



# KINGGS

*of Desire*

M.O. ABSINTHE

# *KINGS OF DESIRE*



## *M.O. Absinthe*

© 2022 M.O. Absinthe. All rights reserved.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and events are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

All rights reserved. No part of this story may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, without the prior permission of the author.

This book is suitable for an adult audience. It contains sexually explicit scenes and graphic language which may be considered offensive by some readers.

***Trigger warning:*** bully dark romance, extremely sexually explicit scenes, Dub-con, exhibitionism, voyeurism, and the list goes on and on.

***The Kings of Desire is not recommended for the weak of heart or for the ones who are looking for a perfect love story. This book is dark, twisted, pushing boundaries and imagination.***

***THERE IS NO LOVE WHERE DARKNESS GROWS, BUT YOU COULD***

***LEARN TO LOVE THE DARKNESS***

## *Contents*

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

[Chapter 21](#)

### *Cole's deal*

‘I agree,’ I breathed so hastily that I wasn’t even sure he heard what I said. It was like taking off a band-aid. Quick and painful.

‘You agree to what? I want to hear you say it!’ He was enjoying this so much that I began to feel the bulge in his pants pressing against my navel as I was breathing.

I looked around me to check if everyone else was still staring, but observed just a few rushed students walking away from the free show ‘You know what, Cole... Come on, don’t prolong this, classes are about to start.’ I wanted to leave, but the clenched hands were still there, pinning my arms against the wall.

He didn’t flinch, not even for a split second, to stop from his path and check what was going on around him. He couldn’t care less about the classes, of what anybody else was thinking. He was the *king* here and that applied to everyone who set foot in this academy- teacher or student.

His signature coldness was surfacing like an iceberg hitting against an already sinking ship. ‘I asked you to say it. Now,’ he groaned, gathering the pieces of me that he was about to own.

‘I...I agree to let you do whatever you want with me for a month!’

### ***Brax’s deal***

‘Let’s hear it,’ Brax cut straight to the point, erasing every sentence that I was preparing to say, and leaving me only with an undeniable truth.

‘I need my family.’ I sounded weak, and that was going to cost me, but all other words seemed to fade when it came to the real reason I was here for.

His eyebrows formed a frown, though only for a moment so brief that I was starting to think it was just in my imagination.

‘Take a seat,’ he hoarsely spoke, laying his head back on the armchair, unwilling to lose eye contact with me even for a second.

I turned to take a step behind me, heading towards the only other chair in the room, though before I could reach it, he

decided to *elucidate* things for me ‘Not there.’

To be honest, I knew from the first time he asked me where that *seat* should be but willingly chose to ignore him, hoping that maybe if I played dumb, he was going to leave things that way.

Taking a deep breath, I whirled to look in his direction where very clear instructions were waiting for me as the tip of his fingers was tapping on the upper part of his leg.

### *Ferris's deal*

‘So, I should take this as a *yes* to my offer.’

‘Yes, it’s a *yes*.’

With Ferris, it didn’t feel so difficult to let him know that I accepted, as it did with Cole or Brax, yet it felt much more difficult in every other way. ‘But we’re keeping the condition.’

‘Ok. I’ll have Alfred take you to the new apartment tomorrow....I don’t keep track of expenses, especially not with the people close to me,’ he struck a match and lit a few candles on the table next to him, letting the flames dance in the darkness of his eyes.

A wolf in sheep’s clothes, and I knew it from the instant I entered his world a day ago, and still, an invisible power was subduing me to be his *little lamb*.





## Chapter 1



*A month ago*

*Bea*

‘Natalia, I swear on everything I hold holy, I will return for you and Sebastian’ With the tip of my thumbs I brushed off the hot tears that endlessly sprung from her eyes. ‘I’ll get you out of this hell and start a new life for the three of us. Do you believe me?’ I needed to hear her say the words. She mustn’t lose hope. Hope was the only thing we had left, beside each other, and right now, I was the one tearing our union apart. I was the one tearing their fragile world apart!

Her voice cracked, filled with a pain that threatened to engrave itself on my very soul.

‘Yes, I believe you. I know you are strong... I believe you will return for us,’ she caught me in the tightest embrace, saying an anguishing goodbye ‘I love you...’

‘Until the end of time,’ I continued her sentence. That’s what our mother used to tell us when I was a child.

*I love you until the end of time.*

Though her *end of time* was much sooner than anyone predicted. She died a year and a half ago, leaving me, Nat, and

Sebastian alone in the cruelest of worlds. The three Musketeers who neither distance nor time can ever divide. Just me. I was the one dividing us.

I broke off from Nat's embrace and disappeared into the night. I couldn't stay a second longer because the fear and regret buried so deep within me were moments away from preventing me from taking another step further. The thought of leaving them behind, of abandoning them with a monster was twisting in my stomach, making me almost throw up.

My feet felt heavy...my soul felt heavier, but I needed to go on.

It was our only chance.

*I* was our only chance.

Things weren't always like this, not back when my mother was still alive. We used to be happy, well as happy as anyone could be these days.

The world has changed, or so my mother used to say, because I only got to know the *now* version of it. The sky is always dark, reflecting itself onto everyone's soul while a small ray of sunshine is a luxury most of us will never benefit from. The heavy smog, the unsatisfied basic needs, the poverty, and the pain all converge into a molten hate, consuming everyone from the inside out.

We were once the last remnants of a fading middle class. My mother was the direct descendent of a baroness and that still opened certain doors, as long as she was alive. But now we were rock bottom. Our father -and when I say father it's with a mountain of disgust and regret because we could hardly call him that- well, he never worked a single day in his life. It didn't affect us whilst growing up because my late mother used to provide well beyond what any other low-classed family ever could, but after her demise, the effects were devastating. He couldn't get a job, not that he would have wanted one anyway, instead, as a resolution to his problems, our *beloved dad* was forcing us to provide the daily basics. The daily basics plus a few extra dimes for him and his drug addict friends.

I can't say that he didn't love our mother. He did, but just her. He loathed us, considering that we *forced* her to spend some of the time spent with him to raise us. We were her greatest blessing and his greatest curse.

The shock of her sudden death changed him completely to the point he became inhuman. From the grieving man left with three young children, he had become an exploiter, using me and my sister to beg for money and food. But who was to spare any if no one had enough for themselves?

My brother, Sebastian got away from my father's *special treatments* for now, mostly because he is only six and his health problems don't allow him to venture off too far. My father couldn't risk losing him, especially since having Sebastian's legal custody was providing him with a few dusty dollars each month.

In a way, I was glad he was sick. I know that this must sound like the most horrible thing to say, but his illness exempted him from much worse things.

The beatings- the punches and blows received every time paranoia got the better of our father and he suspected that we were keeping a part of our daily earnings.

The cold- the freezing winter cold that infiltrated down to the bone marrow while having to walk around half a city each day, dressed merely in rags, so you could receive people's mercy.

The heat- the damp summer heat descending from beneath the clouds, melting the soles of our shoes into the asphalt. That is if we were lucky enough for him to allow us to even wear shoes.

The humiliation- knowing that you are worthless, just a shadow that floats through murky streets, hoping you never run into someone you know. That, until the day you begin wishing that no one would know *you*, that no-one would see *you*. That until you become invisible to everyone –*Yourself* included.

And if things weren't bad enough for us, he thought about turning all of this into a new business deal. His little minions, working day and night to fill out his greedy pockets. Initially, when I heard him talking about it, I didn't think he had it in him. I mean he never went through with a plan in his life. Why start now?

But I was wrong.

His dickhead friends convinced him it was time for them to become entrepreneurs, so the one neuron wandering their minds decided to start with the modern slaves' branch of his business.

People had so little hope these days that they would do anything for a piece of bread, or a miserable roof over their heads- and he became best at exploiting that!

I knew where this was going and human trafficking was just the next step of his scheme. You can guess who would be first on his list since he would stop at nothing to get what he wants, and money was his ultimate goal after all.

I wanted to run away and search for a new beginning for the three of us from day one, but the college year paid in advance by my mother before she died, stopped me from going through with my plan. She used to place a great value on education, and always made efforts to ensure that I and my siblings would receive one.

My father even tried to get a refund on my college fees. Fortunately, he was turned down. Not that he would let me attend the classes anyway, but still, I managed somehow to do it behind his back.

With some of my teacher's permission, I continued my studies. I used to take most of my courses from distance, helped by the notes of a couple of other students, as I only had to show up for the exams. I managed to pass the year, but it was next to impossible for me to pay for the following one. Not in the same city as my father anyway.

The truth was, he was paranoid about me and Nat hiding money for a good reason. I managed to raise enough to get me

through one month's rent and the first installment for the final year of college. That was the main motivator for running away. I needed to finish my education to have any chance of providing for us.

And there was a single location I had in mind!

I heard the rumors of a place where people were having a superior level of life, finding better jobs, and obtaining the so-needed daily basics much easier. That was my *great opportunity*.

How wrong was I!?

*Echo City*. My new city. Weird name for a place where no one hears your screams, no one feels your pain.

They said the sun shines there and I believed them. I believed them until I saw how the toxic vapors coming from the junkyard at the outskirts of the city formed an aurora borealis covering the whole sky.

That was their sun.

*Death was their sun!*

I had no choice but to remain here since the next city was too far and the transportation would either use my rent, or my college fees monies. Besides, this was proclaimed to be the richest city in the area- the only location where I had a chance of finding a job.

Everywhere was the same anyway. The rich live in luxury while the poor are left to pick up the scraps.

Every day is a struggle for survival. Everyone acts like a predator, not even waiting for your corpse to get cold so that they can strip you of your possessions.

This is what poverty does to people. The lack of a defined middle class sets a bottomless chasm between these two types of inhabitants. The wealthy stay in their ivory towers while we collapse in the street.

How can they live so large and leave so little for the rest of us you may ask? It's human nature. The evolution of the species. The competitiveness of always being on top helps you

easily forget what you have to do to get there -and I was about to learn this the hard way.

I registered in Echo Millennium Academy and luckily managed to pay the first installment and find a shoebox apartment where they didn't ask for a few months' rent in advance.

At first, I had hope, things seemed to finally be going my way. I even got a night job at a packaging company. It wasn't much. I could barely cover the rent, but it was a start. The chance I never got anywhere else. Things, for the first time, seemed to be going in the right direction, but with each moment that passed, Nat and Sebastian were running out of time.

My first day at the academy was two weeks after arriving in town. Day one of the senior year. I knew the rules from my old college. Don't talk to anyone. Most of the students were representatives of the elite class, with minor exceptions of one or two that were here on Meritum scholarships. The lower class couldn't afford to go here, and with all honesty, I couldn't afford to be here either. But I was a fighter, I never gave up, and this wasn't going to make an exception. I just needed an extra job...or ten.

I walked down the hall trying to figure out my schedule of seminars, lectures, and laboratories, and at the same time feeling the need to hide in the shadows of every corner so that no one would see me. A failed plan since it seemed I was the newest attraction, though not in a good way, more like in a freak show manner. My clothes were selling me out from the second I set foot in the building, and this, along with the fact that everyone knew each other from the previous years, was turning me into an intruder. All eyes were staring at me with a disgust I was already accustomed to.

'Come, they don't want you here.' A freckled redhead took my hand and guided me towards the other end of the hallway.

'What's going on here?' I asked, confused that she was so desperate to get me out of everyone's sight.

A worried look emerged all over her face, as she was getting ready to explain how things really function around here ‘You’re breaking the hierarchy.’

A hierarchy wasn’t an unfamiliar notion to me. We used to have one at my old college where for certain people you needed to have permission to address them. Though I couldn’t figure out the hierarchy in this place.

‘What are the hierarchy rules around here?’ I asked, letting her in that I already had an idea of what she was talking about.

‘The main lobby,’ she answered in a short sentence, clearing everything out for me.

It all made sense since with each step I took further towards the end of it, the more pairs of consternated eyes seemed to be gazing at me.

The girl continued ‘You’re allowed to walk through there only if you need to get to classes, and *only* if there’s no way around it. The higher echelons stay at the entrance and it all descends from there on.’

I knew this was no joke, but was this place’s normality, and let’s face it, our world’s normality. What went on in here was just a reflection of the rankings used out in the streets.

‘We have to use this back door,’ she pointed to the double glass door behind us which seemed constantly on the move with all the students going in and out. I guess we weren’t the only ones that were categorized as rock bottom.

I rolled my eyes, though honestly, I didn’t have different expectations. I knew my place, or at least, the position where they all thought my place should be.

‘I’m sorry, I’m Jenna. That was rude of me,’ she giggled slapping her forehead with the tip of her fingers as a result of her *kidnapping* a stranger without even introducing herself.

‘It’s ok. I’m starting to believe you saved my life,’ I laughed at the irony of the situation. ‘I’m Bea.’

‘Scholarship?’ the freckled girl asked.

Don't tell me my luxury clothes gave me away...

'Not really, more like work my ass off type of scholarship.' I arranged my jacket a little so I could cover up a stitched-up hole in my shirt. My thoughts still remained at how oblivious my financial condition should have been, and it wasn't like it really affect me, but indirectly, I knew it would. The poorer they think I am, the more they're going to feed on my misery.

'The hardest one,' she giggled again searching for something in her overworn bag.

'I assume you're here on scholarship,' I smiled peaking at the thick pile of notebooks that were one step away from tearing her bag apart.

'That obvious?'

'I'm sorry, I didn't mean to pry,' I apologized, realizing I gave myself away from having looked in her bag.

'Relax, it's not like it was some big secret. I think I'm the only student around here who has something besides makeup and drugs in there anyway.'

'You and me both,' I shrugged, opening my bag for her to see my personal stack of new notebooks. 'But I'm not going to use them unless I can figure out my schedule,' I added exhausted that I had no idea where to go look.

'You're lucky that the right girl found you,' Jenna winked, turning towards the glass exit door 'Come on, it's on a panel outside,' she spoke walking through the door and out into the back garden.

I rushed to follow, and as soon as I caught up to walk beside her, the lecture about EMA went on. That's short for Echo Millennium Academy if you didn't catch on.

She strode through a long paved alley to the empty side of the yard where metal panels were hiding in the back, almost covered by an overgrown green fence.

I thought it weird that no one was there, but Freckles quickly elucidated the mystery, 'I guess we're the only losers



around,’ she observed, continuing walking towards the boards. ‘I don’t assume you have a smartphone or a viable internet connection?’

‘Actually, I do have a smartphone,’ I chuckled, pulling an extinct type of brick out of my pocket. I had a smartphone, but the trick about it was that it wasn’t smart at all. It was an outdated version that used to belong to my mother. I could barely place a call, let alone have access to any kind of advanced technology. The only reason I brought it along was to keep in touch with Nat...if she could ever call me.

‘No offense, but that looks like it came out of a junkyard. Does that even have internet?’

‘I would be surprised if it even has signal,’ I made fun of my *modest* situation, because...why not?

‘Well, assuming it had, we wouldn’t need to come here for our schedule. It’s published online. Same as a part of the research material we need for some of the classes,’ her shoulders dropped as if defeated by the system. It was the elite’s world at the end of the day, and that’s exactly what they called themselves The Elite.

‘Fortunately, we do have a little backup,’ she turned her gaze to look over her shoulder at two guys that looked like they just came from the comics convention. ‘I think I lied when I said that I was the only student to carry notebooks. These two nerds got in with even better grades than I did.’

One of the young men waved at us as he seemed to already be aware of our presence here. ‘Darrel and Thomas,’ Jenna pointed towards them as Darell being the fawn-haired one and Thomas, the curly dark-haired fellow, with glasses hanging on a string around his neck.

‘New blood,’ Darrel placed a hand on his hip, examining me from head to toe.

‘Chill out, you’re not a fucking vampire,’ Jenna spoke in disgust, mostly because his gaze has stopped at my neckline.

Well, not exactly at my neckline, maybe a few inches below, at the round shapes that I was doing a lousy job hiding.

I never liked people staring, and the fact that I was successful heading towards a D-cup was giving me difficulties preventing that from happening.

In any case, he was harmless, nothing that I couldn't handle, and nothing compared to the libidinous looks of my father's friends.

'These two relics are my only friends around this place,' Jenna rolled her eyes as if she couldn't help but stand them. At least she had something I didn't. Friends. Not anymore anyway. It seemed my quick downfall took me out of their graces since the fact that they could afford a warm meal while I couldn't, was the string that broke our *solid* friendship. Though I had clung to them as much as I could. Pathetic, I knew, and I despised myself for that, but the notes they had of the courses and the extra manuals they could afford to buy, made me try and keep the connections. I guess they were as happy as me that I left, but my problem was that, here, I was supposed to do it all over again. For one final year.

A bitter smile emerged on my face 'Be happy you have them,' I spoke, turning my head to look at what courses I had on for today.

Checking out the schedule I couldn't figure out which was where since there was something still confusing me. The Academy was a lot smaller than my old college, even if the land where it was situated seemed to go on for miles. Only three buildings, a few tennis courts, a hippodrome, and a covered Olympic swimming pool.

'Where are the dorms.' I asked, looking back at Jenna.

'Dorms!?' Thomas cackled. 'You think any of these spoiled asses will live in a dorm!?'

How was I to know? Back at my old college they had several dorm buildings and the *spoiled asses*, were often dumped there by their parents since a babysitter was no longer efficient at that age.

'Look around you,' Darrel continued Thomas's idea 'There's a reason why this place is up in the hills.'

I did notice that the Academy was on higher ground but hadn't observed every detail since it took me forever to get here, and I slept on the bus for most of the trip.

'The Elite don't need dorms because they all live here, in the Hills, while the Annelids live in the Pit.'

'Annelids!?! Is that what they call us?' My amusement mixed with contempt.

'Yes,' a sad Jenna answered, taking in a deep breath -like that could ever ease the burden.

'Annelids as in worms?' I asked again, knowing too well from biology what the term represented. A phylum that consisted of different kinds of worms!

'Exactly, newbie, Echo City is separated into two categories -Annelids and The Elite,' Thomas didn't seem happy with the nickname either. But it was just that. A label set by a snob group of people. In the end, we could call them whatever we wanted, couldn't we?

Things like this stopped affecting me a long time ago, and I had much more serious burdens to bear.

'I have to run, I have Calculus.' The first class on my planner was about to begin.

'We'll be joining you in that one,' Jenn snuck her hand around my arm and began leading me back towards the back door. 'We're geeks in case you hadn't noticed.'

'Don't rush, it's only introduction day.' Darell babbled, trying to catch up with us.

The reality was I didn't want to make a bad impression on day one. I needed to have my teacher's support because with the extra jobs I planned on taking on, missing classes will be a normality in my case.

