BARGING INTO my room at the crack of dawn to tell me he'll be dealing with Miroslav— the Russian we picked up in England— before breakfast and asked if I wanted to join him on the interrogation to get my arse in gear.

I don't know where he gets this early morning energy from, but we returned late last night and then stayed up with Kazz to discuss the current circumstances surrounding Archer, Raven, and the possible issue we might be having with the Triads and our partners in the US.

Hoping for a workout in the gym this morning, I cancel that intention. Instead, I pull myself out of bed and head to the bathroom. Seeing my punch bag hanging, I make a quick detour, put my gloves on, and throw a few solid punches at it for a few minutes until I feel a light sweat forming on my brow.

At least it's something.

I observe my form in the floor-length mirror and chuckle at my reflection. I prefer sleeping sans clothes, so I'm only wearing boxing gloves right now. Bring on the ancient Greek sports! I do a couple of vain poses and shake my head at my narcissism before removing the gloves and heading straight to the bathroom to prepare for West's inquisition. This is a unique event that I wouldn't miss for the world, considering it's with one of the most elite lieutenants within the Bratva, Russia's most significant organized crime gang.

I'm sure my cocky cousin already started the party without me, but I can't wait to see what he has planned for our Slavic

friend. It will be interesting for sure.

We've held captive a few second and third-ranking members from various crime syndicates, but none at the level of the man we currently hold in the cells below us.

Bratva is Russia's answer to the Cartels, they are mighty and powerful, and their criminal empire stretches from Moscow to North America. Miroslav is from the upper crust of that organization and is head of narcotics and human trafficking. Our intel led us to him in London, and we kept an eye on his movements, finally capturing him at one of his warehouses in Milton Keynes. Bastard thinks we're acting for Norwood Saints; let him believe that.

But for the Brotherhood, we do what is needed to extract the necessary info because our organization doesn't give a toss about the treaties and keeping the peace between other syndicates. We don't partner up with other criminal gangs like Norwood Saints does. We work alone, get hired for a job, and choose them according to the cause.

I quickly make my way to the main corridor of our floor and stop at the top of the stairs, looking at Raven's closed bedroom door. Kazz said she retired early last night after spending most of yesterday with him, so I haven't seen her since returning from China.

Upon hearing voices in the kitchen, I trek down the staircase to find Kazz with Rosita, our head of staff who manages everyone working for us on the island. I'm guessing they are

in the middle of a staff meeting, so I acknowledge them and leave them alone.

On impulse, I grab a packet of crisps ¹ from the cupboard on my way down to the basement floors. It's not an ideal morning snack, but I was craving something more in the theme of a movie cinema snack.

It doesn't surprise me in the slightest that West already started without me. He's using one of the more fancier interrogation rooms we keep for exceptional cases. Miroslav is strapped to a chair, and just as I walk into the room, I catch West pulling his fist away from the man's face. Blood squirts from a broken nose, and the man spits as a tooth flies out of his mouth onto the floor.

“Ready to talk now, you daft wanker?” West glares at him.

I sit on a counter nearby and decide to be an observer until West needs me. His scarred knuckles bleed from the punches he delivered to our unhappy host, which also means he hasn't yet spilled any info.

“Which vessel are the girls arriving on?”

So, we're still at this stage.

I open my packet of crisps and get comfortable because this might take a while. I hope West doesn't kill the geezer before he extracts any info from him. He's known to let his anger get the better of him, and he's been in a nasty mood since he burst into my room and woke me up. Something is obviously twisting his tits today, and the longer Archer remains MIA, the

more West will start whipping his irritation about at anyone that pisses on his already annoyed nerves.

Miroslav starts a monologue of verbal diarrhea in his mother tongue, and West delivers another blow to his face before stepping back to look at his artwork. Two eyes are almost ballooned shut, lips barely recognizable, and a bloodied face from his nose that just exploded.

West takes a cloth, wipes his hands from the man's blood, and opens the drawers containing my favorite tools. Munching on my packet of crisps, I watch in glee as he prepares the table and then adjusts Miroslav on the metal chair so that the upper and lower part of his body is pushed toward the ground to unbendable positions.

Of course, the man fights West, but he's already done an incredible job weakening him and is no match for strength against my cousin.

"Arghh!" the man screams and curses a racket of gibberish in Russian.

This position is widely known as the *flying carpet* in certain sketchy as shite circles. It causes severe stress to the detainee's back, neck, and spine and often causes permanent damage to the body. Except, we're not worried about enduring injuries because Miroslav won't live to experience such.

"Ivan will come for you. You and your father, you English mutt of a bastard," he spits out.

“Here’s to hoping,” West says, picking up a tool from my personal favorites. My collection of torture tools is vast, and I collect as I go. West tends to use them without planning, but I have a system.

A smile blooms on my face because he’s chosen one of my personal favorites.

The Knee Splitter.

It comprises of twenty spikes across two iron blocks facing each other, connected via two large screws.

I look on, fascinated, as my cousin walks around the man like a predator, his eyes locked on his prey, ready to pounce.

“How many girls are in the container?” West asks, taking a knife from the nearby cart that resembles a surgeon’s table and ripping the man’s jeans open to expose his knee in the flesh.

“Fuck you, mutt,” he spits out again, and I shake my head. Miroslav could have had an easy death if he just released the needed information.

West slams the spikes into the man’s flesh, causing him to yell and curse out in pain. Once embedded into the knee, he tightens the screws, drawing the two iron blocks and spikes closer together, slowly crushing the knee.

“For fuck sake! Thirty girls!” he yells out. Even I hear the bones crushing from where I sit, and it sounds almost orgasmic.

“Coming from where?”

West tightens it even more.

“Tallinn,” he replies, howling like a banshee.

“Estonia,” West says casually as he begins to slice open the jeans of the man’s second leg.

“Cyka² not so stupid, eh?”

“Who you calling a bitch, suka blyad³?” West pulls out the knee splitter and pounds it into his other knee, making the man scream loud and curse.

“Schas po ebalu poluchish, suka, blyad!⁴” Miroslav curses, spitting out more blood from his mouth.

“Idi na hui⁵,” West says casually as he tightens the wrench, and a series of hissy curses pour out of the man’s mouth.

“Your Russian is impressive. Your shlyukha⁶ must be Russian,” Miroslav says with a ragged breath.

“I’ve been hanging around Dimitri for a while. He and I are pretty tight, so to speak,” West smirks, and I know exactly what he’s doing.

This is obviously West’s show. I’m merely an observer, enjoying this event and munching on a pack of crisps. I watch as Miroslav pieces the puzzle together and realize who our informant is. Suddenly a wave of curses and spitting blood projects out of his mouth, and I fight to keep the hysterical laughter from escaping me.

“I will kill that son of a bitch, fucking mudak.⁷” He adds to his final outburst or slurred words.

“You can do that when we bring him to hell for you,” West informs.



The bastard was one strong asshole and withstood the torture longer than the usual methods we use. In the end, West extracted the info needed, including the process for removing the girls, the names of some mules in the UK, and the ship's name that's due to arrive tomorrow in Flexistowe holding the container of thirty girls.

Because of other pressing issues we are currently dealing with, I've already allocated the order for Sam and Liam, two of our four primary second-in-commands, to assign a group of Brotherhood soldiers to locate and target the mules and make sure they receive a sniper shot to the head. I asked Kazz to inform the mercenaries to handle the girls and bring them to the safe haven the anti-trafficking organization we work with maintains.

We have a purposely built crematorium below level for the sole purpose of disposing of the dead bodies of our captives. Anyone we have brought back to the island never leaves, and for a good reason.

All kidnapped visitors have made their way to the fire pit without exception.

Except for one.

The light blonde beauty who's probably still asleep in her chambers upstairs.

Kazz and I have come to the conclusion that she's an innocent who slept with the wrong person and got caught up in a nasty web of the criminal world. West disagrees with us and still believes she's dodgy as fuck and seriously bad news. I won't deny the fact that there's something odd about her story, but everyone has a past they want to hide. Whatever that is, it happened before she was fourteen, and there isn't anything we should be concerned about if it happened when she was a child.

No one can be more shady than the four of us, and I end my argument here.

1. British: crisps, American: potatoe chips

2. Russian - Bitch

3. Russian - motherfucker

4. Russian – I will fucking kill you, motherfucking bitch.

5. Russian – Go fuck yourself

6. Russian -Whore

7. Russian – shithead

Chapter 16



AFTER KNOCKING ON RAVEN'S door, I enter to find her on the chaise longue facing the windows towards the view of the ocean. Her feet are curled up behind her knees, and light blonde hair spills over the black velvet fabric as her head rests on the reclining part.

She lowers the book she's reading and looks up to see me enter the room. I stand at the entrance, curious to know which book she selected after I showed her our library room last night.

We didn't go into any tremendously detailed discussion after our initial beach talk yesterday, but I got an insight into a much calmer version of Raven when she's not pressed for info. I gather her past is something she has kept separate from the current life she has chosen for herself, and to a certain extent, I can respect that. I don't believe she's an agent like we initially thought, even though one can never be sure with these *little nikitass* these agencies breed.

"We're having breakfast downstairs. You should join us." As much as I'd like to remain pleasant and courteous to Raven like I did last night, she needs to be reminded that she's not just any guest here but is under our control until Archer is found.

She realizes my request isn't up for debate and gives me a glaring look as her brows furrow. I noticed she has a very expressive face and would make a lousy poker player.

"What if I'm not hungry?"

I sigh. Here's thinking we've moved past this cellblock behavior.

I give her a look that I'm not going to argue this.

“You don't have to eat, but you've been given free rein of our home. It will be disrespectful if you don't show your presence at the breakfast table.”

She closes the book abruptly, and I notice she doesn't use a bookmark or leave any kind of indication of which page she is at. I quickly glance at what she's wearing and sigh at her appearance. She's back to wearing her hotel uniform but without the blazer. I assume someone from the house staff had it dry-cleaned and returned this morning.

The shopping bags with the clothing items the guys collected yesterday from the pick-up station on the mainland remain untouched on the floor by the closet. I asked the staff this morning to bring it to her room. Rather than ask her why she won't at least try the clothes, I'll let her decide for herself.

Personally, I couldn't care less. It's just a friendly gesture to assist her convenience and comfort while she stays here. If she doesn't want them, then that's her prerogative. They're there for her; it's her choice to use them or not.

I'm in no mood to start up an argument with her. Without any further words, I abruptly walk out of the bedroom. It's fairly apparent by this point that Raven is naturally fiery, and I have no ambition to get my eyes scratched out by her vicious nails. As I continue down the corridor, I won't turn to see if she's following; I can hear her bare feet pattering on the

marble floor. As soon as we arrive in the kitchen, I turn to see her hesitate at the end of the table. She looks directly at West and smirks at him, he gives her a snarl, and I have to question what that's all about.

“Over here, blondie,” Killian says. “There a plate for you right here.”

He pats the seat of the chair, “Come.”

She looks at him full of contempt.

“Do I look like a fucking dog to you?” she scoffs at him.

That raises my brow, but she has a point. Killian can be an arse sometimes, but I don't think he meant to disrespect her.

I pour her a mug of coffee, already knowing she prefers it black without sugar, and place it in front of her on the table. I take a seat next to my currently moody brother, who can't barely take his eyes off Raven.

I can't tell what's up with West. The interrogation with Miroslav went well, and they got the results, so I have no idea why he's in such a foul mood. Killian mentioned earlier that West has been a moody fucker since he barged in on his sleep to tell him he would start the interrogation that very moment.

Currently, he's eyeing Raven, and one doesn't need to be an expert to realize a mix of bitterness and distrust agitates him from the inside. I wouldn't put it past him that he's attracted to her like Killian and I are. We are doing our best to suppress that attraction because we have no business involving ourselves with her beyond finding Archer.

“There’s a choice of pancakes, muesli, toast, scrambled eggs, sausages, and freshly diced fruit. Help yourself,” I tell Raven, but avoid giving her more attention than necessary.

Ignoring Killian and where I’ve put a placemat out for her, she takes the mug of coffee and slides into the chair at the end of the table, facing West. Both seem to be having some kind of stare-off contest with each other this morning and even draws Killian’s attention.

“Is there something we need to know?” he asks, beating me to it.

Ignoring West because he’s known for giving the silent treatment when he wants to be a bastard, Killian turns to Raven.

“Blondie?”

Raven breaks the stare with my brother and sips her coffee, momentarily reflecting on her thoughts.

The moment becomes almost deathly quiet as we wait for a reply.

“Do you realize you are just as blonde as I am?” she asks. “I don’t get why you keep calling me that.”

Killian shrugs his shoulder, “You kind of remind me of a young Debbie Harry.”

“Blondie? Hmm,” She says thoughtfully. “Okay, she’s pretty dope. I think I can accept it.”

“With the arse of Marilyn Monroe,” Killian adds out of nowhere,

Raven nearly does a spit take of her coffee.

At some point, Raven will get used to Killian’s directness, but at least he’s not lying. She does have killer curves, and we’ve all noticed her for what she is; unbelievably hot. Even in that dead ugly hotel uniform, she can wear it like her second skin.

West mumbles something into his cuppa, causing Raven to look over at him.

“Archer has a nickname for me,” she blurts out. “But he never called me *baby* nor *babe*.”

I do not know why she would say something so out of the blue, but it definitely pulls a reaction from West. He looks up at her, and if looks could kill, she’d be dead.

“What does Archer call you then?” Killian says, trying to diffuse whatever the fuck is about to go nuclear between these two.

“I won’t tell you. But I’ll reveal something else.”

There’s a clear smugness on her face, and I have no idea what she’s up to, but whatever it is won’t be good for anyone in this room.

“Raven, it’s a shame that all this food goes to waste. Why don’t you get yourself a plate, darling,” I say in an attempt to curve whatever sinister is currently brewing between them at this table.

“I know his body extremely well. Especially where his scars are, his back is smooth and muscular, and there’s a particularly wonderful scent about him. It’s his signature scent. You wouldn’t be able to impersonate that.” She looks dead straight at West, and a self-satisfied smile filters up her face.

Before Killian or I can react, West jumps the table, throwing breakfast everywhere, and is over by Raven in no time. His hand is gripping her neck, and he’s squeezing her tight.

Raven’s neck is slender, and West can wrap his entire hand around it to the point where it’s as if his hand is permanently molded to her.

Except he’s going to fucking kill her.

I clamber to them and start shouting at him to let her go, as does Killian, but West is in some kind of dark trance, determined to squeeze the life out of her. His eyes are bulging, his nostrils flaring, and his upper lip curves in a snarl.

West isn’t here, his conscience checked out a minute ago, and we’re left with a seriously hacked-off shell of a person who could potentially kill Raven.

Killian grabs the flip knife out of his cargo pocket, climbs the table, and puts West into a loose neck hold, angles the blade to his neck.

“Let her go, mate, or I’ll be forced to do it,” he shouts. “You cannot kill her, so let this go.”

Fuck, how did chaos just spiral out of control so fast?

“Bruv, let the girl go, mate,” I plead with him, gripping the wrist he has firmly around Raven’s neck.

Suddenly West turns to me. He’s lost somewhere inside his mind, and whatever she said triggered something in him that’s taken him to a level where he’s lost all sense of self-control.

“Remove your hands from the woman,” I say in a much more serious tone.

He looks back at Raven, whose lips have turned into a dangerous shade of blue. The bastard has cut off her air supply. Killian tugs his arm around West, cutting off his air, and finally, he lets go of Raven.

She’s bowing over, breathing deep as her lungs are desperate to fill. This sudden force of air causes her to cough from the relief.

For safekeeping, Killian thrusts West away from her.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?” we both ask him, staring at him incredulously.

“She’s a minging trollop,” he snarls at her disgustingly. “She deserves no less. I say we end her now, cut her loose.”

Regaining her breath back, Raven sits up straight in her chair and laughs. The hand print is evident on her neck and will probably bruise.

The three of us watch her laugh turn hysterical. Why the fuck is she laughing? She almost died. This has to be some nervous tic to calm her nerves, or she suffers from incongruous emotions in adverse situations.

“Kill me then because I’ve already died once. I should have stayed dead,” Raven blurts out as soon as she begins to calm down.

Is she pushing West? Because I know this attack must have taken him over the edge, which I have yet to identify the trigger.

“I’ve been through so much worse,” she says, her laughing suddenly seizing abruptly. She pushes her chair back and, as she gets up, slams her palm on the table as she directs her sudden anger at West.

This time her eyes are blazing with fury as she glares at him, her lips curl into a snarl.

“Strangulation doesn’t even begin with what I’ve had to endure. I’ve looked at the face of death and said *fuck you*. I’m a survivor; I’ve seen what the pits of hell look like because I’ve been there. You can throw whatever shit you have at me. I’ve been kidnapped, molested as a kid, and shot at. Heck, I’ve witnessed my entire family assassinated, and then I was raped while still a virgin. So you think a pitiful death by strangulation will do anything to me? You can’t damage something that’s already broken.”

She spits directly in West’s face, but he doesn’t react.

“So, fuck you, West. Your threats are child’s play compared to the shit I’ve had to deal with. Boo-fucking-hoo, your father abused you like he did with Archer, and y’all want to kill him. You’re nothing but a big assed rich thug who attacks innocent women. Yeah. That’s right, I’m innocent. I don’t know what

happened to your brother. Honestly, his disappearance is a mystery to me as it is to you. I have no info for you, so best you take out your gun and shoot me because I just can't wait to claim the throne of hell."

We all remain silent, just trying to swallow what she revealed.

"So here's the thing," obviously, Raven's pretty hacked off, and the woman has a tongue when in a pissy mood. "Lock me in my room tonight because I may just slit your throat in your sleep to see if you bleed red."

She takes off back upstairs, and the three of us breathe a sigh of relief.

"You flippin' wanker," realizing what my mug of a brother did, I cast him an accusing glare. "You posed as Archer and fucked her last night."

Killian glares at him, surprised, as he passes his hand through his hair.

"No, you did not. You gormless knobhead," he says, irritated. "No wonder she's bloody hacked off like a raving banshee."

"Unacceptable," I add. "What were you thinking trying to get info out of her, and then, when she catches you out, you almost kill her?"

West steps back, scowling, "Will you two fucking pipe it down! I had no choice. It was either that or use our usual methods," he looks at Killian since both are familiar with their

interrogation methods. “But you two mugs won’t let me harm a hair on her head. So I had to resort to something more creative.”

“And what exactly were you expecting her to tell you? If you posed as Archer in her bed, why would she tell you where you are if you’re under her flippin’ sheets?!”

“Perhaps show surprise? Maybe ask how he turned up? I don’t fucking know. But if she was responsible for his disappearance, she would have shown surprise at least.”

“And did she?”

“No.”

“You muppet,” I say. “Get it into your thick head. She’s just as clueless about his disappearance as we are. She’s an innocent that got mixed up in our shit.”

“Prophet wants to see us tomorrow,” West pauses, allowing it to sink in as we realize what that fucking means. “We’ve got twenty-four hours to find Archer, or who the fuck knows what will happen.”

That fucking renders us mute for a brief moment.

“Do you think he knows about Archer’s disappearance?” Killian finally asks.

“I wouldn’t put it past him that he wouldn’t. That’s why he’s requested an audience.”

“The Russians,” I mutter.

“When you miss a meeting with Nikolai’s number two, you better be dead or near death. I’m sure he was fucking livid about Archer not keeping the planned meeting and made some noise.”

“Fuck,” Killian rakes his fingers through his blond hair and stares right back at West with those ice-blue eyes of his.

“Exactly,” West says. “Pack up; we’re heading to London to face the wrath of the bloody bastard. Be at the helipad by noon.”

“And her?”

“We bring her with us.”

Before I can object, he cuts in, “We need the distraction away from us.”

“We’d be throwing her to the wolves to save our arses,” I say as our eyes meet, and I can see the determination he has to do this.

“You said yourself, she probably has nothing to do with Archer’s disappearance. She’s just dead weight to us,” his voice drips with disdain.

Killian shakes his head angrily. “Let me reiterate what Kazz tried to explain to you. She’s an innocent woman who got caught up in our shit.”

I cannot agree with what West wants to do with her. Killian and I overrule him on this decision; we can either call him out on it or watch to see how far he’ll go.

“Well, she can add this to her list of tragic things in her life.”

I stare at him as his words roll around in my head with disbelief.

“Sick bastard,” Killian mutters.

“You want to be her guardian angel, then make sure one of you takes the fall for Archer. I’ve done my time for such.”

There isn’t a member of the Norwood Saints or their associates who hadn’t witnessed or heard of what Prophet did to his own son. I was only ten at the time, but I was forced to watch it, and the memory is engraved in my head forever.

“Torturing innocent women is not what the Brotherhood stands for,” I say firmly. We are not throwing Raven into the wolf’s lair. “You know exactly what he’ll make her into, selling her off to the highest bidder.”

West breathes out heavily with anger.

“Let’s make it very clear. We are not Robin Hood nor Superman, nor do we have a mission to save damsels in distress. And we are definitely not saints in the religious term, either. We get paid a hefty sum to deliver goods to their destination. If that product consists of human bodies that were trafficked, and we interrupt their initial destination and deliver them instead to some missionary, then it’s just relocating a fucking delivery job. In that case, it’s the same as delivering a case of coffee beans to a shop. All I care about is what I get paid for doing the job and make sure Prophet’s skin trade is

crushed, along with his fucking head and bloody precious gang.”

I remain silent because West is on a roll to annoy this morning. Whatever Raven said or did seriously ticked him off. I’m pretty sure it had something to do with mentioning his physical scars. Little does she know that the scarring goes even deeper than what the human eye can see.

“It’s not just for money, and you know it, West,” Killian replies. They both stare each other out. I know Killian can be just as stubborn and won’t back down on something he strongly believes in. I also know West isn’t doing this just for the money, maybe the thrill and damaging Prophet’s primary business is a huge benefit, but I know what the skin trade means to my cousin and brothers and their maternal history associated with it.

“You’re chasing rainbows,” West mumbles quietly.

“Bollocks, and you know it!” blares Killian. “She’s out there, and I will find her one day.”

Shit.

Bringing up his mum wouldn’t be the right moment. We’ve all seen Killian desperately show a picture of her to rescue missionaries. He’s convinced she’s alive, but I hope she isn’t because that would mean she abandoned her son to save herself, leaving him with a monster. We have never mentioned it to him because he probably recognizes this himself.

“She’s dead,” mumbles West bitterly, “and if she’s not, you know—”

“Fucking hell!” I exclaim loudly, interrupting West from saying the words that might bring Killian’s nightmare into reality if he hears us confirm his own doubts.

They both turn to look at me, waiting for me to continue.

“She said she was abducted and saw her family assassinated,” I say, recalling Raven’s words.

“Murdered,” Killian tries to correct me.

“So what? Do you have a flippin’ point?” West says impatiently, as usual.

“Only a family of importance would have been assassinated. I don’t think our little guest told us the truth about her background. I’m going to look into it. There must be a connection between her family’s murder and her walking into the police station, claiming she was abandoned.”

That old bullet wound I noticed yesterday on her ribs when she walked up to me from the beach is probably the link to her escaping the assassination.

“Do that,” West tells me and then turns to Killian. “Inform little Miss. Muffet about our plans.”

Killian glowers at him and takes off up the glass stairs.

“You need to control your anger better,” I tell West.

“You need to bugger off,” he scowls and walks off. I watch him head towards the elevators, knowing he’ll go to the

basement to burn some steam in the gun range.

I get it. I honestly do. We all know Prophet takes particular pleasure in using the twins, especially West, as an example for retribution, reminding him how unfit he is to replace him as leader of the Norwood Saints. Neither twin ever wanted such a position. They loath the firm with passion, but to go through this kind of mental and physical exploitation by him all their lives and having their incompetence ingrained in them from childhood to adulthood damaged them to some extent.

I can't help but worry that one day one of them will crack, and most likely, it'll be West because he's already teetering on the edge of self-destruction. The only positive thing right now is that we are around to ground him. Archer is always good at that, but his MIA is throwing West off-track. There has to be some scientific truth behind the whole twin phenomenon because these two share a bond beyond what Killian or I share with them.

We need to get Archer back; otherwise, who knows what the future lies for either of my two brothers.

Chapter 17



GODDAMIT!

I lean against my bedroom door with tears pricking my eyes, threatening to explode. I rub the throbbing pain in my neck, knowing I'll probably wear a couple of bruises for a short while.

Now I received markings from both brothers, love hickeys from one, and a death threat from the other. Neither are amusing in the slightest. I've been scared to an inch of my life before, but not in almost a decade. The fear of death suddenly seeps back into my consciousness like an old friend I never wanted, harassing me to the point where I need to retreat back into my old shell, curl up and stay there for a while.

I fall to my knees and give in to the tears as they begin to freefall. Bravery is for heroes. I'm certainly not one. I'm a survivor who cheated death and depression one too many times. The dread that one day I may not crawl out of the claws of death is a feeling I'm sure will happen to me soon.

No one can be that fucking lucky.

This time, however, with these men, I firmly believe I won't live to tell the tale in my old age. My death is inevitable. They are my final destination.

I was never meant to live past the age of 12, and ever since then, my life has been one agonizing rollercoaster ride after another. With Hayden, I thought I cut a break. Then that one night with Archer, I thought, maybe, just maybe, there was hope for a happily ever after

Yeah, right. I should have known better.

Pulling myself off the floor, I go to the bathroom to grab a tissue. My reflection looks like utter shit, and I open the faucet to rinse my face. As soon as I seize the towel from the hook, I hear a knock on the door.

Fuck, my eyes are swollen and red. It's obvious I've been sobbing like a little girl, and when Killian enters just as I walk out of the bathroom, he realizes it too. Thankfully he doesn't comment, and I appreciate it. The last thing I want is for him to think I'm some big bawling crybaby.

I'm not, really. Crying isn't my thing, but the last few days have been overwhelming, to say the least. So excuse me if I shed a tear to relieve the massive tension build-up.

I glance down at his tattooed hand, holding a black canvas backpack in his hand.

“Just got word that we're going on a trip. We're to meet at the helipad at noon. You can meet me in the kitchen, and we'll head out together.” His voice isn't soft, but compared to yesterday morning, he seems to have relaxed around me. I'm not sure how to take it.

Helipad.

I didn't even know this island had a helipad.

Of fucking course, it has.

Is there anything these men haven't created on this island?

Dating Hayden widened my experience level to things the average person might never get. Riding in a helicopter is one of them, which we often did to his parent's residence in the Hamptons.

“May I ask to where?” Hardly doubt he'll tell me.

“London.”

My eyes nearly pop out of my head. Are they taking me home?

Seeing the surprise in my eyes and probably realizing my instant thought, he smirks sarcastically.

“You might want to pack a couple of things. Don't know when *we'll be back* here.” He stresses the last sentence, ensuring I understand that we all will return at some point.

My face drops, realizing I won't be let free, and they're probably on a hunt for Archer. The dreaded feeling that the end of my days is nearing returns, and I wince from the thought.

These men will own me until my death.

“Keep in mind we travel light since we never know where the wind takes us.” He chuckles, but I'm not sure that's funny.

Or maybe I'm not in any frame of mind to find anything funny.

“Here,” Killian leaves the small bag by the foot of the bed, his eyes drift randomly over to the unopened shopping bags.

He goes to leave but turns around at the last minute and stands by the door entrance.

“Listen, umm....” He pauses and looks directly at me. “Kazz shopped all that stuff, so I don’t know what’s in there, but it would benefit you greatly if you dressed less like a hotel worker, where we’re going. Might even save your life.”

Save my life?

My days are numbered.

“How ironic,” I say aloud without wanting to. I bite my lip to stop me from saying anything further. He doesn’t need to know what I’ve been avoiding most of my life.

Killian stands firmly in the doorway with his arms folded across his chest. I immediately catch sight of his muscles bulging from his arms and fitted t-shirt. My eyes travel upwards, and I watch him lick his bottom lip. His eyes scan my face, trying to decipher my current mood.

“I get that you have issues with shit you went through in the past,” he says after a moment. “We all have Raven. But as far as Kazz and I are concerned, you won’t be dying while on our watch.”

I’m not sure what to say to that. Can he telepathically read my mind? Or am I that damn transparent?

“Unless you purposely put us in danger,” he adds. “In such a scenario, I wouldn’t hesitate to take you out. But while you remain bonded to us, you will live under our protection.”

I frown in confusion.

Bonded?

What does that even mean? Do I belong to them as in ownership now?

Seeing the millions of questions forming in my head, he bows out fast and leaves, shutting the door behind him.

Fuckity fuck. I breathe out heavily, utterly stunned.

Killian didn't include West when he said I'm under his and Kazz's protection. I touch my neck and press on the painful bruising. Then again, after what happened earlier, that doesn't surprise me. West would no sooner feed me to the hungry lions than waste another minute in a room with me.

And then, I haven't really dived deep into figuring out what the fuck happened last night. Did West really believe he could play me by impersonating Archer?

I beat him at his own game and smile with satisfaction at that thought.

But my smug pleasure doesn't last very long as questions come tumbling loudly into my mind.

Why didn't I call him out immediately? And why the fuck, did I allow him to continue? And then he dropped me cold and ran off like the asshole he is.

The biggest question of all horrifies me to my core.

Am I attracted to West?

Dammit, I don't want to be. But, he is almost identical looking to Archer, although they couldn't be more different in

character.

And there's the factor that I simply cannot ignore it.

West ate my ass out.

Isn't there a word for that, like anilingus or something? He didn't just rim around it; he thrust his tongue inside me while his fingers played with my clit and pussy.

I don't even know where to begin with that.

But that's such an intimate sexual act. Why would he do it?

Why would I let him do it?

Because my freaking pussy is a freaking slut.

Spending a day alone with his younger brother did serious things to my libido. He's breathtakingly gorgeous with a physique to match. While Kazz is not as big in muscle as the other three are, he's still tall, fit, and athletic, and I caught him early this morning running along the beach, wearing nothing but a pair of sweat shorts. I ogled him from the comfort of my bedroom so he wouldn't have noticed me staring.

There's no doubt that man has a drool-worthy body, and thoughts of what I'd love to do to it plagued me for hours.

Then there's blond, blue-eyed Killian, who looks more like a giant "Viking surfer dude" than a thug when he's in his island element. I haven't seen him undressed, but I don't need to in order to realize what he's packing underneath. He always wears form-fitting t-shirts that outline his perfect cuts and crevices.

But the more I analyze what West and I did, the more it begins to make sense. He isn't ugly, even if his personality is. Allowing him to do illicit things to my body was just a means to an end, and I craved some kind of release.

Those massive mutilations on his back tell another story about him, and I know Archer said his father had caused most of the scars on his, so I can only imagine that both men suffered severely under the hands of their father.

I don't know if Kazz suffered the same wrath as his brothers, considering that other than his left forearm, hand, and side of his back neck, he is ink free as opposed to the other two who have covered their scars with ink designs that take up most of their arms and torsos.

But, then again, that means nothing; Kazz is their half-brother with different mothers. His mother could have separated from their father, and he ended up living with her.

Kazz told me some things about them, but many open-ended questions about these guys still exist. It's obvious this is a gang, or a secret gang, with this island being their isolated location. I have no idea what kind of business they operate, yet they seem to have a lot of resources available to them. I've seen a couple men in the distance patrolling the area too, yet none so far have entered the house without invitation, but I've seen them on the main grounds. The house staff are sworn to silence. They come inside, do their jobs, and leave.

There are way too many complexities in the mystery surrounding these men.

I sigh heavily and look at the shopping bags.

Killian says I shouldn't wear my work clothes, and I'll heed his advice because while it seemed friendly, I'm sure it was also too serious to ignore.

Taking the largest shopping bag, I open it, pour the contents onto the bed, and rummage through the various items.

There are a bunch of tops, mainly spaghetti-style vests in cotton and satin-type fabrics. There's a short black leather skirt, a pair of black colored sailing shorts, a couple more short-sleeve T-shirts, and some blouses. The colors are various, but the primary color here is black. If I were to use Kazz's fashion style from the brief minute I snooped in his closet, I would say he singlehandedly selected all these clothes for me.

With the next bag, I dump the contents on the bed. There are two pairs of designer denim jeans, both skinny styles. One is black with several purposely designed rips, and one is in basic blue. The black one reminds me of Kazz's jeans I saw the other day strewn across the floor in his closet.

There's also a large black velvet drawstring bag. I open it to find a variety of different lingerie sets, all kinds of styles, and fabrics. Cotton, satin, lace, all in black. I almost want to blush knowing Kazz put thought into selecting these intimate items. It's also as if he wasn't sure what I'd prefer wearing, so he picked a little of everything.

It's kind of cute, actually.

The one thing that stands out the most from all these high-end designer brand clothes and, most notably, the lingerie is that the items are all in my size.

How did he get my bra cup size?

Then I remember yesterday at the beach. My bra was right next to him.

And now my slut of pussy goes straight to the thought of how I allowed Kazz to see me naked. He checked me out more than once, and my nipples pebbled, and my pussy pulsed because he gazed without trying to hide it. I have no idea what kind of woman he likes, but I'm dying to know what he thought when he saw me coming up from the beach.

I must be going crazy to even contemplate such thoughts.

Technically speaking, all three men kidnapped me, so either I am suffering from some kind of Stockholm Syndrom effect, or I am actually attracted to them.

And reality sets in.

Omigod, these men can kill me, and my slutty pussy clenches when I think about what they are packing under their shorts. I allowed West to *tongue fuck* my ass last night, and he almost killed me just a short while ago.

What the fuck is wrong with me?

I'm going to need a cold shower because my thoughts are unacceptable for my current predicament.

In an attempt to eliminate my filthy thoughts, I throw a few items of lingerie, some tops, and one of the denim jeans into the duffle bag. None of these items are for British weather. It was still coat season there when I was kidnapped. I take my hotel blazer from the closet and fold it into the bag, realizing there's one more bag I haven't opened.

Inside are three boxes; in one of the boxes is a pair of black suede sneakers with a silver stripe, and the other is a pair of black leather ankle boots with spikey stiletto heels and silver studs. While the boots are beautiful, I don't see the connection to the rest of the summer weather items. I dump the sneakers into the bag and decide to wear the boots for the actual trip.

The third box is much smaller than the other two, and I open it to find a black string bikini and a black transparent beach dress.

If Kazz didn't clarify what he thought of my naked body, he made it crystal clear now.

He wants me to cover up.

Fine asshole, got your message loud and clear.

Chapter 18



THE FLIGHT TO LONDON was unremarkable, without incidences. I was blindfolded between the trip from the island to the mainland and remained that way until the airplane was airborne. Obviously, these men are super protective of their location, and I have no idea how they can move around in public with a blindfolded person and not get questioned about it.

The three men remained together on the flight, talking low and probably strategizing. I was told to stay at the back of the plane and couldn't hear anything of value I could use. We made one stop to refuel in Dubai. My geography isn't terrible, so I'd guess the island's location must be somewhere in the Indian Ocean. Also, if I were to analyze the ethnicity of the staff on the island, it pretty much looks like they come from this region.

Just before landing in London, Killian came over and sat next to me for a pep talk about what we'd be up to when we landed. He explained that we were going somewhere where it would be best, for my own benefit, to remain quiet no matter what was being said or done. He warned me that this wasn't what he wanted for me, but Archer's disappearance put them in massive jeopardy with some people, and I should refrain from trying to make an escape or even talking.

“Just look to one of us for permission to talk if you're asked a question. These are very dangerous people, they will not help you, and if you think we're bad, they are the devil reincarnate. Do not mention you slept with Archer before he

went missing. You were with me in my flat in Bethnal Green. It's in East London, in case you don't know. And above all, do not mention the island. If you do, I will not hesitate to shoot you in the head. Let us do all the talking, do not even question what we say.”

Not that he even mentioned where we're going exactly, but I get the impression it might be to their boss. I did hear the word Prophet a few times within their private discussions, and I imagine that's a gang name for someone of importance. Archer also mentioned that name on his phone back when I spied on him in the hotel stairwell.

The bigger question is, why are they including me in their little team?

And why to a meeting with their boss?

I did ask Killian what role I was supposed to play.

“The suppressed one,” he replied with a deadpan face.

I wanted to laugh, but seeing how serious he was, it wouldn't have been appreciated.

So here we are, standing outside some old warehouse in god-knows-where in London. Earlier, I watched the guys check their guns and slot them back into the back side of their pant waistbands before we departed the SUV.

This isn't going to be a friendly meeting. Judging by how quiet the drive was over from the airport, it's not an appointment either of them is comfortable with.

I need to keep my eyes open and play my part by ear following the men's expressions because whether I like it or not, I'll need to put my trust that their lead will keep me alive longer than trying to wing it on my own.

Just before we enter, West turns towards me and frowns.

“Are you always so stupid, or is today a special occasion?”

Before I have a chance to reply, he lifts his hand towards my breast and, in one swift motion, rips off the chest pocket of my blazer.

“Looking to get yourself killed, idiot?” He throws the piece of tattered fabric embroidered with the hotel name and emblem into the dumpster nearby.

“Well, if someone bothered to get me something warmer for this weather, I wouldn't have brought this with me,” I look down at my torn jacket. One side is a destroyed mess. I'd take it off if it weren't for the fact that I'm desperate for warmth. I roll up the cuffs to give it a slightly edgier look and hope it passes as something trending.

As usual, West ignores me and continues ahead. Killian lightly nudges me to follow. Kazz walks with us but maintains a fraction behind me and whispers to keep following them.

There were perhaps a million things I expected at this meeting, but none matched the current scenario we just walked into. This far exceeded my expectations of something I could have ever imagined.

Kazz quickly pinches my arm, reminding me to remain silent. We stand at the entrance of what is assumed to be a massive storage area. Several tattooed, goon-looking men, all armed to the nines, stand around the interior's perimeter. And in the center are three older men. One grey-haired man is forcefully held on his knees by a big, burly man, and the third stands before him with a knife to the captive man's throat.

The third one looked almost identical to the brawny one holding down the man. The only difference is he has a scruff beard, and the other has a large deep scar that curves over his forehead.

"Ten percent. Fuck you," the older man spits at the third man's shoes. "I earn one hundred percent without you."

The third man, who I assume is the boss, doesn't even bat an eyelid.

"Count yourself lucky that I'm feeling genuine enough to give you ten percent." As a warning for the old man to accept the deal, he slides the knife across the jawline of the man's chin, causing blood to trickle down.

"Do you even know who I am?" the old man says.

"Do you know who I am?" the third man asks.

"The bloody Prophet, I'm no idiot."

Aha!

So this is who I've heard the guys referring to in their conversation. I was right; he's their boss.

“And yet you still try to antagonize me,” Prophet says calmly. “Here I am offering you a way out alive, and instead of taking it, you spit on my boots.”

Without warning, he throws the knife in the air; the big man catches it and slits the man’s throat, and I have to stifle my shriek; Kazz grips my wrist as a reminder to stay quiet, but I’m not stupid, one sound from me and that bloodied knife will be all over my throat.

Nonetheless, I can’t ignore the fact that there’s a dead man in the middle of this vast room with blood pooling around him. It wasn’t just his throat slit, but his throat was severed through like a partial decapitation, and I quietly swallow down the bile that makes it up my throat.

Killian strategically moves in front of me to block out the scene. I’m thankful for him doing that, even if I’ve already seen all the gruesome bits. At least I don’t have to keep staring at the body if it’s out of my direct view.

I watch as Prophet receives a cloth from someone and wipes down his hands while two other men collect the dead body and drag it out. Perhaps another minute passes when Prophet takes notice of us, and the entire room goes deathly silent.

“So my boys have finally decided to show their presence. Look, Shaw, even your boy managed to haul his arse here.”

Boy?

Oh shit, when he meant boys, he didn’t mean lackeys. This is West and Kazz’s father, and the other guy with the scar on

his forehead that he called, Shaw, is Killian's dad.

Fucking hell, what the hell have I landed myself in?!

Judging by the recent scene and how the other men run circles around the man named Prophet with tasks at hand, he must be either the leader of this crime syndicate or someone very much high up the ladder. And these three men hate him. At least, I know Archer does, but I imagine all four do, and that's why they have the secret island with their own soldiers and mini-gang.

Things begin slowly falling into place, and I'm unsure whether to be in awe, scared out of my wits, or disgusted by this discovery.

Fuck, what a freaking mess.

And I'm referring to myself and the situation I find myself in. How the hell did I manage to get mixed up in all this shit?

"One of you is missing and replaced by some bird," Prophet says as his eyes land on me.

I wonder if he can tell the difference between his twin sons, considering he hasn't named the missing one.

"Archer is unavailable," West says deadpan without elaborating on the subject.

Prophet rolls his head from side to side, cracking his neck, and I cringe hearing the noise his bones make.

"When I request your presence, it insinuates all four of you."

“Archer is missing,” Killian says firmly. “He disappeared a few days ago after he met with Dimitri Petrov. But we’re managing it.”

“Managing it?” he looks at them condescendingly. “He’s not here, is he? Somehow your number one disappears, and all you have to say is that you’re managing it?”

He faces his eldest son, “Weston, I want answers.”

Irritation prickles at the back of my neck at his tone.

“We have some intel, and we’re tracking it,” West says without hesitation, ignoring how his father has referred to his brother as their peer.

I haven’t been around them long, but enough to realize there is no leader in this small crew. West gives off heavy alpha vibes, and I think Kazz and Killian tolerate it but will stand up to him if necessary.

Though Prophet is trying to shit-start a fire by playing each one up against the other. Yet, I don’t see any of the three men buying into the man’s antics. There has to be some deep-rooted bad history for none of this to affect them, and that all three of them are a lot closer than Prophet realizes.

“What I don’t understand is why you never reported that a member of the Norwood Saints was missing? Especially one who is supposed to be my replacement.”

As soon as Prophet says this, I watch West stiffen as if he loathes hearing this. This is the first visible emotional sign I’ve

seen from him, but I think it has more to do with his brother's disappearance than with Prophet's verbal games.

My first impression of their father is entirely adverse. I bet this asshole of a father got a kick out of playing them against each other their whole lives. A wave of anger fills me as I can only imagine how much mental and physical abuse these men have endured as children.

"And who have you brought with you?" Prophet looks at me with interest. "A peace offering?"

What the fuck?

All three men protectively stand in front of me, blocking me entirely from the asshole.

"She belongs to us," West suddenly busts out, and my gaze goes to the back of his head with curiosity. "We've already claimed her." I notice the severe tone of his voice warning his father, which leaves me almost speechless.

Killian said they would protect me, but I wonder to what extent? Prophet is a crime boss here, and one doesn't step over such feet in such an organization.

"So you men bought yourselves a plaything," Prophet replies point blank. "Who did you buy her from, and why aren't any of Norwood Saints whores good enough for you?"

"We didn't purchase her. We just took her." Killian replies.

"And all four of you are fucking her." He says, as a matter of fact.

“It’s more convenient for travel,” West asserts, and I hear a few men chuckle in the background.

I’m not sure what I feel about this sudden declaration right now, but it’s nothing positive. I feel seriously exposed here in this massive space filled with men from all rough walks of life.

“You bring her here to my business; you can’t expect me to not want to meet your whore now.” He pushes past them and observes me as if I’m some kind of meat.

I watch him lick his lips, and that bile slowly creeps its way up my throat again. Despite the fact that his sons look like freaking Gods, I see no resemblance to their father. Biological or not, this older blonde, fair-skinned man is one seriously as fuck ugly piece of shit.

He might have the whole ruthless asshole authoritative down to a T, but there is nothing physically similar between this man and his sons.

Maybe height. Prophet is almost as tall as they are, but that’s where the resemblance stops.

“Take the jacket off, luv. I want to see the whole product.”

My head snaps up, I look at Killian, and he nods his head.

“I see you have her well trained,” Prophet’s eyes dart to the bruises on my neck, and an ugly satisfied grin appears on his face. I can only imagine what this sick fuck thinks happened.

I’d love to give this prick my best bitchy resting face, but this isn’t the kind of event where I show any sort of cockiness.

Instead, I take off my blazer and stand in the loose satin t-shirt blouse. I'm so glad I chose to wear the black blouse with sleeves that Kazz purchased.

He spins his finger, indicating for me to turn around. Once again, I eye Killian with worry, but he doesn't break out of character and blinks his eyes at me. Taking a quick reluctant spin, I face the vile man once more.

"Undress," and I look at him in horror.

"No," West cuts in, grabbing my arm, and spins me into Kazz's hold. "She's ours. We claimed her. You know the rules," he says firmly, and I'm not sure whether I should be floored by this small gesture West shows towards my current predicament.

Prophet looks at him with narrowed eyes. A thick vein forms on his brow, and my eyes wander to it, wondering if it will pop.

"I know the rules, you idiot. I made them. But one may take a member's woman with his permission."

"We never gave you such permission," West says.

"I have every right to inspect the whore my sons are fucking."

"But not from me," Killian says. "As a leader, you have the right to inspect your son's woman, but I also own her. That rule only reflects you and your sons, no one else's woman."

What kind of fucking law is this? Which woman would ever willingly subject herself to this bullshit? They mentioned

purchasing women, which probably means they trade in human trafficking.

Fuck.

Hell fucking no!

This situation just goes from bad to worse.

“Then I’ll inspect her,” The big man with the scar on his forehead, which Prophet called Shaw earlier, steps up, looking all smug, and Killian blocks him.

Right, so this girlfriend law applies to all sons of these gang members. Perverted motherfuckers. A pitiful excuse to molest or rape some innocent, unsuspecting woman.

“Not when the other two block your request, you don’t,” Killian replies, and his father snarls at him.

This suddenly has become a whole lot scarier, and now I understand why they brought me here as a decoy to Archer’s disappearance.

I’m their goddamn distraction. I’m not sure how pissed off I should be since these men seem to be doing well protecting me.

“My, my, my. Aren’t you boys possessive of your bitch.”

Prophet then draws his attention to me, “You must have one magical cunt, luv, for these boys to tighten their claws over you.”

I look at him, unsure how to respond to something like that, especially when the guys had previously instructed me not to

talk back to anyone here. I'd love to give this asshole a piece of my mind, but I know better.

Kazz loosens his grip on me.

“Do you have a tongue?” Prophet asks, and his tone drips with venom. I can only imagine how vexed he must be after they pulled his own law against him.

“She talks when we permit her to,” Kazz thankfully replies for me.

Being the only woman in this room of men and an American among this British mob, I'd rather not talk and draw attention to my nationality. Too many questions will erupt, and I'm unsure what story the boys will spin.

“Take her outside,” West orders, dismissing me with a side eye, but I don't know why he's upset with me. I haven't done anything to piss him off.

“We have business to discuss in private,” he addresses his father and then looks towards the other men. I'm assuming he doesn't want an audience and wants his father to also order them out.

Without waiting for Prophet's reply, Kazz guides me out of the warehouse, where two men in black clothing stand against the SUV we arrived in. They stand to attention as soon as they see us.

“You can't leave me alone here,” I say, eyeing the two men, watching them walk up to us.

“This is Joe and Sam. They’re part of our crew. They won’t harm you. Right, lads?” Kazz asks them, and they don’t even glance at me.

“That’s right, luv. You’ll be safe with us, lass,” one of them says indirectly.

“Get her out of here if anything goes down,” Kazz says, and I look at him horrified and, at the same time, confused.

Why am I suddenly a precious commodity to them?

“Boss,” the bulky dark-haired one with tats running up his neck calls for Kazz’s attention. “Just got word the thirty porcelain items you requested were safely delivered without cracks.”

What the heck?

“The couriers?” Kazz asks, and I have no idea why this has any importance right now.

“All received their post right on target,” the man replies.

“Well, that’s positive news. Tell the boys they will be rewarded,” Kazz smirks a little and walks away.

It immediately hits me; this weird talk was all for my benefit. I’m not privy to whatever it was, but the satisfied look on Kazz’s face was because he was pleased with the results.

I watch him walk back inside the metal doors of the warehouse and suddenly realize that while these three men are my abductors, they took a massive risk to protect me. But this just leaves me utterly perplexed as to why they would bother.

At the same time, fear creeps up my spine because they are safeguarding me from whatever sinister idea their fathers had in mind. I'm not flattered at all by the outright claim of ownership they made on me. Instead, fear sets in as I realize my life will never be the same again.

In the distance, I swear I can hear a chain rattling, and the smell of death invades my nostrils with a vengeance.

My death.

And the grim reaper is on his way to collect. I slipped through his scaly fingers one too many times. This time though, not even these men will be able to stop the reaper's ruthless determination.

Chapter 19



“WELL, THAT WENT FUCKING stupendous,” I say as West parks the SUV just behind Valhalla Ink.

We’re at the shop where all four of us often come to get inked whenever we’re in London. Killian and West also have ongoing piercing adventures here. We know the proprietor, Gary, pretty well, and we selected him to do all our ink because he’s not one of Norwood Saints’ regular artists, nor is he associated with any other gang.

Almost everything on our skin was created by Gary, including the matching Brotherhood of Saints design we all have on our left hand.

The Norwood Saints tattoo, a skull, and cross insignia was added to our skin by the firm’s in-house artist when we graduated from the junior chapter and became full-time members. One day I will ink over the ugly fucker, but for now, we keep it visible on our forearms, surrounded by other more personal designs.

Of course, I’m sure Prophet, Butcher, and other firm members have noticed we have the same hand design, but considering the four of us are tight, they probably believe it’s just some friendship bonding shite or whatever.

It’s none of their fuckin’ business anyway, and anyone who has stupidly bothered to ask, we tell them exactly so. Regardless of how much negative attention Prophet bestows on West and Archer, the disrespectful goat shagger of a father hardly acknowledges me at all. But I believe it has more to do with growing up out of his sight.

Let's put it this way, there is no love lost with having an absent paternal figure in my life, especially when I witnessed how he treated my two older brothers. I just got lucky in that sense.

Regardless of the constant example Prophet makes of his two other sons, the members of Norwood Saints fear them. That's mostly because the twins can handle their own weight of cruel reign around everyone. Plus, there is another factor to weigh in; other than Prophet, no one has the right to disrespect the leader's next of kin without risking getting their tongue or limbs removed. The others know we will remove their tongues if they dare to express anything close to how their leader treats us. We act on our threats and have done precisely such to those whose egos got the better of themselves.

I pull Raven aside and silently keep her beside me as we watch West and Killian walk into the shop. West was pissed that his tongue closed up within hours of taking out his piercing for his trip to China, so he's getting it redone. Killian is having some work done on a design he started months ago, but due to scheduling, it's being done in stages whenever he's in London, which isn't often since we'd rather avoid Prophet.

"Come on," I pull Raven, and we head towards Neal Street in Covent Garden.

Sam and Joe trail us at a short distance in case Raven decides to do a runner. Although she won't get far, she might try her luck. But I watch her eyes wander around, and she frowns as soon as she sees them at a short distance.

“We’ve got about an hour to spare on a mini-shopping trip before we start our next mission,” I explain.

Realizing my mistake in the type of clothes and shoes I bought her and taking into consideration where we’ll be heading after London, Raven needs more suitable gear since she’ll be coming with us. It’s not our first choice to drag her on our missions, but it won’t end well if our enemies get hold of her. Better have her with us where we can protect her better.

And seeing how she’s become a sudden object of interest for Prophet and Butcher, there’s no way we could allow her to fall into the wrong hands. Raven’s beautiful, but I know Prophet has a penchant for the more exotic-skinned woman. The fair-skinned English-rose type is far from the kind of female he’ll take to his bed. He has other plans for Raven, ones I have no desire to find out. As for Butcher and what he does with his women, I don’t even want to venture there.

Right now, Raven probably has a million questions, and I’m most likely the only one of the three of us who won’t shut her immediately down. Putting myself in her place, I imagine she’s scared and confused, but she’s also doing an excellent job of not showing it.

Back at the warehouse, when I pulled her over to me, her heart pulse was raving like mad. She was terrified to death, and while West and Prophet were drawing swords with words, I pulled her in and whispered to her that no one but us would have her.

I questioned myself what the fuck I meant by that. Did I literally suggest that we'd be having her in a sexual element? So far, she hasn't brought it up, and maybe she took it at face value under her current circumstances.

To say none of us are attracted to her would be a massive fib.

Killian doesn't even bother to hide it anymore, and I'm struggling to keep it at a professional level. Whatever happened between her and West on Ignis remains a mystery. But no matter how much he pretends to loathe her, I've known him all my life and can see straight through him. He's as fucked as the rest of us, and the more we get to know Raven, the more we like her better.

But now we announced to the entire Norwood Saint inner circle that she belongs to us. It's not uncommon for several men to share a woman within the gang, but for several men to stake a claim on one woman and not battle for single ownership is.

After Raven was removed from the warehouse, Prophet interrogated us about Archer's last movements. He gave me the impression he was vexed about Archer's disappearance, but history would lead me to believe the only disappointment he'd ever show would be if one of my brothers turned up in a body bag. Until then, I don't think he gives a fuck what could happen to them.

He did give us several non-insightful ideas as to who might have him. He mentioned the Triads, but they don't just keep people hostage and not make any demands.

The lads and I already discussed Archer's disappearance back on Ignis. Any other gang rival would have made their demands by now, and VOSTech could have been hired to kidnap him, but I hacked their databases and found no info to lead us to such a conclusion. They have highly skilled hackers to keep people out of their systems, but they're dealing with me. I haven't yet found anyone better than me. I did use the word *yet* because I don't walk around with a stick up my arse thinking I'm god's best.

Whoever has Archer wants him to remain hidden, and I believe it's a direct hit to Prophet. The twins are his direct line replacement, and it's a well-known fact that while he hates both men, he hates West even more.

With Archer out of the picture, there will be a lot more tension brewing between Prophet and West, leaving the leadership of Norwood Saints open and vulnerable. But anyone attempting a takeover must be on a suicide mission because this is a tried and failed plot where the instigators paid for it dearly. Prophet is the kingpin of British gangland. Not even the Irish have the strength, the allies, or the soldiers to crush my father's criminal kingdom.

"Back at that horrid place," Raven declares, and I don't blame her for being disgusted with what she saw earlier. I wish she didn't have to witness Prophet's business dealings. "There was all of this talk about buying, owning women. Is that one of the business ventures you're in? Human trafficking?"

I'd love to say that any woman would be disturbed to be a witness or associate with the trade of humans, but such isn't the case. Having spent enough time fighting this war, I know that traffickers can be just about anyone, family members, partners, friends, or acquaintances. While most people often incorrectly assume that all traffickers are males, I've encountered many dodgy women involved in the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of people through force, fraud, or deception, intending to exploit for profit. Race, ethnicity, and gender demographics do not differentiate between traffickers in the slightest. Some will even use their privilege, wealth, and power as a means of control, while others experience the same socio-economic oppression as their victims. Traffickers are just as diverse as the victims.

“Norwood Saints are,” I say, responding to Raven's question. “Human trafficking is not an area we, meaning me, the twins, and Killian, are in.”

“But you're part of a gang that trades in such a despicable thing.”

“Raven, the four of us were born into this gang. We never had a choice for a career. Even though I wasn't raised in the same household as Archer and West, I had to join the crew when my time came. It was never a matter of if but when. Our grooming started the day we came out of our mothers' wombs, and carrying the name St John made our fate inevitable. The guys were determined to never end up working in that area of our fathers' businesses. We have our own that we focus on,

which is also a section of the organization, but it allows us to spend less time with the main core.”

“What might that be?” she asks curiously.

“Arms trade.”

As we walk, I glance over and see her carefully absorbing all the info I’ve given her and analyzing it.

“But if Archer and West will be your father’s replacement, they will have to eventually take over that side.”

I don’t answer. It’s relatively obvious with all the secrets we keep from Prophet, she must realize that we don’t ever intend to let it get that far. She already knows from Archer that he wants our father gone.

She takes my silence with a frown.

“The less I tell you, the better it will be for you,” I inform her.

“So you keep saying.” She mutters.

We continue the remainder of the walk in silence until my phone notifies me of a message from West.

West: *Dimitri’s back in London. He’ll be at RC tonight. We’ll all be joining him.*

Bloody Russian loves his gambling as much as he enjoys the company of posh, expensive prostitutes.

“Slight change of plan, luv,” I say, putting my phone away as we head into our intended shop. “Sam,” I call out, and he approaches us while Joe remains in the near distance.

“We’ll be visiting Cassandra’s tonight. Bring the car round in about thirty. We’ll be heading to New Bond Street.”

“Yes, Sir,” he says without question and heads back to where Joe is stationed to tell him the latest plan. I don’t wait around and step inside the shop with Raven.

“Have any particular favorite dress designers?” I ask her.

A little confused, she looks around at the all-terrain outdoor clothing surrounding us.

“We’re here for a completely different motive. Tonight you need a dress, preferably black. Do you have a designer preference?”

“No,” she says, biting her lip, remaining silent on the topic as she turns away, a little embarrassed.

The more time I spend with Raven, the more I realize that I don’t think she’s anywhere near the gold-digging vulture we recently thought of her. Regardless of the fact that she dated that asshole playboy, I think she’s lived a very humbled life.

It makes me want to understand her better, but the truth is none of us know how long and what the future lies for Raven. She’s been thrown into the deep end, mixed up in all our twisted bullshit.

At the same time, the circumstance is obvious, she doesn’t belong with us.

So getting to know her seems a little farfetched when we don’t know yet what to do with her. But at least until we find

Archer, all we can do is keep her close and hope she doesn't grow on us any more than she already has.

Chapter 20



CASINOS COME IN ALL shapes, sizes, and refinements, and London is no stranger to such settings. Nor are Norwood Saints' business ventures. They either run them entirely or fall within the protection racket portfolio they run for dozens of businesses.

There are the casual casinos where punters go in for a few spins after the pub, but these aren't the ones Prophet wanted to initially focus on. He had a different idea than running typical cheap-as-shit tourist-type magnets as one finds in Vegas. Instead, he zoned in on dominating the upper-echelon private member clubs in the British capital's Westend.

With a special dress code, these luxurious member-only clubs are where the quintessential fancy suave clientele arrive in their chauffeur-driven Bentleys wearing their classy outfits to visit such places for fine dining and play at legitimate professional table games.

Depending on how elitist a member is, they may be granted special access to selecting a high-end girl from the exclusive brothel, Crown Mayfair, to entertain them. But these women aren't just your average hookers; they are professionally trained to push clients' egos to spend more at the tables and discreetly drive the sales of tiny glass vials of white powder into their pockets.

Tonight we're not at Royal Cassandra to play the tables but are here to look the part and find Dimitri Petrov, our Russian mole, who might know more about my brother's whereabouts than he cares to inform us.