We pushed the glass door to reach the main lobby, and if things seemed weird before, it was a freak show by now. The hallway murmured with endless voices, whispering- some in horror while others in admiration.

I raised on my toes, trying to see what was happening, but Jenna's quick hand came down on my shoulder and pushed my feet back on the ground 'What the hell do you think you're doing?'

Was that fear glinting in her eyes?

'Let's go, quickly' she scolded me, dragging me into a corner, but not before I caught a glimpse at what was happening. There was a demon- because there is no other way I could call him. A blue-eyed demon, packed with a Herculean body of well-defined muscles and the most devious grin I've ever met.

He was *evil*, and I could feel it!

He was *danger*, and I could feel it from miles away!

A few strands of jet-black hair were falling over his eyes as he was lifting a poor guy by the shirt, in a pure display of force and superiority. The ultimate bully, followed by a pack of jackals to corner his victims. Who knows what that guy that was now hanging in the air did? It couldn't have been more than an innocent word or a flashing look in their direction.

I knew the stereotype all too well.

I loathed the stereotype all too well.

'Who is that guy?' I asked while Jenna was already dragging me along a secondary hallway, far away from the show.

'Fucking trouble,' Thomas answered with the annoyance of a man recognizing it from a personal experience. I wouldn't be surprised if he hadn't been on the demon's list along the way, and in complete honesty, I was asking because I knew I was going to be on that list as well.

Freckles must have sensed I was going to ask again and decided to save me the trouble 'Cole Clyborne. He's a kind of king around here. The king of idiots if you ask me, but don't let anyone hear you say it. Here even the walls have ears and you wouldn't want to end up on the death row over a few misplaced words.'

‘That bad?’ I asked.

‘That bad,’ she answered, stopping in front of a classroom. ‘We’re here. Say hello to the first day of EMA.’ Her enthusiasm faded, almost ironic as if underlining what coming to this town really meant. I was officially an Annelid.

## *Chapter 2*



Two weeks later, and I was nowhere closer to finding a second job. I that I had searched everywhere, from the sweatshop factories to the top luxury restaurants up in the Hills. Absolutely nothing.

A rotten sensation of constant worry began gradually infiltrating my system. A fear that I didn't need within me. Not yet. I needed more time before desolation would take hold and make my struggle be in vain. My sister and brother were still so far away, and failing them wasn't by any stretch of the imagination an option.

I continued attending my classes, might as well take advantage as I paid for them, and I wasn't going to let a single cent go to waste. I never skipped a course, and since for the first time in a long time I'd actually found a friend, I took the opportunity and even squandered a few hours on girl time. It felt so good, almost normal - and I haven't felt normal in so long that sometimes I think I forgot that I was even human.

Jenna and the two guys, Darell and Thomas, tried to help me with finding some kind of work, but there was nothing much they could do. None of them came from money, and

none of them knew anyone in a position that could provide me with a job. I even suspected that Jenna and Thomas had an even more delicate situation back home than my own, but I never asked, out of politeness - and they never told.

This morning I woke up feeling a little dizzy and with a slight headache. Must have been from the hours I put in at night combined with the time spent attending classes. Or maybe since I managed to skip a few meals, mostly because the few coins that were shining on the bottom of my wallet were supposed to be used for transportation. It didn't matter. Tonight, I was about to get my first paycheck, not that it would be enough for food **and** rent, but at least it would buy me a couple of extra days for finally finding a job.

Searching my *waste* wardrobe, I put on one of the two shirts I owned, then pulled the fabulous pair of authentically worn-out jeans, and I was on my way... Though the bus didn't seem to agree with my plans, since the driver could (was) only advance to cross the unmarked border between the Pit and the Hills after having waited for over twenty minutes for a protest meeting to disperse. And as you must have guessed, I was late for class.

I think that I spent around ten minutes in the Academy's Garden. It was too tardy for me to go to my first course and too early for my second, so I decided to go over a few class notes outside before it started to rain.

Finding a secluded bench next to the sports gym, I sunk myself into trying to decipher the scribblings I made on the white papers. With my handwriting, I should have registered to Med school.

'Come on man, give me a break,' a whimpering male voice caught my attention even before I could get through half a page. But who could be around? I asked myself, looking around me but not spotting a single soul.

'No, no...let me search my backpack.' The same whining voice sounded in my ears, I realized that it was coming from behind the gym.

Initially, I wanted to remain on the bench. I even hoped deep down someone would pour instant glue and stick me to the wooden boards. But surprisingly, my body moved, carrying me to see what was happening.

I was like a moth flying to an open flame.

With extra careful steps, I made my way between the narrow corridor that separated the gym from the labs, hiding behind the thick leaves of a climbing plant that covered the walls of the buildings.

‘All of them.’ I didn’t recognize the voice, but I was certain that it didn’t belong to the same guy that I heard earlier.

I needed to take a closer look, so without a second thought, I took a step further, hiding my body beneath the plants.

Now I could see. I could see so clearly that I was under the impression that I was out in the open.

A blond guy, low in the monarchy ranks since I used to see him all the time towards my end of the hallway, was pressed against the English-style brick wall by a much more muscular type of animal - Cole.

‘All of them, I said,’ the brute roared at the student under the ecstatic gazes of the chipmunks that followed him. The *golden boys* as everyone called them, more like the *moron boys* if you ask me, Ace, Jason, and Nicolas- three slaves to their king.

‘Break his nose,’ Ace, the one with the most authority, encouraged Cole to step up his game. They were acting as if back in high school and certainly not like in senior year at the Academy. In an ideal world, they would just be a sick bunch of losers, but until then, they were royalty.

The well-defined back muscles hiding beneath a black shirt tensed, letting out a very angered version of the blue-eyed villain. ‘Are you fucking telling me what to do? Maybe I should break your nose for that.’ Cole snarled with a demon gaze pointing straight at Ace, like an alpha, seconds away from taking him by the throat and reminding him of the rules.



Without giving it a second thought, Ace and the dream team backed down, setting a distance from their leader and his current victim, who quickly regained Cole's attention 'If I have to wait for a second longer, I **will** break your nose,' he roared towards the guy that was almost curled up into a ball by now.

With hasty moves, pulling at his pockets, the caged student raised a hand with a generous stack of bills, wiggling them in front of Cole, not as a sign of defiance, but as a result of the difficulty he was having controlling the nervous shaking of his hands.

Not waiting for a second longer, the *king* yanked the stack out of his hands and with a thief's agility separated more than a quarter, palming them in his own hand, then stretched out the rest to Ace.

'I guess this should cut it for the final arrangements,' Cole raised an eyebrow like he was doing the maths on something.

'My place Friday night,' Jason spoke in a tone that was waiting confirmation.

'Let them know,' Cole nodded, freeing the student who was one step away from having a panic attack.

It was like the poor guy evaporated in a second, running as fast and as far as his feet could carry him while Ace and the rest of the crew took a right to enter the gym.

Strangely, Cole didn't move, remaining a living statue for a couple of minutes until large drops of rain began rolling on his face, filling a thick strand of jet-black hair and making it tumble over those cobalt pools of darkness.

I couldn't leave either, not without revealing my position, and even with the plants that were offering me a temporary shelter, I felt my clothes catching the drops of rain and melting on my skin. I instantly was cold, shaking harder than the leaves around me, but there wasn't a chance in hell that I would flinch and risk him catching a glimpse of me.

Suddenly, he turned, taking a few steps away in the opposite direction and I thought that I was finally free, though my illusion was quickly shattered by the hoarse tone of his voice. 'Get out from there.' He spoke stopping on his way and turning his gaze straight towards the bushes that were hiding me.

I paused, not knowing what to do, embarrassed and scared at the same time.

'Don't make come and drag you out of there myself.' This time his tone was much more menacing than before and angering him more than he already was didn't seem like a good choice at all.

I pushed the leaves away and took a step further out in the pouring rain, while Cole waited for a second then strode in my direction, halting only a few inches in front of me.

I gulped, expecting the worse, including him hitting me.

'You're cold,' he smirked, leaning his head while looking directly at my hardened peaks that were breaking through my t-shirt.

With rivers of embarrassment running down on me I covered myself, wrapping my arms around my chest only to spread a long laugh on his face. I'm sure that it wasn't something that he has never seen before, but it was something that I've never allowed to be seen. 'Do you like watching me?' Cole continued with the arrogance that defined him so well.

I was aware that he wasn't expecting an answer, he was just preening on humiliating me, and before I knew it, his hand raced towards me, making my eyes instinctively close.

I silently waited to feel the impact of the blow. Nothing that I couldn't handle, I'm sure, since I've had such thorough training from my father. But his palm, surprisingly, stopped somewhere else- under my chin. I breathed, opening my eyes to look at him while a tempestuous gaze was falling over me. A lazy thumb rolled over my lips, stealing the oxygen out of my lungs 'Little Mouse, you're going to keep these sealed about what you've just seen.'

He wasn't asking, he was telling, though I nodded to confirm it anyway.

Anything so he would let me leave.

I knew exactly what he was referring to. He didn't care about people knowing he was bullying that student earlier, he would have probably taken pride in that. He was referring to me seeing him taking the money. Though I didn't care. I just wanted to disappear.

And wish granted!

'Flee,' he blew towards me like a flake that was supposed to wander wherever he would decide -and this time I did just that. I didn't need him to tell me twice. I ran as fast as I could, straight into the girl's bathroom where I glued myself to a cold radiator, with no real chances of finding the warmth I need.

'Hey, hey, hey,' Jenna greeted me around twenty minutes later while I was just preparing myself to detach from my new hideout. 'Oh, did you get caught out in the rain?' She asked, turning on the faucet to wash her hands.

'Yeah, my bus was late,' I muttered, remembering the real reason for which I skipped class and ended under Cole's radar. 'And I had the fortune of running into the golden boys,' I whispered so that the rest of the girls that were in the bathroom won't hear us.

'OMG, did they hurt you,' Jenna asked with concern and a tint of horror plastered on her face.

'No, I just overheard them talking about something.' I wouldn't normally have told her about my encounter, not because I had something to hide, but because I didn't think it was worth mentioning. Yet, I was curious about an aspect, and she might just have an answer to my question 'Do you know about them having some arrangements, like something coming up? They seemed excited about it.'

'Oh, I think they were talking about the party.'

'The party?'

‘Two times a year they throw a luxurious party. The first half of the hallway is generally invited. No money is spared- and that’s because the money comes from the Herd.’

I was confused ‘What do you mean it comes from the Herd?’

‘They usually consider anyone outside their close contacts as a member of the Herd. You see, the money is like a protection fee. They use it to finance the party- not that they couldn’t afford it anyway, but it reinforces their authority. The more the Herd produces, the more expensive the bottles on the tables.’ Jenna puffed in profound disagreement.

‘And do the ones attending also pay the fee?’ I needed to understand what was going on around here once and for all.

‘Yeah, most of them need to pay it, depending on how rich daddy and mommy are, but for them, it’s a ticket to the ultimate party, because everything goes there. And when I say everything, I mean EVERYTHING..... At least that’s what I heard. I wasn’t invited to one as you may have guessed by now.’

I know that the *everything* in her tone should raise my interest and probably bring me to start dreaming of getting myself an invitation as any other student would. But it left me cold. I had an idea of what could go down at an Elite party where overly bored people would only begin doing stupid things. That’s about summed it up for me. A bunch of assholes clowning around with no real worries on their mind, when I alone had too many for a single person to bear.

I cut the conversation short since it was just a small curiosity, and decided to go to class before I miss my next seminar too.

The day passed relatively fast, and I was a little excited about getting my first payroll. The first money I ever worked for, and even if it was far from being enough, it was giving me a strong feeling of independence.

*A false feeling of independence!*

I took off from the Academy, leaving everything that happened there behind. I needed another mindset now, one that would get me into a working mood. I never backed down from a challenge, but working nine hours every night and lifting twenty-five pound boxes sometimes had an effect on me by the time dawn came.

Our boss never stays until the morning, mostly because the factory has three shifts and it would be impossible for him to always be on duty, so taking that into consideration, I stopped by his office before going to fulfill my daily duty's.

Heading towards the other part of the compounds' courtyard, where the containers that serve as the main office lay, I noticed a woman crying, hurrying towards the gate with eyes full of tears and worry. I knew her, she worked on a line next to mine, but I never interacted with her. I never interact with anyone here since we're paid according to what we deliver, and every cent matters these days, not only for me. We were human robots from 10 pm to 7 am, and in a way, that was fine by me. I needed to focus on what was important and not take someone else's problems on me. It's in my nature to sympathize with others' pain until it can merge into me, and when it came to sole destroying places, this factory was holding the lead.

'Can I come in?' I knocked on the metal door but didn't push the handle until I heard a confirming sign echoing from within.

I think I must have had the most ridiculous smile splattered on my face as the excitement of receiving my first salary was overwhelming me.

'Ms. White, please take a seat,' Randy, the man who hired me gestured towards an empty seat near his desk. I followed, then waited for him as he was searching through some papers for something. 'There it is,' he uttered, pulling out a thin file and opening it up in front of me then pushing it towards my end of the table. 'Sign below the marked line,' he indicated as if I had any idea what this was all about.

‘What is this?’ I stuttered, noticing the word *finalizing* somewhere above the line he was referring to. I didn’t get a chance to read too much, but from the one-second speed reading, I had an idea of what the document was about.

‘It’s a termination of our contract,’ the man calmly spoke as if this was our initial agreement.

‘What do you mean, I thought it was indefinite!?’ I didn’t understand what was going on as my mind began shaking, threatening to lose all sanity.

‘It wasn’t, haven’t you read the contract?’

Big mistake on my part, because I didn’t. Not that I would have refused it anyway, but I was so excited about finding a job in only two days since I arrived in the city, that I skimmed through the pages and stopped just on the sections where they had specified the pay.

‘To be honest I would have kept you if it wasn’t for what’s happening in the streets.’

‘What’s happening in the streets!?’ Between my time spent at the factory and the Academy, I didn’t have any idea about what was going on around me, plus the lack of the TV was a black ball on this one.

Randy looked back at me with doubt, or as if I just came from Mars anyway, and while lighting himself a cigarette, he breathed in thin strands of smoke. ‘Riots. The whole place is a fucking ticking bomb.’

‘But what’s that got to do with me?’ I couldn’t connect how my job fits into this picture.

‘It’s easy, we produce packages for clothing. Do you think the Elite will be so invested in shopping when all hell is about to break loose? I’ll give you the answer to that. They’ll be running as the scared craps they are.’

You could clearly see in which camp he was playing, but still, none of this would solve my problems, on the contrary, it deepened them. ‘We are shutting down at least one of the shifts to cut the losses for now, and as you may have realized

it, last in, first out.’ He concluded, leaving me speechless to stare into the ground.

Not only I couldn’t find another job, but I was also losing the one that I had. Desolation wasn’t enough to describe the tormenting fear that was sneaking into my soul, and with every second that passed, I felt that I was approaching the end of the world... at least the end of my world.

‘Here’s your money,’ he pushed a few bills over the file, leaving me enough room to fill out my name under the marked line ‘Sign. It’s only a formality anyway. The contract stipulated that our agreement ends today. Your signature is needed just so that I don’t fill out some more useless forms’

‘Please, give me a chance. I’ll work harder than any employee you have. I need this. I can’t leave this room without this job.’ I almost begged for him to let me keep it. As I said, it wasn’t even much to begin with, but it was *something* - and now I was about to be left with nothing.

Randy smiled, but the curl of his lips had a devious amusement in it ‘You think they all don’t want the same thing? That they’re not desperate!? You should have heard the offers I received over a job. And don’t think I don’t know that this packager position is not much, but compared to what’s out there, it’s everything. People are crying out there...people are dying out there,’ he spoke with a dark satisfaction as if people’s misery was empowering him. He was the boss of a few putrid bills, but those bills can make difference between life and death when you don’t even have food to put on the table.

‘Please,’ I pleaded much stronger than I used to do it back in the streets. Now, it wasn’t for my lame attempt of a father, now, it was for my siblings.

Randy took a drag out of his cigarette then paced towards a small window that was positioned to face the factory ‘Come here and tell me what do you see.’

I almost jumped to my feet then walked towards the window, hoping that it was his way of finally telling me that I still stand a chance.

And I did, but it was far away from anything I could ever think of.

I glanced through the window to try and figure out what he was talking about, but there was nothing out of the ordinary. 'People,' I replied, looking at the numbers of workers going in and out as the shifts were changing.

'Dull, murky people,' he snarled, taking a step closer to me. 'You're not like that, are you?' His lips touched the back of my head as a wandering hand wrapped itself around my waist 'You shine,' he added as my body froze like the Antarctic blizzard just went through it. 'I may have another use for you around here,' he was putting light upon his name, as his voice became randy, and his body leached against mine, forcing me against the window.

'Get off of me,' I turned to push him around since there was no need to ask him what he was doing. Things were obvious enough.

A hand that caused my stomach to churn raced to tug on my t-shirt 'It will sure beat working on the packaging line.'

Drawing my arms back to get enough momentum, I dashed towards him, pushing him away, but his force overcame mine, and I was now trapped between the metal wall and his reeking breath while his lips were searching for mine. I turned my head so he won't reach me, but his body came so close that I began feeling his whole weight on mine.

I had to urgently get out of there, though in those moments it seemed impossible to even move.

'Ahem,' the clearing of someone's throat stopped him, forcing him to turn his gaze towards the door, and in that second, regrouping my forces, I pushed him off me.

Not waiting for him to recover from the shock, I ran towards the exit, not before I leaned in an instant over the desk and grabbed my money, but the second I turned to get out the door, my face smashed on what seemed to be a brick wall. The move unbalanced me and my palms open to catch on to



something, letting go of the few pieces of state typography paper that were so important to me.

It was a piece of clothing that served me as an anchor... An expensive piece of clothing from what I soon realized as the man who had just indirectly saved me from my assailant was standing right in front of me.

‘Get your shit together, Randy.’ he roared as I was blocked, glancing up at him. It was like looking at hazard coming straight to you, with absinthe deep eyes and devious indentations in his cheeks- a perfect trap set to destroy you.

He was a God and he was a demon.

I knew it from the first second.

I feared him from that first second!

‘He’s not going to hurt you,’ the man snarled more in my ex-boss’ direction than mine while the chill-giving authority in his gestures was assuring me that he’s right.