I walk through the entrance with Raven by my side, and I would have hooked her arm into mine if it weren't for the fact that I have no intention of giving her the impression that I'm anywhere below the level of antipathy I have for her. The other two can sniff around her like flippin' muppets, but they know better than attempt to get involved with the woman who is mixed up with my brother's disappearance.

Innocent or not, Raven is, in one way or another, the reason why Archer went missing.

There's no doubt that this woman can clean up pretty well and play the part of an expensive hooker, maybe even better than the girls from Crown Mayfair or any of the snobby girlfriends or wives the punters bring with them to this club.

Her dress isn't much to rave about. It's a simple, stretchy black mini-dress with a cutout bust, bare shoulders, and a neck holder. But what's under this figure-skimming clothing brings this relatively minimal dress to life.

If I compare Raven to other women, she is of average height. Her breasts aren't in the large size either, just average. But the difference between her and other women is that she knows how to carry herself and use her assets to her advantage. Her legs are lean and athletic, her hips are curvy, and her arse is meaty. Her breasts are round, and her face is fucking breathtaking with big, plump lips, high, arched cheekbones, and eyebrows. Her deep blue expressive eyes are lined and smokey tonight.

This is a woman who knows herself well.

I also noticed that since we abducted her from the hotel, she mostly wears her hair down rather than in the tight up-do she wore at work. She has long, naturally wavy hair that always seems to be in a just-been-fucked style, where using the word *hot* to describe it would be an understatement.

Dressed up like she is tonight, that whole innocent wholesomeness seems to have vanished and is replaced by a lethal, seductive, confident woman who poses a danger and offers excitement. Raven is a natural chameleon, able to switch roles at the drop of a hat, and this is why bitterness and distrust continue to churn beneath the surface with me.

“Remain close to me tonight unless I say otherwise,” I tell her, my voice as emotionless as my expression. The other two know their roles. I eye Sam in the distance, and he’ll trail us just for theatrics. Everyone here knows who we are, but they love performance and a good chinwag with each other. Raven is just arm-candy that they can focus their attention on rather than me.

Raven responds with a simple nod as I catch her eyes dart across the first bar room, and I know she’s probably recognized a few famous faces here. With its plush décor and luxury seeping out to the max here, this casino has been graced by royalty and celebrities coming for some of the best gambling money can buy.

“Was that Prince —“

“Yes,” I cut in sharply. “Stop gawking. It looks unnatural here. Act like you’re not fazed by anything.” I say because the

last thing clients come here for is to be gapped at by idiot tourists awed by their celebrity crushes.

Her brows furrow, and maybe the tone of my voice is sharp enough to cut ice, but if she wants to remain alive, she needs to act the part, or we cut her loose with a single gunshot to that pretty head of hers.

I don't give a fucking shit that the other two want to keep her around as a live spank bank for their dicks when they go to bed alone at night. She's just heavy baggage we don't need, and today with Prophet was a pure example that she's just extra weight that now needs round-the-clock protection.

Prophet and his fucking asshole of a brother, Butcher, are two of the most notorious, despicable human garbage ever to walk this planet. If I had the choice, I wouldn't allow any kind of pussy around those two monsters. They are feared and loathed within the British gangland circuits and admired by countless others. Their front is a wealthy businessman's celebrity lifestyle, but behind their glamorous lifestyle, these two brothers are ruthless cold-hearted killers.

"He's in the Palatial Room, Sir," Sam informs me via my earpiece. I eye Killian and Kazz, and they nod. Apart from Raven, we're all wearing hidden wireless micro earpieces the size of a pinprick, tiny enough to be invisible to the average person.

The four of us head up the marble staircase to the next floor above. We enter a luxurious room with plush carpets, marble

and gold, and a gaming floor with croupiers manning sixteen tables. But this isn't where our little Russian is at.

Dimitri has a penchant for beautiful women, fast cars, Cuban cigars, incredible food, and, most importantly, what most Americans would say, is a *high roller*. He doesn't gamble recklessly but gets off on high stake games. London is his favorite playground to gamble, club, fuck, and snort expensive blow Norwood Saints offer in little fancy as fuck glass vials with golden lids.

But we discovered a little secret about our Slavic friend, he loathes to the core his cousin Ivan Obraztsov who is second in command to Arkady Sovietnik, the Krestniy Otets, or more notoriously known as the Godfather of Russia's mafia world.

I don't care for details of the family disputes within this organization, but Dimitri is a well-connected spy-whore whose intel has made him an even richer man to support his lavish taste for the lifestyle he was born into. The Obraztsov family were part of the first generation of Russian oligarchs, mostly hustlers who had made their money on the black market or by seizing entrepreneurial opportunities in the late eighties when the Soviet Union began loosening its restrictions on private business practices. They were smart and wealthy enough to exploit a poorly organized privatization program after the collapse of the USSR and took over Russia's economy and post-communist states.

Dimitri prefers London over the French Riviera because the Russians have much less stronghold here than they do in the

Southern French region. That's precisely how he's become a target of the Brotherhood of Saints, and as long as he complies with us, he knows he can play around as he likes in our region untouched while under our dominion.

We walk through the main room that's already buzzing with people at all five tables, and a guard opens the door for us as we enter the private suite, aptly named Dragon's Den, where minimum bets start at twenty-five thousand. Only two people are playing here, but such is to be expected.

I ask the croupier to remove the second player from the room as this will become a highly private meeting. After a moment, the man is escorted out of the room without resorting to any incidents. He'll be rewarded immensely with chips for his cooperation.

"West St. John," Dimitri says without taking his eyes off the table and placing his chips on the numbers. I pull out the coral-colored velvet chair, sit next to him, and indicate for Raven to join my side standing.

I noticed Dimitri's bodyguard outside the main room and another standing a few meters away from us, eyeing the entrance. It doesn't surprise me that he was informed about our presence as soon as we stepped out of the car.

"I would think you've taken a fancy to me, putting a tail on me as soon as my plane landed in the city." He indicates to the croupier wearing noise-canceling earbuds that he's done placing his wagers.

Unlike his gang-affiliated cousins, Dimitri grew up in London, attended a private boarding school, and acquired a posh British accent, but listen close, and one will catch the trace of the heavy Russian he's tried hard to rid.

He's a tall man, just pushing into his forties and put together. Everything about him screams money, from the manicured fingernails to the diamond encrusted Rolex on his wrist and monogrammed tie pin and tailored suit. His perfectly coiffed light red hair is pushed away from his freckled forehead, revealing bright blue eyes.

"You're on Norwood Saints' turf. You know the drill when a Bratva arrives in England. A tail will always be up your arse."

"Which Saints are you acting for tonight? Weston or West?" He looks up, and the Russian whore's eyes land directly on Raven. Eyes wide open with fascination, he licks his lips as if he's suddenly developed an appetite.

"Your concern should be directed elsewhere," I snarl at him.

Dimitri huffs a laugh, "Your secrets are safe with me."

"I'm referring to my woman," I say, two minutes away, morphing from man to beast.

His eyes dart to me, searching my intentions.

"If you are here to get info about your brother, I don't have any," he turns his focus back to Raven.

"We haven't been properly introduced, darling, but we all know how West doesn't like to share his toys. Do you have a

name?” He pulls out his hand to Raven, but she has enough sense not to take it.

“Unless you want a knife in your eye, keep your whoring trap shut with her.”

There’s a dark smirk on Dimitri’s face. The bastard knows how to rile me up, and I would have killed him ages ago had it not been for the fact that whatever intel he’s sold me in the past checked out. But that doesn’t mean he can ever be trusted. If the bastard can be a rat to his own family, he’ll be ruthless to non-blood.

I glance up at Kazz, and he understands exactly what needs to be done. He moves close to Raven and whispers something in her ear, to which she nods in agreement.

“We’ll be downstairs in the Diamond Bar,” he says, putting his hand on Raven’s back to escort her outside.

I don’t respond, but I can’t stop my eyes from drifting to Raven’s arse in that fitted dress as she walks away.

An arse I’m only too familiar with, and I feel my knob twitching beneath my black tailored suit trousers.

“I only heard a rumor that Prophet is reshuffling his inner core and losing a grip on his prodigal sons,” Dimitri says as he throws his chips onto both red and black even numbers on the roulette table.

“That’s a total bullshit story,” I say, knowing full well that other than Butcher, Prophet does not have an inner core in his gang. Sure, he has his financiers and politicians he runs from

his pocket, but he would never regard them as anything but that. He doesn't share anything outside the duo band of brothers.

Dimitri shrugs his shoulder as if he could care less either way and collects his earnings from his wins.

“Ivan is sending reps here to look for Miroslav. Your father will pay a pretty penny if Miroslav's body turns up on British soil.”

“Not my fucking problem,” I mutter, knowing full well there is no body for anyone to find as much as I would have loved to plant this on Prophet, it's not the right time to do it. With Archer missing and Miroslav's body turning up, the attention would have been focused on me, not Daddy dearest.

“Crown Mayfair has beautiful, fine women. But that woman of yours is one piece of fine ass if I don't say so myself.” Dimitri's eyes are on the roulette's turning wheel.

“Keep your knob in your pants, wanker,” I sneer. “That one is off limits. Touch her, and I'll send your hand in a black velvet gift bag to Violetta.”

“I'm sure my wife will find some use for it,” he chuckles, utterly unfazed by my warnings. Good, because when I eventually kill him, I'll enjoy the games I plan on playing with him first.

“But it's not me you should be wary of. Should your father's eye land on that piece of pussy you're pulling around, he'll see something of worth.”

“She’s already been officially claimed.”

“And you think Leo St. John keeps to rules?” his brows rise in question as he quickly glances in my direction before returning to the table.

“What I think is not of your concern,” my reply is clinical cold. One thing I don’t do is go into details about myself with anyone.

“You’ve pissed someone off,” Dimitri says. “Who that is, only you will know. But my money is with who you’ll find your brother.”

“You’ve been playing a Fibonacci strategy since I got here. That’s why I would never take any heed of your theoretical advice. It’s too fucking safe and boring. Try living a little.”

I push my chair to get up.

“Tell me, West, where you’d place my next bet.”

“Focus on bets placed on even-money areas, of either red or black. If you win the bet, you can decrease the unit on your next bet, and if you lose, you can increase the next bet by one unit.”

“You’re odds of winning each bet are around forty percent.”

“Forty-eight percent,” I correct and get up and glance at Killian. He follows me out the door.

“Cocky bastard,” Killian mutters as we head down the staircase.

“His time will come,” I promise as we enter the bar area, and my eyes land immediately on Raven. She’s sitting on a plush blue velvet sofa, and Kazz is beside her, his arm opened across the backrest behind her and drawn into a deep discussion with her.

I don’t miss her eyes suddenly catching my presence. It’s more of a dark, cold stare that lasts a moment until she casts me away with scorn, bringing her attention back to Kazz.

“I want Chastity to keep tabs on the wanker upstairs,” I say to Killian, signaling to the attractive, legged brunette sitting by the bar.

He nods, knowing precisely what that entails, and I watch him saunter over to the other two at the end of the room on the blue sofa. Raven abruptly looks up at him and greets him with a smile. He joins her other side, and the two men sandwich her as if there’s bloody throuple going on.

I watch her gaze briefly move toward me. It’s a smoldering, heated look as if she’s almost challenging me as the other two boxed her between them.

Licking my lower lip, I smirk at her.

Challenge accepted, darling.

After discreetly removing my earpiece and shoving it into my suit jacket pocket, I stroll to the bar where the legged beauty is.

“West,” Chastity greets me as I approach her at the bar.

I lean in to hug her. It's a friendly, welcoming approach to a woman I've known for several years and with whom I am professionally acquainted. To Raven, I'm sure it looks more than just colleagues.

Good, because that hug was lined with every intention of making it look more than it is.

"You're looking very suave tonight. If it weren't for the facial jewelry, I would have almost mistook you for your brother."

"You saying my brother is a better dresser?" I eye her with a flirtatious glee in my eye.

Chastity is a woman I haven't fucked and have no intention to. She's a working girl and one of the most trained prostitutes Crown Mayfair has to offer, and while her paycheck comes from Norwood Saints, she works directly for me.

If MI5 were to ever gain word on Chastity's skills, they'd snatch her up in a heartbeat. Speaking five languages and a penchant for extracting info from her punters, she's one of Crown Mayfair's elite girls.

But I doubt she'd ever get the kind of salary and tips she receives with us if she switched to Britain's counter-intelligence agency. She knows that looks don't last forever; this gig makes her a very nice nesting egg for her future.

"What can I do for you, darling?" She flips her long chestnut hair over to one side as she sits cross-legged on the bar stool.

“I need you to entertain the red-headed Russian oligarch upstairs while he’s in London. Find out who he talks and meets with. Heads up, he’s a rabbit posing as a wolf. Kazz will be in touch with you should you need anything, and report your findings exclusively to him.”

She nods as her finger plays around the rim of her martini glass.

“So, whose the blonde American you can’t keep your eyes off?” she asks with a smirk.

Chastity is not only intelligent, but she likes to take a lot of calculated risks.

“No one of importance.”

“You like her,” she announces as a matter of fact.

“Stay behind the line, Chastity,” I warn softly.

She grins at me. “I could have said the same to you after that special long hug you gave me earlier.”

“She’s not my type.”

“She’s exactly your type. I’ve seen the scrutinizing look she threw you. You’re intrigued by this woman who won’t throw herself at you.”

“Don’t talk of stuff you haven’t got a flippin’ clue about,” I mutter and lean closer to meet her gaze. “Don’t meddle in unwarranted territory, darling.” I give her a blazing look and run my tongue over my lower lip before leaning away.

My eyes discreetly glance at Raven, she's seen me with the prostitute, and I think my point is clear now. If she has any doubts about where we stand about what happened with my father earlier, she's clear now.

Nothing will ever transpire between Raven and me.

Chapter 21



WE DIDN'T STAY THE night in London, and after leaving the private casino club, we headed straight for the airport. These men seem to be constantly on the road chasing some mission.

After a long flight, we arrived this morning in Taiwan and directly headed to the main port, where we boarded a Catamaran Patrol Vessel.

Kazz explained earlier that we're heading out to a cargo carrier on its way to California and holding containers with their arms shipments. He said this route is often hijacked by one particular organization of pirates, and they believe it has to do with one of their competitors getting greedy.

That's all good, but what the fuck does this have to do with me, and why are they bringing me with them halfway across the world to chase some sea pirates?

"Leaving you on your own on the island is not an option. So it's either us or end up at Prophet's headquarters," Killian explains, and I shudder at that last suggestion.

"You could just let me go. I think it's obvious by now I have no idea where Archer is."

"That's not it anymore. You know way too much to just let you go."

I purse my lips as my eyes hold these men with a hard and disapproving stare.

"So you intend to forever drag me around with you like some backpack?"

All three men remain silent, and I think it's because none of them has an answer for me. Or the answer is basically in their silence. It's relatively obvious without having to give any words, and my heart drops.

Talk about kidnapping and holding a person against their will.

“And you three claim you'd never trade in human trafficking. But that's exactly what you shamelessly did with me.”

West abruptly yanks my arm, pulling me against his body; his eyes burn intensely as he stares back at me.

“Make no mistake here, Raven, we're not missionaries. We do a job, and it isn't for sentimental reasons.”

There is something more to that statement that he's not prepared to offer. He wants a challenge, and I'll fucking give him one. So, I return that intense glare, ensuring he understands I don't fear his fierce anger or mental threats.

“Don't you think if Archer were dead, someone would have made that claim by now? And if he were kidnapped, his abductors would have already made their demands. All you mobsters are massive show-offs and can't shut your egos up for a minute. So if he's not dead and no one attempted to make demands, someone's holding him away from you three for a reason. Probably to weaken you.”

“How does Archer pick'em canny birds?” West says, letting go of my arm. “She's a smart one,” He shakes his head,

smiling sarcastically, and walks off.

I glare daggers at the back of his head, watching him in the near distance approach his three men. In addition to Joe and Sam, a third one, Liam, met us at the port earlier. All three seem chummy with the guys, so I assume they are directly under their command.

“Don’t take it the wrong way, blondie,” Killian seizes my attention, “West is naturally an asshole. He’s had Archer his entire life, and it may not show, but with his brother missing, it’s killing him. Your theory is right up with what we believe too. It just seems the target is more on West. Those two were always inseparable.”

“How did he get those scars on his back? Archer said the cigarette burns were from his father. Are West’s scars from his father?” I remember feeling those rough, pronounced long lines that ran from the back of his shoulders down to his buttocks

Killian shakes his head, “Nah, can’t tell you, luv. That’s a particular story West needs to tell you himself if he wants. But you met Prophet; you can make your own assessment of the old bastard.”

The hairs on my arms prick up just as that man’s name makes it into the conversation. The old perverted asshole wanted me to undress for him in front of all those men! I can only begin to imagine how they must treat their women.

I watch as Killian goes off to join West and their group of men waiting on their orders. Kazz remains next to me, and we

take cover under the awning of the catamaran.

It's exceptionally windy, wavy, and cold here in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. I'm grateful that Kazz was thoughtful enough to take me shopping to purchase more appropriate clothing for this trip.

"There it is," shouts Kazz.

I glance up ahead of us to see the biggest mother-fucking tanker, and we're fast approaching it. I look around me and see the men getting their gear together.

"Zip-up," Kazz pulls up the zipper to my windcheater. "Do you have something to tie your hair up?"

"Yeah, sure," I grab the elastic from my wrist and wrap my hair into a tight bun. I think Kazz is impressed that it only took a few seconds.

"Here," I feel someone from behind me plop a cap onto my head, "You'll be needing this," Killian says.

"Why?" I ask curiously.

Kazz leans over and pulls up the black tube scarf over my mouth.

"Because on that ship, there are about thirty men who don't often see a woman for weeks on end, and seeing a pretty little thing like you will give them the wrong ideas."

"Wait. What?" I pull the scarf down in disbelief. "We're boarding that vessel?"

I look at the monstrosity of it, and I'm pretty sure it won't stop for us.

"How the fuck are we boarding it?" I look at all three men in horror.

Kazz pulls my scarf back up and hands me a pair of gloves. "Just follow me. When we get near enough, this boat will connect with the ship. We'll begin climbing the soft ladder, then the slant metal ladder, and board the bridge. It's actually not that hard."

"Unless you fall in, and then you're doomed because the power of the ship will just drag you under," West snarks.

Kazz sneers at him and turns to me, "Here, give me your bag. I'll take it for you."

"I'll be right behind you," Killian says, realizing the shocked look on my face is edging with skeptical fear. "Forget what my mug of a cousin says. You won't fall."

The waves are high and strong; we're racing against the wind in the largest and deepest ocean on Earth. This is like a real-life action movie, except it's not.

I was a boutique hotel manager in training just a week ago, and now I'm somewhere in the middle of the Asian Pacific, about to board some massive freight ship with a rope ladder while it's still in motion.

How the fuck did this happen to me?

As soon as the boat begins to make contact, West is the first to climb up, and I watch him do it effortlessly like he's

freaking Spiderman. Sam and Liam follow, and they have no problem either. They make it look so easy, but there are waves everywhere, crashing against the ship. I have no idea how pirates make it up there if there are no ladders.

I watch Kazz take hold of the soft ladder and begin to climb.

“I’ll be right behind you, blondie.” Killian whispers in my ear in an attempt to help my confidence. But nothing can help me right now; my nerves are shot, and my heart is jumping and thumping like crazy against my chest. I’m hoping I’ll go into cardiac arrest so I don’t have to do this climb.

Taking a deep breath, I grab hold of either side of the rope ladder. It bangs heavily onto the metal tanker. The wind and heavy waves are making my mental situation even worse. I look upwards, but the movement of the ladder hasn’t even phased Kazz. He’s almost reached the point where he’ll soon connect to the metal ladder.

Lifting my knee up, I let go of whatever sanity I held onto for the last 22 years of my life and begin the ascent. This really is a lot harder than what the others made it seem. I won’t look down because I know it will freak me out. I’m climbing a fucking freight vessel while it continues sailing through the ocean.

This is just too much of a James Bond moment for me. I’m not 007; I’m just a girl who spent the last eight years of her life trying to put her life back together again. I promised my uncles that I’d always make safe choices. This isn’t one of them.

I should have tried my luck back in London and escaped them.

Who knows? Maybe I could have outrun them. I'm a pretty fit runner; after all, it's what I do every morning.

Used to do.

I haven't run in almost a week now.

The truth of my situation sinks in. My life wasn't perfect before, but it was mine. Now apparently, I belong to them, these three men who claimed me theirs in front of an entire British crime syndicate.

I falter on one step and grip the rope like my life depends on it. Actually, it does.

The force of the wind is swinging this thing hard against the wall of this tanker.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

My eyes shut tight as my entire body trembles. I can't do this. Cold fear runs down my spine, and a loud whimper escapes me, too scared to freaking move anymore.

Suddenly a large, warm body is right behind me.

"I've got you, luv. You're doing just fine. We'll do this together. One step at a time." Killian's deep voice penetrates my ears and begins to fill me with confidence.

We take each step together, his body up against mine, shielding me from the wind and water splashing onto us. His touch helps calm the fear that's built up inside me.

Five more steps, and we reach the junction, where I grab onto the metal ladder, and Kazz pulls me over to him.

“You okay?” He asks, concerned, holding me tight against him. It’s only a brief moment, and he lets me out of his arms.

“No, not really. I don’t want to be doing this,” I say, and a lump forms in my throat as I fight back the tears.

His gaze suddenly softens, and he nods his understanding but knows he can’t change my situation. I follow him up the steps. The ladder is placed at an outer angle, and I’m climbing it up with the water below us. I notice the boat that brought us here is now departing, and I continue to go up these never-ending steps.

As we reach the top, West and Kazz go one way with two of their men and some ship crew. Killian directs me inside and down towards the cabin areas. Joe hands him a wad of keys and continues onwards, holding what I presume are the other guys’ bags.

Killian opens a door and leads me through a tiny cabin with two single beds separated by a bedside table, a small desk, and a chair at the end of one bed with a narrow door which I’m hoping leads to a bathroom. A small porthole sits above the bedside table, but it doesn’t look like it opens.

“It’s not much to look at, but it’ll be comfortable enough for you for the next week.”

I look at Killian, horrified. Does he mean I’ll be locked inside here for a whole week?

Sensing my sentiments, his face turns serious and firm.

“It’s for your safety, blondie. For starters, you’re not safe with the crew. We haven’t vetted them ourselves; they’re not our staff, and have no idea who they are and what they’re capable of. Secondly, we’re here to catch a bunch of pirates; you can’t be out roaming around and find yourself in the middle of some crossfire.”

I don’t say anything and sit down on one of the beds, succumbing to his demands.

“Look,” Killian plops down on the bed opposite me, putting my bag on the floor. “In a week, we’ll be in California. We’ve got a meeting with someone who I think you’re going to appreciate.”

There’s nothing Killian can do or say at this point that will cheer me up. I didn’t have much of a life before all this, but this isn’t something I want.

This can’t be my life now.

I’ll be dragged around like some Raggedy Anne doll and locked up like a prisoner while they’re on some mission.

My silence is his cue to get up.

“Killian?”

He turns to me, his bluish-grey eyes seeking mine. It’s the first time I realize how his big frame makes this cabin seem so tiny.

I get up, and I'm almost face-to-face with him. The size of this cabin isn't big enough for the two of us.

"Thanks for earlier, out on the ladder."

He smiles, "I did say I had your back, luv, didn't I? And for the record, it was a toss-up between Kazz and me, who got to be the one stuck behind you." He smirks with amusement.

I look at him wide-eyed, unsure what to say to that, which makes him grin wider.

"It was a beautiful view," he chuckles, and I stare at him, even more shocked.

I stand there observing his cocky smile, and the mischievous glint in his eyes tells me he's currently having illicit thoughts, which I'm sure are of me.

"Cheeky bastard. Don't trip on your way out," I bark, dismissing him and causing him to chuckle.

He doesn't say anything further and grabs his bag from the floor.

"Listen, Raven," he hesitates a moment, gathering his thoughts. He's using my actual name, so this has to be serious.

"Keep the latch on the door locked at all times and only unlock it if you hear me, West, or Kazz on the other side."

Suddenly it dawns on me that my safety is genuinely at risk on this vessel.

"Where will you sleep?"

"Probably with the other two. Why?"

I know I'm taking a giant leap here, but the idea of being alone here for the next week is unfathomable. Perhaps the adrenaline of fear I had on the ladder earlier still pumps through my veins, and I'm just being overly foolish about it all.

"Do you mind staying here with me?"

He looks at me as if he misunderstood me.

"Come again?"

Shit, the more I think about it, the more absurd it must sound.

"I'm not comfortable being on my own here."

"I ughhhh..." words seem to evade him, and he casts me a skeptical eye.

"Are you sure that's what you want?"

It's not really, but my choices are limited here.

"What I want is my life back, Killian. But we're beyond that. I don't want to spend the next few days and nights on my own here. At least knowing someone is here with me will give me some peace of mind. If you don't want to, then ask Sam or Joe. Just someone. I need someone sharing this cabin with me."

"No," Killian says sharply, and the mention of the other two men causes his eyes to narrow to slits. "I'll stay," he lets his bag down from his shoulder and pushes it under the desk.

My bottom lip drops in surprise because I didn't think he cared that much.

"I'll see you when it's dinner time." He says dryly and leaves the cabin.

I follow to pull the latch up and turn to look around the room.

Geez, it looks tiny even without Killian.

What the fuck am I supposed to do here for the next week?

Chapter 22



I'VE BEEN STARING AT this blasted ceiling for the last hour; maybe I drifted off for a bit too. It all feels vaguely familiar to my tiny prison cell I was held in not too long ago, except this one is clean, the bed is semi-decent, I have my own bathroom, and I have the option to leave should I want to.

I also had a shower earlier, and it's so tiny I almost bruised my hips in there, but at least it works. I can't complain; they could have been total assholes and given me a cabin with a communal bathroom.

It seems a little unreal, but I get the impression these guys want to protect me more than kill me. Even West, if I stretch this theory far enough. I'm sure he'd love nothing better than to see the back of me, but he was ready to fight his father and uncle over me at the Norwood Saints warehouse.

Raven, I tell myself. These thoughts will lead to nowhere good.

A knock on the door brings me out of my daydreaming. As soon as I hear Killian's deep voice, I unlock it to find him carrying two trays of food with some bottles of mineral water. He sets everything down on the desk, and his eyes approach me. He takes a moment to observe me with some interest, and I'm about to ask him what the problem is.

"Is that my T-shirt?" he asks curiously.

I look at the oversized white shirt he's referring to. It's long enough to be a T-shirt dress.

“I uh...is it?” I look up at him questionably. “I don’t know. Kazz gave me a bunch of things on my first day on the island. I like how this one fits, so I’ve been wearing it to bed.” I shrug my shoulders.

He grins at me, “No worries, keep it. It looks good on you.”

But I can still see him smiling as he looks away, grabs a bottle of water, and opens the top. He again takes another sly glance at me as he drinks but doesn’t say anything.

Suddenly my stomach makes the most embarrassing rumble as I look at the two burgers with side salads on the tray.

“Someone’s hungry,” he says, passing me a plate and some cutlery.

I take it and sit cross-legged over the bed and dig into my burger as if I hadn’t seen food for weeks.

“Oh, before I forget,” he blurts out before taking the chair to sit.

I look up between bites, and he pulls out something from his back pocket and hands it to me. “Kazz said he saw you leave this by the bedside table on the island and thought you might appreciate it, considering you’re stuck inside here.”

That’s so sweet of Kazz. It’s really surprising he bothered to stop by the room and pick it up for me.

“Tell him thanks when you see him,” I say, taking it from him and putting it beside me on the bed.

“Never pegged you for a Twilight fan,” He says, finally sitting down by the desk and picking up his burger.

“And what kind of fan would that be? Goth or something?” I ask him.

“No. Yes,” he shrugs his shoulder and carries on eating.

“It was the only book I recognized in your library. The shelves were filled with a bunch of references, encyclopedia shit. That’s not what libraries are for, you know. A little bit of fiction wouldn’t hurt nobody.”

He chuckles, “I have to agree with you. Archer put the library together. You can tell him that when you see him.”

“Tell me something about all four of you when you were kids. Okay, maybe Kazz is a lot younger than you three. But I’m sure you three must have some crazy stories.”

He chews his food and thinks at the same time.

“No, I have one with all four of us, actually. Kazz will probably remember this, too, since he was seven at the time, and I doubt the twins will ever let him live it down. The twins used to spend a lot of time with Kazz and his mum, Aunt Keiko, at their house; I sometimes joined them on weekends. The age difference between Kazz and us is pretty big, so it wasn’t really to hang out with him, but Aunt Keiko guaranteed a safe place for us. Plus, she’s only twelve years older than the twins, so their relationship is more *older sister* than *step-mom*. I think we would have lived there if we could, but Butcher and Prophet would never have allowed it.”

“Butcher. Is that your father? The one the Prophet called Shaw?”

“Yeah, that’s his real name, Shaw St John. The younger brother to Leo St John, aka Prophet. There was a third brother, a younger one, and a sister. The brother was killed before we were born, so I don’t know what happened to him. Aunt Louise was traded by Prophet as a bride to one of the South American cartels for some treaty. It was before my time, so I don’t know the exact details.”

“Oh, that’s horrid to be traded like that. Then again, I don’t know why I find it shocking since your gang trades humans for money.”

His lips form into a tight straight line, and his brows furrow.

“No, Raven. That’s something we would never trade in, not us four. That’s our fathers’ business, not us. This? Right here on this vessel? This is our business. We’ve got several cargo containers with arms, and we’re here to see this ship make its delivery. Now will you let me tell you the story? Because you asked for one.”

He takes my silence as his cue to continue.

“So the three of us got to Aunt Keiko’s house, but we wandered to the back garden rather than ring the front door. Her house is a single-standing house situated on a large property, so we often went back there to smoke weed and stuff, you know, typical teenage shit. Sometimes Aunt Keiko would catch us in the act and give us hell, but I think most of the time she turned a blind eye to it.”

I nod my head and smile.

“She must have bought Kazz one of those kiddy football sets with the temporary goals, and we found the football lodged in some bush, so we started fooling around, and I stood as the goalie. I guess Kazz must have seen or heard us. The little shit was always excited to see us, especially his older brothers. The twins loved him to death. None of us had seen him for a couple of weeks because, by that point, Archer and West had already been inducted into the junior chapter of the Norwood Saints, so they were kept busy on various assignments. I’m two years younger, so I wasn’t a full-fledged member, but the twins had me under their wings. No one told us that the few weeks we hadn’t been up to the house, Kazz caught chicken pox and that his entire face was covered in these massive boils.”

I think I know where this might be going.

“One of the twins, honestly, I don’t remember which one because I was the only one who saw the running kid and his mom chasing him, kicks to score the goal, and Kazz gets in the middle, the football skims off his face taking most of it with him.”

“Oh no!!” I gasp with my hand in front of my mouth. “What happened?”

Killian is laughing, “Well, his mom is screaming at everyone to back off. Honestly, with the amount of blood over the side of Kazz’s face, I really thought we deformed the poor kid.”

“But Kazz hasn’t got any scars,” I say, thinking about it.

“That lucky bastard survived it. Aunt Keiko cleaned up his face and put on some Japanese homeopathic stuff that healed the kid’s face like new.”

I giggle, “I don’t know how I could ever look at Kazz again and not be reminded of a 7-year-old little twirp with a bloody face full of boils.”

Killian laughs with me. “Don’t tell him; it might kill his ego.”

I finish my salad, put my napkin on the plate, and stack it with Killian’s empty plate on the tray.

“Thanks for that, Killian. I know you didn’t have to come and eat dinner with me, but I appreciate it.”

As soon as he stands up, he realizes it’s kind of tight when the two of us stand together in the cabin between the two beds. I look up at him, and there’s a weird moment between us. We’re so close I can almost smell his scent. His aftershave is mixed with ocean scent. He looks down at me and studies my face, his gaze so deep as if he wants to decipher my thoughts. I bite my lower lip nervously, a little unsure of what happens next.

He makes the first move and dashes uncomfortably towards the door.

“I should go,” he says and then sees the trays with the empty dishes.

He comes back to collect them. “I’ll drop these off on my way out.”

I nod, and then he hesitates. “I’ll be on deck for the next two hours. Will you be okay? I could ask Kazz or West to check up on you.”

I’m sure West would just love that.

“No. That won’t be necessary,” I hold up my book and smile, “I’ve got Edward Cullen to keep me busy.”

He chuckles and goes to leave.

“Raven, don’t forget to put the latch back on.” He sternly looks at me, and I nod.



I’ve been on and off reading this book. I already brushed my teeth and prepped for bed, but my mind’s constantly running circles about what could have happened between Killian and me earlier.

Am I really going to go there?

As if sleeping with one of these guys wasn’t what got me into this tangled web of a mess. Then I was nearly strangled to death for slutting around with the second one. But my slut of a pussy, got a whiff of Killian, and she’s dancing and grinding and begging me to take her out for a spin.

But the more I think about it, the more I believe he looked too uncomfortable. I don’t think I am his type. Sure, Killian’s

good with all the flirting, but he looked visibly distressed with how close we were and possibly my stupid googly eyes.

Way to go, Raven!

Removing any further thoughts from my head, I turn back to my book. I had already turned off the main light in the room and was using the reading light above the bed. It's almost three hours since Killian sped off, and I have a feeling he's avoiding me, hoping I'd be asleep when I return.

There's a sudden jiggle on the door handle, and I get up fast to put the chair under it.

Shit, I look around the room for something to use as a weapon, and there's nothing. My eyes scan Killian's duffle bag. Surely he has something in there I could use. I've seen the knives he carries on him; he doesn't mess around. The man is a serious lunatic with his weapons.

He'll kill me if I go through his stuff. I pull out from the safety hoop the metal garbage can and jump on my bed and watch the door handle jiggle more.

"I have a gun, asshole," I yell out, "I suggest you fuck off!"

"Raven? It's me, Killian."

Shit! I jump down and move the chair, still holding the can in my arm, pull off the door chain, and open the door for him.

"I thought it was someone trying to get inside," I say, and he looks around the room.

“I get the chair on the door, but what were you planning to do with the rubbish bin?” He gives me his usual cocky grin

Looking foolish, I put it down.

“You left me with nothing to protect myself. I mean, come on, Killian, you scare me half to death with the entire crew being horny. What do you expect me to do with a weapon, kill you all, and jump ship?”

He rolls his eyes, and I nudge his arm. “And what? You said you’d be back in a couple of hours. It’s been like four. When I asked to room with you, it was for my protection, and I was alone, and what if something happened to me. What if—“

He puts both hands over my shoulders and leans down to kiss me. Okay, this is one way to shut me up. It’s also completely unexpected, and slutty pussy is saying to keep kissing back, and I have to agree. Killian is one hell of a kisser. But I’ve been craving this kiss for the last few hours. Deep down, I’d been wanting him to kiss me like crazy.

The longer our kiss goes on, the more likely I will have to give in to him right here and now.

My hands reach up, but this man is packed to the nines with weapons; I stop at his shoulder holster. Realizing this, he steps back and releases me, and I want his lips back on me.

He looks at me and licks his lips.

“You shouldn’t have stopped,” I say.

“I shouldn’t have,” he says, and without taking his fixed eyes off me, he begins removing his weapons.

One at his shoulder, another two at his waist, together with a couple of knives. If it weren't for the fact he was on a mission here, I would say Killian has a serious weapon attachment.

When he's done, he grabs my waist, pulls me to him, and I slam my body against his.

"Now then, we can't have you ever feeling unsafe," his massive body hovers over my much smaller frame.

I lick my lips and look up at him.

"I believe you were going to kiss me again," I say, anticipating his lips, not giving a damn where this puts us later.

He runs his hand up my arm and cups my neck, his eyes falling to my mouth. He leans down, and as he gently pulls me closer to him, he presses his lips to mine, and the sound of pleasure he makes vibrating from his chest as he kisses me weakens my knees.

I come undone as I lean into him and fall straight into his embrace, giving myself into his demand as his lips move over mine, holding me tight. He's not going to take this gently; instead, he winds his fingers through my hair, firmly clasping the back of my head. The kiss starts off rough and punishing, but Killian quickly adjusts as his lips soften, and he makes love to my mouth in a way I am definitely not expecting.

The pure rawness pouring from me scares me, and I rip my lips from his before he takes me back once more, and this time I give in to everything he gives me. As soon as his tongue

pushes into my mouth and meets the tip of mine, I shudder, melting as our tongues slide together.

I moan when our lips clash together. Every nerve in my body feels like it's on fire. His hands begin to run up my thighs, under the t-shirt.

“Wait,” I suddenly burst, pulling my head away.

His blue eyes focus on me. There's a slight smirk on those lips of his. Damn, he has sexy lips.

I shake my head to focus, “I've slept with Archer.”

“I know that,” he says, his smirk getting wider.

“I did some things with West. Well, it wasn't exactly consensual.” He suddenly raises a brow of concern, “I mean, it was, but there weren't any real feelings involved.”

“I know that too,” I cock my head at him, “anyone else? Kazz maybe? Sam, Joe, Liam?”

“Omigod, Killian! No!”

“Good because it stops at Kazz. The other three work for us. One of them ever touches you, you let me know about it.”

There are so many questions I have about that statement I'm not sure what to do with it.

“What do you mean it stops with Kazz?”

“Meaning, in case you missed the declaration back in London, you belong to us now, blondie. And you're lucky that we've all taken a fancy to you.”

“Somewhere in that statement is something very unsettling.”

“Never had so many men pine after you?”

“No, but you include West too?”

“Well, he hasn’t admitted it, but it doesn’t take much to see he’s fighting a losing streak with you.”

“I’m not sure how I feel about West either.”

“Good, so more for me,” he goes to move in, and I lean away.

“Have you guys shared women before?”

Realizing he may not be getting anywhere tonight, he lets go of me.

“Not that I wanted to make this into a massive discussion, but yeah, there have been women we’ve shared in the past. The four of us are a tight-knit group, extremely close, and we share women, among other stuff.”

I’m suddenly turned off by all this. I’m just another whore for them, just like they told Prophet.

“I don’t want to be just another notch in your bedpost. Archer and I shared something significant.”

One that is beginning to fade fast in my mind. Was it even real?

Killian doesn’t respond. I watch him take his weapons and throw them into the duffle bag along with his shirt.

Holy smokes! Archer was a super fit man, but Killian can carry his own pretty well. The swoops and swells of his biceps, corded arms, and strong shoulders, and I don’t know

where to begin on his eight-pack. He's got an entire piece inked on his back, chest, and shoulders, but his ribs are covered in plastic which I assume is from the ink he got done back in London. I sit down on my bed, somewhat frustrated, and ignore him.

What's the point?

He thinks I'm a whore. Their whore.

He removes his pants, and I think I'm going to die, like, really die.

Those long, tanned legs thick with muscles, but it's what he's packing under those tight black boxer briefs sitting low on his hips that gets my panties wet. The light blond fuzz continues to go down his shorts, and I'm dying to know what's underneath because if those V lines are anything to go by, then I'm impressed.

I look away, move further down on the bed, and pretend to grab my book.

As if this display wasn't enough, Killian pulls his shorts down and grabs a towel from the wall cupboard.

Fuck.

Killian St John is standing right here in his birthday suit, like a Greek god. His cock is long and thick, and if I was curious to know where that light blond fuzz extended to, well, now I do.

"None of us ever thought of you as a whore, Raven. I've never treated you like one, so I won't apologize for something I'm not guilty of. I think you're attractive, sexy, and hot but

also amusing and enjoyable to be around. That's something you have that's way above any woman I've just fucked for the sake of fucking. Yeah, just fucked. Not taking her halfway across the world with us because we can't keep her out of our sight. You are the closest outsider to come to knowing who we are."

He throws his towel over his shoulder and steps into the bathroom, shutting the door behind him.

I take in everything he says, which almost renders me speechless because then he had to turn around and show me his extremely firm ass that nearly had my pussy screaming for him.

I hear the water running inside. I get up from the bed and pace the small space, biting my thumb.

It's now or never. I look at the bathroom door.

Am I really going to do this? If I don't, I may never get that chance.

Goddamit!

Why does he have to be this gorgeous?

Why did he have to admit he likes me more than just a quick fuck?

Suddenly I realize I'm standing completely nude. I've cast my socks, panties, and T-shirt aside.

I twist the door handle and open it. The water's running, and he's still behind the curtain in the shower. I don't even know if

it'll fit both of us in there. I hesitate momentarily, but a tattooed hand sneaks out and drags me behind the curtain.

“Trying to sneak up on me?” Killian says as he pushes me against the shower wall, the water running over both of us. He's let his hair down, and it flops over his face in this sexy, wet manner.

His arms box me in against the wall as his eyes take a long, unashamed look down my body, licking his lips, and looks directly back up my face, waiting for my reply. There's no smile on his lips, only a hot, intense gaze he gives me, demanding I answer him.

“I would never...” my words get lost on his lips as he takes me completely, his mouth feverish against mine.

He loops his hand behind my neck and pulls me against his solid body, his arousal is evident against my abdomen. There's no going back now, and I want this so much more than I realized. I kiss him back with the same intensity, a mixture of wild and raw. Then I bite his lower lip, and he pulls away, licking the blood off his lip, and finally smiles at me.

He turns the water off, yanks me out of the shower, picks me up, and tosses me onto the bed. We're both dripping wet, yet none of us cares enough to mention it.

“I'm going to taste every bit of you,” he says, his voice so deep my knees automatically open for him like he's said some magic words.

He joins me on the bed but gets in between my legs, buries his face into my wet, throbbing sex, and proceeds to eat me out ferociously. The way he's eating me is absolutely fucking filthy. He sucks, licks, and blows hot air over my entrance. I'm surprised the scream that comes out of my mouth doesn't send anyone barging in here.

Killian won't let up, and I fist his wet hair as he continues, his cheeks running up against my hot, damp folds. I feel a slight press of teeth against my clit and almost pass out.

Finally, the man comes up for air, and his entire face is covered in my juices mixed with the water from the shower. I'm not even sure anymore. My brain is gone.

He strokes his cock a few times as he looks at me, running his hand through his hair and pushing it back.

"I don't have any condoms," he says and does not hide his regret.

I get it. When you plan for a war, condoms don't go on your list of priorities.

"I got tested before I left New York. It's part of the training program to get a full bill of health before going abroad. The only person I had sex with was Archer, and we used condoms."

"I got tested, but I've slept with other women, Raven. But I promise you I always used condoms. You'd be my first. Are you on the pill?"

"No," and now I must tell him the truth about me.

“Something happened to me when I was a kid. I can’t ever get pregnant. I had enough tests to know it’s impossible,” I say, and I hate having this discussion. It never came up with Archer because it was only just one night. But I did have it with Hayden after he wanted to stop using condoms.

“Are you okay with this?” Killian looks at me.

With being barren? Find me a woman whose choice was taken from her, forcibly against her own will, only to discover later on in life that she’ll never be able to bear her own children.

“Fuck me, Killian. I want to feel you inside me,” I say, blocking out the pain growing inside my head. I don’t want to think of that horrid part of my life.

He’s stroking his beautiful perfect cock, smooth and velvety, and it distracts me from my thoughts. It’s beading with precum, and I lean forward, swipe my finger across it and hover it over my mouth. Sticking my tongue out, I lick it off my finger, causing him to groan.

“Fuck, blondie.” He firmly grabs hold of my hips, lifts me up, and swiftly maneuvers himself underneath me, planting me on top of him.

“I bet you have a few good moves to show me because you look absolutely unreal on top of me,” his hands rake my curves, and his eyes watch my pale breasts and beaded nipples as I lift myself up, take his length, and slide myself onto him.

Together we start up a fast rhythm that gets more and more frantic. He grips his fingers in the soft flesh of my ass, then smacks one of my buttocks hard. I hiss at him in a breath through my teeth, and he smooths his palm over my skin, feeling the sting he gave me.

I stroke the rugged ridges and planes of his abs, up to his pecs, skimming across his nipples, and end at his inked neck.

The first time I saw his fully inked neck, I was intrigued and terrified of him at the same time. I realize he's watching me, his eyes following mine as I admire his body.

"You're a gorgeous woman, Raven. A stunning beauty," He says it in a way that's so wholehearted I believe every word he's just said.

I rock forward onto his cock. He sits back, his head against the pillow. His one hand is on my hip, the other cupping my breast. His hand firmly grips my hip as he rocks me back and forth with force.

Our eyes are locked, neither of us speaks, and we're like this connected to each other, and I'm loving every bit of this. Suddenly, he releases my breast, and his fingers find my clit.

I tip my head back as my orgasm comes shuddering deep within me. Before I even have a chance to come down from my high, he picks me up and slams me onto his body. His moans become louder, the look on his face, sheer ecstasy.

"Oh fuck," he cries out as he holds himself deep inside me, gripping my hips tight. I feel the telling jerk as he empties

himself into me.

Seconds later, he lifts me off and slides me onto his body. This is a twin-sized bed, and Killian takes up most of it. But he holds me close and kisses my head affectionally. I smile.

“Now I’m never letting you go, Raven. Ever. So, get used to me,” he suddenly blurts out, and I’m not sure what I’m supposed to say.

Thank you?

They kidnapped me, and now I’m falling for them as they’re falling for me?

“Don’t overthink it, darling. No one expected this,” he says, almost reading into my thoughts.

A shiver goes through my body, and he wraps his arms around me.

He thinks I’m cold. I’m just suddenly nervous at how much I’m enjoying this when I have no right to be.

Chapter 23



WE MOVED ONTO THE second bed because the first one was soaked from our wet bodies and hair, and it wasn't very comfortable. Since no one thought to bring a hairdryer with us, Killian took a towel and dried my long hair until it was partially damp, and then he did his, which took less time than mine. I helped him remove the large, clear plastic bandage from his ribs and rubbed down the ink that had already broken through his skin.

As soon as we finished fussing over each other, Killian scooped me up and took me under the covers. We've been like this since, just talking, facing each other, unable to keep our hands off each other, my hands tracing his incredible abs and his fingers going through my hair, my jaw, my collarbone, wholly focused on me.

"Tell me about your family," he says softly, and I know from his tone that it's just a curious question and not one purposely asked in order to analyze me with the other two.

"I'd rather not. It's not a happy story," I say, knowing I could never tell him or anyone. It doesn't matter what transpired between us this evening or where my feelings lie for him, my past needs to remain a closed book. "And I'd rather not ruin what took place between us tonight."

"But you promise to open up one day? Blondie, I want to know so much about you, luv."

"Tell me about the single dagger on your inner arm," I say, changing the topic because I can't keep making up stories or locking him out with it, causing a rift between us.

He looks at me as he strokes my arm, those blue-grey colored eyes realizing I wasn't going to talk about myself and letting it go for now.

“It's a pugio, a Roman dagger used to kill Julius Caesar. I got it when I turned 14. It's there to remind me that one day I'll find my mum, and I'll kill the bastard that sent her running.”

I nod my understanding. “You have the same feelings for your father as the twins do for theirs.”

“Even the mightiest men will fall from grace.”

“There's nothing graceful or grand about your fathers. They deserve whatever comes to them.”

He leans over and kisses my lips.

“You understand more than you realize. One day I want to tell you everything, but for now, accept that I'm falling hard for you, blondie.”

Before I can reply, a loud siren is heard, and men are rushing around outside the cabin. The rush of feet and chaos outside causes me to stiffen with worry.

“Shit!” Killian jumps out of bed.

“The pirates?” I ask now, my voice trembling as I watch him quickly tug on his black combat pants and get dressed within seconds. I guess he's trained for this.

“Yup,” he says, starts arming himself, and stops a second to realize I'm still in the room and terrified about what happens

next.

“Don’t be scared, blondie. We won’t let them even get this far to the cabins. But get dressed regardless. Lock the door, put the chair under the door handle, and close the lights in the cabin. Under no circumstances do you open the door unless it’s one of us three.”

He comes and sits by the edge of the bed, putting his hand on my thigh.

“Raven, it might get ugly, but do not leave the cabin no matter what you hear. The captain will not stop until he reaches US territorial waters. Then, these pirates will not have a chance in hell as soon as the American authorities are alerted that a cargo ship is under attack. We just need to keep the ship from being taken over until then, got it?”

I nod, realizing how real this has become. Killian kisses my head and gets up again to finish arming himself.

Watching him do his thing, he takes out a silver metal box with a number lock, and I watch him turn the dials until it clicks open. I lean over and watch him take out two Glock 18s.

The last time I saw such a gun was in my brother’s hand. The thought sends a chilly shiver down my spine. This isn’t a good omen.

Killian looks at them and gives them a similar look he gave my two breasts earlier. Admiration and excitement coat his eyes. I think I get it, as I’ve already realized he’s a little weapons trigger-happy, and it comes as no surprise he’s going

to war with a full-sized automatic pistol capable of firing 1200 rounds per minute.

He pushes them into his holster along with various knives he stuffs here and there inside his cargo pockets and combat boots. He takes out another gun he had earlier, places it on the bed with a thin flip knife, and sits beside me again.

“Use the gun if you need to protect yourself. Hide the knife on the inside of your boots toward the front.” I nod, and he kisses my lips like there’s no tomorrow.

“And keep that bed warm for me. I’ll be back before you know it.” He opens the door, and I hear him hoorahing down the hallway.

The crackhead is actually getting high on this.

Quickly, I pull the latch on the door and bolt it. Following Killian’s advice, I push the chair under the door handle, close the lights in the cabin, and then quickly get dressed because the last thing I want is to be caught naked in the middle of this battle. As a second thought, I tie my hair up and put on the cap.

Staring at the weapons Killian left on the bed, I haven’t yet touched them. Instead, I crouch in the corner of the bed and listen to the war going on outside. Some of the bright moonlight mixes with the red flares going up to warn other ships nearby and lightens up the room through the small round window above me.

Gun shots are loud, the men are yelling, and I can hear people running above me on the decks. I wonder if Killian found West and Kazz. Together with their three other men, I feel like perhaps they might be outnumbered.

Boom.

There's an explosion somewhere, and the vibration of it carries down to my cabin. The ship is still moving, which means the pirates haven't penetrated the bridge, so that's a good sign.

But what if they bomb the ship with the intention of sinking it? And I'm below deck down here. I'll be stuck in this place and drown with the ship like those people on Titanic.

Shit, my brain is working overtime time here and imagining scenarios that really aren't good for my psyche.

Maybe I should just pop up quickly and see what's going on, making sure the men have everything under control. Just a quick peep, and then I'll rush back inside; they'll never know.

I grab the two items Killian left for me and unbolt the door. Popping my head out into the passageway; it's dead down here. Either the crew bolted themselves inside their cabins or were killed. I climb the maze of stairs to find myself on the upper main deck and take cover under the open stairs, where it's hidden well within the shadows.

Killian is jumping from one container to another, hitting every single shot he makes. I swear he truly is a gun-trigger,

happy person. This almost seems like a sport to him, and he reminds me of a simulation character from a PC war game.

West is not far behind him, using one of the containers to shield himself, and I hear gunshots above me which I assume come from Kazz and the other three men fiercely guarding the bridge.

One of the pirates runs straight past me, completely missing me, and it probably has to do with the all-black clothes I'm wearing and the fact that I'm crouched down and sitting in the shadows. He sees West, who's completely uncovered from this direction.

Doesn't anyone above me see him?

The pirate is savvy, hidden within the shadows like me, and I realize I only spotted him because he ran past me. There's no way anyone would spot him. I watch him crawl like a snake to take better aim.

Fuck, he's going to kill West.

I have a choice, get up, expose my location, shoot the bastard, or let him kill West. The odds of surviving the twin's wrath after this is over are stacked against me. If he discovers my capabilities, then he'll use them against me. I'm not expecting a thank you after this. He will grill me to find out who I am.

This is a deliberating moment, and I should just crawl back into my cabin and let nature take its course. Darwin's theory comes to mind in this instance.

My life was spared when I should have died. It was my time to die, and I beat fate by an inch of it taking my life.

But now I'm West's destiny.

I remain here crouched down like a useless bystander, about to watch West's life slip between my fingers. I could save his life or let his fate take his soul like it was meant to be.

Offer the Grim Reaper another body instead of mine and prolong my time on Earth.

Slowly rising, I get into a better position where I know the angle I'm in will make a perfect shot. I take aim, click back the gun's safety, and shoot the pirate before he gets a chance to do the same to West.

West turns to find the man falling down into the cargo hold. He frantically looks around, wondering where the shot came from, and spots me just before I crouch back down. Fuck, I didn't actually need him knowing it was me or discovering I was out of my cabin.

I had second-guessed that he wouldn't even know I was there if I hid fast enough. I curse myself for making such a stupid decision.

Suddenly I realize there's a stampede of men heading in my direction. They must have boarded from the rear of the ship. This is a fucking ambush.

I've never killed a man before; the one just now was my first, but my racing heart hasn't got time to figure it out with my brain because this has become a battle of survival. I lie

back down in the shadows. One guy comes barrelling from around the corner. He's dead before his foot even reaches the third step. His body drops to the ship's deck with a sickening thud.

A second one comes around, and I have the perfect angle. My shot hits him straight between the eyes. He's dead on impact with the floor.

My hidden position makes it easier to aim between the open stairs. I shoot a third bullet into another unsuspecting pirate's forehead and watch him fall, causing the other men behind them to falter, seeing the three fallen bodies.

West and Killian's insane rain of fire from their guns makes sure the remaining men never make it over the staircase and fall to their deaths almost immediately.

Suddenly Sam bursts out the door to the main cabin area, spotting me. He abruptly pulls me upwards and drags me back inside.

"Sorry to be so rough, Miss, but orders came directly from West. Do I have to lock you inside your cabin?"

A flicker of anger lights up inside me as I burrow my brows at the man.

"None of you could have spotted the guy. West's lucky I was there when I was,"

"Explain it to him when you see him," he insists, removing the gun from me. He watches as I head down the stairs toward the passageway of my cabin.

I knew I'd be facing the consequences from the guys for leaving the cabin, including the wrath fury from West for saving his life.

Ungrateful asshole.

Now I'm sure there will be a lot of question marks surrounding my existence. I've just opened up a massive can of worms, something which I never intended to do. But I know I made the right decision to keep West alive, and time will show that my decision was correct.

Chapter 24



“THESE ARE OUR KILL; this here is all hers. She needed just one shot for each man and took them out straight between the eyes. The other one is clean, right behind the back, straight through the heart. She knew exactly where to aim at his back to take him out immediately.”

I saw where Raven stood, hiding under the stairwell. She held that gun like a pro and got the asshole on the first bloody shot. Who the fuck is this woman?

“So?” Killian lazily looks at me. “Maybe she’s gone to shooting school before with her ex. You know these rich brats love this kind of shite to post on their social media for likes.”

I glare at Killian.

“Maybe if you kept your knob out of her cunt, it wouldn’t be so fucking tied around her finger,” I bark at him.

“Don’t be a wanker,” Kazz says, and I need to resist that snarl edging its way up my lips.

We all heard Killian and Raven earlier tonight. Raven is freakishly loud, and my cousin ensured the entire Asia Pacific heard her. We tried to keep a woman on board hidden, but how the fuck can you not hear a woman’s throws of passion in the middle of a fucking ocean?

“She’s a sharpshooter and playing you two for muppets. Probably a trained assassin.”

“Americans pride themselves over their rights to guns,” Killian insists. “You’re looking too far into this. It’s just a cultural difference, cuz. That’s all.”

I look at my cousin and want to tear his pussy-whipped brains out of his head.

“That statement is debatable, depending on which American you talk with,” Kazz adds so casually that he’s not even concerned by anything I’ve been saying.

None of them do.

My blood is past boiling point, and my ears are going to explode from all the fucking rubbish I’m listening to coming from these two knobheads.

“A cultural difference?” I begin to pace around the collection of Raven’s dead bodies. “A fucking cultural difference?!” my voice is getting louder by the minute. “Are you both off your fucking rockers?”

Both men look at me like bloody mutes as if I’m the one who’s lost the bloody plot!

“Are you telling me you aren’t even remotely curious about where she learned to shoot like that?”

“Well, sure, I think it’s fucking sexy,” Killian grins as if this is a joke. I’m going to fucking punch that smile off the bastard’s face.

“One shag is all it took, and you’re fucking pussywhipped.”

Killian narrows his eyes at me.

“Sounds like someone’s properly jealous they didn’t get to finish off their own session.”

So, Raven told him I stormed out of the room that evening I snuck in and posed as my brother. I bet they had a right laugh at my expense. I should have slit her throat that evening when I had the chance to do it.

“Okay!” Kazz butts in between us, and it’s perfect timing because I am ready to throw my dear cousin overboard. “This discussion is not getting us anywhere, and considering we’ve successfully sunk a sabotage attempt and our shipment will be successfully delivered to our intended customers, you two are acting like a bunch of nursery children.”

“I still believe we should question her,” I suggest, and I should just outright demand it.

“You would have been lined up with the rest of the bodies here had she not saved your arse. Why can’t you take it at face value? She deserves a thank you, not an interrogation. I’m just as curious as you to learn where she learned to shoot like that, but only because I’m impressed, not because I think she has some underlying mission.” Kazz is always going to try and make it out like he’s looking at it logically, but he’s merely being theoretical. “She could have taken us all out, but she didn’t. Maybe let that thought sink in a little.”

“How did she get that gun?” I whip my head to Killian, knowing the answer before asking it.

“She needed protection, and I didn’t think twice about it. I had my duffle bag in her cabin for hours, mate, fucking hours with these two babies in a box. I used one of those sensor clips Kazz has on the inside of my bag. My phone didn’t once alert

me that my bag had been tampered with. She respected my privacy. That's how I know she's for real."

I stare at my cousin and brother, deliberating everything they tell me; my lips are pressed into a tight, unhappy line.

This wasn't supposed to happen with Raven. She was supposed to remain under our custody and keep her safe until we find Archer and then allow him to decide what becomes of her. Instead, she's wormed her way into their brains, and there's no way they'll ever let Archer determine her fate.

After seeing her singlehandedly take these pirates out, it seems she can take care of herself without us, and she's proven to be utterly useless in finding my brother. She's just deadweight, carrying her around on our missions.

"Right then," I say dryly. "Make sure she knows what to say at border control when we arrive at customs in the US. She's just a regular passenger traveling on the cargo ship doing the whole world tour on a budget. Kazz, give her passport back to her when we arrive at customs; we're cutting her loose."

"What?"

I look at Killian with a cunning smile I can't resist.

"You think she's harmless, so why keep her a prisoner with us and drag her around as extra luggage?"

Both remained there staring at me. They fucking asked for this, which has nothing to do with me.