I tumbled on the floor to pick up my money, I had to do it with all risks because if I didn’t, it would be game over from when I would walk past the door. With rushed moves, I gathered the bills that were spread next to the Italian leather shoes the man was wearing. He didn’t help me and I didn’t expect him to. I was just happy because if I was in the Pit someone would have tried to steal them by now, but still, I was in the wrong place, and no matter what affirmation the businessman had made, I was still in great danger.

The second I was done, my feet raced straight to the exit, not having a second look in their direction. I never again wanted to see them, not my despicable boss or the strikingly handsome stranger.

I ran so fast that I thought my shoes would tear by the time that I’d get home. I had to stop around three bus stops further because it was impossible for me to go on. My heart pumped loudly in my chest and every single cell of my body seemed to be catching on fire. I was a moment away from breaking down, but with my last strength, I crawled into the shower. This day had been an ordeal, and as soon I got to put

some clothes back on, I realized how big of a nightmare it really was.

Counting the bills and with tear-dropping desperation, I realized that it wasn't the whole sum I needed. Either Randy gave me less money or I lost a few bills when I dropped them on the floor back at the factory. It didn't even matter since it was impossible for me to ever return there.

I could no longer hold in the distress weighing on me. Hot tears covered my face, soaking the bed sheet as for the first time ever, I felt defeated. It was rent day tomorrow, and I didn't even have enough to cover for that. Not a single dime for the Academy tuition and my stomach was twisting with a loud sound, trying to make it through another night with no food.

I had to pull another blanket on top of me, not sure if it was even cold in the room or my body beginning to cave in, but it managed to give me the comfort of insulation. I wanted to disappear. It would be so easy if I would just disappear. Yet, I couldn't do that, not to Sebastian and Natalie.

I think that I cried for hours, still hiding between the pillows, knowing it may be the last night with a roof above my head.

Sleep eventually found me, ravaged by tormenting emotions and utterly exhausted from fighting a battle every second I breathe.

I didn't wake up until the morning... still with no idea what to do. Didn't even feel like getting out of bed, just lazily melted there into the mattress, hoping that I could find a supreme power to start everything all over again.

But where could I go? What should I do?

I wanted to close my eyes and go back to sleep, maybe inspiration will find me, but as my lashes were preparing to unite, a small red spot on the floor caught my attention. My eyes blinked wide open and I let my feet fall on the ground, looking at the object that seemed to be an envelope.

Was it a bill? Utilities? Not likely since I didn't really have any except for the water, but that came from a barrel that my landlord keeps outside.

I rushed to open it, curious and intrigued since I observed the paper as being high quality, and unfolded the white sheet until dark letters revealed themselves. Letters that little did I know would change my life.

*Come to where two worlds meet and find the key to a new life - today 6 pm.*

## *Chapter 3*



I folded the letter in two and placed it back in the red envelope while every single one of my instincts was telling me to throw it on the floor where I initially found it. But it was hope when I was losing all drops of it, sinking in darkness with few chances to survive.

Maybe it was a trap, maybe it was a scheme, but that 1% chance that this was real was forcing me to follow it. I just needed to figure out what this was about.

Reaching the sink, I splashed cold water on my face, hoping to reconnect to reality. The room seemed to be spinning while my instincts of self-presentation needed to dissipate in front of the last shot of saving my family from that monster. I had to do this. I had to pursue this last possibility, no matter how risky it could be.

This is a world that shows no kindness and deep down I feared the price I needed to pay because even if the words on the paper were true because, in life, nothing comes for free.

I searched for the black skirt that I brought along with me when I left. The only skirt I ever owned since I was more of a pants girl, but judging from the expensive paper, I had a feeling that my torn jeans wouldn't do me any favors this afternoon. I didn't have a shirt, not a decent one anyhow, but tugged a white t-shirt into the skirt and made one of those careful messy looks. Maybe they will think that I'm am a punky. In any case, it was the best that I could do.

Combing my hair into a ponytail, I took a last look in the mirror. I was far from being ready, but it had to do. I was already late for the Academy and staring for a few extra minutes at my shabby reflection wouldn't get me a new set of clothes anyway.

A knock at the door stopped me on my way out. I was two steps away from twisting the doorknob when a voice that I feared to hear brought me to my senses. 'Rent,' my landlord barked, reminding me of the sum that was due today.

What could I tell him when even I didn't have any answer? I needed to stall him, at least for a few hours, until I'd figure out what the letter had to say. That meant that I couldn't go through the front door so I decided on making a getaway. Opening the small window I usually keep tightly shut, I threw my bag on the metal fire escape ladder then followed, speeding down the stairs. With all the running I was doing these days, I could participate in a marathon.

At least I managed to make it out to the Academy on time, not that any part of the Seminars or the Lectures scheduled for the day stuck with me. I was nowhere near that territory, just drifting away *to where two worlds meet*.

It was a riddle. A complicated one, yet all too easy at the same time. The two worlds - the Pit and the Hills divided by a thin line. A street half poverty and desperation, half luxury and opulence. An invisible border that divided our society so well.

Now, all I had to do was to figure out the exact place I was supposed to go to.

I barely survived throughout the courses, staring at the clock's hands counting each second, and the instant last one of

them drained, I was on my way to *find the key to a new life*, whatever that meant.

I didn't even take the bus to get there. It was just about a mile away and my feet couldn't be held still to wait at the station anyway. Too much excitement, I guess, and I could only hope it would have a real foundation.

The street I was searching for, finally revealed itself in front of me, though no open doors or large signs with my name written all over them, not that I was expecting any in the first place.

Initially, I thought about asking around, but what exactly was I looking for anyway?

There was no option left other than wander around and hope that I could figure things out on my own, maybe even find a small clue to where it may be.

I analyzed each house I went by, focusing on the luxurious part of the street since the quality paper was a sign that my location had all chances of being on that side of the road.

And I was right.

*The Key to a new life* suddenly made perfect sense since a key-shaped entrance door was standing right in front of me. It was a gothic building, unique in its architecture, as intriguing as the letter that brought me there.

I gasped, realizing that I was moments away from uncovering the mystery, while every sensation known to man was racing across my body. I was cold while burning internally, shaking but driven by all the courage in the world.

I needed to know if my little brother and sister were lost or saved.

With full sail ahead, I ventured to knock on the door, though no one answered. This had to be it, I wasn't mistaken. I knocked again, harder this time until the metal door clicked, opening, yet without anyone being behind it. I stepped forward, tilting my head just a little inside to see if anyone was

around when a voice acknowledged my presence ‘Just in time, Bea. Lobby, first door on the right.’

It was a woman whose voice I didn’t recognize, though I guess that we must have met since she knew my name.

Following her command, I entered the hallway and stopped in the doorway of the first room on the right. In front of me stood a tall beautiful woman, late 40’s, maybe early 50’s, but the only thing that betrayed her age were the small wrinkles forming under her eyes because her body looked like she had just come out of high school.

A golden dress made of expensive material wrapped tightly around her while every piece of her jewelry screamed luxury. She was distinct, glamorous in every sense of the word, maybe a rich businesswoman, high society for sure. Though I didn’t get to linger on the subject for too long since my thoughts were abruptly interrupted by the sound of her voice ‘Good afternoon, Bea.’

‘Good afternoon, but how do you know my name?’ There was something strange going on around here that pushed me to try and find out immediately where she knew me from.

She smiled, revealing a perfect row of pearl white teeth ‘I wouldn’t be in this position if I didn’t. It’s part of my job to know everything about the people I interact with.’ Taking a few steps towards her desk, she gestured me to take a seat ‘My name is Vanya in case you’re wondering. You were smart enough to decipher my note, which means you are worthy to sit in this chair. There is a certain level of cleverness I search for in a person, and you passed the test.’

‘Can I ask why I’m here?’ I needed an elucidation.

‘You tell me why you’re here. Everyone has a reason. What’s yours?’

‘Hope,’ I gulped. ‘I need the new life you mentioned in the letter,’ I was putting my cards face-up on the table.

‘Then let me see what I can do for you. Ever heard of The Pleasure Room?’ She asked so casually while the title sounded so horrific in my mind.

‘What?!’ I startled.

‘It’s not what it sounds like, not if you don’t want it to be. But it does fulfill a man or a woman’s pleasure, fantasy... call it whatever you like.’ Vanya reached for an elegant leather pouch that concealed a pack of cigarettes.

‘I can’t do this,’ I babbled. There had to be some trick. I knew it, but no matter how desperate I was, selling my body wasn’t an option.

Lighting herself a cigarette, she raised an annoyed eyebrow ‘You didn’t even get me a chance to explain. I’m not a patient woman and you’re almost taking the last of it...’ Her cold tone cut right through me, bonding me to my seat. ‘As I was saying... We have some simple rules here. The girls and guys here are like a family. I do not tolerate, envy or any behavior resulting from this in my establishment.

The Pleasure Room is actually the room you wait in, along with the others that work here, for the Pleasure requests to arrive.

For each client, you will receive a letter that stipulates their desire... The Pleasure, as we will refer to it from now on.

Any one of you can read the letter and let the others know what it contains.

Each letter will contain the Pleasure itself, the amount you will receive, and the duration. Some of them contain specific requests, though not all, and some of them can be addressed to a specific person.

You’ll take turns in getting The Pleasures. For example, if you were first today you will be the last tomorrow, and so on, rotating with your colleagues so that everyone can have a chance.

If you refuse a Pleasure then, the next in line can decide if they refuse or accept.

Did I make myself clear?’

I nodded, though all I was thinking was that I had to get out of there.



Yet, this was by far being her intention ‘Now, do you have any other questions?’

And here it came. The sensitive part that I knew she willingly left out ‘What am I supposed to actually do on a job?’

‘Whatever your client desires, as long as you are comfortable doing it. The initial Pleasures aren’t of a sexual nature. I don’t allow them to be, and if the client decides to raise the game they also have to raise the paycheck. That usually means adding another zero to the sum. But it’s your say so where you go from there on.’

‘If I accept or not?’

‘Yes, if you accept to let the Pleasure be of a sexual nature or not. I’m not going to lie and tell you that my clients don’t usually want to go further. Most of them do. You’re all attractive and it’s a part of human nature, trying to satisfy a primordial need. But you’re the only one that decides if you go on, or not.’

I inhaled all the air that I could, hoping it will manage to calm me down and help me remain in my seat to listen to all she had to say.

‘The jobs can differ. Some of our clients just need company because they feel lonely and need someone to talk to. Others want you to pretend to be somebody they need you to be.. and some of them just want to take pride in having a pretty girl on their arm.’

Everything the woman said sounded like danger to me. Even the thought of having contact with these people was sending a cool shiver down my spine ‘Is this legal?’

‘The mayor and a few judges are amongst my top clients. It’s legal. Very legal, but also very private. Our clients usually like to keep their identities unknown from all others besides me and the person who they actually hire for The Pleasure.’

And since we reached the legal part, we also sign a contract that stipulates the requests and our limits. No one can reveal the nature of your job, and at the same time, you get to

keep your mouth tightly shut about anything that could happen at a Pleasure and about the person who requests it.

I think there's another aspect I should mention. Our clients are only from the elite society, so they spare no expenses to make sure their Pleasures come to life. You can easily earn in an hour what you used to make in a couple of days, maybe even a week of working in the Pit.'

'What if I want to back out of a job?'

'After you've accepted a job, you can't back off unless the one who solicited the Pleasure tries to harm you in any way. But that usually doesn't happen because the compensation they'd have to pay in case of any event cuts deep even into the largest of pockets. Plus, we have a few bodyguards that you can call on at any time.

To sum things up, usual Pleasures can't be declined. If you refuse a Pleasure after initially accepting it, you are required to pay our agency the price of the contract, even though the client won't pay you.'

Her words began settling in my mind, yet I was far from seeing myself involved in any of this. Still, my curiosity was pushing me to know more about this strange place 'You mentioned something about the Pleasure possibly requesting a certain person.'

Vanya took a long drag out of her cigarette 'Usually, it only specifies if they're looking for a man or a woman, but we do have clients that ask for some of our employees in particular. Most of the time, the clients that require a specific person have worked with that employee in the past. And to make things clear, if the letter asks especially for you, then the rule in which you have to wait for your turn no longer applies.' She finished her sentence, raising to her feet and leaning forward on the desk, supporting her hands on the counter 'I need a decision now! I'm two girls short since two of my employees left without a warning, and as you may have realized, I can't just put an ad in the paper for this job, so my time frame is very limited.'

The walls seemed to be closing in on me and no matter what I may answer came across as being the wrong decision ‘Can I have a moment, please?’ I ran out the door, unsure if she answered, and even if she did, I didn’t manage to hear anything. My heart was pumping loudly in my ears, covering all thoughts and making room for over-the-edge adrenaline.

I wasn’t the right person for this job.

But was it the right job for me?

I woke up in the street, trying to breathe in the thick smoggy air. Nothing and everything made sense.

That, until reality hit me!

What was I going to do since nothing awaited me back there? I had run all the streets, exhausted all possibilities. This was the only chance I had. Maybe I could even get enough jobs to bring Nat and Sebastian here to live with me... that, without having to break my dignity.

It wasn’t even a choice to begin with, and I was just starting to see things clearly.

With lightning speed, I was back, sitting in Vanya’s chair. I couldn’t afford to miss this opportunity ‘I’ll take the job,’ my voice trembled so hard that it sounded like an old cassette stuck into a playing mode.

Vanya’s palms glued together while her forehead was frowning in annoyance ‘Never walk away from me again when I’m talking to you. Got it?’

I had rushed out in desperation and made a mistake. ‘Got it,’ I answered, hoping that my rude action wasn’t enough to make her withdraw her offer.

‘You’re lucky I’m in a difficult situation with not enough personnel on my hands, I would have locked the door behind you if the times were different,’ she muttered, searching through a thick stack of files that were placed in a corner of her desk. ‘You’re hired. Go towards the end of the hallway and wait for a Pleasure. I’ll prepare your contract by the time you’re ready to go.’

What?

*Now?*

As in today?

‘Go, you’ll know which room when you get there,’ Vanya didn’t raise her eyes to look at me, continuing to search through the files - and I didn’t give her the chance to get mad at me again.

I walked out of the room, though this time with slow steps, heading towards a place of no return. Once I passed through that door, my life was going to change, or maybe it already had, ever since I entered this building.

Mystery or glory, moments away from finding out. One thing was certain, Vanya was right about me recognizing the room immediately since a large wooden door was revealing itself to me an inch at a time, as I was heading towards the end of the hallway.

Stopping in front of the room, I reached to touch the old wood carvings that looked like a direct dive into the underworld. It seemed magic, with black and golden gargoyles masterfully sculptured into its surface, watching poor souls, ready to devour them. Everything that Echo City represented, and a little more. The gateway to heaven and hell.

Rise or fall - this was it.

I pushed the door open and stepped into a new world, finding myself in the middle of an imposing room, all pairs of eyes pointing at me.

‘Welcome,’ I didn’t even get to see their faces clearly when a female voice greeted me. I raised a few shy fingers ‘Hi.’

‘I’m Laura, Vanya usually assigns me to guide newbies around the place’ The woman who greeted me continued, while I kept looking all around me. Maybe around a dozen people, men and women, scattered all over the large hall, some involved in vivid conversations while some just hanging around the place.

‘Bea,’ I smiled... Well, more like just exposed my teeth since a genuine smile was pretty hard to emerge in a situation like this.

‘Come, follow me,’ she walked towards a table where different drinks and snacks were laid out, carefully arranged. ‘Help yourself to whatever you want.’

I’m not sure that was a great idea since at that point I could have eaten the entire contents of the table- plates included.

‘Just a glass of water,’ I reached for the water decanter and poured myself a glass, not entirely ready to stuff my face with all that I could find in front of all these unknown people.

‘They’re not that bad,’ Laura benevolently smiled, looking around her at the other people in the room, then placed a few tiny sandwiches and an apple on a small plate. ‘Let’s sit at that table,’ she gestured towards a small byzantine metal table placed into a secluded corner of the room.

I followed her there, taking the seat next to the window.

‘I come from the same place,’ she nodded, placing the plate in front of me. ‘And I’m never returning there.’ The bitter gaze I know so well flashed through her eyes ‘Eat, they don’t care.’

I wanted to say it wasn’t necessary, maybe some dumb excuse that I ate just before I got here, but she knew. She knew *the hunger*. She knew the pain. There was no use in denying, especially since my stomach was one step away from rioting on me.

‘Is it hard?... I mean is it hard doing this job?’ I asked while feasting on the first meal in two days.

‘It was at first. That, until I realized that it’s a lot easier than working for a dusty fist of cents and fearing every second of the day that I wouldn’t be able to afford food or rent.’

‘And do you...you know...step up the game?’ I was ashamed of asking, but I needed to know what was truly going on here.

She paused, raising her eyes to peer straight at me ‘I... I personally don’t, but almost everyone else here does it. Let’s be honest, all the people in this room were hopeless at one point. You don’t end up here otherwise. I guess stepping up the game depends on how desperate you are at the time life opens this door for you.’

A weight was lifted off my chest. There was a chance that I could do this without losing myself. Maybe, in the end, coming here was the best decision.

I didn’t get to fully weigh things up though before I noticed a small red envelope, much similar to the one I received this morning, being slipped underneath the door.

‘Hey, new girl,’ a tall blond man, leaned to pick it up then looked my way.

Was I the new girl!?

‘He’s talking to you,’ Lara chuckled, nudging me to go in his direction. Everything was happening so quickly, that I didn’t even have time to react.

‘Don’t look so surprised, since you’re new around here, we’ll let you have the first letter. We do this with everyone.’

Vanya was right. They did work as a team- a small family. Pretty strange when outside this door it was eat or be eaten by the bigger predator.

With shaking hands, I reached for the letter, slowly opening the envelope. My feet were seconds away from abandoning me and my eyelashes closed, hoping to avoid what had already become unavoidable.

***30 minutes speed date - tonight 8 pm***

***Attractive woman in her twenties***

***\$300***

‘You certainly fit the picture,’ Laura came from behind me, peaking at the letter over my shoulder ‘Easy money. Not great, but easy...’

\$300 for half an hour wasn't great!? I used to make that money in a week, maybe even a week and a half. There wasn't a chance in hell I was saying no to that.

'I'll do it,' I answered even before anyone asked, mostly to convince myself not to back down, while a warm hand sneaked on the small of my back.

'Welcome aboard,' Laura whispered, catching my wrist and practically dragging me to somewhere on the right 'Come, you have to get ready. The time is so short. I have no idea what the one who'll pay the bill was thinking, giving you only a half an hour to prepare.'

I turned my head to look at the large clock on the wall-7:31.

What was *I* thinking about accepting my first Pleasure less than half an hour away?