"It's not my fucking fault the two of you wankers developed feelings for her. But it ain't normal to keep her tied like some

fucking prisoner. It's up to her if she wants to stay with us. My money's on the fact that she'll do a runner as soon as she can. Then you muppets can both mend each other's hearts."

I walk up the stairs to the bridge to make some phone calls and inform London that our shipments are on their way to the Americans.

Before I enter the control center, I look down at my men.

"Crew needs to get rid of the bodies and bullets. And they'll need to scrub the ship clean before the Americans do their inspection. Killian, I'll be with our capture in the kitchen. Will you be joining the interrogation?"

We rounded up and apprehended the remaining pirates and sought out their leader, then eliminated everyone else and kept this big fish alive. Whoever's been paying them to sabotage our shipments and jeopardize our business with one of our key players is going to be punished severely.

"Yeah, mate. Let me know when you're ready."



The extraordinary thing about this ship is that the galley has an entire walk-in temperature-controlled storage room, so it can alternate as a fridge if needed. That's exactly where we put Freddie, our prisoner, to wait for our return.

His name isn't Freddie; that's what we tend to call all maggots we capture that are guilty of attempting to do us

wrong.

My motto is, *don't be a Freddie*, especially if you value your life.

Looking around the kitchen, I wonder where I can string him up for the interrogation.

“There’s a meat hook right inside where we’re keeping him,” I hear Killian’s voice enter the room.

“That’ll be too much of a clean-up. It’s stocked with consumable products, so there’s a hygiene issue we need to consider. I’m thinking of stringing him up between those two rafters by the stove.”

Killian smiles at me wide and toothy. If there’s a sicker fuck than me, it’ll be my cousin. I bet he’s already planning how this is gonna go. Perhaps I’ll take a backseat on this one and just observe for entertainment purposes.

“Sam, did you manage to get what we asked?”

“Sure did, Boss,” he sets the bag of toys on the counter next to me. Killian immediately digs in as if it’s a fun bag, grabs the chains, jumps up on the opposite counter, and swings them around the rafters, securing them. He begins to weave the chains in a way he’ll know how to pull a body up and down like a puppet.

I overturn the bag’s contents on the counter and neatly line the equipment up as if one were preparing utensils for surgery. I grab the first tool lined up.

A serrated screwdriver, unlike Killian, I don't get as excited as he does over weapons and torture tools. But if I had to pick one, I'd say this is one of my favorite interrogation tools. It's a pretty fucked up technique to use on a human body, but we go to every extent necessary to extract info. There is no end to the depravity of our methods. It's who we are and the kind of action we take to find out who orders these hits on us and our businesses.

"Secure both ends of this corridor, and ensure there aren't any bystanders in the nearby rooms for the next two hours," I tell Sam.

"Yes, Boss," he closes the door behind him, and I lower the long lever over the two double doors to prevent entry.

Taking a booth at the back, I raise my boots over the table and watch my cousin set up.

It would be interesting to know Raven's thoughts if she had any remote idea of what her lover does as a profession. It's actually amusing because I bet she'd jump shit immediately.

First, she wraps her legs around my brother, and now my cousin. I wonder what she'd think of the man whose fingers she comes all over on also uses those same hands to settle his cravings for bloodlust and torture. Killian's personality to the outside world is perceived very differently from what goes on deep inside his head. He says this craving stems from his need to discover the mystery behind his mother's disappearance, but I don't think it'll end when he finds the truth. In fact, I think

it'll intensify because he's banking on the fact that he'll find her alive. The odds are significantly stacked against his theory.

“Do you plan on watching and wanking?” he turns to me as he finishes his stage setup.

“Don't get too excited, knobhead, just watching,” I snigger.

He shrugs his shoulder without much care. “Suit yourself.”

He heads inside the storage room to fetch our guest of honor, who probably zonked out from the chill.

Meanwhile, I discreetly set my phone up against a napkin container and begin to record. Raven should know precisely what she's signing herself up for if she decides to stick around. I intend to make that little birdie fly fast.

Killian returns with Freddie draped unconscious over his shoulder and drops him to the floor like a sack of stones. He fastens him to the chains and pulls the lever to straighten the body up. The head sits drooping between his shoulders, and Killian takes the hot iron he has heating and holds it against the man's face.

That instantly wakes up unconscious Freddie, and there's a rather large burn mark in the shape of the iron over the side of his face.

“So nice of you to join us, Freddie,” Killian says, putting the iron down and picking up one of his specialty knives.

The man looks at him, then around the room, before realizing he's attached to chains and spread eagle a little above floor level.

“All your men are dead, and your command ship and little row boats sunk somewhere off the coast of whogivesafuck. You little pissheads have aerated us with your shenanigans and getting your pricks into our business. You’ve cost us quite the penny with your petty games. Do you have something you want to say?”

The man glares at Killian and spits in his face, but it doesn’t even affect him.

Instead, he laughs, but his eyes don’t find anything funny. His blue eyes have darkened, and there is a level of evil excitement and anticipation brewing. One has to actually take enjoyment to do this kind of job, and it isn’t for the faint-hearted.

My cousin is in a mode where his inner demon has come out to play, and until its ego is sated, it won’t be going back in. There’s nothing to be ashamed about taking enjoyment in the torture of others if it means justice is being done.

We all have demons inside us; some have just learned to control theirs a little better than most.

I look at my phone and wonder how much shame Raven will feel after giving her body to such a monster. Killian is not ashamed of what he does, but I doubt he’d ever want to subject her to this kind of hellish work.

With a couple of tactical flicks of his knife, the man’s outer clothes lay shattered on the floor.

Killian's a bloody show-off, and I know he's done that procedure just because he knows he can effortlessly do that without even so much of a scrape on the skin.

I'd love to do that move on Raven. Remove all her clothes with the sweep of a knife and uncover those ravishing breasts and sweet-tasting pussy of hers. I already sampled a taste of her, and every time my mind drifts back there, my knob stiffens, like it's doing right now.

Why the fuck is my mind consumed with thoughts of this woman?

She needs to go.

End of.

I focus back on the current view. Sam had already removed Freddie's boots and socks and prepped him how we prefer to interrogate our special guests.

Kazz already ran this man's profile within the dark web, and it turns out he and his crew are sea thugs for hire, everything from kidnapping people for ransom, to robbing and murdering. But primarily responsible for the plundering, hijacking, and detention of almost every recent ship that's held Norwood Saints' cargo to America.

They're a visible manifestation of maritime security, and we're going to find out who hired them and then crush the fuckers who dared mess with our business.

With another flick of Killian's knife, the man is entirely nude.

“You could spoil my fun and just come out and tell me who’s paying you. Or you can let me have some fun first and then tell me later.”

“I tell you shit,” Freddie sneers at him.

“Ever tried a butt plug?”

Freddie laughs at him.

Killian cocks his head at him.

“You find it funny? How so?” He picks up a butcher carving knife and shows it to him. “Okay, Captain Sparrow, you want to be amusing? We’ll try it your way, then. Which end do you prefer? Pointy or blunk?”

The man goes momentarily still.

Killian drags his knife across the man’s chest, causing him to yelp.

“I asked a question, matey.” He flicks his finger on Freddie’s forehead.

“Fine, I’ll choose,” he rolls his eyes as he walks behind him, starts slicing off chunks off the man’s arse, and then jabs the blunt edge of the knife up his hole.

Now Freddie is screaming and yelping, realizing Killian has just stepped up his game.

“If you were waiting for the opportune moment,” Killian says in the voice of his favorite Caribbean pirate, “that was it.”

He picks up the two irons he has heating up.

“Ready to tell me who’s giving your orders?”

“We never get a name; the order comes through,” the man whimpers. “via DuckGo.”

Kazz had already discovered that DuckGo was a link within the dark web where business assignments were given anonymously.

“That’s nothing we didn’t know. How do you get paid?”

“Cryptocurrency, Monero.”

“Tell me something I don’t know,” Killian presses a button on both irons, releasing a pressure of hot, cloudy steam.

“It’s all, man.” The man is shaking in his chain.

“Nah, there’s more. Maybe this’ll trigger a reminder.” Killian places the irons upright on the ground, leveling them with wooden planks. Then he lowers the lever so the man’s feet just skim the irons.

He’s screaming, and the stench of burnt skin is pungent in this windowless room.

“Anything?” Killian asks, “Online name? Nothing at all?”

The man mumbles something between his cries, and Killian lifts the lever.

“The contact. I spoke to him a few months ago over a secure line,” the man whimpers.

“You spoke directly to him?”

“He had a British accent and spoke like you. He called himself Blueball. It was his online profile too. It’s everything. I don’t know anything else.”

Killian looks at me, and I nod my head.

“It seems my partner and I have mutually agreed to end your torture and send your soul to hell.” Killian picks up his specialty knife and slices straight through the man’s neck, instantly killing him.

“Who the fuck is the Blueball?” he turns to me, and I stop recording as soon as he picks up his specialty torture knives and throws them into the sink to scrub himself and them down.

“No idea, but if he’s British, it could be any of our rivals.” I uncross my legs, bring my feet to the floor and rest my elbows on the table.

“They should know better than try and get involved in our business. Norwood Saints is the largest firm in England. All the smaller ones only exist because they are allowed to as long as they keep to their territories and pay their fees to remain functioning.”

“Kazz can run the name in the system,” Killian says, “and I’ll bring it up via contacts I have with the Finsbury Boys, considering they’ve been around longer than the Norwood Saints.”

“But they’re pretty insignificant; you really think they’ll know who this person is?”

He looks up at me, meeting my gaze.

“They might not be powerful, but they have more connections with the entire British crime syndicate.”

He makes a good point.

“Avoid telling Prophet?” Killian asks, but it’s more of a suggestion, and I wholeheartedly agree.

“I don’t trust him with this info. Until we know who this Blueball is, we keep this mum from both Prophet and Butcher.”

I watch Killian wipe down his knives with precision. He’s obsessed with his weapons and a little too mental sometimes.

“I’ll get a crew in here to clean up the mess,” I say and walk out.

Here goes thinking the Triads were up to something, and we almost raged war on the arseholes when all along, the threat came from homegrown soil. When I get my hands on the fuckas, I’ll destroy them.

Chapter 25



“I SPOKE WITH MAD Billy. He has never heard of the name Blueball running in any of the London circuits. He also thinks such a gang name must come from a pre-90s era,” Killian says, and I disconnect my laptop and slide it into my duffle bag.

We’ve been smooth sailing for several days without any further incidents. Now that we’ve entered US waters, it’s all easy from here.

West rubs the back of his head. “Probably just made-up. It does sound more like a flippin’ fifties Kray boys era nickname. Someone’s having a laugh at our fucking expense.”

I roll my eyes, “We all come from somewhere, mate, maybe not by blood but woven from the same dodgy piece of gangster cloth.”

“This just gets even more fucked up. The deeper we dive, the more shite should have stayed dead and buried.”

“Think maybe Archer discovered something he shouldn’t have?” Killian and I follow West out of the cabin.

“The thought crossed my mind, but why leave Raven?”

“Maybe he negotiated a deal for her to be left alone.”

“Speaking of the lady of the moment, are you sure you want to go through with this?” I look at West because I already know what Killian wants. He’s spent the last few days between working on deck with us and locked up inside the cabin he’s sharing with the little madam.

“We’re cutting her free. She’s obviously useless to us,” West’s lips press into a tight firm line.

He’s developed feelings for her and is afraid to keep her around. He doesn’t do the whole female relationship emotional thing.

I get it. He’s worried that it’ll interfere with his judgments. But pushing something that has the potential to be positive is the wrong way to go about dealing with something you fear. But I dare not even mention this to him unless I want World War Three to start between us.

“I wouldn’t say useless,” I add in Raven’s favor. “She seems pretty fine with a gun.”

West looks at me, quirking an eyebrow.

“That’s your knob talking,” he sneers. “There’s no room for a woman within the Brotherhood because I know you ain’t referring to Norwood Saints.”

Killian pushes a hand into hair, one stray lock refuses to obey, and it falls over his forehead. He yanks his entire hair together and ties it all up with a black-colored elastic band he always keeps on his wrist.

“I think you’ve mistaken my knob for yours and Killian’s. My knob hasn’t been anywhere near her pussy,” I admit with a touch of envy.

West sneers at me, catching me with an accusing glare; his short temper is two seconds from exploding.

“She’s a trained sharp-shooter who saved your ugly arse,” Killian interjects West’s irritation away from me. “Kazz is right, her skills might be handy with a gun, but she’s pretty handy in other areas, too,” he winks at us. “And to top it off, West, you know exactly what I mean when I say her pussy is mighty fine to keep around.”

That does nothing to sway West’s opinion.

It’s evident that he’s become pretty negative about Killian and Raven hooking up. I don’t know why, considering he could have made a full claim on her had he wanted to. We would have laid off for sure. But he didn’t, and that made her open for the takings.

There’s no denying that I might be a touch envious about the lads’ adventures with Raven, but who’s to say she’s even attracted to me. I’ve caught her eying and checking me out, but that doesn’t mean she’s enticed enough to want to do something about it.

“Put your knob back in your pants, Killian. A woman only spells drama. Raven’s got a closet full of hidden secrets we don’t know about, and there are no current openings in the Brotherhood for new members. She’ll be more trouble than she’s worth. It’s a gut feeling.”

And it’s my gut feeling that he’s sending her away because he’s scared of facing the fact that there’s a soft side of him that he’s never explored before because he’s been hardened by the years of torture he’s endured under the wrath of Prophet.



“So this is the deal, Lone Ranger, we’re cutting you free,” West explains. “Go off. Get your life back.”

I hand over her passport. Raven hesitates and looks at me, questioning the legitimacy of West’s words.

“He’s talking the truth, angel. Go and be free,” I confirm, feeling uncomfortable about this. A massive part of me doesn’t want to do this, and another part of me hopes she doesn’t take on our suggestion.

She looks up at Killian, but he gives her a deadpan stare. We promised to provide her with the choice without influencing her decision, and now she has it.

“This is a trap, isn’t it?” Her eyes carefully observe us with disbelief.

“Nope,” West pops the P like Raven always does, and I have to stifle my chuckle. She’s already grown on us without even realizing it. “Your decision is the final one.”

“But I know about the island.”

“And if you start blabbering your mouth, be prepared, I’ll come hunting for you,” West tells her as his eyes narrow to mere slits.

I have no idea what’s going on in Raven’s mind right now, but she catches me off-guard when she snatches her passport

out of my hand and runs toward border patrol for US citizens.

“Told you,” West gloats. “As soon as you gave her a chance to leave, she took it and left you twits in the dust.” He chuckles and walks off to join the lines for foreigners.

I turn to Killian; he’s speechless for once, and I think he probably has the most to lose, considering that he’s developed obvious feelings for Raven. I did as well, but I never acted on them.

“We couldn’t hold her down like a little trapped bird. It would never have been right,” I say, slapping my hand on his shoulder.

“We could have tried. At least explained how we felt about her.”

I shake my head, “She knows how we feel about her, mate. She didn’t like us pulling her away from her life like that. Raven is a free spirit. She needs to do things that are from her will, not someone else’s.”

He takes a last long look at her, and I do feel bad for the guy. She’s next in line to get her passport checked and hasn’t turned around once to us. His eyes narrow briefly, shakes his head with a light laugh and walks off towards where West is standing in line.

I also take a long, final look at her. I’ve never met a woman who could so boldly take on all three of us and challenge us the way she did, and that’s probably why we’re disappointed

that she bolted on the first opportunity. We expected something more from Raven.

She got under all our skins, especially West's. He acts like he doesn't give a toss, but I heard that fraction of disappointment in his voice just now. There's no doubt that she affected him a little differently than she did with Killian and me, but he needs a woman like that to ground him every so often and challenge him too.

I join the other two and find them both still gazing over at Raven. She hasn't once reconsidered her choice and turned towards our direction.

"It's like she couldn't wait to get rid of you two," West jokes, but I still hear that tinge of discontent in his voice.

"You mate," Killian snarls. "You treated her like garbage,"

I cut him off before it gets nasty.

"Stop it!" I scowl at both of them. "She chose her freedom. What kind of life would she have had with us? What could we offer her? Hayden Aspinalls would always be a better choice. He could offer her a safer life."

Killian growls, "If she returns to that bastard, I'll shave his balls slowly off his body."

"What the fuck is she doing?" West comments, and we all look up to see her at the border counter pointing at us as the officer turns to confirm us three.

"Is she fucking us over?"

“Stay calm, boys,” West says quietly. “We don’t know her, never seen her. You gave all your weapons to Sam, right?”

Killian and I nod. We aren’t taking any chances at US customs controls.

We watch the counter officer call over to a guard, say something to him, and indicate to us three. Raven’s all smug and smiling, like she planned this the whole time.

The guard works through the crowd to us, “You three all go by the surname of St John?”

“Is there a problem?” I ask, and this isn’t going to go down too well. West looks at Killian and me, and we nod our understanding. We’ll all insist on not knowing who she is.

“Follow me,” the guard says without elaborating further.

Chapter 26



THE LOOK ON THE guys' faces is priceless.

They're not sure whether to go all armageddon or just follow what is being asked of them.

When they offered me my freedom, I took it without a second thought and ran off before they could change their minds. That's what any sane person would do under such circumstances.

But while I waited in line, I began to think about where to go, and I didn't have a clue. Back to London? And how do I explain my absence? That I was kidnapped? I wouldn't even put it past Hayden to have used the opportunity to strike me off the management training program just as quickly as he struck me off his IG account.

That training program was, in essence, all I had going for me.

Now here I am, penniless, homeless, and not one person who would have given a shit that I disappeared for a couple of weeks.

I give a side-eye glance at the boys, and they're staring straight at me. I had a shared moment with Archer; as beautiful as it was, it was brief. With the other three, I had started to build something. I'm not sure exactly what, but I know it could lead to something significant.

The way all three guarded me like I was a person of worth back at the Norwood Saints' warehouse is a feeling that's hard to explain. Nobody had ever done that for me before. Even

West, who seems to forever hate my guts, was the most outspoken to protect me.

Then there's Killian, and I can't forget what he told me the night of the pirate attack. He was falling for me, and in the days that proceeded after, he just underlined what he originally released to me and spent much of his free time with me in the cabin.

Let me reiterate this. Killian said he was falling hard for me.

A man like Killian St John has feelings for me, real and raw. Sure, I can imagine he's probably as possessive as fuck, but maybe I want that in a man. I want to feel so important to him that he wants to own me and make sure the world knows I'm his.

And, yet, he didn't even blink when he admitted the other two also felt similar as he did for me.

My relationship with Kazz is a mixture of sexual attraction and kindred spirits. He took the book he noticed I was reading on the island and brought it with him so I'd have something to do.

On a fucking ambush mission to fight sea pirates!

That takes a lot of thought process, and Kazz was considering my welfare while locked up in that cabin for the week. Albeit I had Killian to keep me entertained for a couple of hours every day, but I don't think any of us ever imagined feelings to develop between us in such a short space of time.

And West.

My knees weaken whenever he's around, and I can't understand why. Maybe my body comprehends it more than I can. His aura is so dark, I could nickname him the *asshole of Hades*, and yet I'd still allow him to bend me over and fuck the sanity I have left out of me. He barely acknowledges me when I'm around, but when he does, I've seen the heat intensify in his gaze, and he can singlehandedly make me feel exposed and uncomfortable with minimal effort.

And how do I compare all of them to what I left back in Aspinalls before they kidnapped me?

My life was certainly different before all this. Not exactly boring, but just everyday ordinary, making sure I get from A to B, ticking off my daily chores, rinsing, and repeating the following day.

I didn't have much going for me when Archer asked me out back in London, but what I did have I valued. So much so that I was clinging on to a job that any sane person would have abandoned had they been treated like I was.

But it was all I had.

And, now?

These men stepped out from the underworld and wreaked havoc on my quiet little life. And now they've offered my old ordinary life back to me.

The question is, do I want it after getting a taster of what life with them would be like?

Unhinged, glamorous, thrilling, sexy, powerful, hot, dangerous, spicy.

I must be losing all sense of rationality if I'm actually deliberating about doing this.

All three men wear these carefree masks in a completely uncontrolled way. But the more time I spend with them, I realize that when their masks slip, I see their darkness. These men rule the world like it belongs to them, and they hold themselves to no standard but their own. They are rash with unrestrained impulsiveness, enthusiasm, and zeal. In their true form, they are dangerous and lethal, and I should be fucking scared of them.

But I'm not.

These are three men who would probably lay out their lives for me if they had to. Three men who need me as much as I need them. I might be a touch delusional here with that theory because these men are powerful and possibly toxic, and maybe they don't need me as much as I probably need them.

This is crazy.

And maybe the stupidest thing I have ever done.

I cannot believe I am seriously considering this, but I'm jumping in with my eyes open and a partially sane mind. My life would forever be a massive, perilous rollercoaster ride with them, one I swore I would stay away from.

But maybe this is my fate?

I tried the safe road, and it led nowhere. Now I need to see where this goes.

I know once I take that step, though, they'll never let me go. I'm aware of it, and I'm prepared for it. It's something I need to do because if I don't, maybe it'll be alright, but there's always going to be that breeze in the wind reminding me that I was not brave enough to risk it and see what happens.

I watch the guard bring them over to my counter. I wait on the side, smiling.

A little cunning smirk passes my lips because they probably think I've done the unthinkable.

All three men look like they want to destroy me, and I can't wait to see their shocked expressions.

"As the three of you are Ms. King's travel companions, I'll need to see your documents."

All three men's shoulders suddenly relax, and a giggle escapes me. Killian catches it, sets his bags down, approaches me, and wraps one arm around my waist. The other hand brushes a stray strand of hair off my face.

"You little hellion, I should make you suffer for this," a sinfully dark smirk appears on his face.

I look up at him, my eyes darting all over his beautiful face.

"I hope you do," I reply in a whisper that makes the smile on his face grow wider.

He picks me up, twirls me around excitedly, hunkers me back down on the ground, and kisses the life out of me. Somewhere in the background, the border control officer is yelling at us, but we ignore him.

“Mr. St John!”

Killian looks up without letting go of me. “There are three of us. You need to be a little more specific if you’re referring to me.”

“Yeah,” I say. “The blonde one is Porthos, that’s Aramis, and the moody one is Athos.”

Kazz chuckles, taking his passport from the counter, and moves to take the place of Killian while he answers whatever questions are needed at the border check counter.

“I’m happy you decided to stay.” He says, wrapping his arms around me, but he doesn’t kiss me like I want him to.

“Well, it kind of looks more like I invited you over to my neck of the woods,” I say with a hell of a lot of purposely made cheekiness in my voice. “Which also means I have some rules of my own to enforce.”

“Aha,” he grins, his voice full of mirth as he tugs me closer to his hard body, and I like this sudden closeness with Kazz. “I always knew you were cunning. So what kind of rules would that be?”

“You don’t own me. That’s just one of them.”

In a strange way, I want them to, I just don’t want to make it so easy for them.

Slowly, he shakes his head. His smile is gone and replaced with an intense gaze.

“No, angel. You agree to have us in your life; that means no one else is permitted to have you.”

“You’d share me with Killian?”

“Isn’t that what you’d like?”

And I can tell there’s a little doubt mixed with hope in his tone. Does he think I’m not attracted to him?

“Yes,” I confirm. “I just didn’t think of the logistics.”

“Don’t. Outsiders are never welcome. It’s always been just the four of us. You’re the only one that’s made it through, making you ours.”

Maybe it doesn’t sound so bad when he puts it that way. We’d be one unit, and they’d be mine as much as I am theirs.

“What’s the next rule?” he asks, drawing my attention to the fact that his arms are still wrapped around me, and I look up at his sexy lips and desperately need them on mine.

“No other women,” I’m firm on that decision. “Not outside the circle, nor inside. You want to possess me. I want the same exclusivity.”

This possession thing might actually work for all parties.

He tugs me over to him and leans into my ear. “You and I haven’t even kissed, and you already want to tie yourself down with me?”

Kazz can read my desperation like he's telepathically linked to me. He knows I want him to kiss me, but he won't give me what I want so easily.

I am always right about the quiet, friendly ones; they are the most dangerous because one never knows what to expect from them.

And to top it off, his warm breath on my naked neck is doing things to me that have no business doing while we stand here in the middle of a US customs checkpoint.

"Yes," I manage to breathe out, "because I know there's no fucking way you could ever disappoint me."

"Good, because when it's time for you and me. I'll guarantee your pussy won't be disappointed."

The gasp that escapes me causes him to chuckle, and my panties are so wet right now. I think my relationship with Kazz has just reached a certain level where I'm willing to throw all logic to the wind and beg him to take me right here and now.

"Fuck, getting arrested for indecent exposure and disturbing the peace. I want you now, Kazz," I say, and there's this sexy curl to his lips that instantly makes my clit throb with need.

A slap on my ass suddenly brings me back to earth, it's Killian, and he slides a lazy arm across my shoulders, pulling me from Kazz and leading me outside the building with Kazz beside me. West is on his cell phone in an in-depth discussion just a couple of yards away from us.

He hasn't once brought up anything about me being back with them. Nor has he acknowledged me at all other than a side glance while he chats on his phone. It's like he doesn't care much and is just going along with this for the other two.

Fine, I get it. Maybe he isn't that into me, but after Kazz's confession and Killian's obvious infatuation, I think I'm well covered in the love department. As long as Mr. Moody Cow keeps his diabolical opinions to himself, we'll live harmoniously.

But I can't ignore that slight pang of disappointment that hits the back of my head. Even if I did have that tiny bit of hope that something could develop between West and me.

Suddenly a black Lexus SUV with dark tinted windows appears outside the terminal, and Joe emerges from the driver's section, handing West the keys.

"Everything is in order, Sir. Your possessions are in the trunk," he says, and I am sure he's referring to their weapons because we're all still carrying our backpacks.

I wonder how Joe managed to swing that through customs. Now that I think about it, I don't even remember seeing any of their three men at the border check.

Another black Lexus, identical to the first one, drives up right behind this one, and I watch Liam and Sam get out, take our backpacks from us, and load up the vehicle. Killian kisses my head before letting me go and walks over to greet them with their typical bro shakes I've seen them do before.

How did their men get here so fast and with the two SUVs?

“Don’t think too much about it. There are things that you’ll see and just have to accept as they are,” Kazz says before leaving me to greet the men.

I’m beginning to think this man has superhuman powers and can read my brain because I know I am not transparent.

As I stand by the passenger door, watching them interact with their men as if they are old friends reuniting, I feel a warm body come up close behind me. The familiar spicy woody scent tells me who it is, and I dare not move in his presence. That familiar shiver snakes down my spine whenever he’s near me, sliding its way against my titillated nerve endings. My heart beats like crazy with him so close behind me, and it’s a mix of anticipation, lust, and fear.

What this man brings out of me is beyond normal by any means.

I stay still, holding my breath, waiting for him to make his move and say what he needs to express out of his dark heart.

“Agreeing to stay with us will be your downfall. Because when I’m done with you, you’re going to wish you selected the alternative. You don’t just belong to them, but you’re mine now.”

His voice is low and deep, but his hot breath on my neck weakens my knees.

“There’s nothing sweet I plan to do with you. Be ready, Lone Ranger, when I come to claim you, there’s no going back.”

And then suddenly West is gone, and if I thought my panties were wet before, they are now soaked with what that man has threatened to do with me.

I dare not turn around to look for him.

The worst part is that I have no idea what that will entail, but I'm willing to give in to him. I've never been in a position like this before; it's so utterly foreign, yet so thrilling at the same time.

What the hell have I just gotten myself into?

"Come on, blondie, in you go," my thoughts are interrupted as I see Killian holding the front passenger door open for me.

As we drive through the city, there's minimal small talk between us. West leads us towards more barren land where civilization seems to end, and the wild and unfamiliar appear with a vast open dry landscape of typical western desert slowly appearing ahead of us.

The lonely stretch of highway is a displacement compared to the rugged scenery around us. The cool air of the a/c inside the vehicle seems like a different world to the dramatic one outside, safer almost, if I could ignore the fact that I'm sitting here with three dangerous British gangsters, who I still don't know very well but have resigned my safekeeping to them. The insanity of my current position at this very moment doesn't register that this is very real.

"Where are we going?" I ask and turn to West for an answer, and there's a cunning smirk on his face.

I look behind us; Kazz has his headphones on and his laptop open. Killian's knocked out completely in slumberland with his hand down the front of his pants.

Charming.

I turn back to West since he's completely ignored my question.

"Well?" I insist.

"Have a little patience," he mutters, irritated as if I interrupted his moment of quietude.

"Oh, so we're back to being *asshole and grumble*. And here I thought you softened just a little."

He looks at me wide-eyed and amused.

"Softened? Is that what you got from that back at the airport?" He shakes his head and scoffs. "Never. I'm all hard and thorny. West St John doesn't do soft, darling."

Suddenly he slows down and turns off the highway onto a dirt road that looks rarely used, but more importantly, it doesn't look as if there's any end to it. I grip my seatbelt and hope this SUV doesn't break down because I don't think anyone thought about bringing any water with them on this drive in the middle of a red desert.

We continue driving for another hour, and no one seems to have any questions as if they're expecting this drive. Killian's still passed out, but Kazz doesn't seem phased by anything, and he continues working.

As soon as we drive past a large ridge, an unexpected walled commune appears ahead of us at a distance, and I spot several cameras discreetly shoved into some of the boulders we passed. There are male guards at the front gate, obviously armed.

I hear Kazz on his phone.

“Confirmation XZ7895G2,” he says to whoever he’s speaking to and ends the call.