'Hurry,' she rushed me, pushing a door to open and guiding me to the middle of an enormous dressing room. If the white Italian custom furniture wasn't impressive enough, the exhibited display of gowns and shoes was absolutely stunning. Large showroom cases of colorful purses and shoes in all shapes and sizes were defining an aisle that led to the most outstanding collection of dresses and outfits.

'What is this place?' I asked with eyes wide open, gleaming at the sequins that were delicately twinkling under the light cast by a crystal chandelier.

'Hun, as I said, none of us came from money,' she shrugged, pushing some clothes aside and searching for something. 'All Pleasures are paid by people belonging to the Elite society, and you can't really go to the Hills dressed with what you're wearing.'

Hearing her, I turned my head to catch a sight of me in the mirror. My black skirt could be almost decent, if it wasn't for the cheap material, maybe even the t-shirt I had on since the hole it had in it was tucked away in the hems of the skirt, but my worn-out shoes would definitely give me away, revealing my true condition.

‘Please, don’t feel offended, I didn’t mean it like that. It’s just that you have to fit in their world, and you can’t do it without selling the whole package illusion. You should have seen the clothes I had when I first came in. Makes yours look like they came from a runway,’ she said, pulling out a red bodycon dress ‘Here, try this on.’

‘But that’s so tight,’ I uttered, looking at the tiny piece of red material.

‘It’s supposed to be that way. Put it on, you do want them to return for another Pleasure, don’t you?’ Lara practically threw the dress in my arms and walked away. ‘I’ll be back in 5, give you some privacy. Put the dress on and do something about that hair.’

Now there was also something wrong with my hair!?

I waited for her to clear the room since I was a little embarrassed to change with her still present, then got out of my clothes pulling on the red dress. It slipped right on me, just like it always belonged there, revealing a whole different person. The curvy shapes of my posterior that I usually hide in my one-size larger jeans along with the large contour of my chest, were turning me from a nobody into a temptress. Yet, there was something missing from the picture. Laura was right about my ponytail, and getting rid of the band that held my locks together made a cold chill run along my spine. It was the best version of me, and I can’t deny that it empowered me to the tip of my toes. But the change was also terrifying me. In an instant, I had become an object of desire, and sooner or later this would have an irremediable effect on me.

The cheering sound in Lara’s voice brought me back to my senses ‘Yes, perfect!’

I could see her admiring me from the distance while I was having trouble arranging the dress to wrinkle itself around my defined shapes, trying to cover them up a little.

‘Just take a deep breath and let it stay the way it’s supposed to be,’ she smiled, sensing my clumsiness but also my timidity. ‘Here, you need shoes too,’ she handed me a pair of black heels, completing my *newfound* image. ‘A tint of



makeup,' she smudged a brush over my eyes, then a little mascara and- 'you're done.'

It was a brand new me staring back in the mirror- a *completely different me*.

'Two minutes left on the clock, you have to hurry.'

Where did the half an hour disappear!?! I panicked, steering to the door then almost running into the main lobby.

'It's ok, you got this,' Laura caught up with me since walking in those heels was almost like walking in tin cans.

At that point, she better be right because only moments were separating me from literally stepping into a new era of my life.

'Sign here,' Vanya's voice echoed from her office, stopping me on my way and forcing me to make a small detour to put the pen on the paper.

With no time to read the contract, at this point, it was just about blind faith, praying that I wasn't repeating the mistake I made with Randy. Maybe I was sealing my fate, maybe it was a pact with the devil, but if that was the case, then the devil was personally dragging me out of my own hell.

Two seconds later and there it was: my name black on white as the dice were tossed and the game had just begun -my first Pleasure.

## *Chapter 4*



I stepped out of the building, eyes looking across the street. A brand-new luxury car was waiting for me, engine purring and the right front door wide open.

‘Hurry up, please,’ a male’s voice was pressing me to move faster, and before I knew it, I was occupying the seat next to the driver.

‘Wow, you look amazing,’ the man behind the wheel happily exclaimed, then without a single explanation drove off in a hurry.

My limbs were trembling, trying to keep my anxiety from getting the better of me. A freak, a rapist, a serial killer, or maybe all of the above, I think the guy beside me was unwillingly becoming the vivid representation of a horrid abomination.

I took a quick sneak peek out of the corner of my eye to catch a glimpse of probably the last person I’ll ever see. Funny, he didn’t look so menacing, just a regular man in his late thirties, maybe early forties, dark hair, hazel eyes, oval face, small beard, Caucasian... Ok, ok, I was rehearsing in my

mind a description for the police - if I'll still be alive to give one.

'Here's the deal,' the man turned to face me with an even more concerned expression than my own. 'I never did this, but desperate times call for desperate measures. I need you to pretend to be my date for tonight. It's not even for the whole night, just for a few minutes until I drop off my kid.'

I turned to look at the backseat where a little boy was sleeping peacefully in the car's baby seat.

What kind of killer takes his child along to a crime scene?

'My wife recently left me for one of her interns. Met him during surgery. Probably confused the scalpel with his dick.'

'I'm sorry,' I had no idea what to say, especially since this Pleasure was quickly turning out to be something completely different than I had imagined it would be.

'Not as sorry as I am, believe me. He's fifteen years younger than me.' The man sighed, stopping at a red light. 'I loved her, I still do, but I need her to realize the mistake she's making. What's she's really losing. That's where you step in.'

'How's that going to help you fix your relationship?' If anything, seeing him go his separate way would only deepen the precipice between them.

'I need her to see that I'm still worthy. You know...that I can still get a woman's attention.'

I tilted my head to take another look at the gent sitting next to me. What was he talking about? I don't usually look at men older than me, but he was like fine wine as the few expression wrinkles on his face, accentuated every single one of his manly features. I had no idea why he hired me when he could have found himself a real date, maybe one even more attractive than me.

'Then let's show her that,' I smiled, determined to play along 'But I think that I should know your name... You know, people that usually date tend to know small details like that,' I giggled, raising a smile on his frowned face.

'Michael. And my date's name would be...?'

‘Bea.’

‘Even your name is beautiful,’ he flashed me a quick smile then drove off since the traffic light had turned green. ‘My boy was with my mother for the day and I’m returning him to my wife now... Just so that you know what’s going on in case she asks.’ He was giving me a short briefing and I was starting to feel like an actress preparing for her first part.

‘We’re here,’ he spoke after driving for a few blocks, stopping in front of an impressive mansion.

‘Come one, Nathaniel, it’s time to wake up,’ he got out of the car, unlocked the back door, and reached for his son while the main door of the house opened to reveal a woman in her thirties waiting for him.

‘Shit, I can’t do this. Please stay there.’ He suddenly had a change of heart, intimidated by the arch of her eyebrows while looking in my direction.

*Man up for God’s sake.* I thought to myself, yet following his instructions and remained in the car while he walked down the front alley, carrying his half-asleep son to pass him to his wife... If she could still be called that.

I watch his face change a million colors under her inquisitory eyes as if he was the one to blame for her infidelities, and even if I couldn’t hear what they were saying, the desolate expression of his face needed no words. He was losing the game, and the only ally he had in this was staying still on the front right seat of his car.

That was it, all or nothing, I pushed the door open and walked like a gazelle until I found his arm... Ok, maybe a wounded gazelle since the heels were still an unsolved mystery to me. ‘Michael, we’re going to be late for the Opera,’ I whispered, leaning towards his ear then stretching out my hand to meet the main target. ‘Bea,’ I smiled, making sure to show off my perfectly white teeth while a look of helpless anxiety was reflected in her eyes. Having a bimbo by his side could pose no threat, but having a beautiful girl asking him to go to the Opera was another kind of trouble.

‘Come,’ I rushed him, catching on to his arm ‘We do have plans after,’ my voice warm, filled with a seductive tone that was almost making me laugh. But for her, it was the real deal. I was the real deal.

She babbled something as I hung on to Michael’s arm and walked back to the car.

‘Thank you,’ he breathed. ‘You must think I’m such a fool.’

And that was exactly what I believed, but I knew the real reason behind it ‘You still love her. You can’t dictate your heart. You’re not a fool.’

‘I’ll take you back,’ he drove off back to Vanya’s trying to avoid the subject, but before the car pulled to a stop, a beeping sound lit the screen of his phone.

***Can you come over and look after Nathaniel for a while. I don’t feel too good. I think I’m coming down with a fever.***

‘It worked,’ he spoke while looking with disbelief on the screen. ‘She’s never been sick a day in her life. A little weird to get the flue right on my date night.’ He parked the car, turning a warm smile towards me ‘Thank you again.’

‘My pleasure,’ I returned the smile ‘But I feel that I need to add something.’ I knew it wasn’t my place to say this but my mind sometimes cannot be stilled ‘She doesn’t deserve you.’ And then I saw it in his eyes.

*He already knew.*

I walked back to the building low-key satisfied with myself. Mission complete. It was so easy. Too easy if you ask me.

In less than a half an hour since I left for the Pleasure it was payday. My problems were as good as solved with rent being paid by the end of the night, and strong hopes that I would be able to raise the money I needed in around two months so I could bring Sebastian and Natalie here to live with me.

If it was up to me, I would go get them tomorrow, but my father will probably call the cops on us since he was the one who had full custody. I needed a lawyer and we needed protection- and neither of those two comes cheap.

I returned to The Pleasure room the next afternoon, yet in Laura's opinion it was a slow day since only a few Pleasures arrived, and my turn was still far away since I just had a Pleasure the day before. No need to get disappointed, there is always going to be tomorrow and a longer Pleasure could get me back on track in no time. Though tomorrow came... And the day after...and then the day after that too.

The letters still arrived, but most of them specifically asked for the ones who the clients had already worked with, while the others were addressed to the strong gender.

I was panicking, even if Laura was trying to calm me down, explaining that the right letter would come soon.

But I couldn't do soon.

I needed it *now*.

*Soon* would only delay my plan, and time was an asset I didn't have on my hands.

I waited, dreading the moment at the same time, and when I had almost lost hope the red envelope opened for me.

**Sex bomb for the night**

**\$1000**

**Today 9 pm**

'Wow, a classy one,' Sonya, the girl that opened the letter laughed, handing me the envelope. 'You can pass if you don't like it,' she reminded me of the rules since the one who was paying for this Pleasure sounded like an absolute dick.

My instincts were strongly warning me to pass it along. Wait for an hour or so for another letter to arrive. But what if that hour turned into a day again, and the *one* day into many others?

Plus, there was the pay: \$1000 -almost enough to get me back on my schedule.

I shook my head, removing all doubts- and mental sanity along with them, and before I could get a chance to second guess my decision, I breathed ‘I’ll take it.’

‘Are you sure?’ Laura asked with a hint of concern since the classy *sex bomb* wasn’t a usual request for a letter. Sure, they all wanted *attractive young women* or *sensual dates*, but the *sex bomb* must have been a first.

‘I’m sure,’ I answered, thinking about what the money truly represented. Besides, what could go wrong? There was a certain line that couldn’t be crossed without my consent, and I decided from the first second of my agreement with Vanya that the bridge will never be burned.

‘Go get yourself pretty then, you have two hours to spare. Make a sex bomb out of you,’ Laura chuckled at the irony of the situation.

‘Two hours... A bomb with a timer,’ I continued, heading towards the walk-in dressing room. Though my timer was rather long since the sex bomb look was ready in less than an hour... And I say an hour because I spent half of that time staring at myself in the mirror, making sure I’d left none of my *assets* unexploited.

My choice for the night was flawless. A short black lace dress that wrapped around my body in heavenly perfection, revealing the very last curve of my voluptuous shapes, exquisitely accessorized with a black pair of heel sandals, and as for my hair, large waves of silky curls that rolled over my chest. I added some makeup too. Just fine black lines above my eyelashes to bring out the greenish color of my eyes and a tint of lipstick to plump the sex bomb vibe out of my lips.

Now, all I had to do was wait....**for an entire hour.**

I was beginning to regret all the time I had on my hands. I think I preferred it the other way around, like it was with my first Pleasure, rushing everything to the point it managed to take my mind off the pressure of things.

At least the hour to kill was finally giving me the time I needed to go through the Pleasure's contract. It wasn't a scam, everything was laid out clearly in black on white, benefits, and penalties all together.

'Your car is here five minutes early. You can still wait if you want to, but I have to leave for a meeting,' Vanya spoke while collecting her purse and heading towards the door.

'I'll leave now'- it made no sense in stalling the unavoidable, so I got up from the chair I was sitting in and followed her outside where a cab was already waiting for her.

'Your limo,' Vanya gestured towards a black limousine while she got inside of her own transportation and drove off in a hurry.

I turned my head to look at the impressive car that was waiting for me. A real-life 30-foot-long limousine! I gulped, heading towards the door which seemed to be opening to greet me.

'Hop in,' a male voice encouraged me to enter, and from the giggles and laughter coming from within the car, he wasn't alone.

'Don't be shy, we don't bite,' another man spoke while I was just getting on board, only to observe something that my mind could never have conceived of happening.

In front of me, I found a familiar face, Jason, while on my right there was Ace, followed by Nicolas. The golden boys - yet without their leader.

I braced myself, preparing to voice an explanation since their amazement of finding me in this position seemed to be inevitable.

'Fuck, she's so hot,' Jason growled as if I wasn't even present there.

'You're not touching her, I signed the fucking contract and it's my ass on the line. That greedy bitch will sue me for everything I have if we break the terms,' Ace rushed to remind his friend about Vanya's specific terms of service.



‘Lucky fucker,’ Jason roared, rearranging himself better on his seat.

‘Yeah, not so lucky tonight,’ Ace grinned, showing off a devious smile that I thought made him look like a hyena... Not that he wasn’t usually acting like one.

But there was something off about this whole scenario and I was having trouble figuring out my part in it. At least they didn’t recognize me, and that was helping me be more relaxed. I guess being a nobody pays off at the end of the day.

‘Listen, babe,’ Ace decided to address me in his *all so mannered* way, ‘One of our friends recently lost a bet. So he’s in for a penalty. That’s where you come in. He can look but can’t touch...a little tormenting since he’s not the most patient person in the world.’

You could read a certain level of satisfaction on Ace’s face as the word *friend* didn’t really fit into his story. ‘What he doesn’t know is that you will try to seduce him. That’s your job for the night and I’ll be watching over you to be sure that you fulfill your part. Vanya gave me a double contract so he will have to sign it too. Respect the rules since you’re going to be his companion for the night.’

*He-* I feared this *he*, feeling an empty sensation gnawing at the bottom of my stomach only by taking the *option* into consideration.

At least they seemed to fear the contract’s clauses, and that was lifting a small weight off my chest. Yet the smothering burden was still there, pressing deeply on every nerve, killing all illusion I had that this Pleasure could be as easy as the first.

No, I realized it from the start. This will be an endurance test, and putting up with these idiots will probably prove to be much more difficult than I thought when accepting the letter.

‘How much for the full show?’ Nick decided to test the water, confusing the purpose of the Pleasure with a whole different thing. At least, different for me.

‘You’ll have to go to the piggy bank for this one, she’s definitely pricy,’ Ace answered on my behalf like he would have any idea of what were my rules.

‘Excuse me!?’ I retaliated, extremely annoyed with his question. Just because I accepted the mission didn’t mean I had to keep my mouth shut. ‘If you are searching for a different type of company, I suggest you turn the car around and ask for a different person for your Pleasure. See if your luck will change.’

I was expecting them to do just that, take me back to Vanya’s place and ask for another person who would probably be more open in fulfilling their fantasies. Yet, strangely they didn’t, since my bitchy attitude seemed to agree with Ace just fine ‘Nah, you’re perfect,’ his eyes flared with devious thoughts like an evil mastermind seeing his plan come alive. He was up to no good and I could only pray that his scheme for tonight wouldn’t have repercussions on me. In the end, I just wanted this to be over with so I could get paid and get on with my own agenda.

‘You know, come to think about it, I think I know you from somewhere. But I can’t put my finger on it,’ Jason narrowed his eyebrows as if he was trying with all strength to get the rusty wheels of his mind to work... and who knows, maybe even recognize me.

‘If she ain’t a stripper, the chances are pretty low of you knowing her,’ Nick was letting out the sarcasm as if the splinter fell too far from the tree in his case. They were all the same in my opinion, three spoiled brats with too much money to burn and too much time on their hands when, on the other side, I didn’t have either.

I wish I could say that the ride was a short one... or at least a pleasant one...yet it felt like a never-ending bad dream. The guys’ sexual allusions kept rolling in for almost half an hour, while I had either smiled through my teeth or made them bite back their words, yet nothing with any decent success since the hormones mixed with the vodka bottle they shared in the car was making them even more obnoxious than usual.

I was almost happy when the limo stopped... *Almost* being the keyword since nothing involving this evening could make me happy in any way.

I stepped out of the vehicle and it was like stepping into a different world. Sure, I've seen luxury before but never on this scale, so glamorous that even the street seemed to be made of gold. A private piece of heaven, for those who could afford it, of course. For the rest, an unobtainable dream, especially since for most of those living in the Pit, their greatest achievement is putting food on the table.

There was a lot of fuss around the mansion, and I was starting to realize that we were arriving at a party. From my guess, the party I caught them talking about a few days ago. That meant trouble - a world of trouble since probably half of the Academy was going to be there.

How the hell was I supposed to get out of this one?

'This way,' Jason's hand fell on my hip, skimming the curve of my posterior while his alcohol reddened eyes were trying to stare seductively into mine.

Though his moment of playing Casanova was short-lived since I hoisted his palm before he got a chance to *feel me up* 'I can walk by myself, thank you.'

'I think I'm falling in love,' he decided to pursue his juvenile pick-up strategy, insisting with his *seductive* gaze.

'Cut it out before Cole gives you a black eye,' Nick tried to bring him back to his senses, confirming the thought I feared most. Their *king* owned my time for the night, and if the ride here seemed impossible, the rest of the evening will be catastrophic. 'There he is,' he turned his head to my right where Cole was talking to one of the girls that I usually see hanging around in their circles.

It didn't take long for him to notice our arrival, and since I was the centerpiece of the evening, his night-blue eyes set to scan me from the instant he acknowledged my presence.

'My man, I brought you the victim for tonight,' Ace made sure to introduce me as the acquisition of the day, and

when it came to Cole, that's exactly what I was- *a victim*.

## Chapter 5



Cole seemed to know exactly what Ace was talking about, and picking up a whiskey bottle from the ground, cut through the lawn, heading to the back of the garden ‘Let’s go into the guesthouse, there are too many people here.’

The guys followed one by one while my feet seemed to be stuck to the pavement.