“We have the all clear,” he tells West, and as soon as we approach closer, I realize this place is some massive high-security area. Definitely not government-owned, but I spot more guards on the outer perimeter.

We sit just outside the gates while the two guards examine the outside of our vehicle.

“What are they looking for?” I ask.

“Trackers,” Killian says, and I hear him stretching behind me.

I look up at the rusted, dirty sign, *Dry Valley Haven*. What the hell kind of place is this?

As the gates open, I’m taking in the view ahead and around us, surprised that it’s nothing but a large ranch. Maybe there’s an underground facility, and this is all just a front.

“Why does a farm ranch need such high-end security detail? And why in the middle of fucking nowhere?”

“You’re gonna see something you probably never expected us to take you to,” Kazz says, and I see he’s already put his equipment away.

“Should I be scared?” I ask randomly, not directing my question to anyone in particular.

I hear Killian chuckle with amusement behind me, and West says I should, while Kazz says to be prepared to be amazed.

The car pulls to a stop, and I’m not sure if I should get out. I observe the view before me, and there are animal barns to my left, a large ranch house to my right with smaller cabins behind, and a paddock with horses. But it’s the women and children working the ranch that surprises me the most.

Is this one of those cult places?

What the hell are these Brit boys up to? They don’t seem the cult type at all.

West and Kazz are already out of the vehicle and approaching an older lady with wild, frizzy grey hair. She greets each one as if she knows them well, but there’s no hug. Suddenly my door opens, hot, dry air replaces the fake cool one, and Killian’s standing there looking all godlike and sexy.

“You plan on getting out?” he asks with this mischievous smirk.

Halfheartedly I unbuckle my seat belt. I’m not big on surprises. Suspicious notions swirl around in my head, none I can lock down in a solid thought.

“I’m confused,” and I turn to slide out the door, except he grabs my hips and sneaks a kiss on my lips as he pulls me out and sets me down.

“Don’t be. Come on, luv, there’s someone you should meet. You’ll like her.”

It’s almost as if he’s so sure of that fact.

Impatient with my slow, apprehensive movements, he grabs my hand and leads me to where the others are standing.

As we approach the older lady, I figure she must be in her mid-sixties. Her full greying hair is left to fall over her shoulders. It’s frizzy now but must have been curly in her hay day. Her piercing blue eyes slice straight at me as I walk up and stay close to Killian, still holding my hand.

“Raven, this is Genesis X. She runs the ranch or shall I say, the entire organization,” he says.

What the hell kind of name is that and what is this organization?

But before I even get a chance to ask anything, Killian drops my hand as soon as the woman steps closer to me, and a wrinkled, tanned arm reaches out to my face and then gently pushes several strands of hair behind my ear.

I generally don’t like people I don’t know touching me as if they do. Then again, other than my mother, no one has ever touched me in such a maternal manner before.

This is strange. This whole experience is bizarre and surreal.

“I never thought I’d ever see this day come,” the woman huffs as her gaze makes me uncomfortable. “You are an exact copy of her as if god just copied and pasted her exact twin and placed you on this earth.”

“I don’t have a twin,” I say, confused, staring at her bright blue eyes with wonder.

Is this old lady smoking something? I wouldn’t be surprised, considering we’re in the middle of a red rock desert with no civilization for hundreds of miles.

“I know, darling,” the back of her hand caresses my cheek, and I feel weird. I wish she would stop all the touchy-feely stuff. “The same eyes, the same straight nose, you even have her beautiful full lips.”

I look to the men for assistance here. This isn’t comfortable at all. I’d swat her away if it weren’t for the fact that they seemed so relaxed around her.

“Do you know each other?” Kazz asks, and all three men are observing us with interest.

“I’ve never seen this woman before,” I say without some trepidation, stepping back awkwardly.

“I knew her mother,” the woman says, and I’m feeling a little uneasy. Because if she knew my mother, then she knows my past or at least where I come from, and that is a part of me that I buried along with all the ghosts of my past, never to reappear in my life again.

“I hardly doubt that.” I cast away whatever fear passed over me and conclude that this old lady, Genesis X, must be smoking crack. Geez, with that name, she’s got to be. There is no freaking way she knows anything about me or my family.

“Was she one of your girls?” I hear one of the guys ask.

“This is bullshit,” I exclaim, my glare directed at West. “If this is some sick game, then just call it off. It’s not even remotely funny.”

I look around my surroundings. “What kind of cult is this place?”

The old lady responds by cracking up laughing, and I cast her a suspicious stare.

None of this is funny.

“Baby,” Killian wraps his arm around the back of my waist. “No one expected Genesis to know you. This place is a rehabilitation center for trafficked women and children who were stolen or sexually exploited. We deliver them here, and they receive the proper therapy until they are strong enough to return to society.”

I look at Kazz and West in disbelief.

“It’s true, Rev..., Raven,” the woman says, and I don’t miss that purposely made slip. “We work with the Brotherhood and rescue women and children who had been sold into human slavery.”

The Brotherhood? What the fuck is this?

I can't help but wonder if she almost called me out on purpose. I have no idea who she is, but I don't trust this woman. Her intentions are questionable.

"What's The Brotherhood?" I ask rather than dwell on who this woman is because I won't give her the attention she's obviously craving.

Genesis looks at the four of us and scowls.

"Seems there are still many secrets between the four of you."

"You still never answered my question, Genesis," West insists.

She waves her finger at him. "When Raven is ready to tell you about her mother, she'll tell you herself."

I stare at her, wondering how much bullshit she's talking about. So far, she hasn't actually revealed anything, just clever enough to pick up on signals and spin a story. I bet she used to have one of those fortune-telling booths at fairs in her younger years. The ones who run clairvoyant scams designed to trick people into giving away their money, usually offering 'help' in exchange for a fee.

"Right now, we have business to discuss," she announces fast without waiting for West to develop further agro. She senses his aura well because he doesn't like being given the runaround.

"Shall we have lunch first and convene in my office?"

I'd rather leave this place, but I'm guessing we're here because of some business deal the guys have with this woman.

As we head up the porch steps to the main building, I notice a nine-year-old girl with some threads, trying to weave a friendship bracelet but getting the knotting wrong. Having spent hours upon hours making these as a child, I break from the group and venture over to her, kneeling down to her level where she sits on the worn wooden floorboards.

“I used to make these when I was a little girl. Can I try?” I ask, and she just nods, pointing to the box of various colored yarns and threads she’s working from.

I pick out the same three colors she’s using.

“Usually, I start off with three colors, two in the center and one for the sides,” I explain, and she stops what she’s doing to observe me.

For the center two colors, I cut one string, and for the outer color, I cut two strings and then tie an end.

“So, for the first weave,” I continue and realize she has taken a keen interest, so I explain in detail what I’m doing.

“I take the purple string and make a forward and backward over the blue and brown yarns. Then I pull gently to the side, keeping the knot square.”

I see she’s watching what I’m doing intently, her eyes entirely focused on my hands with so much interest it makes my heart swell.

“Now I repeat with the blue string but in the opposite direction. Would you like to try it?”

She nods, and I hand it over and explain how she should hold them and talk out the directions until she's smiling and confidently weaving it herself.

“According to tradition, you tie a bracelet onto the wrist of a friend who may wish for something at that moment. The bracelet should be worn until it is totally worn out and falls off by itself, at which moment the wish is supposed to come true.”

“Pretty neat, isn't it?” I ask. Even though she hasn't uttered a word, she nods and smiles as she dives back into her silent world.

I get up from the floor and find all four adults staring at me. There's an odd proud smile on Genesis's face, and she heads inside without words. West, Killian, and Kazz just stare, maybe with a bit of surprise or something I quite can't figure out.

“What?” I ask, confused.

West shakes his head and follows the old lady inside.

“Never pictured you a kids' person,” Kazz says with a crooked smile.

“I like kids,” I say defensively.

Killian slides his hand behind my waist, “There's a lot of sweetness in you that goes beyond just the taste of your pussy,” he says and smacks a kiss on my cheek.

“Omigod, Killian! Learn to filter between your head and your mouth!” I say in horror, pulling myself away from him, and he tugs me straight back closer to him.

Kazz chuckles, and I quickly detach myself from *Killian, the perv*, and follow the others inside.

“Well done on the rescue with the thirty girls in England,” Genesis praises the men as we are led through the ground floor of the ranch house. “That kind of intel is hard to obtain. I won’t ask how you got it, but I imagine some unorthodox methodology was used.”

“We do what is necessary to extract the data to rescue victims. There are no morals for such missions.” West replies as emotionless as a dead fish.

Thirty girls.

Thirty porcelain items.

It hits me as I recall Sam’s discussion with Kazz outside the Norwood Saints’ warehouse. They were referring to girls who were rescued. How did I not see that?

We’re led through to a large covered outdoor type rustic dining area. There are two very long wooden tables with matching benches and chairs. The entire room is basic but has a rustic Western feel that goes well with the outdoor environment.

One table is already dressed with plates, cutlery, and bowls of different foods, a leafy salad, potato salad, grilled vegetables, eggs, cheeses, and what looks like homemade bread.

“Raven, everything you see here is produced on this land. We’re very self-sufficient. One needs to be when you live

remotely like us.”

“How many women and children who were rescued stay here?” I ask as we all take a seat.

“We have nine children and thirty-five women, but many are volunteers. Rescues who have decided to stay on and help the mission. Most, however, will leave to start a new life after completing the rehabilitation program.”

“What happens to the children after they’re rehabilitated?”

“The children are fostered into homes that are vetted by social services. We’ll often work side by side with them to ensure the children are starting their new lives in a safe environment.”

“And their original families?”

She picks up a chunk of bread and rips it in half, dipping it into a bowl of chili beans in front of her.

“Unfortunately, it’s not as straightforward as one might think, Raven. Many children were stolen from such young ages that they won’t remember where they’re from or who they are. Some of the countries they were taken from don’t always have reports on their disappearance, mainly because the parents never officially reported them or they were sold to the traffickers. We do our best to locate their families, but not always successful.”

“Sold?” I have read about it, but it never really rang true until now.

“Yes, in some cultures, a girl is a massive burden. She can only be married with a dowry, and in some families, such isn’t affordable, or in poverty-stricken families, they cannot afford to keep the child or children.”

“That’s horrible.”

She looks up at me, and I catch the brief weariness that passes through her. It’s only for a split second, but she hides it well. Perhaps working in the business has aged her faster. I observe the deep ridges and furrows on her hands and face it’s obvious that she’s seen a lot of trauma pass through her life, whether it’s hers or these women and children.

“It is, but we have a decent system in the US that can provide these children a new life and perhaps a safer one. Sometimes returning the children back to where they were originally trafficked might cause a repeat of the offense. So they are safer here in America where our organization can keep track of them.”

“Raven spent time in foster care,” Killian blurts out, and I blink, not expecting him to say that.

“And the women,” I say, purposely ignoring him. “What happens when they complete the program?”

“Those who can speak English or learn it efficiently enough while they stay here are given a completely new identity, accommodation, a job, and a choice to obtain an education should they want it. We remain in touch with all our women and check on their progress from time to time.”

“Genesis has been doing this for a long time, Raven. Maybe you might be interested to see if you can find any records of your mother if it exists here,” Kazz suddenly suggests, and I feel my blood boil.

Why can't they just let this go?

“My mother was never a victim of sex trafficking,” I retort. “She had a family, brothers, a father.”

“Raven is right. Her mother never passed through these doors,” Genesis confirms. “But it wasn't as if she didn't run with the wrong crowds and get herself into trouble.”

“My mother was a decent human being and was happily married to my father.”

“Your father is the reason she's dead. He was bad news. They all were.”

I throw my cutlery onto my plate together with my napkin and stand up. I'm done here. Genesis can take her lunch and shove it up her backside.

“How dare you talk of my mother as if you know her. I don't know what games you're playing, but my father was a wonderful person, and they both loved each other.”

“Yes, so severely that it cost her life,” Genesis says calmly, and I don't like how controlled she is while I'm seething with fury.

“Fuck you,” I scoff angrily. “You know nothing about my family. I don't even know who you are. If you were anything of importance, she would have mentioned you. She died when

I was 13, and up to that point, she never once mentioned your name. You act like you know her, so where were you for the last 13 years of her life? Whatever game you're playing here is cruel and evil. Is this the same kind of warm, friendly welcome you give to all young women who come through your gates, or just me you decided to target?"

I look at the guys, angry at them too for bringing me here. Kazz tries to get me to sit back down, but I'm too wired. Instead, I hop over the bench and head down the deck towards wherever I can disappear from their direct sight.

How dare she talk about my parents as if she knows them.

I climb the fence of the horses' paddocks and sit on the top edge, watching them being lazy and finding cover from the sun under an open-sided pasture shelter.

Probably a little over an hour passes when Kazz comes to fetch me.

"Sorry for the outburst earlier," I explain. "But that woman clearly doesn't know me or my mother."

"Genesis is pretty much what you might call an outspoken, harsh critic. We've been working with her for a few years now," Kazz leans his body casually against the fence next to where I'm sitting. "She's a decent person and probably has a ton of her own skeletons in the closet that have toughened her core."

I remain silent because we all have skeletons hidden away. Just some of us choose not to become assholes because of it.

“Have you entertained the thought that she knew your mother before you came into the picture?”

I shake my head, blowing off his suggestion.

“She hasn’t shown me anything that proves she knows me other than say some crap about how much I look like her and that she’s dead.”

Kazz rests his arms over the fence and takes a more relaxed pose as a sigh escapes him.

“Angel, if I’m going to be honest. You kind of spun your own web of stories to us.”

I press my lips together because there’s no denying that I’m out of my depth here. I’m accusing Genesis of making up stuff about my mother when I’ve been doing the same to them about myself. But I can never tell them the truth, and seeing my face frown so fast, Kazz seems to understand it.

“I don’t want to stay here much longer with her.”

“Actually, we’re on our way out. Just came to get you. It will be a few hours’ drive to where we’ll stay tonight.”

I swing myself off the fence and jump down. “Do you mind if I take the back seat? Sitting up front with West is a little intense.”

He chuckles. “Sure, I’ll switch with you. Although Killian’s supercharged knowing you’re staying with us now. Just giving you a heads up.”

“I saw him earlier with his hand in his pants while he was zonked out on the drive here.”

A whole-hearted laugh escapes Kazz. “Yeah, that’s Killian for you.”

I’m glad Genesis decided to keep her distance on our departure. I see her standing on the porch, and I have no intention of greeting her goodbye. I will give her credit for her work, but she was outspoken and rude about my family. Instead, I head straight to the car.

Killian holds the passenger door for me, but I’m suddenly accosted by the little girl I had sat on the porch with earlier. She pulls on my leg to get my attention and shows me the finished woven bracelets. She had made two matching designs and colors, and one bracelet hung on her wrist.

Without words, she grabs my hand, indicating she wants to put it on me. I crouch down to her level and give her permission.

“Should I make a wish?” I ask, and she nods her head.

I watch the pale, dark blonde, long-haired girl focus on the bracelet and my wrist. Her face is so expressive and pretty. I can’t even imagine what her life could have been had the boys not rescued her or had this place to find her safe haven. For that, I’ll respect Genesis and her organization.

“Thank you,” I say and smile at the girl. She gives me a brief smile and runs back up to the porch.

I look up at Genesis, and she nods, acknowledging my brief, warm connection with the girl. I don't react and get inside the vehicle.

This was a strange meeting for me, but it gave me insight into the work these men do other than trade in arms. They were born into a crime syndicate that deals in human trafficking, and on the other end of the spectrum, they have a secret establishment that destroys the business of the very same crime gang they are members of.

Today they've unofficially shown me their true nature, who they are, let me into their secret world and trust me with such info. These men aren't just dangerous criminals but ones with a conscience. I know they want to crush their fathers, but I also have to question their motives behind choosing this particular sector of their fathers' businesses to destroy.

Then I think about what Killian told me about his mother, and I have to half-wonder whether he believes she was trafficked by his father, and this has become a secondary mission for him to comb the trafficking world searching for her.

Recalling what Archer said about his mother's tragic death but didn't go into details, I have to question whether both mothers' heartbreaking stories are somehow inter-connected, considering they were associated with two heartlessly ruthless men. Having witnessed how they regard women, I have to question what kind of harsh, ill-fated treatment these women suffered under their brutal hands and callous mentalities.

And suddenly, I'm seeing these three men, plus the one that's missing, in a completely different light. We are the victims here, the products of a tragic life, fate brought upon our young lives.

But the longer I'm with these men, the better I am able to understand myself and how I got here in life. I'm still on a learning curve. Maybe we were born into misfortune, but I'm beginning to realize that we have the power to change our destinies regardless of what fate wants. No one controls our lives but ourselves. I still need to find that strength within myself, but I believe eventually, I'll get there.

Chapter 27



“WHAT DID YOU WISH for?” Killian asks when we’re all inside the vehicle and driving through the security gates.

“Never you mind,” I say, poking his ribs. “You’re not supposed to tell your wishes, or they won’t come true.”

Killian reaches over and slings his arm around my neck, yanking me closer to him. His deep-set blue-grey eyes possessively hover over mine, and I watch them flare with need.

He lifts my chin with his finger and leans towards my lips.

Finally.

I’ve been dying to glue my lips against his all day.

Sinking into the kiss, he pulls me to straddle his lap, holding my face and tenderly stroking his thumb over my jaw. When he pulls away after a beat, he kisses the tip of my nose and smiles.

“This is far too overdue,” he says before lifting my T-shirt to remove it from my body. I oblige and remain in just my bra.

He thumbs my already hardened nipples for a moment, admiring the black lace fabric, and without warning, pulls the cups down, dipping his head straight to my breasts as he attacks them with a ferocious appetite, groaning as soon as his lips hit my nipple. While his fingers roll my other nipple, my hands entwine in his luscious thick hair, and my pelvis shamelessly grinds against his, completely forgetting that two other men are sitting in the front seats.

Self-preservation goes out the window when I'm horny for all three men. I feel the back of my bra clasp unfastened and removed from my arms.

"You want my dick, baby?" he asks, and I nod with need. I look at the gorgeous man in front of me, his hunger is just as desperate as mine. He unfastens my denim jeans and pushes his hand down the front, pushing my panties to the side as he forces his fingers through my folds.

I cry out as soon as he finds that one spot throbbing for his touch.

"Bloody 'ell blondie, you're wet and desperate for my cock aren't you?"

If he only knew what a nymph I currently feel like, having fantasized about fucking all three men while I waited for them to finish their meeting with Genesis earlier.

I roll my hips onto his fingers and excitedly bite my lower lip. He helps me out of my remaining clothes and unzips his jeans, taking out his solid cock, and I lick my lips, watching him stroke it.

"Turn around, Raven, show the others your beauty. You're theirs as much as you're mine now. Show them what they've signed up for with you."

I hesitate, realizing within this moment of desperate need to fuck Killian, I'm naked in a car with West and Kazz. I've never even gone so far as to share a kiss with Kazz, even though earlier today, he made his feelings crystal clear to me.

Killian leans into the crook of my neck and buries his face as he nips and bites my skin, marking me. He then grabs my hips and turns me around, moving his fingers fast, dipping deep inside my pussy while his other cups my breast.

Kazz has already unbuckled himself and is turned fully around to watch me. There's a possessive glare in his eyes.

He's seen me almost nude before, but this time he watches me like a sexual predator.

“Come back here, mate. Taste how sweet I told you she was.”

He hooks his leg over the middle and dives into the back seat. I hadn't noticed it before, but Kazz's pants are already unfastened, and his smooth, velvety dick stands to attention.

This isn't how I pictured my first time with Kazz, but he seems unfazed and leans down into my lap as soon as Killian removes his hand from my pussy, and Kazz replaces it with his mouth.

He moans as soon as I feel his tongue swipe over my slit.

“What did I tell you? Full of sweetness,” Killian firmly announces. “A woman with a lethal mouth but a pussy that tastes like god's divinity.” His voice is deep and stern, but his eyes sparkle with excitement when I pull my head back and look at his face.

Killian's aroused, sharing me, watching Kazz go down on me, and I can feel his hard dick against my back twitch with need.

I look into the rearview mirror and catch West staring. Our eyes lock as his brother continues to suck on the most private part of my body while his cousin attacks the side of my face and pumps his dick against my backside.

West might be driving and not participating in this orgy, but I know he's watching, and it's turning me on even more. It makes me spread my legs even more to give Kazz better access.

Killian cups my breasts and gently bites at the back of my neck, causing me to moan. His thighs hold my legs open for Kazz as he continues to go down on me, and waves of pleasure start to pulse through me. He pushes three slick fingers aggressively into my sex, and I wince.

I tip my head back with delight, taking everything Kazz is giving me. Killian bites my shoulder, and then at the last minute, I turn my head upwards, and my gaze catches West's in the mirror right as my orgasm comes in the form of a tidal wave, shuddering deep within me.

Kazz lifts his head up, his face covered in my juices, and swipes his tongue over his lips as if he's just had the most delicious meal. I groan, watching him.

I feel Killian shuffling beneath me.

"Lift up a minute, blondie," I pull my pelvis upwards as he pulls his jeans and shorts down to his thighs, and I turn to face him.

Without hesitation, I mount him once more. This time facing him and taking his massive cock inside me. My walls stretch for him, and I feel the pinch to accommodate him, but it's nothing compared to the throbbing need of his cock in my pussy. I lean in and take his lips. He moans into my mouth as I begin to ride him.

“Fuck baby, you feel so fucking good,” he breathes and presses a kiss to the nape of my neck, then starts to fuck me with heavy solid thrusts. He grabs hold of my hips, lifts me up, and slams me back down on him a few more times until I feel his fingers dig deep into my buttocks and finally lets go. His release is a full-body shudder, and I feel the warmth spread through my belly as he spills into me, filling me deep. I close my eyes. It feels incredible.

Killian holds onto me, wrapping his arms around me, hiding his face into the crook of my neck, licking off the light sweat that coats my skin.

“You're perfection,” he says before gently lifting me off him into Kazz's arms while he grabs a box of tissue from the armrest. He takes a couple of sheets and wipes down the cum that seeped out of my pussy. After cleaning himself off, he pulls his clothes back up his body.

Kazz cuddles me into his body and kisses my forehead. “Hey, angel,” he says, slowly stroking my arm.

A different ballgame has opened between him and me after today, and I know he doesn't want to take anything further with me in the car, so I won't pursue or insist on it.

I smile at him. I don't feel odd with him, but this is a first for me. Being in this strange entanglement with these men. Here I am, completely nude, albeit in a darkened window SUV on an American highway, with three British men who are completely dressed, having sex with one while the other two witness it. My world couldn't get more odd or pornographic.

Or could it?

“Close your eyes, Raven, and get some rest. It'll be another couple of hours.”

Feeling completely sated, I close my eyes as I lay in Kazz's embrace, and a long-deserved sleep takes over, not caring about the fact that I've remained entirely unclothed.



“Get her dressed. We're nearing the tolls,” I hear West say as I slowly wake from my slumber.

“Angel?” I hear Kazz whisper in my ear.

I open my eyes to find I'm still in his arms while my feet somehow found their way over Killian's lap, and an oversized black sweat hoodie is draped over my naked body.

“How long was I out?” I ask, straightening myself out, taking the garment, and putting it on.

“Almost two hours,” Kazz says, handing Killian my panties, pushing them through my feet, and bringing them up to my

knees, where I take over and pull them up.

I get handed my bra and manipulate it under the hoodie as both Killian and Kazz watch me with fascination as I twist and pull until it's on.

"Women have Houdini skills when putting on a bra," Killian laughs.

I smile as I roll my socks on before pulling up my jeans and taking my t-shirt, stuffing it into the hoodie's front pouch.

This time it's Killian who pulls me into his embrace, and I lean into his chest as his arms wrap around my body. Kazz takes my feet, pulls my socks off, and presses into my soles, giving me one of the most amazing foot massages.

"Oh! Omigod! Ahhh!" I moan, arching my back upwards, and I can feel Killian's body shake with laughter.

"What the fuck are you doing to her now?" West calls out, and I see him shift the rearview mirror.

"Giving her a foot fuck, apparently," Kazz huffs a light laugh. "Do you know you moan the same as when you fuck?"

"Yeah, babe, you're making me hard, even if you're wearing West's hoodie, and I smell him all over you.

"You're one sick pervert, mate," West says.

"Don't sit there all high and mighty, cuz, and tell me you aren't turned on by her moaning."

"Self-control. Something you two obviously lack," West boasts.

“I’m calling your BS,” I say, and Kazz hits a pressure point, causing me to moan again. “I saw how you adjusted that mirror like the horny bastard you are.”

I hear West curse and mumble something under his breath but can’t make it out.

“How North are we going?” I ask, noticing how the desert scenery has changed to a more wooded forest.

“Just a few more kilometers past the tolls. It’s a tiny, unknown town. The house is one of ours.”

“Yours as in yours or Norwood Saints?”

“The latter,” West explains. “We have clients and partner syndicates around these parts. There are a couple locations across the US where the gang owns properties. Not that Prophet ever comes to the country, but his men do if a business transaction is needed. The places aren’t anything special. The one we’ll use for the night is one of the better ones, but don’t expect anything posh.”

“Gotcha,” I say, still unsure where we are. But sometimes it’s better that way.

Chapter 28



WEST WAS SMART TO stop first at a convenience store before arriving at the cabin and stocking up on food for tonight and tomorrow morning. There's nothing like starting a bad day without breakfast and a cuppa. Except we've found the tea here in the US is diabolical, so we drink coffee instead. It's not our first choice of morning beverage, but America's answer to tea is boiling water over a stove or, even worse, a microwave.

You need a kettle.

There is no other way around making a decent cup of tea.

A kettle is something most here don't even know what it is. And I've heard of people here adding milk before they take the tea bag out. That's just pure sacrilege.

Americans can make a cup of coffee insanely well, so I have high hopes they could learn to make a perfectly decent cuppa once given the necessary instruction.

Raven isn't a big tea drinker, so I let her choose the coffee brand while I select the deli meats and cheese. Kazz said he'll take care of the beverages, and West remained in the SUV, taking a call on the phone and organizing our meeting with our partners for tomorrow.

After loading up the trunk with more food than we need, we drive towards our remote location, a small three-bedroom cabin on an off-road just outside state lines. Sam and the other two have already dropped off most of our bags and equipment and drove to one of the other smaller locations we have a short drive away.

“Wow, there’s got to be at least half an inch of dust in here,” Raven says as we walk in, and she stops to take in the place.

“I said this is one of the better homes we have, never said it’s one of the palaces we own,” West says, taking two of the black duffle bags the guys dropped off earlier and stuffing them into the storage cupboard.

Usually, a cleaning crew comes in after someone vacates the property and prepares the house for the next guest, but that could be for months, so the place remains locked up, gathering dust, as Raven rightly commented.

“Can I open a couple of windows?” she asks, and I get the impression she’s a bit of a clean freak. I saw how she’s very particular about her belongings back at the hotel, and I wonder if she was forced to become like that, living in the different homes she said she had as a teenager.

Several boys I know from the junior chapter come from *boys’ homes* or multiple child foster homes. I imagine the keepers of such establishments keep a tight ship, influencing the children to carry on such habits after they become adults.

“Knock yourself out,” I say, but she’s already getting a cleaning cloth and wiping down the kitchen surfaces.

I’m not complaining; it would have been one of us doing that. Instead, I busy myself putting the shopping away, and West is setting up the connection for the TV while Kazz is checking in with London via his laptop.

“Are sandwiches okay for dinner, blondie?” I ask, tipping the cap off a beer bottle with a knife, passing it to her, and then reaching into the fridge to grab one for myself.

“I’m fine with that. I’m not very hungry, actually,” she says, and I don’t miss the sullen tone in her voice.

I watch as she picks up her backpack from the floor where I left it next to mine and slings it over her shoulder. “I think I might take a shower.”

“Take the second bedroom on the right. It has an attached bathroom; we can share that room.” I say, observing her as she takes her beer and bag and disappears down the hallway without noting what I just suggested.

“What’s up with Raven?” Kazz asks, looking up from his screen, also noticing her sudden mood change.

“Don’t know,” I hand him a can of soda. “She seemed fine after we left Dry Valley Haven.”

“Let me prep dinner,” he offers. “Go see how she’s doing since the two of you have a more intimate relationship. Maybe she’ll open up more to you.”

I scoff at him in disagreement. “I don’t think she sees us that way. You saw how lustful she was for both of us.”

“I know, mate. I hope we get a repeat of that soon; my balls are flippin’ swelling for that cute arse of hers.”

I chuckle and take a swig of my beer before leaving it on the counter.

The shower is still running, and as I step inside the room, I notice that Raven has found her way to the airing cupboard and has already laid clean sheets on the king bed. I walk over to the bathroom to find she left a sliver of the door open and stroll in to see her behind the steamy shower glass, but she's standing with her hands on the tiled wall, hunched over.

I give her a minute to recover, and she doesn't notice me leaning against the sink with my arms across my chest until she shuts the water and opens the glass door.

"How long have you been standing there?" She asks, grabbing the towel I hand her and wrapping it around her body. I give her the second towel to cover her hair in it.

"Long enough to know something is bugging you."

She doesn't answer. Instead, she goes to her shower bag and the plastic grocery bag containing some things she picked up at the shop earlier.

"Considering we're in a relationship now, you can talk to me."

She looks up at me with those big blue eyes, but it's difficult to decipher what she's thinking about my recent declaration.

"Is that what this is?"

"I'd like to think so. After all, we gave you the option to walk away, and you didn't. You also said you didn't want other women. We agreed to that. So that makes me, or rather the three of us, your boyfriends."

“I never had more than one boyfriend before. I don’t know how to do this.”

I cock my head and meet her gaze.

“I think today in the car, you mastered it quite fine.”

At least that renders a smile from her, as brief as it is.

“Killian, before the attack with the pirates. I had never killed a man before,” she sighs heavily at this admittance.

“At the time, it never occurred to me; it was just an action. I knew I had to make a quick call; take the man down or risk him killing West. There was no time to reflect on it. I just shot him. And then, when I saw more sneak on board from the rear, I had to stop them from getting up the stairs to Kazz. So I just kept shooting. But when I was taken back to the cabin, I was sick to my stomach, riddled with guilt for taking another life. I hid my feelings from you because I didn’t want you to think I was weak or a helpless damsel in distress.”

She looks up at me, and tears threaten to explode all over her face. This is the first time Raven has offered me a deeper look inside her soul.

“I know I had to do what I did. I had no choice, but the guilt is eating me. I don’t know how to deal with it.”

My initial reaction is to hug her, and so I do. I wrap my arms around her and bring her close to my chest.

“First kill is always the hardest, Raven.” This actually surprises me, considering her shots were so professional and precise. We were all under the impression she’d done it before.

This also means there's nothing dodgy about her like West suspects. It's clear from her current demeanor she's guilt-ridden. We've all been there with our first kill. There are lots of people who can cry on cue, but right this moment, Raven is genuine. I've done a lot of interrogations in my time, and I know when a person is under stress, the human body can betray a person with how they feel even when they believe they are in control.

“But your shots were spot on, professional even. Where did you learn to shoot?” I ask curiously.

“Growing up in the country, it's part of life. Everyone learns how to use a gun. From eight years old, my dad started to regularly take me out in the woods for target practice. It was kind of our thing.”

I was right about Americans and their guns. Even kids here own BB guns and air rifles, and it's considered the norm. Perhaps Brits would be the same if our laws were different. But when one grows up in the kind of lifestyle I have, guns are given to us at the age of fourteen, and expected to have become immune to killing by sixteen.

“Raven. It's obvious the story you first told Kazz about your parents being junkies isn't exactly true, is it?”

She shakes her head and uses her hand to wipe her face from the tears that managed to escape her eyes.

“My parents and brother were murdered. I saw my mother and brother killed in front of me. The killers shot me too and left me for dead, and I've lived in fear of telling my story to

anyone in case these men catch up with me. I'm not yet ready to tell you guys everything. I promise you, it won't compromise who you are, but for eight years, I lived in fear they might find me to finish the job. I can't tell you more, so please don't ask me. I'm too scared."

I keep my arms around her body and look down at her as I use my thumb to wipe away the last tear that falls down her cheek.

"Raven, darling, you'll always be safe with us. One day we'll expect you to tell us, but even if you can't right now, you need to know we'll never allow anyone to harm you."

She nods her head, and I grab her chin and squeeze it. "I mean it, luv. Anyone ever lays a hand on you, and they're dead."

I pull the turban off her head and comb my hand through her damp hair.

Raven's come crashing into my life at the speed of a bullet, and up until now, I hadn't realized how much I needed her. Maybe I've fallen under her spell, but I don't give a toss because I find myself not having any desire to break free of it.

I lean down and take her lips, feeling her shiver in my arms. I kiss her more and feel her finally relax as her mouth parts and my tongue battles against hers. My kiss holds no pity, no mistrust, or hatred; it's pure and real. Right here, at this moment, kissing this woman, I realize she is all I'd never known I needed, and I intend to remain hers until death comes for me.

I gently pull away and watch her slowly lick her swollen lips, savoring my taste on her. I hide the smirk itching its way on my face. She feels the same for me as I do for her, and that's enough for me because I don't need to hear her words. I know how she feels.

“Why don't you get ready and come out and join us for dinner, even if you're not hungry.”

The edges of her mouth lift with a faint smile, and she tells me to give her ten minutes.

I leave her and head to the main room where the other two are to tell them what I just learned. It's also time we reveal some things to Raven about us. She's going to be around us a lot, and she's already suspected we're working against Prophet and Butcher to weaken and eventually destroy them. She needs to understand how dangerous they are and how powerful we've become.



“That roast beef with honey mustard was pretty good, but you hardly ate anything,” I say as I hop onto the sofa from the back and sit beside Raven.

“Honestly, you men eat a lot of meat; there's only so much I can take in a sandwich,” she says, passing me her beer bottle. I take a swig and put it on the table in front of us.

Kazz sits on the other side of Raven, and West joins us on the armchair. The three of us agreed to give Raven a brief summary of our background. We tell her the story about our mothers, and that's how it more or less launched us into forming our own secret organization to find the truth. We mentioned what we do for Norwood Saints but hadn't gone into great detail about the Brotherhood yet.

West thinks it's too early to bring her into the main web, but Kazz and I believe she deserves to know, considering the giant leap she's taken to remain with us. She'd be giving up her life, career, everyone, and everything else she once knew.

She takes Kazz's tattooed hand and rubs her thumb over the same design we all have on the same hand.

"I always knew with the four of you having this symbol, it was part of some gang, but Archer and Killian also have the same cross and skull designed into their larger pieces, so I'm a little confused.

"We all had the Norwood Saints cross and skull inked, which is customary for every member when we they leave the junior chapter. It's a kind of right of passage that full-fledged gang members are proud of. But for us, it's just a front. Over the years, we've had other designs inked in. Mainly because that's a part of us we no longer are connected with but need to keep for now."

"So the one on your hands is..."

"The Brotherhood of Saints," Kazz finishes off Raven's sentence.

“Yup,” I confirm, popping the *p*. “The viper and dagger represent betrayal and loss because of what we discovered about our mothers and their ownership rights, but it’s also a symbol of protection and sacrifice.”

“Invictus,” West interjects. “Snakes shed their skin. We shed ours the day me, Archer, and Killian formed our bond outside the Norwood Saints. And when Kazz was old enough to join us, the four of us became unconquerable. We built an empire behind our bastard fathers’ backs, and they have no idea who the Brotherhood is nor how many of us are there.”

“How many of you are there?”

“The four of us are the inner circle, the heart, so to speak,” Kazz explains. “Then there are another four on the outer circle. You know three of them, Sam, Liam, and Joe. The fourth is Neal; he works heavily with the missionaries of the skin trade, so he’s gone a lot. And then there are one hundred eighty soldiers dedicated to our cause and have sworn loyalty to us. Some soldiers work around us on a constant basis, and then there are the reservists, meaning they carry out their Norwood Saint duties, but the day we call upon them will be Armageddon day.”

“When will that be?”

“It’s already started,” I interject. “Working with Genesis X and other agencies to destroy the skin trade. There’s an ongoing silent war happening. Billions of dollars are being exchanged between both sides.”

“Secret societies that consist of politicians, presidents, celebrities, plutocrat businessmen, and bankers are pumping billions in to either save the trade or fight it. There’s a much larger consortium that consists of crime syndicates from all over the world and includes these secret societies. Norwood Saints sits at the head of the Senate of this human trafficking crime league.”

“Holy shit,” Raven looks first at Kazz and then West. “So you’re saying your father is one of the bigwigs behind this shameful crime?”

My woman catches on fast.

“The bastard himself with his second-in-command weasel brother are the two most powerful forces behind this league of criminals.”

“Do you think Archer was kidnapped for this very reason?” Raven asks, wholly drawn into this discussion.

“Could be,” Kazz replies. “But to serve what purpose? If Prophet knew about our missions, he would have struck out at us. He wouldn’t hesitate a second to crush us. We cost the consortium losses in the billions every time we successfully deliver a rescue mission. He wouldn’t let such losses go.”

“And right now, his leadership is being threatened,” I add. “But we need to keep him at the top to destroy the entire league.”

“How so?”

“He doesn’t know it, but he’s our puppet. We’ve got people around him who are providing us with information from the senate’s consortium.”

“Human trafficking is a massive crime industry. You intend to take it down on your own?”

“We intend to take down the senate. They are the ones responsible for orchestrating and directing the crimes. We want to make an example of them and send a clear message to anyone who thinks they can take control of where the old Senate leaves off. Money is being exchanged, but if there’s no one to action the crimes, money becomes irrelevant.”

“But there will always be the next crime syndicate waiting on the sidelines to take over.”

“Our mission is to crush Norwood Saints and send a message across syndicates. Prophet thinks he’s indestructible, and in a way, right now, he is. He’s gained way too much power over the last decade, but he’ll never expect his own flesh and blood to conspire his assassination.”

“He’s vain and narcissistic, thinks he cannot be beaten. That would be his own undoing.”

“So the warehouse we were at in London....”

“It’s one of the main convene venues for the Norwood Saints, but its headquarters is Roxies.”

“Roxies?” Raven looks at us, perplexed.

“Well, indirectly.”

Her sudden discomfort is obvious.

“Roxies is owned by Norwood Saints?”

“Raven, how do you know about Roxies?” West catches on fast, realizing the state of her uneasiness, and moves forward closer toward us. His eyes focus directly on her as if he’s about to pounce on her to attack or protect her. I would say the latter; he’s angry in a protective way.

“You’re referring to the club in east London? I’ve been there. But I would never have imagined it being a gang headquarters. It was more like a posh, high-end club.”

A sudden flash of anxiety and worry hit me, and my eyes nervously flicker to West and Kazz as the same wave of shock slips down their faces.

“Raven, this is an invitation-only club. Who exactly did you go with?”

“Does it matter?” She mutters, unaffected by what she doesn’t know yet.

“Yes, dammit. It matters,” I say but reign in my angry tone. She wouldn’t have known; this isn’t her fault.

“You were targeted,” I explain more calmly, but I’m burning with fury. “There are similar clubs all over the world owned by Norwood Saints. Agents and handlers work for them; they seek out girls who fit a certain profile and bring them to the club. Behind the glass walls are individuals who buy and sell these women; as the night goes on, the women are being

auctioned off for hundreds of thousands, sometimes even millions of dollars.”

“No,” she says with disbelief, but her voice shakes with apprehension. “Are you sure? But that must mean—“

“You were sold to the highest bidder that night,” Kazz interrupts. “Raven, who brought you to the club?”

I will fucking kill them, give them a slow, painful death, by cutting off their feet and hands first and skin them alive, making them watch as I make a Halloween costume out of their hide.

“Louise. My boss at the hotel. But she can’t be an agent. She’s just...I don’t know....” She looks at us with doubt. “Louise, of all people? In the human trade industry? It also seems unreal.”

“Luv, it will amaze you how women are lured to these clubs without their knowledge of what goes on in the back rooms of these clubs,” West explains. “Agents target specific women. Your background, having no family, no one who would look for you is the ideal kind of woman they mark.”

“This Louise person, is she British?” West asks, and Raven nods. “When did she take you to this club?”

“Umm, it was the Saturday before Archer’s disappearance.”

West looks at Kazz, and an understanding passes between them. One I pick up as well.

“I don’t think she’s working alone,” West adds, then turns to Raven. “Who is the head of this management training program

you're on? You were placed in London for a reason, luv."

"Noooo!" she says in utter disbelief. "Hayden Aspinalls is. But there's no way he's involved in human trafficking. For Christ's sake, he was my boyfriend. We dated for two years!"

"And he knew everything about you. He made sure to remove every trace of you from his life."

"Angel," Kazz gently takes her shaking hand in his to calm her nerves. "That's how these individuals operate. They prey on innocent women with backgrounds like yours. Aspinalls hotels are either a front for human trafficking, or your ex is using them as one. Most likely, he is Louise's handler, as he is probably for other locations within the hotel group too. Sending women like you on these management exchange programs, only to never return home. They won't be missed because they have no family to report their disappearance to."

"But after several disappearances, Aspinalls would become an interest to the authorities," Raven says, gazing at him, her mind a clusterfuck of confusion and skepticism.

"Not if the disappearances were never reported. In your case, who would have reported you missing? Louise wouldn't, and she'd make up an excuse to staff why you no longer work there or that your work visa was suddenly revoked."

"Do you think I was auctioned that night?" she asks, and I'm trying to read her frame of mind and where she sits on this new revelation.

“Without a doubt,” West interjects, “and I bet they paid a pretty penny.”

“The agent won’t release you to the buyer until the money is exchanged and they receive their cut of finder’s fee. Hayden’s sudden removal of you from his online profile was planned.”

“Now I’m beginning to think Archer may have suspected something. His disappearance may have something to do with him discovering you had been sold,” Kazz says, and I think we’re onto something with this thought.

“Does your father know who I am?”

That’s an excellent question. The bastard must have recognized her, which was why he was so keen on her. So many women pass through Roxies, so for Prophet or Butcher to remember her, it means her purchase was made by someone close to them, such as a business partner, or at an extremely high rate, possibly in the millions.

“I think he does, but he doesn’t know when we claimed you. We said Archer was involved in this love circle, meaning you belonged to us when you were taken to Roxies. So, now Prophet needs to deal with the consequence that a woman belonging to a Norwood Saints member was sold to a buyer within the Consortium. It breaks a long-standing rule within the gang. Our women are off-limits. This will make things difficult between him and the Senate.”

“And you’re hot commodity. Whoever this buyer is, they will attempt to come for you regardless of our gang’s rules. Prophet needs to barter a deal.”

“Which I doubt he will. He will attempt to kidnap you and deliver you to the buyer via a third-party host not linked to him.”

“So what do I do?” She looks at us, those big blue eyes searching each of our faces, desperate for a solution. She’s scared and worried. When her eyes catch mine, a dark shadow swoops over my soul and the feeling hits me hard.

I’ll protect this woman with my life if I have to.

“Be linked to us by the hip. Literally.”

“It would be safer for her to be back on Ignis,” I say to West.

“Ignis?” She looks at us with interest.

“The island,” Kazz smiles softly at her.

“Hold on,” she begins putting pieces of the puzzle together.

“The tattoo on your hand that says Ignis is the island?”

“It’s home. Our sanctuary.”

“She might be safe on the island, but I’d feel safer if Raven was around us where we can keep an eye on her,” West replies.

“Plus, I could probably lead you to wherever Archer is,” she adds.

“No, you’re not getting involved,” I retort sternly. “It’s too dangerous.”

“She has a point,” West says.

“No fucking way,” Kazz and I say simultaneously.

West growls with irritation, and I can see him coming close to losing his patience.

“And risk losing Archer? Are you fucking mad? She could lead us straight to him!”

Kazz and I say nothing as we sit on either side of Raven, almost protectively, as we face her strongest critic.

“He’s our brother,” West looks to Kazz for support.

“And she’s our woman,” I say immediately.

“Your plaything.” His attempt to correct me warrants a fist in his face, but I hold back my anger because I know I’m already worked up about Raven’s current grave situation.

“Arsehole, you could —“

“Stop!” Raven exclaims, interrupting me. “West has a point, even if I disagree with his theory about what I am to you. If you’re going to keep me stuck to your thighs for an indefinite period, then maybe I can be useful. Protect me while you use me as bait.”

I purse my lips as my eyes hold hers. Taking advantage of Raven like this isn’t something I could ever feel comfortable doing.

“Blondie....”

“No, Killian. This is an opportunity. You need Archer back. And if he cut some deal or did what he did to stop me from being trafficked, I want to help him escape this mess. Maybe Prophet knows who I am, but he doesn’t know who the

Brotherhood is, and he also probably doesn't realize that we know about my current predicament. This can work in our favor; hell, it might even help to crush him. That is your ultimate mission, right?"

"Raven, I'm not comfortable bringing you into this, but then you need to trust us. That means do what we tell you," Kazz says, rubbing his temple. "No running off and being a hero, like you did on the pirate raid."

"But..." Raven says, and Kazz puts his hand up to stop her.

"Putting yourself out there means risking our identity. If Prophet were to find out we're behind the Brotherhood, it doesn't matter that we're blood-related; he would slaughter us. He sold his sister to the demonic Cartel to settle a trade deal. Not that she's doing badly now, which is for another story, but the man is the devil reincarnate. The word mercy doesn't exist in his vocabulary."

Raven is rendered quiet for once, and I think she's running everything Kazz and I explained tonight in her head.

"I know logic is telling me to run away from this," she explains. "But if Archer truly put himself out there to stop me from being kidnapped or given to the buyer, I will never forgive myself for not helping. I was on my own before, but I've got you three to protect me."

"Goes without saying," I say, flickering my eyes up at her even though my mind is split with conflict about Raven's latest circumstances.

“Angel, you have my word on that,” Kazz rumbles as he runs a hand over the back of her neck, encouraging her to lean towards him.

My eyes burn on her arse as I watch her lift off and straddle him, keeping my arousal at bay even though I’m pretty sure this discussion has now switched to a more physical one. I hear West sigh, even though he doesn’t look up to watch Raven and Kazz.

Instead, he quietly gets up and disappears from the room. Seconds later, I hear the front door to the cabin slam shut and heavy steps leave the porch. As attracted as he is to Raven, he’s not ready to join in our little group session, and I think it stems from the fact that there’s still an element of distrust.

It’s going to require a lot of time and effort for Raven to penetrate that side of West, which I know exists, but I don’t think he is prepared to allow another female to that side of his inner world. His mother was the first woman to betray him by hanging herself, and I’m not sure he ever got over learning the truth behind her death.

I switch off from my concern about West. His personal issues won’t be solved tonight. My attention is drawn to this little blonde minx on my cousin’s lap. Somehow she managed to worm her way into our hearts just after a week of knowing her, and all I want to do is fuck her pussy and protect her like she is my greatest asset.

Maybe that’s all we ever needed was the one woman who could be the center of our universe. The woman who’s

powerful enough to complete the picture and close the circle.

Chapter 29



WHEN RAVEN CAME ON her own accord and straddled me, I hesitated to act on what my knob urged me to do. Curious to see how far she will go with the other two men still here, I'm leaving the ball in her court. I won't initiate a group session without Raven being sure it's what she wants.

Earlier in the car, she already gave us an insight that she's willing to let her guard down and give in to her desires. It's apparent Raven is into all of us, but how she tackles it is up to her because none of us will force her to take all of us. I'm willing to go at whatever pace she feels comfortable with because it's important she's on the same page as we are.

The four of us men have shared the same woman in the past and even had group sex with her, but it wasn't a relationship and definitely not at the level of mental capacity we have set about with Raven.

Even though it's early stages, I've never felt so strangely connected to any other woman as to how I feel with her. And we all want her, but that's something that seems to come pretty naturally for us. The twins and Killian grew up in an environment where all they had were each other, so it was natural that they shared women between them. One woman is less of a hassle to manage than several, although I get the impression Raven will keep each of us busy with the kind of sexual attention she craves.

Right now, I feel her pelvis grinding over me, and someone has just added background music, some American hard rock local stuff, not my usual Ladbroke Grove mate raping away.

Ignoring that fact, I focus back on the beauty begging me to fuck her, and for fuck's sake, my knob is always hard for her.

My hand glides across the back of her neck as I push her hair off her shoulder and fist it into a tight ponytail. Tugging her hair, I pull her head back at a slight angle. Her half-lidded eyes focus on mine as she slowly swipes her tongue over her top lip. As soon as I give her hair a little leeway, she leans towards me, and our lips touch.

Electricity explodes through my body, my abdominal muscles tighten, and my knob twitches excitedly. She opens her mouth, and I do the same. She tastes like sweetness and life. I feel that tingle between our lips, her passion and my lust mingling with our breaths.

Oh, there's a part of me she's awakening fast, one I don't think I've ever cared to explore before. Raven is lethal and toxic and has managed to wedge her way under my skin. She is the woman I never wanted, but she succeeded in convincing me otherwise.

Letting go of her hair, I grip the back of her neck and draw her body closer to mine, my hand tangling in her silky blonde curls. I press my lips harder on her and slip my tongue inside. She gasps and pushes closer.

I feel pressure from behind her, another body has joined us, and my hands release from her neck as I sandwich her between us.

Her body quivers against mine, my cock so hard now, I feel I'm about to explode just from the kiss alone. She releases a

breathy moan that goes straight to my cock. I force my tongue deeper into her, dominating her mouth, marking her lips, bruising them, taking what I want because she's already indicated how much she wants this.

We're both unwinding fast, and she's eager and willing to go to lengths to explore what's happening between us.

I release her and look at the blonde beauty before me. Her lips are swollen and red.

"You want both of us, angel?" I realize West is long gone, having removed himself from the room. He's not quite there yet with this menage. This is all happening within a blink of an eye, and he has trust issues.

"I want West too, if he'll have me," she clarifies.

"West will come through, but give him time, baby," Killian whispers in her ear and lifts off her oversized t-shirt, tossing it aside.

I thumb her hardened nipples over the black lace bra. One I had selected for her and had to shamefully jerk myself off when I had purchased them and fantasized about her wearing them.

Killian unfastens her bra from the back, and I pull it off her arms. Her soft, fair-skinned breasts and peachy-colored nipples are released and so heavenly. I lean in and catch one between my lips, tugging at it, but when I graze my teeth over it, she groans loudly, desperate to remove the last of her garment. She gets off me and slips it off herself.

“I want to taste both of you,” she says, standing in the nude. She kneels before me, opens my knees, and settles between them.

I watch as she unfastens my jeans, pulling the zipper down. I oblige her by lifting my ass so she can pull them down, then she cups my jewels and slides her hands inside my black boxer briefs to free my cock.

Killian’s already undressed and stroking his cock as he watches Raven admire the size of mine. It’s so hard and flushed for her lips. She takes it in her hand, feeling the girth, fascinated by its size. She plays with it for a few seconds, kissing the tip and running her tongue across my slit. I close my eyes as she licks me all the way from my balls up to my shaft.

She takes me in her mouth slowly, and I open my eyes to watch her. She doesn’t break eye contact as she inches her lips down my shaft.

I hiss. Fuck, her mouth feels incredible, warm, and unbelievably soft. Suddenly a moan escapes her that almost makes me come alone.

Killian is kneeling behind her, playing with her pussy. He’s got one hand between her thighs, and the other grips her hips, squeezing her buttocks.

I expect her to stop, but she keeps going, putting almost all of me into her mouth. I curse softly against my breath as she slides me along the back of her throat. She gags a little and pulls out but quickly pushes back in, slowly sliding me down

her throat. I watch her head start to bob. Her eyes flutter shut, and she hums softly onto my dick as Killian behind her takes her over the edge toward her orgasm, and I pull my dick out just as she screams out her excitement.

“Oh god, oh my fucking god,” she groans, her hands gripping my thighs as she digs her nails into my skin. Her eyes squeeze shut, and Killian shows no stopping.

I watch with amusement as Raven continues to grip my hips and squeezes as another earth-shattering orgasm rips through her entire body.

“I need to be fucked, goddammit. I need someone’s dick in my mouth at the same time,” she cries out. I look up at Killian, and the edges of his mouth curve into a smile.

“Get on your hands and knees and take my knob and fuck it with your mouth,” he says, and at this point, Raven will take whatever orders we give her without question.

She’s a sub and I’m loving that idea.

Following his command, she turns to face him as he sits on his knees. I get up from the sofa to quickly undress, my own knob still swollen and desperate for release.

I take a moment to observe her on her knees, her face hidden within Killian’s pelvis, his hands fisting her hair away from her face as his eyes almost roll behind his head. The woman gives terrific head, and her technique is fucking awesome. I watch her head bob up and down over his knob with so much rigor she loves this with an almost obsessive horniness.

I shift her hips. She obliges for me and wraps her hands around Killian, gripping his arse tightly as she attempts to take the whole of him down her throat. He's starting to thrust his pelvis, encouraging her to go deeper.

Killian already mentioned to West and me that she's clean, and there's no chance of her getting pregnant. Like the others, I've only ever had sex using condoms, but with Raven becoming a fixture in our group, I don't see the need to start using them now.

I position myself behind her; damn, she has a beautiful plump arse. I caress it before squeezing those juicy cheeks. Taking my cock, I thrust into her core with enough force that causes her to gag over Killian's knob. He looks at me and chuckles with amusement, but soon she must do something to him that causes him to groan deeply, and his glassy eyes fix themselves downwards to watch her again.

I pull out of her and slowly slide back in, claiming possession over her. She's too much. So tight, so hot, so fucking good. I kiss her across her back, then caress the top curve of her arse and softly squeeze it.

Every muscle in my torso contracts as I continue to pump her. Then I slam into her and hit just the right spot, and she moans.

"Oh fuck," Killian says, "Do that again," he tells me.

My hands guide her hips as I fuck her hard and deep. I watch myself pull out of her pussy and slam back in, X marking the special spot inside her.

“Ahhhh,” she groans onto Killian’s dick, and he goes to pull out, except her lips lock onto his dick, and her hands pull his arse tight.

“Babe, I’m gonna come,” he says.

“Mmmhmm,” she hums, and he clenches his eyes tight as the entire muscles on his torso tighten, and his body jerks. He looks down to watch her lick every last of his cum, and I think this is the best porn on the planet.

“Fuck, babe, you are amazing,” he says, pulling out.

I have Raven to myself now as Killian takes a seat back on the sofa to watch us.

I pull out of her and turn her to face me. I need to see Raven’s beautiful face as I fuck her. Lifting her leg over my shoulder, I slam back into her with so much force she gasps. Slowing down my thrust just a notch because I want to enjoy this, I slowly rock into her, leaning down to kiss her passionately every so often until the intensity becomes so overwhelming that we both explode together, staring into each other’s souls.

She remains clinging to me, even after I let her leg down. She wraps her legs around my waist like a monkey, and I realize she’s still thrusting and wanting more. I look up at Killian; he’s watching her with dark eyes, slowly palming his knob.

“Killian still needs to fuck your pussy, babe. Still up for the challenge?” I whisper into her ear, and she takes the hint.

Unlocks herself from me and goes to stand between his legs.

He looks at her, dazed and horny for her. His hand is still on his cock, working it to an erection.

“I need you to fuck me hard,” she breathes out, and in one swift move, he stands up, takes her over his shoulder, and heads into the bedroom with the king-sized bed.

I’m momentarily left alone with my thoughts and brush my hand through my hair.

“Fucking ‘ell,” I say to no one in the room. I go over to the kitchen, open the cupboard, find an unopened bottle of Maker’s Mark, and pour a shot into a glass. I rarely, if ever, drink alcohol.

Raven’s moans are heard from the bedroom, and whatever Killian’s doing to her is driving her insane with excitement. Without any hesitation, I down the glass and slam it onto the counter.

“No rest for the wicked,” I say, heading toward my woman’s cries. Realizing we may have just awakened this woman’s insatiable sexual appetite.

Chapter 30



I'M UTTERLY SPEECHLESS. I don't know when the three of us laid down to sleep, but I have a feeling we completely zonked out together at the same time. I'm sandwiched between Killian and Kazz, and either man has claimed some part of my body. Killian, my boobs, and Kazz has his leg draped over mine. Their heavy breathing tells me they are utterly out of it, stupefied by the long horny sex session the three of us had this evening.

Geez, my pussy is so exhausted; she's been stretched, licked, fucked. We did everything and anything except for one area. None of them suggested anal, and to be honest, I'm not ready to go there.

I have my reasons, and as quickly as I am reminded of them, I expel the thoughts out of my head because I'm not tainting this fantastic evening I had with these two men tonight.

Never in my wildest freaking dream could I have imagined a sexual menage could be like this. It was definitely a first for me and judging by our discussion tonight, these men want me with them for a while.

The thought of making something permanent in my life never presented as an opportunity before this. Mainly because I'm constantly reminded that nothing in my life is everlasting, not a home, a family, nor a boyfriend. But these men are different; they told me stuff about themselves because they expect me to stick around.

My intentions are to stay, but my shady history says otherwise.

So I make a decision.

I'll remain here for as long as fate allows me to, but as much as I want to fall head over heels for these men, I can't let my heart do so.

Because everything I love becomes cursed and ends up in one massive agonizing death.

These men might live and breathe danger but loving me is the bringer of death. It's like I attract the spirit of the Grim Reaper, finding his victims, getting his victims to fall in love with me, and then just as he baits me to them, he swoons in and takes their souls, leaving me empty, and my heart baren.

I can't do this to these men.

Because maybe ... and I can't believe I'm admitting this ... just maybe, the feelings I have for them are strong enough to easily sway me to fall in love with them.

My dry mouth begs to find a release for its thirst, and like a snake, I slither through the limbs entwined around me and escape. As I stand up and turn to face the bed, I take a minute to admire both men as they sleep away, not even realizing I'm gone, their muscular, partially naked bodies on either side of the bed. Strands of Kazz's black hair flop over his forehead; other than his arm and the side of his neck, his body is free of ink. A smooth, blank palette of an athletically toned body.

Killian's luscious beach blonde shoulder-length hair was let loose sometime after we showered and lays messily over the pillow. The demon tattoo, whose head covers his entire neck

while its body and tail wrap around his shoulder and arm, looks as if it's awake, staring at me as he breathes heavily in his sleep.

Realizing my oversized shirt was long forgotten by the sofa, I walk out of the room, closing the bedroom door behind me.

All is quiet in the house, and I see my white T-shirt on the floor among the men's strewn clothing. Instead of immediately getting it, I first stop by the kitchen, take out a small bottle of water, unscrew the cap, and take a long swig of water.

The cool liquid soothes my dry throat, and I feel it go down my entire body. I'll take the bottle back into the bedroom in case someone else feels parched in the middle of the night.