‘Are you coming? Or should we ask for a refund?’ Nick noticed me hesitating and did what they all do best - feed on my misery.

That’s exactly why I couldn’t show him signs of weakness ‘Yeah, I was just admiring the house.’

‘Just make sure nothing sticks to your fingers on your way out,’ Jason was defending his property.

Great, now I was also a thief...Was I expected to *crotch* some silverware out of the house?

We made our way to the guest house, which was a mansion in itself, even having a secondary garden, a tennis court, and a swimming pool. Of course, anything to entertain the *poor* guests that came to visit.

‘I need to have a word with her first,’ Cole turned to look at us and at the same time, pushed the entry door open so I could go in.

The thought of being alone with him even for a second was sending cold chills down my spine as the refund Nick was talking about seemed to be a perfect solution. Though there was a catch. *I* was supposed to pay that money to Vanya, and under no circumstances I could ever afford that.

There wasn’t any other option than to take a step forward and go inside.

‘Just don’t touch her,’ Ace muttered just about when I was walking past Cole.

‘Only if she asks nicely,’ the tone of supremacy I feared hearing was pounding in my ears, confirming each anguishing thought I ever had regarding him.

And then the door closed behind us, revealing an infuriated version of this devil, taking a step in my direction until our bodies almost joined.

*What the hell did I get myself into?*

‘What are you doing here?’ He muttered under his breath, so heavily that the words seemed to fall upon my face.

‘What am I doing here, what?’ I only managed to mumble, trying to comprehend what was he talking about. Didn’t he know about Ace’s contract? Because he didn’t seem so confused a minute ago in the garden.

I didn’t answer, not because I wanted to infuriate him even more, but because I couldn’t risk exposing myself just on a hunch.

If his friends didn’t recognize me, then neither would he, right?

In the end, I was just a nobody from the Herd, and that served me just fine. Besides, what were the chances of him recognizing me since he doesn’t even recognize the girls he sleeps around with?

‘Mouse, I asked you a question ‘- his words like rocks crushing me to the ground.

*Mouse...* Deep down, I hoped that it’s just an appellative he likes to use, yet I knew... *I was Mouse* and he was the Big Bad Cat.

‘I’m here for the Pleasure,’ I almost whimpered, unable to hold my ground.

He was taking control and there was nothing I could do you stop him. It was his night from now on.

‘Man, I hope you’re not fucking her. That wasn’t our agreement, and I’m not paying for that,’ Ace’s patience had lasted for less than a minute, cutting our *wonderful* conversation short.

‘No, *not yet,*’ Cole answered him while his eyes were peering through me, then turned his head to the door ‘Get in.’

He didn’t have to tell them twice since all three of them came rolling through the entrance door in a heartbeat.

‘Next room, now,’ Cole snarled towards his wingman while I was left with Nick and Jason.

At least I didn’t fear these two, but they weren’t exactly the best company either.

‘Jason, don’t touch her,’ Cole decided to growl out loud as he was closing the door to the other room, making his friend sound like a dog in heat that needed to be put on a leash.

‘Why did you bring her here?’ I could hear Cole talking from the other room since it was silent as a grave from where I was standing.

It seemed that I wasn’t the only one eavesdropping in on them as Nick and Jason took a few steps to almost glue themselves to the door. It was all about hierarchy, and when it came to the important stuff, Cole and Ace were the only ones whose words would count.

‘*Her?*’ Ace still hadn’t caught on to what Cole was asking, and that made the leader take a long pause.

‘Couldn’t you find one less attractive? This bitch is going to give me blue balls by the morning,’ Cole quickly recovered to become his usual self, but somehow managed to avoid the real question.

And there was something else that was beginning to stir inside of me. He found me appealing, and even if he was admitting it in *his* specific manner, it still managed to have an unwanted effect on me. *I’m in need of therapy.*

‘This is payback for fucking my girlfriend.’ I could hear Ace speak, trying to sound ironic, maybe even turning his affirmation into a joke while covering the signs that his manhood had been seriously offended.

Not that Cole would give a dime about his feelings anyway ‘Me and the whole football team. Just because you’re the only idiot that takes her out on dates doesn’t make her your girlfriend. Now give me the fucking contract and let’s get this shit over with.’

‘Ace’s been waiting a long time to get him with something,’ I could hear Nick and Jason talk.

‘He’s lucky Cole chickened out and lost the bet.’

‘That’s only because he was wasted when he made it.’

‘Were you talking about me?’ The door opened while the dragon itself was stepping into full light with nostrils flared, moments away from spitting rivers of fire on them.

They both became irrelevant, just small scared children in front of him.

‘We were just wondering how you’d be able to keep your hands off her. You know...Look, but don’t touch,’ Jason decided to babble something out, yet it came off the wrong way, annoying him even more.

‘Fuck off, shitheads,’ he roared towards them, making them all evaporate out the door.

‘You, come with me,’ his tone was no different than the one he used with the guys, exactly the same air of total supremacy as if he was ordering me around like a slave.



Without many other options, I followed him up the stairs and into a small bedroom, letting the thought of being all alone with him in the house gradually sink in.

The door closed behind us as Cole began searching for something in the room, first in the nightstands then all around the bed, and finally heading towards the dresser in front of which I was standing.

Although I had no idea what he was looking for, I took a step on the left so I wouldn't be in his way, but before I could step out of his space, an arm blocked my exit, trapping me between the dresser and the fine material of his leather jacket.

His gaze raw, visceral, cutting to the bone whilst analyzing every breathing inch of me.

An unknown feeling shattered through my system, so intensely that it made me try and remove the arm that was barricading me. I needed to get out of there that instant as nothing made sense anymore.

*He was intoxicating me with every breath of air that left his lungs.*

His arm seemed to be much heavier than Jason's, impossible to budge while his demanding eyes seemed to add new bars to my prison.

'Where are you going, Mouse?' He groaned, parting his head a few inches away from me so that he could take a better look. 'Are you cold again?' He grinned, fixating his gaze on my cleavage where my breasts were displaying every reaction he was raising inside of my body.

Now I wished so badly that I had chosen another dress that would have allowed me to put on a bra beneath it, and cover the consequences of our closeness. But how was I supposed to know that I would run into someone like him?

'You said you wouldn't touch me. It's in the contract,' I tried to sound menacing but my voice only came out as a scared whisper.

'But you'll keep quiet about this, won't you,' he let the weight of his breath fall on me while drawing his palms on the

exterior of my upper thigh and lifting me on his waist, then up on the dresser that sat behind me. ‘How am I supposed not to touch?’ His fingers ran through the curtain of my hair, tucking some loose strands behind my ears.

What was his game? Seduction? Whatever it was, it was having an effect on me, hardening my body on the wooden counter in the last attempts to keep ahold of my sanity. It was still Cole, the ultimate bully, and now he was just intimidating his way to get under my skin. I needed to hold on to this thought, even though the alternative seemed so tormentingly real.

‘Close your eyes, I promise it won’t hurt,’ the whispered words that instilled beautiful fear into me.

I thought he had a deal.

I thought *he* was the one supposed to resist me.

‘Now, Mouse,’ he barked, making my legs close around his waist in the most useless conservative instinct a person could ever have, hoisting a long groan out of his lungs.

Maybe I was scared, or maybe I was just weak, but my eyes followed his command, closing to expect what was to come.

I felt him moving around me, as I was trying to chase away the thoughts drifting through my mind while my intuition was telling me to start running.

Something was stirring in my hair as his wicked words made their way to my ears ‘You smell of fear.’

He could see right through me, and that was no surprise since I found it impossible in those moments to hide the obvious.

Though he had something more to say, ‘That turns me on.’ A thought that made my eyes squeeze themselves shut, desperately trying to conceal the perilous feeling that was building inside of me.

His hands advanced to the back of my head, tightening something around my eyes ‘You should be good to go... That,

unless you want me to continue,' he low tone spoke, resting his palms on my knees.

'What is this?' I asked touching the material wrapped around my face and realizing it was a mask.

'You're not the brightest bird, are you?' Cole rolled his eyes, making me push him back to try and see myself in the dressing room mirror.

'No charm school classes for you, I assume,' two could play this game.

'Watch that mouth of yours, Mouse. Or I'll have to watch it for you.' Apparently, Cole could say anything he wanted, but no one could offend the king. 'Or maybe you would like that. You could close your eyes again and imagine it... Or maybe I could make it reality.'

'That whiskey must have gotten straight to your head.' I just couldn't keep my mouth shut since he kept insisting that every living soul should fall for him.

'Don't fucking test my temper,' the lion roared, taking me by the upper part of my arm and whirling me around to face him. 'I like you better when you shiver.'

It was a threat and it was also a pending promise, while flames of desire were sinfully dancing in his eyes.

'Why did you put the mask on me?' Was this a sick fantasy of his or did he have an ulterior reason?

He let his eyebrows narrow into a frown, since explaining himself was certainly NOT a part of his usual routine, yet he manages to indulge me 'Just because my friends have the memory of a goldfish doesn't mean that nobody will recognize you. The whole fucking Academy is here, you're going to run into someone you know sooner or later.'

His answer surprised me. Yes, the mask would be a tremendous advantage, but why would he help me 'Why are you doing this?' I asked, determined to convince myself that there could be a living human being trapped behind the asshole layer he's so proud of displaying.

‘Oh, you haven’t realized it by now? It’s because I fell in love with you from the first second I saw you, and all I want is to protect you,’ his tone so ironic that he almost burst into laughter, even before he got to finish his sentences.

A wake-up call, underlining so thoroughly that fairytales don’t exist. There are only urges, needs of the body, and of a troubled mind. No happy endings, only hollow hopes drifting in a sea of doubts.

‘It’s fine if you don’t answer, but you don’t need to patronize me.’

‘Why do you think I put it on you? I don’t want people to see me around with you.’

At least now he was telling the truth, I was a nobody. No matter what dress I put on, how pretty I look, or how smart I am, I would still be the girl at the other end of the hallway.

I turned again towards the mirror, in an attempt to dodge another bullet since I felt him instants away from explaining my true place in the society ‘How did you know you’ll find this mask here?’

‘It belongs to the blonde that’s friends with Jason’s ex. I forget her name.’

I managed to change the subject, though his answer seemed to be bothering me. There was a 99% chance he slept with her. How else would he know the mask would be in the bedroom? But no matter how much of an obnoxious jerk he was, I still had hopes in that 1%. Apparently, when it came to Cole I was running on auto-destructive mode. ‘But it looks a lot better on you,’ he was still playing his game, alternating ice with fire.

I puffed, decided on not letting him get to me ‘Are we done?’

‘Yes, unless you’d like to take a seat on the bed.’

I raced through the door, without providing an answer since only fightback lines could come out of my sharp tongue at that moment.

‘I’m starting to think I’m going to have fun tonight,’ Cole deviously whispered while rushing to catch up with me as I was walking back through the garden. ‘Take a left through here,’ he continued, showing me the way since I had to stop, unsure if he wanted to stay outside or go inside the main house.

For some reason, a knot got stuck in my throat as I was spotting through the double glass doors so many familiar faces from the Academy, but *luckily* for me, I didn’t have time to brace myself as Cole was a master of giving instructions ‘Inside,’ his heavy palm fell over my rear, sending a painful chill to travel through my body.

‘Why did you smack my posterior?’ I turned irritated towards him.

‘You mean your ass!?’ Now, he was playing dumb.

‘Fuck off.’

‘Let me get this straight, you can say fuck off, but you can’t say ass!?’ His laughter filled the overcrowded room as we just entered the house.

My teeth clenched, turning my head to the right to look at him, decide on giving this spoiled brat a piece of my mind, though before I got to say something, another person caught my attention. Ace was staring angered in my direction as if reminding me of my mission for the night.

Shit...I was supposed to seduce him.

I guess *fuck off* doesn’t fit into “the words of love” category.

‘Come, I need another drink,’ Cole walked towards a table as the whiskey bottle seemed to have gotten lost on the way.

I didn’t enjoy following him around like a lost puppy, but I needed to own the seduction part ‘Let me,’ my fingers traveled over the back of his hand as he caught a new whiskey bottle. ‘I’ll pour you a drink,’ I reached for a glass and filled it with the brownish liquid.

His eyes flashed with suspicion, and the next thing I knew, he took the glass out of my hands and placed it back on the table ‘I’m a drink from the bottle kinda’ guy,’ and he had every intention of proving that as the bottle glued itself to his lips, taking more than a few large sips.

‘That’s not water, you know? I would like to have you sober for the night.’

‘You would like to *have* me for the night. That’s an interesting thought.’

‘Do you have to twist every word I say?’

‘I like getting you flared up.’ The devil spoke while gazing at me, assuring himself *all* senses of the word got to me.

‘And do you think you’re succeeding?’ My tone low, warm, almost seducing, I may say.

‘I think you want me to succeed. I intrigue you.’

I couldn’t deny that at least the second part was true. I wasn’t even sure of what I was doing, and the consequences of my actions seemed to be having a stronger effect on me than they did on him, but I needed to give it a try. The seduction plan was on.

‘What if I would admit that to you?’ I needed a gesture, maybe even a kiss, as outrageous as it may sound, to fulfill my part, especially since I could constantly feel Ace’s eyes burning on the back of my neck.

Though I guess I shouldn’t apply to an acting school since my plan was sewn with a red line. ‘Either you have multiple personalities, or Ace put you up to this. Don’t try to fuck with me, Mouse. I’ll fuck you back. Or maybe you’d like that...’

The words hit a sensitive spot and probably raised an uncontrolled reaction on my face. One that betrayed my *delicate* condition.

‘No way...Are you like little Virgin Mary?’ The corners of his mouth raised into a grin. ‘You are, aren’t you? I can see

it written all over your face.'

How the hell could he tell. I was even wearing the stupid mask. Was it that impossible for me to keep my reactions under control!?

'I would have helped you take care of that problem for you but I won't lose this bet tonight. I can't. Though that doesn't mean you can't be tomorrow's challenge.'

'I don't see it as a problem,' I muttered, offended by his offer. This dickhead thought he was doing me a favor!

'You're missing out on the best part of life. You should see that as a problem,' he took another sip, looking straight in front of him from where a Nick was approaching, heading straight to our direction.

'Hey, man. What's with the mask?' He asked turning his attention to me.

'It's my new fetish,' Cole spoke without showing any sign as whether it could be a joke or concealed sarcasm.

'Cool... Listen, I came to tell you that I'll be leaving earlier tonight. I found myself a hookup and I'm not really in the mood for partying.

'Ok. Leave,' Cole turned his back on him as I was left mute, looking in Nick's direction.

Did he really come to ask permission to leave?

'How can this even work?' I guess Cole had questions of his own, regarding me 'How does a girl like you get involved in something like The Pleasure Room? What were you thinking signing up for this? You're a fucking virgin for fuck's sake.'

'What do you care?' I wasn't going to give an explanation to him regarding my reasons.

'I don't. I'm just curious. What was it, money? Clothes? Did you want to get out of the Pit?'

I guess my plan on keeping my mouth shut couldn't work as I felt deeply offended. It wasn't about clothes, or a better life for myself. It was about 'Family. I have two siblings that I

want to bring here into the city to live with me. I need money to do that. It's complicated.'

'Enlighten me. I have time, besides there's not too much to be done around here, and if I keep making out with this bottle, I might put a smile on Ace's face and break the bet.'

He did have a point, but I wasn't going to spill my soul out just because he couldn't keep it in his pants. 'I said enough. Let's change the subject.'

'Oral sex.'

'Excuse me!?'

'I've changed the subject. Let's talk about that,' he snickered, enjoying the blushed color of my cheeks.

'You're not going to drop this, are you?'

'Not unless you can find other subjects to get my attention.'

'Fine. I need the money to pay for a lawyer since I need to get custody from my father. He won't willingly let them leave... And I need other things too. Like pay for college, rent, food. Give them a better life. Satisfied?'

'I don't get satisfied so easily, but this is boring me. I thought it would be some exciting reason.'

'Sorry I'm not living up to your expectations,' my eyes seemed to roll to the back of my head. How could someone in the Elite ever understand, though I did suspect him not to be so *elite* after all.

'But I could teach you to live up to them,' a whispered promise that installed both anger and a certain level of uncontained curiosity.

'Do you have a moment?' One of the girls that I usually see at his end of the hallway cut in on us licking her pumped-up lips while trying to batt her eyelashes as seductive as she could.

She was flirting with him right under my nose, and even if our connection wasn't real, it did leave an invisible trail in



my ego. I was being stumped over once again. 'I see that you have enough disciples,' I spoke, trying to hide the tremble in my voice.

The words seemed to hit him differently than I suspected they would, and turning his back on the all too eager marionette, he whirled to look directly at me. 'Yes, but they don't fear me like you do,' his words so heavy and serious that they seemed to halt all things around us. The people evaporated and the music stopped just so that his affirmation will sneak into the deepest corners of my being. He wanted me to fear him, he thrived on my weak reactions, every single one of them confirming his supremacy.

I was empowering him.

'Ahem...', the girl was still behind him, not being too successful at processing the oblivious message.

He never even bothered to address her, ignoring her presence completely. That would have made things clear in my opinion, though it seemed Cole had a certain power to possess the ladies as I came to find out, after two similar attempts that followed in the next few hours. At least they, and the crowd of people that wanted at least a nod of him acknowledging their presence, kept him busy, dispersing his attention from his main *victim* - me.

I was almost out of the woods. The party was slowly dying as everyone appeared to gradually evaporate, leaving the premises or seeking discretion in some secluded corners of the house. Though almost doesn't quite cut it, especially with Ace's eyes pinned down on me. I had to give it another try at seducing him, and it had to be something that his friend would get to see.

Mission Impossible since Cole had already caught onto the plan, but that didn't mean I didn't owe it by contract to Ace to have another shot at this.

I kept thinking of a strategy as another one of the pretenders to a warm place between his bedsheets just showed up. The notion of self-respect had died, brutally slaughtered by these girls...and now I was supposed to act the same as them.

My back glued itself to his chest, drawing my head far back to look at his cobalt eyes ‘My feet are killing me,’ I whispered, and with good cause since we had been standing for the whole night.

‘I don’t like couches, they give me ideas,’ he smiled, looking down on me, straightening his posture until I felt every rocklike muscle of his body.

The sexy smell of his leather jacket, the faded hint of whiskey, and the devils dancing in his eyes were all conjoining up to make anyone fall under his spell, and to be honest, if I had met him a couple of years ago, there was nothing that could have stopped me from doing the same.

‘I’m going to go and get myself a drink, then return,’ Aria, the girl that seemed to be stuck like a key chain to him, despite my presence there, finally excused herself, probably noticing that it was impossible to raise his interest.

‘Don’t try to play with fire. You may find me to be the perfect match.’ He was evil and sublime at the same time, recognizing the absolute dose of *everything* he was transmitting to me.

‘He’s watching you, isn’t he?’

Busted again!

‘Ace is an idiot. I’ve lost a fucking bet and this shithead took advantage of that. Now, I’m stuck with you, so unless you’re in for a threesome when Aria returns, I suggest we get out of here.’

Well, that thinking quickly brought me to my senses, as I kept confusing Cole with a human being and not the jerk he truly is, while his *let’s get out of here* seemed to be a weapon with two blades. I hope he didn’t mean to a room.

He left, and I was constricted to follow, exiting through another part of the house, to an interior garden where a swing bench was waiting for my tired feet.

‘What are we doing here?’ I asked, balancing my body on the swing to catch a little momentum.

‘I didn’t have anything particular in mind, I just wanted to escape from the house, but I’m sure that I can think of something.’ Every single one of his words had a double meaning, always testing out the waters and implicitly my reactions.

‘We could just talk...,’ the dumbest idea must have come to my mind since I’m sure the talking was far by being his favorite activity.

‘Ok talk,’ he shrugged, waiting to see what goes on in my head.

And there was a question that I wanted to ask all night ‘I was curious what was the bet about?’

‘Hmmm,’ he trailed his fingers over his lips as if he was thinking of something, coming up with the most absurd request ‘Kiss me and I’m going to tell you.’

I wasn’t that curious...

Though he decided to continue what was turning into a ravishing torture ‘You can do it here,’ he raised his shirt, revealing a sculpted V-line and placing an index finger right where it was beginning ‘or here,’ his hand went up along with his shirt, showing off the exquisite art of his tattoos, then stopping right on his pecks, above a silvery metal piercing ‘It doesn’t count as losing the bet as long as *you*’re the one kissing me.’ He was playing games, under the delusional impression that I could ever be one of his pawns. No matter how mesmerizing his muscles shone under the moonlight, they were far from being enough to get me to consider such a thought.

‘Does it have something to do with the fact that you no longer have money?’ I tried to get him in the direction of a more normal discussion, but apparently, I screwed things up.

‘What the fuck did you say!?’ He roared, entirely changing his attitude, catching the string of my swing and making it stop while keeping my body above ground.

‘I’m sorry, I didn’t realize what I said,’ and in all truth, I didn’t. I just thought he would understand it was safe to talk

about something like this with me since I was probably the only person he knew that wasn't in a position to judge him.

'My father just put a lot of money into some congressman's election. It's just a matter of time before we will cash in on it.' He suddenly was calm again. Too calm if you ask me...

'Which brings me to my next point...', he continued raising the corner of his mouth so diabolically high that I recognized on spot that nothing good could come from what he was about to say next. 'There is something about you that I want, and there is also something that I have and you need.'

'What could you possibly have that I need!?' This wasn't about money since I knew about him having his own problems, and even if it was, I would have never accepted. And for the other part, I just chose to ignore it since I had a feeling that nothing good could come out of asking *that* question.

'Protection. You said something about needing the money to get custody. I can get you custody and all the legal protection you may need. My father owns some politicians. And I control my father. No one institution would dare to come after you in this city. And no money necessary.'

'You would do this?' The foolish girl forgot for a second that she was face to face with the devil itself.

'For a certain price, of course.' There had to be a catch as some prices don't need to be paid in money. 'You think that what you tried to pull on me tonight would go unpunished, Mouse? You think that I could let things go after you talking back to me?' It was the Cole I knew at the Academy. The cold insensitive bastard that thinks he can always get what he wants. 'I could always have charmed my way into those pretty panties of yours, but it will be a lot more fun like this.'

'Like what, Cole? You think that I would sleep with YOU?' The thought made me laugh. 'You said yourself that I'm the Virgin Mary.'

'And I will let you have that... For now.' He talked with the certainty of a man that already had the deal in his pocket.

‘Sorry to disappoint you,’ I looked at his whiskey bottle to convince myself that he was drunk, yet it was almost full. Strange.

‘Don’t need to be. You’re not going to,’ he let go of the strings of my swing and I drifted away from him. ‘You will agree to be mine for a month and I, in return will give you what you need.’ So determined that even I was having difficulties not to believe him. ‘Now run away, Mouse. Our time together is over... for the night.’ He caught on to the strings again, halting the swing so I could get out and leave. And who was I not to follow his command when it meant my freedom?

‘Go fuck yourself,’ he roared towards Ace who was watching over us from the distance, then sat himself on the swing, taking his whiskey bottle to his mouth as I walked out the door.

I couldn’t believe that even for a second I thought of him as human. That’s what I get for trying to see the best in a person when sometimes *the best* doesn’t even exist.

Leaving the party behind, I finally found a cab to get me to my apartment and crashed the instant I saw the bedsheets. It was an agonizing evening, but I just brought a thousand dollars home and that was all that mattered.

I was one step closer to winning and three steps closer to losing myself.

## *Chapter 6*



The night passed like a second, mostly because it was around five by the time I got in my bed. But I was waking up into a new morning- hopefully, a better one.

The memory of Cole was still fueling the trembling in my knees, yet I was determined that I wasn't going to let him occupy the first hours of relaxation in the last month.

Since I arrived in Echo City, I split my time between EMA, searching for a job, or actually going to work. I can't even remember the last time that I had even an hour to myself, and today I was going to make up for lost time... at least until 5 pm when I was expected back at the Pleasure Room.

Since I wasn't the most exciting person in the world, I divided my day between cleaning and looking over some courses, then spoiling myself with an afternoon nap- mainly trying to catch up on lost sleep.

Before I knew it, I was back on duty, sitting on the sofa of The Pleasure Room and listening to some of Sophia's stories, one of the girls that work there with me. Apparently, most of the Pleasures were tedious and pretty easy, but once in a while

you did get the misfortune of running into a difficult one, yet from what she was saying, it didn't get much worse than Cole.

Lucky me!

At least that will keep me out of the woods for a while... according to her statistics. And I couldn't be the only one drawing the short straw all the time. Right!?

To be honest, I wasn't expecting to receive a letter today, even though the weekend was the busiest time of the week. There were enough guys and girls waiting in line, and even if the odds were in my favor, I wouldn't get a job earlier than tomorrow night.

But never say never, since after only about an hour from coming in, I heard my name.

'Bea,' Matt, one of the guys was calling for me while holding one of the red envelopes in his hand.

'It's not my turn,' I mentioned since he probably had the order mixed up. Even if I was indeed desperate to obtain any mission I could get, I wasn't going to cheat my colleagues out of one.

'I believe it is. Here. Read it.'

I wanted to explain to him again that he was making a mistake, but something made me take the letter.

***24 hour City break***

***\$1500***

***Requirements: Bea***

***Now***

The letter was specifically asking for me. But who could it be that knew me?

I first thought of Michael, maybe having another attempt at getting back together with his wife, though the city break didn't seem to fit the picture. Then my mind raced towards Ace and I immediately had the urge to decline, yet the sum of \$1500 was making it impossible for me to do that. No matter what!

Besides, *the statistics* were leaning in my favor.

The timeframe of *now* wasn't leaving me with much time to think, so before I was even sure that I could do this, I found myself answering 'I'll take it.'

Everything went on fast forward from there on, as I rushed to the dressing room, disposed of my clothes, and put whatever first came to my hand on. Vanya's contract was signed whilst storming out of the hallway, and less than five minutes after receiving the letter, I was boarding a black jeep and heading off to an unknown destination.

There was no one else except the driver in the car, but I suspected it was Ace who asked for the Pleasure since the interior was even more luxurious than the one in the limo. Or maybe it was Cole!? Though his financial situation wasn't making him the prime suspect in my assumptions.

Bracing myself for a second night of mingling between the wolves, I laid my head back against the headrest and waited to arrive wherever I was going and meet my objective. I found it weird that we were drifting away from the Hills and heading straight towards the heart of the Pitt. I never imagined one of the Golden Boys heading off to enter the ghettos or even have any form of contact with the Annelids, except me- though I highly doubted that besides Cole any of them knew my origins.

The car pulled to a stop in front of a club, which although having a tint of glamour to it, lacked the luxury of the Elite.

What on earth could Ace be doing in a place like this?

'Follow me,' the driver instructed, getting out of the car and opening my door, then walking me inside the club through a backdoor.

There was something off. This wasn't Ace's doing and neither Michael's.

A dimly lit hall was marking my path through a maze of doors and corridors, leading me to the place that I needed to be at.



‘Get inside,’ the guard had definitely skipped charm school, but at least opened the door for me to get in.

It was pitch black, and although I had just come from the shadowy hallway, my eyes couldn’t adjust to any clue of what was in the room.

A hurried beat was pumping in my chest, as the fear of the unknown was settling in, alarming my senses and bringing me to the verge of a panic attack.

‘You were late,’ a voice that I’ve heard before broke through the darkness.

‘I needed to change.’

‘Did I ask you to change?’ He asked as if I was to know what he had in mind.

In any case, I don’t think he would have appreciated my initial choice of clothes for the day. The dress I had on was more appropriate... for pretty much anything.

‘You wouldn’t have appreciated the type of clothes I was wearing.’

‘And do you think I appreciate these?’

What was he even talking about? He could barely even see my shadow, let alone my dress.

‘I don’t care what type of clothes you usually wear. If I did base myself on that, you wouldn’t be here today.’ The light in the room went on, revealing a face that has been haunting my dreams for more than a couple of nights. The man that I met in Randy’s office was standing right in front of me. Dominant. Powerful. Astonishing.

The memory of his image bestowed upon me that day served him no justice as I remembered him to be alluring, when in fact he was a sculpture chiseled by Michelangelo himself. A defined jawline was framing the perfect features of his face while the contrast between the raven hair and the two deep jaded orbs that glared at me was melting my kneecaps into some kind of jelly pudding.

He was too good to be true, and that's because goodness was the one attribute missing from everything reflecting in his eyes. Evil, mastermind, tempter, dominant...but good *-no*. He was bad news, and I had no doubt about it, yet there I was, face to face with the most tantalizing danger.

'Take them off,' his tone calm, as he had done this a hundred times before.

'Excuse me!?'

'Your clothes, I want them gone,' he detailed the request, although I already knew what he was referring to. Just having a hard time believing his nerve.

'I think you got the wrong person. I don't accept those kinds of requests.'

'I've got exactly the right person, Bea. Now take off your fucking clothes.'

He wasn't giving me any room for negotiation and the anger hiding on his face was forcing me to comply.

But who was he? *And what was he going to do with me!?*

Unzipping the dress I had on, I pushed it down to my feet, remaining only in my underwear, drawing my arms around me so I could at least try and cover the exposed parts of my body.

Hot tears became rolling on the ground, as I was praying that he wouldn't hurt me.

'Cut the drama and put this on,' he spoke, picking up a clothes bag from the couch and handing it to me.

'What's this?' I asked while pulling on the zipper to reveal a beautiful golden dress.

'I need you dressed...for now. Unless you want to put on a free private show for my men on the way to the car, I suggest you slip that on.' I could tell that he wasn't kidding around. He wasn't the type to do that, on the contrary, he seemed dead serious in all of his actions, from the way he pronounced every single word to the way his body managed to remain completely still while he talked.

The dress wrapped around me in a blink of an eye, molding on my forms as if it was custom-made to fit me.

‘Can you please turn so I can remove my bra?’ I had to ask since the straps were showing from underneath the dress.

‘No.’

‘No!?’

‘I own three strip joints, amongst other businesses. Believe me, you don’t have anything I haven’t seen before.’

‘Fine,’ I muttered, though without any intention of exposing myself in front of him. With Houdini skills, I slipped an arm under my dress, opening the piece of underwear and removing it without showing any skin. ‘I bet you haven’t seen this one,’ I wiggled the bra in his face then threw it next to my clothes.

‘You’ve got quite a mouth on yourself for someone who was so desperate less than a week ago.’

He did make a point. I sometimes tend to drift off and forget my main goal.

I never was the most obedient person so I guess following so many orders all of a sudden needed a little time for me to become accustomed.

‘This isn’t a coincidence is it?’ I asked, having the impression that I was part of a plan. And it didn’t take him long to confirm it.

‘Let’s go. I’ll tell you what you need to know in the car. It’s a two hour drive and I’m already falling behind schedule because of you.’

I could have nagged him about how he could have asked for the Pleasure earlier since he already had everything figured out, but the man was a ticking time bomb and I wasn’t going to be the one pulling the trigger.

We soon climbed into the same jeep that initially had brought me here, then drove off to continue our journey.

‘We’re going to attend a party for a few hours. You’ll do exactly as I say and you’ll be sleeping in your bed by the

morning with the money in your hands.’ The boss of all breathing organisms was ordering me around, placing me as if a pawn on his chessboard.

‘Why did you ask especially for me?’ The question was grinding in my mind, and I couldn’t find peace before having an answer.

Ignoring me, he took a whiskey bottle from the car’s minibar and poured himself a drink. He was going to talk only when he wanted to, or when he felt that it was needed.

I think he left me to boil for almost half an hour, while looking out the window and shifting his glass, stirring the ice cubes in his drink. ‘Did you know that Vanya hires only on recommendation?’ He finally decided to speak, asking a question that I completely ignored. In the rush and madness of everything, I didn’t get to ask how did she find me. But I had a feeling that soon it will all begin to make sense.

‘I didn’t find it necessary. I was just thrilled with the opportunity.’ It wasn’t appropriate to look dumb now, was it? ‘But who could recommend me?’

‘Someone you should be grateful to.’ The tone of self-satisfaction was leaving no room to doubt that he was talking about himself. Not that I won’t be eternally grateful to anyone who helped me like this but the *thankful* he was talking about had a certain connotation to it. Now I owed him, and no debt would remain unpaid when it came to someone like him.

‘Why would you recommend me?’ It had no use in playing the fool since it would have led to the same result.

He downed the alcohol in two mouthfuls, then gazed straight at me ‘I need you for a *job*. And I wanted to make sure that you won’t talk without unnecessary headaches. Vanya has her ways of seeing that through.’

‘What kind of job?’ I had to ask since I feared what the word means to him.

‘We’ll go to a party and pose as a couple. I will handle the rest. You just have to look pretty and smile.’

‘Probably like most women in your opinion.’ I mumbled, seeing a stereotype in him.

But before I realized that my mouth was getting the best of me again, his eyebrows narrowed, while his eyes were peering through me ‘What did you say?’ The weight of his body leaned against mine, completely trapping me between him and the seat. ‘Do you think this is a game?’ His eyes were losing the shades of green, changing into the black of the night.

‘No,’ I whimpered, as one of his palms locked on my waist.

‘Then you better start acting like it. You will do what I say, the second I say. Understood?’

‘Yes,’ I puffed feeling my heart trying to leave my chest.

The man was as deadly as he was impressive, and agreeing with him was the only way around this, although I was certain that I will find a way to screw things up.

‘I will be Joshua Davis and you, Milenna Russo for the night. I am an entrepreneur and often do charity work, so we met when you came to our foundation to ask for our help with a local canteen for the needy.’

I couldn’t hold down a laugh, seeing the white thread in everything he was saying. No one will believe this.

‘Do I amuse you, Bea?’ I guess the part when I would be screwing up things was already here.

The smile on my lips suddenly disappeared ‘No.’

‘Then what is it?’ His tone too calm to be real.

‘I was thinking that if you want to make a gullible background, maybe we should change the part where you do charity work.’ He seemed so far off from the type to even consider something like that. Certainly a taker and not a giver.

‘There are five dinners in the Pit that every night after 10 pm serve warm food to whoever needs it. All mine. Would you like to change the charity part of the story in your case?’

Speechless. That's how he left me, with a cold chill running down my spine. I had judged him when I was the last person ever entitled to do that.

'No. It's ok. I didn't mean-'

'Then just keep your mouth shut and listen.'

I nodded.

'We've been together for five months, and we currently live together in Salt City.'

The name brought a painful past to count me 'That's where I'm from.'

'Good, then you'll know what to answer if anyone plans on a visit there. Main attractions, and places. Though I doubt there is anything of interest there.'

And he was right. Just dirt and poverty covered the streets while the Elite seemed like peasants compared to the luxurious part of Echo City.

'We should have everything covered. If something emerges, we'll improvise.'

'Can I ask a question?'

'You will ask at some point even if I say no, so we might as well get this over with now.' I was starting to believe he was the best judge of character I've met because he was 100% right.

'Why are we doing this? Why didn't you just go there alone?'

'I need access to someone. He has never seen my face but knows of me. I don't want him or his guards to suspect who I am. A couple draws less attention, and if I play my cards right I'll get what I want. Now, if you're done, I have some work to do before we get there.'

His attention turned towards his phone, where it remained for the rest of the drive. Not that I had anything against it since I didn't want him in any way to be focusing on me. There was something very twisted about this man, and even though he

wasn't the definition of the regular textbook psychopath, I reckoned that he wasn't falling far behind.

After around an hour's drive, the car stopped in the middle of nowhere 'Come, we need to get out,' he waited for me to get out then followed me outside.

'Where is it?' I couldn't see anything around us for miles as the most sinister thoughts began prowling my mind.

'It's not here. We're just changing cars,' and as he spoke a couple of headlights lit in the foggy darkness, revealing a similar limousine to the one Ace rented the other day. 'Get in before you freeze to death.'

It was a lot colder than in the city, and the few minutes spent outside were already making me wrap my arms around myself, trying to preserve body warmth.

The limo drive was pretty short, reaching the luxurious destination right after we entered the city.

'Just stay calm and everything will be just fine, *Joshua* wrapped an arm around my waist to escort me out of the car, and he made sure it stuck there from the invitation checkout point until the majestic ballroom where the event was taking place.

I was stunned, having never witnessed such grandeur 'There are so many people in here,' I whispered looking all around me.

'You only have to focus on one person. Me.' His grip tightened, as his voice changed from rough to extremely seductive. If I didn't know better, I'd say he was trying to charm his way under my skin. 'Let's go to the bar for now. I need another drink.'

'What will the lady have?' The bartender rushed to ask, ready to prepare us drinks.

'Water, please,' I answered the bartender who looked at me as if I cussed him.

'And a whiskey double for me.' *Joshua* nodded. 'Slow down. You wouldn't want to get too drunk,' he cackled

looking at my glass.

Was that humor? I suspected him of a lot of things except that.

And I suddenly decided I should let him know that it didn't pass unobserved 'Your mood seems to have improved.'