I can't seem to get over how silent it is up here; the lights are off, but there's enough moonlight seeping through the windows via the reflection it bounces off from in the lake beside the cabin.

I remember my T-shirt and leave the bottle on the counter to collect it upon my return to the bedroom. Sauntering over to the sofa, I pick up my top from the pile of clothes. I wonder if my thong and bra are somewhere around this mess.

"Oh fucking hell!" I gasp.

As soon as I see the dark figure at the end of the fairly large sofa, I jump back, causing me to trip backward over the coffee table, and I know I'm going to go crashing into the glass.

It's one of those moments when you know what's ahead but cannot stop once the motion has started.

An arm reaches out of nowhere and grabs me, yanking me back up. The force causes me to crash against his body. He keeps me steady by gripping hard onto my waist. His scent invades my senses, and I can't believe my sore pussy, forced to retire for the night hours earlier, suddenly awakens.

“I wasn't expecting anyone so late here,” I go to cover my body with the T-shirt, but he jerks it out of my hand and throws it somewhere nearby.

Hearing him breathe heavily, his hand softly caresses my neck, shoulder, and arm. His hungry eyes take their time to rake over my naked body and then abruptly move to meet my gaze.

“The Lone Ranger out on the prowl?” he finally whispers, his voice deep, and I know it's a question he doesn't require an answer to.

I allow him to explore my body with his hand while his other grips my waist and grounds me still. He explores the ridges of my collarbone, the depth between my breasts; his fingers trace my pebbled nipple, making sure to visit each one.

When satisfied, his hand traces the curve of my waist, stopping off to trace the slight curve of my abdomen, then my outer hips, once more detailing the center of my pelvis, before sweeping down to my hip, using a finger to stroke between my folds, causing me to sigh deeply.

My pussy likes his touch, and I feel the tantalizing sensation travel up to my hardened nipples.

As my sigh catches his attention, his head tilts up to face me, his eyes too dark to follow where they land. His fingers outline my lips, and he pushes the one finger he stroked my pussy with between my lips.

I take his finger and suck it, wrapping my tongue around it, tasting myself, and groaning. I want more from him, but West is unpredictable; he might fuck me or leave me hanging cold with need.

But this time, I have my own ammunition, and he knows it. There are two other men asleep in a room down the hall who will answer every need and desire I require. He can drop me and run, but he won't be punishing anyone but himself.

West knows this because his next move so is so totally unexpected, I don't even have time to question it as his hand grasps the back of my neck and drags my face to his as his lips crash on mine, causing me to gasp at the sudden onslaught. Every nerve in my body feels like it's on fire. God, this is so good; I need more from him.

West's kiss makes me feel like an electrically charged lightning rod in the middle of a thunderstorm. I love this. He feeds the wild streak in me, turning me into some wild primal animal. He forces my mouth open and pushes his tongue inside, feeling the round metal studded piercing he has. I shudder, melting as our tongues slide together. His kiss feels desperate like he's been wanting it for a long time, and now he's finally doing it.

He grips my hair in his fist, holding it like a ponytail, and yanks my head back, staring straight at me with a feral, predatory look. His stare catches my breath because this man wants to consume me.

Without releasing his lock on me, he guides me over to the dining table. His free hand snakes between us, finding my clit, tweaking it with utter perfection. I can feel his heavy breathing on my collarbone as he buries his face into the crook of my neck. He momentarily stops, looks up at me, and rests his forehead against mine.

I dare not say anything; the need between my thighs is highlighted by his deep breathing.

Without warning, he spins me to face the table and, grabbing hold of my neck, forces me down while he pushes my hips upwards and smacks my ass so that I cry out with desperation for him to fuck me.

I hear clothes rustling behind me and then another slap and one more until his hand smooths the red sting forming on my delicate cheeks.

His other hand sweeps down my spine, savoring my body before he grips my hips and positions his body against mine, the tip of his cock teasing my entrance with a few strokes before thrusting into me. I cling onto the table as he continues to pound into me, giving me everything he's got, and I feel his desperation as he rotates his hips, beating himself into me.

Suddenly it stops, and I feel him release himself from me. He turns me around, his hands are on my hips, and he lifts me

up to sit me on the table. He grabs my legs and wraps them loosely around him as he pulls my pelvis forward so I sit right at the edge of the table before plunging his massively thick cock inside me. I gasp as my wall muscles accommodate him once more.

His chest heaves, throwing his ripped abdominals back and forth into stark contrast with every breath we both take. He leans forward and kisses me, biting my lower lip until it bleeds and swiping his tongue over it.

“You mine, Raven King. Mine to want, mine to have, mine to fuck,” he says and sharply nips the nape of my neck, marking me further, and then licks the wound to soften the severity.

West begins to fuck me with solid and heavy thrusts.

He keeps pounding into me, brutally grinding against my G-spot, and I grip his hard, round shoulders. Continuing to drive himself up into me, he groans like a beast as my walls tighten around his thick cock. He needs no encouragement to keep going; he’s morphed from man to bestial creature.

My mind spins with pleasure, and I come in a sudden flurry of moans as he slams into me. I hold him deep, shutting my eyes, and stars burst behind my eyelids.

Clamping down on him must have hit the spot with him because he digs his fingers into my hips and finally lets himself go. His release is a full-body shudder as he continues to pound into me, grinding against me, panting into my hair. Slowly, his thrusts slow down. We stay panting, our hips still

making tiny little rocking motions against each other till we come to a stop.

He rubs his lips down my neck, across my shoulders, and to either nipple, and his hot breath sends shivers all over my skin.

“Fuck that was ...” I’m lost for words. I think West St John fucked my brains out of my head.

He releases himself from me, leaving my legs to fall to the floor. They feel like freaking jello; I don’t think I can walk on my own and steady myself against the table.

West says nothing. Instead, I watch his naked ass walk away as he strolls into the hallway, opening a door and shutting it, leaving me cold and empty.

“It was intense,” I say out loud, knowing he probably wouldn’t hear me. And probably doesn’t care enough to reply.

I don’t know what just happened between us, but West showed me a side of him that I don’t think he’s ever released to anyone before. My finger traces my lower lip, which is beginning to swell. He broke my skin and licked my blood. And as feral as it sounds, he’s made sure to mark me as his.

West walking off right now may seem somewhat emotionless, and had I not known him, perhaps I would have felt used. But what occurred between us was something so beyond my ability to comprehend the enormity of it all.

Rather than try and pick it apart to analyze it, I leave it as it is. I take the bottle of water I left earlier on the counter and wobble back to the bedroom, where I know the two warm

bodies will take me into their embrace and calm my inner animal down to the point where it's purring with sated tranquility.

I crawl back into bed, and Killian feels my presence even in his deep sleep as he turns his body to spoon me, flopping his arm over my waist and dragging my ass to his semi-aroused dick. I hear him sigh in his sleep as if he can finally settle back into his slumber.

Facing me, I stare at my handsome, dark-haired man with almond-shaped eyes as he opens them halfway.

"Satisfy your thirst?" he whispers, knowing full well what just transpired between West and me.

"More than you can imagine," I whisper back. Kazz gives me a brief smile and slides his hand on my thigh, grabbing my leg and crossing it over his. I hear him give a satisfied sigh, and his breathing starts to slow and go deep.

I close my eyes, feeling like I'm in the best place on earth.

Tomorrow might be another day, but when I wake up, my fantasy will still be right here between these two gorgeous males.

Chapter 31



THAT'S THE SECOND SET of painted black rocks I've seen on the edge of the two-lane highway, and my heart is beating like crazy. I should have paid attention to the road signs to figure out where we were going, but never in my wildest dreams did I ever think I'd be returning back here.

This is where it all started, and a deep, imaginary dark cloud dwells over me, telling me this is where it will end. I was never supposed to return, I promised my uncles, and now I know being here will be the event of my demise.

Sitting straight in the back seat, I nervously twist the thin blue friendship bracelet on my wrist, observing Kazz sitting beside me. As usual, he's focused on his laptop, working away.

AJ Tracey's rhymes and beats play softly in the background, and Killian's in the front passenger seat, swirling a knife between his fingers and chatting away with West about something I can't fully hear to make out the discussion. I wish I could lip-read him because I'm sure they're discussing where we are heading and with whom they are having this meeting.

I can't be here, not in this territory. Those tell-tale markers on the road signal to others whose territory they've just ventured in.

This is Black Stone Roses region, and I realize they've expanded their strength over the years across all three states. I'm not safe in any of them.

“We’re heading towards Oregon?” I say, knowing we’re nearing the state border. I’m trying hard not to let the fear overwhelming me emerge in my voice.

I see West’s eyes look up silently at me through the rearview mirror. We haven’t spoken about what occurred last night, but he’s looking at me in a way that’s dark and possessive. It’s a different kind of look that he’s never had with me before.

Since this morning, I’ve noticed that he gazes at me with such an intense predatory stare that I know he would rip my clothes off and fuck me senseless at every opportunity. His brother had that same voracious stare. It makes me excitedly vulnerable because all I have to do is just think about West’s warm breath on my skin, and it does stuff to my insides that makes me want to tear every piece of clothing off myself and beg him to ravage my body, control and dominate my mind. It’s a sick kind of infatuation, one that’s new to me but also one I’ll never share with anyone but him.

Killian stops twiddling his knife and turns his head sideways to grin at me. Those beautiful blue-grey eyes dance and flicker as he takes a moment to observe me before replying. I know he’s thinking of something very spicy right now. We fucked in the shower earlier, but that only temporarily sated his sexual appetite.

“Yes, we are but don’t worry yourself; it’s just a social business visit with our US partner.”

He takes another long, lustful look at me before he continues.

“You can stay in the car if you prefer but I don’t trust these cowboys in this territory with a pretty lass like you.”

“You’re better off being where we can see you,” West interrupts in a way that is not a suggestion but one where the decision is final.

“An American woman with a bunch of British *ganglanders* might not sit well with other gangs in these parts,” I say, now doing my best to show that I’m not freaking the hell out.

I’m almost sure this meeting is with the gang I most fear and loathe at the same time. I need to stay far away from them. Sitting in the car is not the safest option but it will provide me some opportunity to hide.

Killian turns again and smirks at me. “And pray tell us what our little hellion knows about gangs in these parts.”

Enough to know, never to trust these particular BSR assholes, even when a truce treaty is declared.

I look out the window and avoid answering Killian. There’s no point explaining my reasoning because I could never tell them how much I know about this particular gang. I hear an amused laugh at my expense, but I don’t turn around and instead observe the familiar scenery around me, never realizing for a million years that I’d be returning to these bloodied parts again. The highways, the roads, the trees, and the dense forests are all spilled with blood, and the stench of death fills my surroundings.

My memory swells with angst. The sharp, pungent smell of my own approaching death pours and invades my nasal senses. I look up towards the blue skies with white clouds and the richly green forest, knowing they will still be here after I'm long gone. I'm just another notch to the Grim Reapers' death count.

Suddenly a strong hand grips my knee, and I turn to find Kazz holding it firmly, stopping it from nervously bouncing like a tick. I hadn't even noticed I was subconsciously shaking it.

"You're with us, angel. No one will lay a hand on you," his attempt to reassure me goes to deaf ears. "You won't have to speak or do anything. It's just a friendly business visit, darling. They handle the transportation and distribution of our arms into the US market."

That explanation brings my consciousness to another level of fucked up hyper-nervous panic. To know the Black Stone Roses are Norwood Saints' biggest US ally brings a different kind of terror to my psyche.

I observe Kazz return his gaze to his laptop, and the ball lodged in the back of my throat has just become more prominent.

This visit isn't going to end well. I can feel it in my bones.

Half an hour later, we arrive at the familiar gates and are greeted by security, who allow us through the personal grounds of the gang's headquarters. I can see that they've not just expanded their territory across several states but also their

commune headquarters since I was last here. They even have their own western-style saloon town, a homage to the leader, Griffon Liverton's maternal side. The bastard is probably still in charge and as big-headed as ever.

The idea that he'll be here makes my guts swirl nervously, and my knees shake with fear. It's been a decade since he last saw me, and even then, it was momentarily short.

Then a hopeful thought occurs. A 12-year-old kid changes and matures; the hardships I suffered altered the way I look. My darker blonde hair's much lighter and longer. I'm taller and have breasts and curves.

Hoping that Griffon doesn't recognize me is the only thing I have going for me right now because I feel raw and exposed on this property.

I know deeply this is a business partner these men should not trust. They don't know what I know about how Griffon handles his work with his gang, Black Stone Roses, also notoriously known as BSR.

We park the car, and the second SUV pulls up beside us. Sam, Joe, and Liam walk out of it, their black suits neatly pressed as if they've stepped out of a GQ magazine. These men ouze the quintessential traditional intimidating mobster that sets them up several classes higher. The difference between the British mob and American West Coast gangs is evident in every fucking way possible.

Even my men here are decked out in their impeccably tailored British suits, exactly how I found Archer that morning

on the streets in Elephant and Castle.

These men here are making a point about who they are and the kind of class they come from, and they will flaunt their background with pride. They'll go to war wearing their forty-thousand-dollar suit because they see it as their armor. They essentially run the world's most significant arms trade business, and Griffon's gang, in the middle of the woods, are mere mules to push Norwood Saints products around for them.

Does it make me feel a touch safer being with the bigger sharks? No, because I know BSR's capabilities and their strengths in deception and dishonest betrayals are no laughing matter. But the arms trade was never their primary area of business.

Trafficking drugs and humans are.

It confuses me why the Brotherhood would even consider making BSR their direct US business partner for the arms trade. But I can't question them with this; otherwise, my knowledge will raise massive red flags as to why I know such solid info.

To them, I'm just some orphan Annie, who's had a little traumatic childhood that they're saving from being trafficked into an organized sex slave society.

And I need them to keep believing that.

But being here on forbidden ground and coming face to face with the man who still traumatizes my consciousness even after a decade might jeopardize my entire identity.

My car door opens, and Killian lends me his hand to get out. I nervously take it, hoping I can steady myself on my pointy black stiletto ankle boots. I straighten myself up, twist my red-painted lips, push my large curled hair off my shoulders, and glance at my two girls to make sure they are behaving themselves behind the low-front scuba dress. The entire garment molds to my body like a second skin. It's not trashy but more sexy. A lot more sexy. And other than my red lips, I went pretty neutral on my make-up.

I was given to wear this off-the-rack high-end designer dress to look the part. I'm these boys' expensively dressed female sidekick.

"Did you put what I gave you earlier in your boot?" Killian asks about the knife.

I nod because there is nowhere else I could have concealed anything on this super short, skin-tight piece.

Back at the cabin, I saw Killian lining the collar of his suit and shirt with blades. I assume all men have done the same in case someone tries to grab them.

He leans in and squeezes my ass, "You look so fucking hot, it's going to be hard keeping my knob down like a good boy."

"You were never built to be a good boy. You're a filthy, horny Viking," I say, and he chuckles, placing a protective hand on my lower back but quickly removing it.

"Stop fidgeting," West says on my other side and then steps ahead of me.

“I’m not...,” and I realize my fist is all scrunched up.

I try to breathe in the fresh woodland air into my lungs, but I almost choke on my own breath.

West turns and gives me a glare to stop acting like a fucking idiot. Killian draws me a touch closer to him but doesn’t want to make it look like he’s all cozy with me. I get it. In official gangland territory, showing any weakness towards me will make me an easy target and him an item to effortlessly exploit.

I’ve been that target before, and it’s what got my family killed, along with dozens of others.

Kazz walks along with West while Sam walks along my side, keeping an appropriate distance, and the other two men follow us behind.

We reach the bar, BSR’s favorite meeting place, and walk into a semi-darkened room full of men, and Skillet’s Finish Line plays on the speakers in the background. Two semi-naked female dancers dance on either corner of the bar, grinding their hips to the music.

There’s no playing with the fact that we’re dressed way out of place here. That’s the entire purpose, I guess. We’re here representing Norwood Saints. The whole tongue-in-cheek point is that BSR works for them, and thus power in a suit puts these men way above these country hoodlums.

How much power does the Norwood Saints have over the US mob world?

I never thought I'd ever see something so unusual, but I guess when you're one of the organizations dominating the arms trade, you're bound to gain respect and flaunt your supremacy to your partners to keep them in check.

Kazz told me the US isn't even their most significant market and that India is, closely followed by Saudi Arabia and Qatar as their largest arms importers. They don't just sell arms but dominate the export licenses of US and European weapons productions. I don't know how these Brit boys single-handedly managed all this before they hit the age of 22, but six years on, they've grown to something scarily surreal.

It makes sense why Prophet has allowed them to single-handedly dominate their own side of the Norwood Saint enterprise and keep them out of his centralized business dealings. He doesn't ask questions as long as the boys keep bringing in the billions and the Brotherhood continues to run alongside, anonymously gathering intel on Prophet's private business dealings.

It's legendary genius, but one wrong move will topple the Brotherhood's kingdom, and with Archer missing, it leaves them open to vulnerability.

My men seem to know where to go as they casually walk through the large bar. The men in here take notice of us and stare but do not dare approach us. All of them are armed, and I'm nervous as hell, even if I'm surrounded by these powerful British men in suits.

We walk out a metal door, and we're outside again. I don't get this weird maze of a building, but there's an open doorway where a soldier greets West and Kazz as they stroll inside. It's another bar, but most likely, it's exclusive to the BSR inner circle members.

I can't see Griffon, but I'd recognize his deep grizzly voice anywhere as soon as I hear it. He greets West and Kazz first, who are blocking my view of the old bastard.

I'm dreading this moment. My heart is bashing against my chest, terrified of seeing the man who took my life from me and launched me into the hell hole I've been slowly trying to crawl out of for over a decade.

As soon as I come face to face with the bastard, I feel the vein in my neck throbbing as if it's about to explode with the amount of venom coursing through my veins, and I'm tongue-tied.

The years have aged him. He's been peppered with dark and light hair on his shoulder-length hair and short beard. But he's as built and bulky as he's ever been, and those dark, evil, deep-set eyes that have haunted my mind day and night haven't changed at all.

His eyes pass over me as he takes me in, and I notice a brief flicker of recognition in his eyes that quickly disappears. He licks his bottom lip as he stares at my low-cut, braless chest, and his puny mind probably wonders if I've been brought as a gift.

Fucking, bastard, lowlife piece of human garbage.

You're not even a son of a bitch. That's too dignified a term for what you are.

You're not even human.

You don't deserve the word human because you are that much of a fucking disgrace to people all around the globe, worldwide.

You are the biggest scum that walked this planet.

I continue to curse this godfucking, shitheaded, pedophilic, godforsaken, piss-drinking, ass fucking, syphilis-spreader, beer belly, choleric, tetanus-suffering, monkey-assed, douchebag-faced, hepatitis-filled asshole to a slow, tortured death.

One day, Griffon, I will meet you in the underworld and make sure to claim the devil's crown because I plan to make you suffer an eternity of hell's wrath.

My attention is drawn to a throat clear, and it's West drawing Griffon's attention away from me.

"That is way off limits, Griff. Ensure your men keep their eyes to the ground and off our property." West's eyes narrow at him as a deep warning.

I begin to believe that if West is that much against other men looking lustfully at me, he'd most likely kill a man who dares lay a hand on me.

I'm not sure whether to be proud of that fact or mortified. Leaving this debate for later, I focus on what's happening right now.

Griffon stiffens slightly. This foreigner making demands is not something he's used to. But somehow obliges as he cuts the current ice and smiles, placing a stiff hand on West's shoulder, assuring him this is neutral turf.

I see West look at the hand on him, and Griffon pulls it away casually.

Wow! Fucking, WOW!

How much power do these British men have?

"Come on, partner," Griffon throws a forced smile. "Tell me how your trip is so far."

He begins to lead West away, and part of the crowd follows.

That's when I see him.

The boy with the light blue eyes, dark hair, and funny side smile that stole my heart the instant he laid eyes on me. I was cursed to a lifetime of emotional love-sick pain with that boy who's now apparently all grown up.

He was always taller than me and built athletically but now he's filled out in areas that only my insides crave with lust. His face obviously matured and grew a perfectly sharp jawline that could cut glass. A short dark stubble lines his lower face emphasizing his perfectly even full lips, and his thick muscled neck is decorated into an elaborate inked design that's more tribal than pictorial as Killian's is. His dark, messy hair is scruffy and sexy, almost as if it's made to look effortlessly cool.

He sees me, and the huge contrast between his dark hair and cold, bright blue eyes almost makes him resemble a beautiful Husky.

Dylan Peterson was the first boy I fell in love with, and now he's a man. One I never imagined I'd ever see again when my life was viciously taken from me.

"Rev?" he whispers, but the two men closest to us hear him.

I look at Dylan and give him a slight shake of my head, a silent beg for him to stay quiet. He realizes his blunder and looks away, casually dismissing me.

There's no messing with West. He immediately distinguishes the recognition between Dylan and me, and the look of demise overcomes his stiff expression.

Griffon is an asshole, but he isn't stupid. He didn't grow through the ranks of BSR to become its leader through ignorance and a spacey, careless mind.

"You know each other?" he asks Dylan with interest and surprise.

"No," he says, giving me a look of dismissal. "Just someone I thought I knew."

Dylan looks at West, bows his eyes in an attempt at an apology, and takes a step back.

Killian sidesteps slightly in front of me protectively, ensuring he blocks Dylan's and Griffon's view of me. I'm not sure if he caught West's expression or if he's uncomfortable with the sudden interest in me at this meeting.

“That boy’s always chasing his fucking ghosts,” Griffon sniggers amusingly, but his attention on me doesn’t waver, and looks at Killian, who is now possessively blocking their view of me.

“Pretty protected property,” he says, taking a little leeway with his choice of words. “Does she have a name?”

“St John,” Killian says and doesn’t expand on an explanation.

“All of you, St Johns,” Griffen laughs and shakes his head. “Typical Euro mob mentality. Well, if it fucking works.”

“Griffon,” Kazz says, taking control of the situation, laying his bag over the long table, and taking out his laptop. “There are a few missing shipments you’ll need to clarify this morning.”

Kazz eyes Griffon directly, urging him to focus his attention elsewhere, and this is the first time I see Kazz take complete control of the situation. I always thought West called the shots, but it seems the three of them hold equal strengths, while West, the eldest, maintains dominance over the entire situation. This dynamic makes sense considering he and his brother are the direct next in line to control Norwood Saints.

Sam flanks Kazz’s other side as Griffon takes a seat opposite him and his men similarly flank either side of him. West makes his way over to me and gives Killian a look to take over while he walks me out the door we originally came in. He’s silent, but the firm grip on my forearm tells me his frame of mind, and it’s not good.

I'm guided outside by him to the rear of the building where it's remote and quiet.

"I'm going to ask this just the once before I get nasty," West's light amber eyes have suddenly turned a shade darker, and his chin stiffens as his jaw twitches.

"Who the fuck are you?" He takes out his gun and points it at my head. "Don't fucking spin me any stories. Tell me who the fuck you are."

I feel a bead of sweat drop down my forehead as my ears ring with fear.

"Take your goddamn gun off her," I hear a deep male voice behind West and look over his shoulder to find Dylan pointing a gun at the back of West's head.

I'm not sure who has removed the safety clip from their gun, but I heard the click in this serene part of the commune.

"Make a sudden move, and your motherfucking British brat pack are all fucking dead," Dylan says in a deathly growl that sends shivers down my spine.

Who has he become after all these years? He was never supposed to be part of this gang.

West looks at me; his dark amber eyes are confused and aggrieved. A sudden pained expression passes over me, and I fear there's going to be a damn showdown happening.

"Good to see you back to claim your throne, Revna Kingstone," Dylan says, although his voice is solemn and pained. He's not happy to see me, nor is he in any celebratory

mood. He thinks I'm back for one reason and knows exactly what my blood rights entail.

“What the fuck...?” West's voice is ragged with confusion. The stress on his face holds me captive, frown lines mark his forehead as he tries to understand. It's as if he's suddenly entered a parallel universe where the tables have been flipped.

No. This can't be fucking happening.

Not again.

*To be continued in **Impetus**, Book 2 of Brotherhood of Saints.*

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XOXO,

*Marian
Andrew*

Coming Soon

Brotherhood of Saints

IMPETUS

Book 2

There's a new game changer, and his name is Dylan Peterson. The boy with the wolf eyes, my first crush, and real heartbreak.

Except he's no boy anymore, that teenager morphed into a body rippled with danger and strength. It would be a perfect reunion if it weren't for the fact that Dylan is an inner circle member of the gang that murdered my family, left me for dead, and destroyed my life.

And now he holds a gun to West's head while the latter points one at mine.

We're standing like dominoes on a gameboard. One push and the end effect will be disastrous; nothing good will come from this new revelation about me. I've spun so many tales to

West and his crew that I'm not sure he'll believe if I tell him the truth.

But here's hoping because my identity is compromised, and the odds of getting out alive from BSR's compound are slim.

Even if by some miracle I escape, there's a bounty on my tail because someone thinks they bought me at a sex trade auction house, and I'm sure Archer's disappearance has something to do with it. I need to find the missing fourth player of the Brotherhood so they can finally topple Prophet's kingdom.

I'm playing a dangerous game, but there's no turning back now. Destiny has mapped out my future for me.

It's IMPETUS from here on out.



Have You Read?

MINE

Clarence House Stalker

I have the craziest feeling that I have a stalker.

I left my comfortable life in Queens, New York, on a scholarship to study on the other side of the Atlantic in a sleepy British town known for its ghosts, medieval castle, and cathedral. Some say the spirit of Charles Dickens haunts the streets after midnight.

I haven't seen any ghosts, but I know someone stays hidden in the shadows, watching my every move for the last two years.

But now, five alphaholes have transferred to my campus, acting like they run things here. Stuff is happening, and I know it has something to do with them.

My life is slowly winding out of control, but I worked hard to be where I am. This is my final year, and I'll be damned if anyone thinks they can make me leave.

You can take the girl out of Queens, but you can't take the Queen out of me.

You don't mess with Gena Russo and expect to get away with it.

Let the fight begin.

This Queen won't share her crown with anyone.



Have you read?

The Titans Series



The Titans Series is a group of reverse harem contemporary romcom novels. Each book in the series introduces a different story about Ava's adventures and life journey with her three male roommates. Every book is written to be read as a standalone with a HEA chapter ending. However, the epilogues of each book in the series act as the introduction to the next book and will end on a cliffhanger.

Gods of City Glory is the first in the series.

The books can be found at Amazon as Ebooks and Paperback and are also available on Kindle Unlimited.

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0B4FFKS1G>

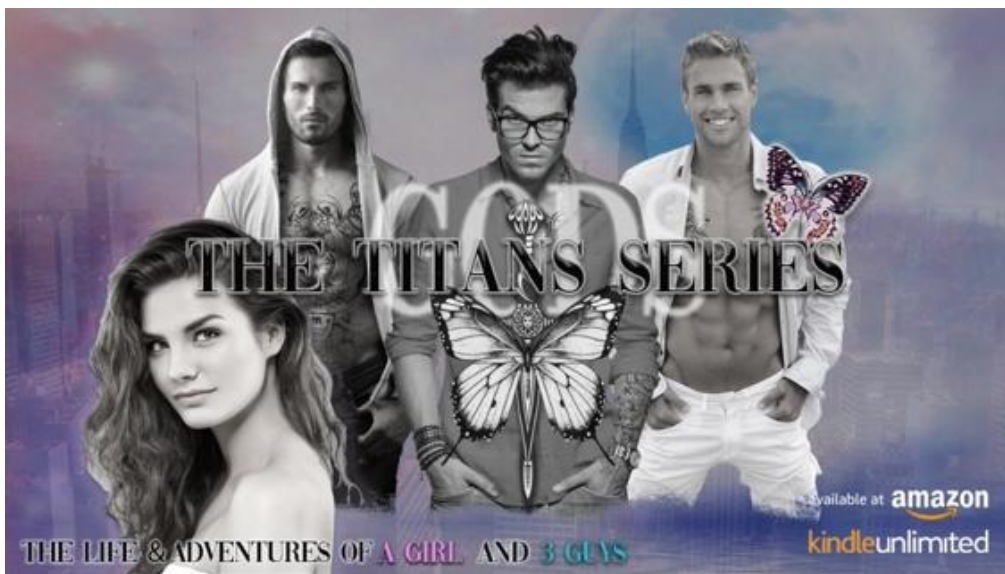
For more info about this book series, visit:

<https://www.marianandrew.com/the-titans-series>

Have you read

GODS of City Glory

The Titans Series, Book 1



“I live with three sex gods, Happy, Bashful, and Grumpy. If I’m not careful, I’ll develop feelings for them, and I need to remain platonic if I want to stay living here.”

Ava Baros has recently graduated from art school in Europe. She returns to New York to pursue her dream job as a fashion designer but has a short time frame to find work and a place to live; otherwise, her father will summon her back to Greece.

She lands a job that she's partially happy with but finding a place to live in Manhattan is brutal.

As a last resort, she answers an ad for a flatmate but remains skeptical about sharing with three guys. Despite her dubious presumptions, she is surprised to see the room is in a luxury apartment shared with three men who are dangerously sexy, handsome, and powerful.

There is constant amorous and personality antagonism between the four roommates. Ava is fighting temptation and knows getting romantically involved with these men may cause multiple dilemmas with serious complications.

Funny, Steamy, Hot. It's a story with a feel-good factor about a girl, three guys, a butterfly tattoo, and a Manhattan apartment.



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