'You acted more... How should I put it... Docile? That's a quality I appreciate.'

Well, he won't be appreciating me for long because my mouth had a time lock on it 'I bet I would look really pretty on a leash,' I rolled my eyes. Sarcasm here I come..although it was a bad joke if I get to really think about it.

'If you behave, maybe I'll consider pitting on you,' he emptied the glass, making it clink on the bar.

Was he for real!? I hope he didn't take me literally.

But I was starting to think he did since without warning he fastened an arm around me, pulling me to his chest.

'What do you think you're doing?' I quivered glancing straight at the carved lips that seemed to be closing in on me.

No answer. Not before his mouth got lost down my neckline, seeking refuge between the curls of my hair 'We're supposed to be a couple. What's so hard to figure out?' This time I could feel the irritation in his voice, though explaining the whole plan seemed to be slowly erasing that 'The man I'm looking for just went upstairs. I need to get there without looking suspicious. You will get me there. It will look that things are getting heated up between us and we're searching for privacy.'

'Doesn't that sound a little high school?' I asked since I was beginning to think that would be something Cole would do.

'The world evolves the same. Fifteen, twenty-five, or forty-five. People live for the thrill, and tonight, we won't be different.' The words didn't even finish reaching my ears before his lips fiercely pressed on mine.



A charade! That's all this- is. The words kept repeating in my mind.

That's until his tongue sneaked inside my mouth without asking for permission.

Strangely, it felt real. Alive. Ravishing. Like a tidal wave crashing on the rocks only to caress them each time it was leaving.

A dream and a nightmare at the same time while deep down I fought to loathe it, but the thought was far away from connecting with my body. I was mesmerized, kissing the illusion of him back, already losing a game that I had no idea I was playing.

'Come,' he took my hand, guiding me to the top of the stairs, only to catch me in another union of lips.

Things were happening a lot faster than I thought they would, but he wasn't the man to miss any opportunity. I was certain of that, especially since his hands fell on the curves of my posterior, gluing me dangerously close to his growing excitement.

Did he feel it too? *The magnetism? The passion? The heat of our bodies?*

But I couldn't have that. Not when my main mission was of so much more importance.

'This is a little too much, don't you think?' I asked between the pulsings of his tantalizing tongue.

'Is it?' He asked, intertwining his fingers through my hair to steady my head, and exploring my mouth so deeply that he would leave no corner untouched. 'I'll pay extra for the inconvenience,' he paused, sucking on my bottom lip.

*Inconvenience?* Was that what this should be? Shit!

'Or I could ask you to join me for the night,' he pulled me in even tighter, to crash against his body, squeezing his fingers against my flesh and leaning in to continue our kiss.

'*Joshua*... I can't.'

'It's Brax. *Joshua* is only for tonight.'

That did sound a lot more fit for him. The *x* in the end seemed to harden the letters, reflecting his true temper.

‘You don’t have a boyfriend or a husband. I asked for a file before I hired you. So what’s wrong? I will *try* to behave if that’s what you’re worried about.’

I was sure that the word behave meant different things for him than for the rest of the world but ‘I am not in the habit to ever do that.’

‘Make it your habit with me.’ Now he was really pulling all weapons, trailing a line of kisses along my jawline, reaching for my ear.

‘You got it wrong... Not in my habit entirely.’

‘You mean..!?’ He stopped to regain a normal position and look straight at me.

Embarrassment one on one.

‘Mmmm,’ he groaned as if coming up with plan B, though didn’t care to share it with me - yet! ‘You never know how the night might end,’ he traced his tongue against my lips for them to open, and receive him once again.

Closing my eyes, I hoped the sparkles humming within me would cease. Maybe I would get used to him kissing me, or maybe I’ll find a way to detach from everything and he won’t have an effect on me. Though I soon realized I was only fooling myself as the twinkles were turning into fireworks and my body was exploding with the need of him.

‘Let’s get you upstairs.’ It sounded like a promise more than a mission. One that I didn’t intend to let him keep in all sense of the word.

My feet seemed as light as feathers, walking on invisible stairs then drifting off into a labyrinth of lobbies with lips still tightly joined.

‘Wait,’ he made us stop in front of a room where three men were having a conversation. ‘Shit, he’s not alone.’ I felt him tense, scanning the area while analyzing all possible scenarios.

I had no idea what was really going on, but it sure seemed crucial to him to get whatever he needed to be done.

‘Here,’ he pulled me outside on a terrace that led to the lobby, then closed the glass door behind us. The plan was still working as it had full vision of the room where the man Brax was following was. ‘We need to wait until they leave and hope he won’t join them,’ he was revealing his thoughts, walking me through the scheme of things. ‘Get back here,’ in one swift move, he grabbed my wrist, rotating me to fall into his arms.

He was heavily armed when it came to the power of seduction, and my innocence was turning me into the pheasant he likes to hunt.

‘We don’t need to look suspicious if anyone passes by,’ he smiled, flashing out the devastating dimples in his cheeks. ‘In case you were wondering...’

‘What if-,’ I didn’t get to finish my idea before a ringtone I haven’t heard in so long was cutting between us. My phone. But it never rings, *unless*...

## Chapter 7



Bea!?’ The cracked voice brought me to my senses the minute I picked up the phone.

‘Natalie!?’ Finally, a sign!

‘Bea, I don’t have much time. I took one of the guards’ phones.’

‘The guards?’ What guards was she talking about?

‘Yes, we’re guarded now. You have to return... To get us out of here.’

‘What? What’s happening.’

‘Father has gone mad. He’s planning on sending me away. I think he wants to *sell me for a pretty sum* that’s what he said to one of his friends.’ Her words shocked me so strongly that I almost lost the phone out of my hand.

‘No...no. I won’t let that happen,’ I screamed, trying to figure out something that very second.

‘He said something about leaving at the end of the month. That’s less than two weeks from now.’

I don't know what to do. I'm scared. I've tried to run, but he's got all these people watching us. It's like there's no way out.'

Her pain and fear were killing me, like a rock crushing me to the ground. 'I'll find a way.' Even if that would kill me 'I'm coming for the both of you.'

'I love you, I have to run before he sees his phone is missing.'

It went dead before I got to say a word, and so did everything around me. I wasn't on the terrace anymore, just in a dark place, needing to escape.

I had to go and get them back, I had to go that very second!

I started walking as boiling rivers were flushing down on me, maddened by the thought I would never get to see her, or that my father could hurt them. I kept striding in an unknown direction with everything around me a blur, just pushing myself into the ground to advance faster and leave this place. Still, I didn't seem to be moving, just stuck on the ground, as if a captive of this house.

'Bea...Bea... Bea,' the calling of my name brought me back to a fractured reality. I was still there, a prisoner in Brax's arms. My body trapped between his, glued so tightly over his chest that it gave me trouble breathing. 'Calm yourself. You're making a scene,' he muttered under his breath, whirling us both around so he could still look inside for the man that he needed to meet.

'Who was that?' The question wasn't his to ask. He had his mission while I had my own.

'None of your concern,' I snapped, trying to break free from his grip.

'I asked you a question. I think that it would be wise to answer,' the tone of his voice lost all trace of warmth, as my reality was once again crushing in on me. This man was as dangerous as it got, and I needed to still be breathing in the morning so I could go after Natalie and Sebastian. 'Answer!'

His palms caught the upper part of my arms fully shaking me back to my senses.

‘My sister... My father has her and my brother,’ I inhaled deeply, bracing myself to tell what happened, not that I thought it would matter to him, but because with each word I was speaking I was realizing that going there in this state would only end us all. ‘My father has her guarded. Plans on selling her,’ I’m sure that I wasn’t making much sense, yet nothing seemed to make sense any longer. ‘I have to go get them,’ I spoke with my last remaining powers, acknowledging that I was boarding a suicide mission - or worse! But I had to try. It was my duty to try and protect them.

‘Shit, they left,’ Brax looked through the glass window behind me, catching the moment when he would have full access to his objective ‘Don’t move an inch. I’ll be back and we’ll talk about this. Got it?’

Brax didn’t expect an answer before storming off to meet the man we came here to see, but probably he should since I was still edging the line between desolation and reality.

A minute, maybe two... maybe even an hour flashed me by as I was drowning in a river of emotions, with fear the most potent of them all, subduing me under its wings and washing all reasoning away.

My feet carried me back to the lobby. I couldn’t wait any longer, no matter what that meant in the end. I was leaving with or without him, heading straight back to my old city.

I tried to see where he is and closing in on the room, I could hear men’s voices arguing. But I didn’t care anymore. I pushed the door open to inform Brax of my plans. I was supposed to be his partner, so a sudden headache could be excused at any time. Though my *plan* was so far from seeing the light of day as the instant I pressed the doorknob, a muffled roar rushed through the air. A bullet just hit its target, finding its way between its victim’s eyes and filling the room with his red liquid.

It wasn’t a private meeting that I was aiding Brax to achieve.

It was an assassination!

My eyes filled with horror, staring at a killer while my voice let out an uncontrolled cry. The next seconds were foggy, and before I knew it, all air seemed to have abandoned my lungs. I was up against the wall, struggling to breathe while Brax's hand was tightening around my neck to the point I thought I would hear my windpipe crack under his pressure 'Shut the fuck up or you will get us both killed and **I will end you** before I let that happen!'

Although there wasn't much room for my head to move, I desperately nodded, and in an instant found the relief I was searching for. I could breathe again.

'Put this on,' he took off his jacket, wrapping it all around me then dragged me out the door. 'Things got heated and you had a little more than usual to drink. That's how you will act on our way out, and that's the story we're sticking to if anyone asks. Got it?'

'Y...yes,' I mumbled as we were making our way through long corridors and back to the stairs that led to the main room.

'You'd better.' The snapping sound of his voice seemed to be even more threatening than the muffled sound of his gun.

We almost made it, cutting through the vibrant crowd with my arm pinned between his own, floating towards the exit. That's before someone caught on to us 'Leaving so soon?' The hostess placed at the entrance rushed to ask, not really out of curiosity, but because it was in her job description. Though I didn't realize that in those moments as everyone appeared to be plotting around us, and every single person in the room knew what Brax did.

My face was transfigured, changing colors as I barely kept myself standing, supporting my body weight on his arm.

'She needs some one-on-one time,' Brax winked at the hostess, putting on his charming smile on display, and escorting me out of there.

We were free! From all except our consciences.

‘You will keep quiet until we get to the jeep,’ he nudged me to get inside the car, waiting for the driver to close the door behind us and looking straight at the tears springing from my eyes.

The privacy window went up the instant our transportation took off, bringing Brax’s index finger to solder itself upon my shivering lips ‘Shush.’

And I did, for the rest of the trip, bottling a mixture of sensations that were almost making me throw up.

Reaching the same sinister field, we switched cars, revealing the true nature of Brax’s personality ‘What the fuck were you thinking?’ The shushed voice turned into a lion’s roar while his complexion was revealing the burning eyes of a dragon.

The eyes of a killer.

‘I...I..-’ I had no idea what to say or even what I was really thinking in those moments, just babbling away with words I didn’t understand myself.

My arms felt like they were melting, burned by torching flames, while the inside of the car was turning into an oven under his threatening gaze. With last of my strength, I pulled on the sleeves to take his tux jacket off my shoulders, letting it slip on the seat next to me. Yet my nightmare was far from over. Red dots were splattered all around my dress, as I realized that was the reason he rushed to cover me back at the mansion.

I was covered in blood!

A state of dizziness spread throughout my entire body as Natalia’s words along with the blood on my skin and clothes were pounding in every corner of my mind. ‘Blood... blood...’ I rubbed my skin so roughly that it was starting to tear, though without any results. The blood was still there, mingling with drops of my own as my nails kept digging to erase it. That, until I felt a small sting somewhere around my neckline and everything turned black.

*Brax*



She fucking flipped out on me, so I had to calm her down somehow. It was either the injection or a bullet, and in a clear state of mind, she would certainly have chosen the first option.

I made a mistake by choosing her. I should have just picked one of the strippers from my club. For the money I paid, they would have done anything I asked. No questions asked. No further complications.

And still, I chose her. There was something about this girl that intrigued me ever since the first moment I laid eyes on her, back in Randy's office. I like pretty things in all shapes and forms and she was as pretty as they came, just never figured that her mouth would be ruining everything.

Honestly, I couldn't care less about her life's problems. I wasn't in for a relationship, maybe at best for a good time. Though my chances of having that were slim to none, especially after her *confession*.

It was best to just let her out of my mind, though little did I know that an unsatisfied craving can lead a few hours later to the most absurd plan.

We rode back in silence. The target was eliminated and everything at this point was according to my agenda. I had finally revenged *them* and even if it wasn't my place to do it, I felt that it was my responsibility.

I may have rushed to speak. Everything was according to my agenda, *except for her*. I did hope the dawn would catch us sharing a hotel bed, especially since she wound me up so badly back at the party, but I never took into consideration that she would be unconscious from the sedatives during this time.

'Someone bring me her clothes from the club first thing in the morning,' I instructed my driver then stepped out of the car, carrying her inside my home.

I never planned on bringing her here, especially since I haven't had anyone around the place in so long, but I guess never say never. Not when it comes to such intense cravings.

With unhurried moves, I placed her on my bed, gazing at the blood that had tainted her dress. She couldn't sleep like that, and she could definitely not wake up like that.

Trashing out the kitchen, I searched for a bowl which I filled with warm water, then snatched a small towel from the bathroom and returned to the bedroom to play doctor. Strangely enough, I never took care of anyone else except me, at least not at this level, but the sky wasn't opening and the angels weren't playing some heavenly grace tune on my account. I'm more on Lucifer's side when it comes to divine blessings, living under the motto that no good deed goes unpaid, and sooner or later, I will receive what I want.

I traced the damp towel over her face, carefully whipping all evidence of what happened tonight. Then, down her neck, drawing the sensual shape of her collarbone, lower and lower until it glided under the plump part of her chest.

A gasped moan drowned down her throat as my hand slipped on that edge between her breasts to clean all traces of redness. I wasn't sure if it was a coincidence, or maybe she was moaning under my touch, but the sound had severe repercussions over my body. I was fucking hard in seconds, cursing at the poor manly construction, though without any real intention of stopping what I was doing.

All visible skin was clean now, but the blood spreading over her dress, was calling me to check beneath it and *properly* finish my job.

The zipper of the gown purred open, as I tugged the material down her ankles, revealing at the same time an even more attractive set of shapes than I thought possible. Being totally unable to stop, my eyes lustfully traced every inch of her body. She wasn't skin on bones, and she wasn't fat either. Just the right things in exactly the right places, as if calling for me to merge with her.

After rinsing the towel, I brought it to her abdomen, then went up on her chest, removing the last tracks that brought her so much horror. That until the cloth got lost somewhere along the way and only my fingers were left in contact with her skin.

I couldn't hold down a groan as the shape of her breast molded on my palm, drawing my thumb to circle that rosy tip that was calling so loud for my mouth.

The red scars from her fingernails were still there, marking fine lines that I urged to comfort. I wanted to touch her so badly, for hours and hours, until she makes the bed squeak from the pleasure I cause, and she will eagerly return the favor. I want to make her mine, to feel her squirm around me until she would forget even her own name.

I was far from being a good man and she was definitely so close to being my meal for the day, but I was never going to take advantage of an unconscious woman. No, I needed her to *willingly*, give herself to me. Even though I had a feeling that I was going to force that *willingly* to its last boundaries.

*Bea*

I woke up with a strange music humming in my head, not one unfamiliar to me, but one that I never expect to hear - Chopin's Preludes. My mother used to be a fan of the classics and it didn't get much more classic than this collection. But who of the people I know could listen to this? And more importantly, where was I!? My eyes leaped wide open as I tried to raise myself from bed to discover in horror that I was only in the bottom part of my lingerie.

'Jesus!?' Though there was nothing sacred about my whereabouts. 'What happened to my clothes?' I questioned mostly to myself since there wasn't anyone else around to ask.

'They're on the chair next to the window,' surprisingly enough, someone answered, while a presence I now feared, found its way to the room.

Brax took a few steps in my direction, trying to show me the way, but luckily my instincts acted before he could reach me, snatching the quilt off the bed to cover my exposed chest.

'As I said yesterday, no need to cover yourself.' And I was starting to think he was right since he has already seen most of me anyway.

‘You undressed me,’ I quivered, holding on tightly to my fluffy shield.

‘And washed you. Some gratitude would be in order.’ The man always wanted something in return.

‘Gratitude!? You put me in that position.’

‘You put yourself in that position. I never forced you to go to Vanya or accept the Pleasures. That was your own doing.’

As much as I would want to deny that, it was true. He just created the momentum and I was the one who went in full steam ahead.

My eyes fell to the floor, still holding on to the quilt for dear life. ‘Did we...?’ I felt it was a little difficult asking him the question.

‘No. You will be very much conscious when *we will* do that. Now get dressed. I’ll expect you in the living room.’ Rushed steps carried him out of the room as if he was using the last of his control to leave the space, and still, the arrogant attitude was very much there encouraging him into hallucinating that he’ll ever willingly have me in his bed again.

I dressed as fast as I could, ready to leave Brax and his whole world behind.

He was a killer and I wanted nothing more to do with him.

What happened the other night will remain buried between the contract’s pages while I, on the other hand, had other urgent matters on my mind.

I needed more time to raise the money, especially since I would need the finances for Sebastian’s medical treatments, at least until the papers clear out. And as if that wasn’t bad enough, I needed a viable solution to get them out of there. But this was neither the time nor the place. I decided to come up with a plan only after I reached my apartment so that I could think through every aspect in peace.

‘I’m ready to leave,’ I announced Brax, as soon as I stepped into the living room, though his agenda was far from being close to mine.

‘Who said that you were leaving? Sit down.’

Without too much opposition, I found myself a place on the couch. I couldn’t argue. It had no sense as this was his house. His rules.

I was in too big of a rush to initially notice, but looking around, the place had nothing in common with the club where he brought me to yesterday, resembling much more like the luxury mansion where the party was held. Numerous pieces of art were proudly arranged on display, from valuable paintings to unique sculptures, revealing a part of him I knew nothing about. I thought of him being much more of a thug than an erudite, though the selection art exhibited, and the large bookcase I could spot, since the door to his home office was open, were making me completely change my mind.

One way or another, there was a thing I was still certain about. He was the villain and I was just moments away from finding out exactly how much of a villain he was.

‘I’d like to extend my bidding.’

I had a feeling this was coming along, but I dreaded even thinking about it.

‘That part isn’t available, in my case.’ I had no use in spinning around the finger about it.

‘It will be, I assure you. Everything and everyone has a price. And you right now desperately need the money.’

I couldn’t deny that he was entirely right, but sleeping with him was definitely not the way that I would have got it.

‘But you need something else even more than money. You need a way to get your family out while escaping the guards. Is that right?’

A knot was clenching my throat from speaking ‘Yes.’

Yes, he was right, even if I could raise enough money, I still needed to find someone able to get them out without

harming them.

‘I happen to know some very skilled men in these kinds of operations. The type of men you don’t find in the local newspaper to hire.’

Brax was king of the underworld and he was making full use of that function.

‘What do you want?’ My voice demanded, waiting to hear the rest of the deal out, only so that I could leave this place.

‘As you may have noticed, I collect different items of my liking. Things are simple. I see. I like. I obtain. And you, Bea, are playing hard to get.’ His fingers rolled over the dining table, tapping it in a rhythmic, yet cranky beat. ‘I’m not going to play the good guy just to get under your skin. I don’t own the necessary patience to do that, and I believe you would be better off without this experience with a satisfied body rather than with a broken heart.’

‘You think that I could fall for you!?’ I laughed.

‘I *know* that you would fall for me. But we wouldn’t want that, would we? You see, I’m a pretty complex individual, and when I set my mind on something there is little to no chance I’ll let anything stand in my way. And pretty much now, I decided that I need to cross your name off my list, and for you to start your *habit* with me.’

‘Do you want me to have sex with you!?’ I puffed.

‘You make it sound like a bad thing, but basically yes. Full access into your panties for one night.’ He paused as the devils were dancing on his shoulders ‘You’re right. It does sound bad when you say it out loud. Can’t help it with the foul mouth.’

He was just plain evil and at the same time delusional if he ever thought that I would enter his game.

‘So, to sum things up, I get to have the unspoiled version of you for a night, and your family gets an express trip to your apartment in Eco-City. Win-win as I see it.’

‘Are you done?’

‘I say when I’m done! Don’t make me bring penalties into this equation.’

I may have pissed him off, but his plans are never going to see the light of day. He was even more dangerous than my father, and getting involved with a man like this never ends well.

‘You don’t have to give me an answer now, but I expect one by tomorrow night. I run a club on Orchid Street. There is where you can find me.’

I won’t be looking, but I didn’t get to tell him that, not wanting to get into another polemic any longer about how I’ll be crawling at his feet.

‘Now, we are done. A car is expecting you outside to take you home.’

Not waiting for him to tell me twice, I seized the opportunity and said my goodbyes then walked straight outside.

*I can’t do it... I can’t do it*, my mind was on autoplay steadying the words into my conscience as on the other side another question was being born *Did I even have an alternative!?*

## *Chapter 8*



The refuge of my apartment didn't bring me any answer to my problems, while the thought that I still had to keep Brax's offer on the table was making my insides quiver. There was no way that I could say yes, but I couldn't refuse it either. I needed support in getting them out, and as of this moment, Brax was the only one who could provide that for me. But I also needed money for lawyers and hospitalization, and the two grand I had left after rent and groceries was far from covering any of those.

There had to be another way. Life couldn't be that cruel. At least that's how I was reassuring myself.

And when I really came to think about it, there was a person that I could try and ask for help. Maybe a loan which I would gladly pay back, even with interest as I was to complete the Pleasures. Vanya, my boss came to mind, since she was the only person I knew who was wealthy enough to be able to support me.

It didn't take me long to get changed and head down to the Pleasure Room, although I still only managed to arrive



there late afternoon. I guess the morning in Brax's bed was somewhere around 1 pm - excusable since I've been drugged.

The first person to greet me was Laura, bumping into her right as I was preparing to go through the main door and she was returning from buying coffee. 'I thought we had an espresso machine.'

'Yeah, but we don't have the cute barista guy across the street,' she giggled, walking inside.

'I need to talk to Vanya for a second,' stopping right in front of her door, I was letting Laura know that I won't be able to walk her back all the way to The Pleasure Room.

'She's not in today. I'll handle the contracts.'

'She's not!?' Of course, she wasn't. Fate was playing a trick on me once again.

'What did you want to talk to her about?' She stopped next to me, curious about what I had to say 'That is if you want to tell me.'

I wasn't sure if I should, but asking for her opinion before I spoke to Vanya seemed like a good idea at the time. 'Actually, I wanted to ask her if she could help me with some money. I would pay her back by completing Pleasures. Maybe with interest if that would help her agree.'

'No, never do that,' Laura was wiggling a finger in front of me as if I was committing the greatest blasphemy. 'She has a strict rule about loans and asking her won't get you anywhere except making her see you....differently. The thing is, she helped a few employees in the past and they all screwed her over at some point. She's the kind of person who learns from her mistakes, so the only result you may get is probably being unemployed again.'

Laura seemed so determined to prevent me from doing this, while all I could think about was that my very last chance had just been blown away.

'I guess, I should leave then.' There was no need for my presence here today since I just took two Pleasures in two days.

‘Not really. It’s good that you’re here. Things got crazy last night after you left, and the letters came flooding in. We get that at the weekend sometimes. I think there are only one or two people left before you now.’

I can’t deny that I was a little bedazzled that I had all chances of getting another Pleasure so soon, but since I couldn’t get Vanya’s help, I was definitely not passing up on the money.

‘Come, I need to leave my overcoat then return to Vanya’s office in case someone comes to see her.’

I followed her to the room, where despite the two coffees I made myself and all attempts of staying awake, I dozed off on the couch. Exhausted was an understatement as fatigue was already becoming a part of my daily routine, bouncing like a ball from Pleasures to the Academy, just to be tormented every night by the problems running my life.

‘Wake up,’ Sonya’s voice made me realize that I probably was like an old woman falling asleep on a park bench, to the point that I was checking for any signs of drooling.

Temptress of the day!

‘I just got a letter, and I need to leave. You’re the last here, so I suggest you drag your eyes to fully open and watch the door. Laura already called Julie and Maria from home so that we won’t have to deny any pleasure, but the next one is yours.’

That was a comforting thought, though in whatever way I added things together, the money would still not be enough, especially since I won’t have another chance any time soon of getting three Pleasures in three single days.

‘Ok, bye,’ I waved her goodbye, then got up to pace the length of the room, like a wild cat trapped inside a confined space. My heart didn’t want to be there for a second longer, just needing to run back to my old city and at least get to see them, while my reason was keeping me grounded, waiting for the knock on the door that would contribute to the fund that I needed so badly.

And it didn't wait long to arrive, letting the red envelope that I both feared and expected to slip under the door.

***Company throughout the night***

***Woman early to mid-twenties***

***\$2000***

***9 pm***

The sum was a little over the average, giving me more reason to be worried about this, especially after rereading the title. But that didn't matter. None of it mattered. I didn't matter anymore.

'Is the contract ready?' I knocked on Vanya's door.

'Yes, come in.' Laura seemed to be buried in papers but shortly managed to provide me with the agreement that I needed to sign. 'Just be sure to pack something to sleep in,' she added before I got a chance to leave.

'I didn't see that in the request, but I will pack something.'

'The guy asked for Pleasures before. I know from the other girls.'

'Oh, then why didn't he ask for a particular person?' It was kind of strange since the clients that return usually return to the same person who they worked with in the past.

'They don't work here anymore. The last left a few days before you arrived. Just be careful with this one.'

'What's that supposed to mean?' Now I was scared, perceiving it as a warning, and combined with the ***company throughout the night*** was giving me a strange vibe.

'I'm not sure how to explain it. I'm not sure even if I should say, but the girls that took his Pleasures seemed to have fallen in love with him.'

'Do you think they went further? Slept with the man?' The thought unsettled me, especially coming after the two Pleasures where the guys wanted the bar raised.

‘I’m not sure. I didn’t ask and they didn’t tell, but one of them I knew for sure that she usually took the Pleasures further. So, if he offered, then the chances are that she accepted.’

A precedent didn’t sound good to me. Precedents create expectations and there wasn’t any way that I was going to live up to them.

‘Thank you, I’ll leave you to it. I need to get dressed anyway.’

I left for the dressing room, not necessarily because I was on a tight timeframe since I had almost an hour and a half to wait, but because Laura seemed to be busy enough, and my presence there would have just dragged her work on.

Dressing up was becoming a routine so it didn’t take long for me to get ready and pack a pair of silk pajamas to bring along. The rest of the time didn’t pass quite as easily since the same math was still circling in my mind, adding the sums that I needed and always coming up short, needing much more money than I could ever raise in the given time frame.

The clock eventually hit nine, and it was time to walk out the door, though what I found in the street managed to surprise me. A regular yellow cab was waiting for me, no limo or glitter and gold luxury transportation. And it suited me just fine, feeling a lot closer to my true condition than to the person I needed to pretend to be. Though the feeling of relaxation didn’t last long since after we took a few turns, I realized that we were heading straight to the Hills. The top of the Hills, to be more precise, watching the luxury and opulence grow proportionally with the altitude.

And still, we weren’t stopping, going higher and higher, passing almost every house and heading for the rooftop of this world.

‘Mr. Ayers’s delivery is here,’ the driver announced to a security booth that stood at the gates of an overwhelming estate.

Great, now I was nothing more than pizza.

‘She can go straight up.’ The answer didn’t keep us waiting as the car continued its journey for almost half a mile before its wheels pulled to a stop in front of a gothic mansion. Maybe even a castle.

‘Have a nice evening,’ the man that drove me here opened the door, waiting for me to get out.

‘Thank you,’ I murmured, heading away from the car, overwhelmed by the grandeur of the place.

With timid steps, I reached the front door and after saying many prayers and graces, I decided to knock, though the instant my hand made contact with the wooden door, it came wide open.

Fear - I had no fear any longer since I was transferring from anxiety to numbness, stunned and terrified at the same time, expecting everything and anything to happen. Nothing was tying itself together as what I was anticipating to find when I first got in the cab, did not reflect what I discovered here. They were entirely two different things.

The place was remarkable, and at the same time so unusually dark, filling the air with an atmosphere of mystery but also with a warmth in which you could easily lose yourself.

Shaking my head to try and escape the trance, I followed the guards’ instructions and climbed the mahogany stairs, going straight up.

The first floor appeared to be endless, with rooms displayed on each side of a twisted hallway. There was definitely a wing B to this building, maybe even C, D who knows how many more. Yet, somehow I knew exactly where I needed to be as a small glimmer of light made its way from underneath the door to the lobby.

That was it, just needed to drag my feet and find out what Pleasure was really waiting for me.

Nudging the door to open, I found myself in the middle of a place I knew I would fall in love with at first sight. Warm

and dark, very similar to the main lobby, though this particular room was a star that shone in the middle of the night.

Red flames were dancing in a black marble fireplace while hundreds of candles were leading the way towards two glass doors. The balcony. But I delayed following them. I couldn't do it before I got to take a look at the Victorian black sofa, and the extra-size holstered bed that completed the room. If you could even call it just a room since it was the size of an apartment.

The place was spellbound and I was about to meet the enchanter.

Little did I know that there was no chance he would fall behind his newly gained nickname.

My sight ran to the glass door, taking a peek outside and realizing on spot why Laura's words couldn't exactly leave my mind *The girls that took his Pleasures seemed to have fallen in love with him.* Why wouldn't they, and how could someone even prevent it when an angel with eyes of a demon was to be the company through the night?

Slipping my body between the glass doors, I stepped outside to meet my target. Or was I the real target in this case?

'Hello, I hope that I'm in the right place,' it took everything inside me to speak as I was falling under a spell, looking at the fawn strands of hair bathing in the moonlight.

'That remains to be seen,' the man almost ignored me, turning his attention to an apple he held in his hands, which he was trying to peel.

Just what I needed, another one with a temper, but strangely he didn't seem to raise a snapback reaction from me, as another emotion was potentially growing.

*Sympathy.*

A glint of madness intertwining with something so beautiful and yet so broken flickered in his pure black eyes, reflecting the ultimate void yet also the whole universe at the same time.

I had to take a step closer as nothing in this world could make

me stay away, and when I said I take all human emotion upon me I wasn't kidding since, by the time I reached his side, even if I didn't know him, I was drowning in his silent pain.

'We're so high that we could almost reach the sky,' I noticed, taking a step closer to the ledge and seeing nothing more around us. We were so high that I could see the clouds, while the toxic smog engulfing the city was left behind somewhere below us.

'The Hills as everyone calls them used to be part of a mountain range which eroded over the centuries. We're currently standing on the highest ground that's left. The closest and the furthest from divinity.' The words of a man that knew exactly what he was talking about. 'And you? Where do *you* stand?'

'Down there,' I took a step to reach the railing 'Body and mind.' It was no use hiding from him as his eyes were leaving me no room for obscuring the truth. No matter what lies I would have fabricated, he would know.

I glanced downwards, at the bottomless pit, seeing nothing but darkness as we were standing at the edge of our world.

'Maybe you need a miracle,' in an instant I felt his presence behind me, colder than the night's air. 'But miracles don't exist,' the strange vibe or his words made me turn to face him only to discover myself standing face to face with the blade of his knife 'Do they?'

The metal was closing into the collar of my shirt, making my body vibrate with the insane rhythm of my heart.

One reckless gesture and it would be the end of me!

'No, they don't,' I breathed, but not before I swallowed the lump in my throat so that I could speak. 'What are you doing?' I was looking straight at the knife that was tracing a line on my shirt yet without damaging the material.

'You are mine for the night. Or am I mistaken?' The path of his blade didn't stop but continued in a straight line to the center of my chest.

‘I’m pretty sure that Vanya has rules about this. And penalties,’ I tried to threaten him, indirectly, but only managed to raise a dark grin to spread on his lips.

‘Look around you. Do you think I would be afraid of wasting any sum of money?’

And he was right, in those seconds I was just a name on a document, even when it would come to Vanya. A nice cheque would make my whole existence vanish from all archive files, wiping me off completely from the face of the earth.

The thought made me quiver, and so did the lack of rational judgment mirroring in the dark depths of his eyes.

‘So now what? You brought me here to hurt me?’

‘Is that what you think?’ His question didn’t hide concern, but just pure curiosity, thriving on each shiver of my limbs.

‘You tell me what I should think!’

‘Are you afraid of me?’ The knife ascended to the corner of my jawline.

He wanted me so desperately to say *yes*. ***For him to be the monster.***

To be completely lost.

‘No. I’m afraid of the blade. But not of you.’ The words came from the heart, unwilling to give him the satisfaction of self-destruction even more than he already had.

‘Then you’re a fool,’ his voice rasp and strikingly ice cold, though the gesture that followed reflected the opposite of that. His knife pierced the apple, being jabbed on the railing, freeing me from its entrapment at the same time.

My eyes blinked slowly in relief, supporting my weight against the balustrade behind me not to fall. This was a test which I just passed. One of strength and proving myself in front of him, but most important, one that was proving that I understood him, splinters and all.

‘It’s colder here than in the rest of the city.’ I clutched my hands to my chest as my blood had stopped from boiling, and



the cold atmosphere outside was beginning to freeze even my pulsing veins.

‘It gets like this at night. Because of the altitude. You should go inside. I’ll be there in a little while,’ he turned to look into the void beneath us, leaving me to return to the candlelit room.

I must have waited for an hour, staring at the flames that sparkled inside the fireplace, while trying to figure out how it was that this man could have such an effect on me.

I must be losing my mind.

The sound of his steps clattered inside the room, and a different man from the one I met outside returned. Same body, yet a much more tamed behavior.

‘Are you ok?’ He asked, taking a place on the rug in front of the fireplace, right next to me.

Was he actually showing concern!?

‘I’m sorry for the way that I acted. Sometimes my past seems to get the best of me.’

I wasn’t going to ask, already knowing that there was no point getting into the subject. Not now, at least.

‘I’ve been through worse. I’ll live,’ although I wanted to, I couldn’t hide the bitter aftertaste he left me with, revealing a sad truth. Willingly or not, he hurt me no matter how hard I tried to deny it.

‘I’ll make it up to you... Somehow,’ the promise of the man who had nothing and everything to give.

‘Then you can start by answering one of my questions. What am I supposed to do here?’ Simple and to the point, yet the answer based itself on something so complicated.

‘First of all, I want to ask you a question. Do you know who I am?’

I had a feeling that I missed something, but with all I’ve been doing lately, the news was the last thing that would concern me.

‘I’m sorry, but no. I just moved into town a month ago.’

‘Don’t be. It’s better that you don’t.’

‘I did hear the guard at the gate call you by your last name. Mr. Ayers. But that didn’t ring any bell.’

‘Yes, Ferris Ayers.’ His name like a symphony snuck beneath my skin. Everything about him seemed to be molded to seduce, not necessarily by perfect beauty but by those unknown elements building up to make him undeniable. ‘I’ll probably get to that later, but now to answer your question.’ He paused then let a smile that held no humor within it appear on his face ‘You’re here to keep me company through the night, and yet, I don’t even know your name.’

‘Bea,’ I whispered, gleaming at the darkness in his gaze.

‘I like that... Bea,’ he breathed each one of the letters out like my name had some divine magic to it while my body was reacting to his calling, raising a fluttery sensation within me. ‘You see, I can’t usually sleep before the dawn, and I don’t really enjoy being alone,’ he continued on in a much more relaxed tone. ‘I have a butler, Alfred, who usually keeps me company, but once in a while he has to go out of town.’

‘Alfred!?’ I giggled, thinking about the cliché of his name.

‘His real name is Halifaster. Can’t go around calling people like that,’ Ferris shrugged while smiling at me. ‘Can’t help it if I like Batman. Even if at the end of the day I think I may be the Joker.’ The serious ardor frowning his face as he spoke was leading me to believe that the role would suit him just fine. Besides, The Joker was my favorite character of them all.

‘Should I have called him Igor?’

‘Don’t tell me you’re hiding a pair of fangs.’

‘No, a pair of fangs is one of the few things that I don’t hide.’

Should I be scared or fascinated!?

‘I won’t try to pry, I promise,’ and I planned on keeping my word. This Pleasure should be like a heist. In and out. No more complications needed.

‘Don’t make promises that you can’t keep.’

‘Cocky much!?’

‘More like damaged goods.’

‘We all are damaged goods one way or another, Mr. Ayers.’

‘Mr. Ayers!? Really? In the hour you’ve been around I think you have seen all shades of me. I would say it’s ok to call me Ferris.’

‘Ok,’ I nodded, stretching my feet closer to the flames. ‘This room is the most amazing place I’ve seen.’

‘For a second there I thought you were about to say that about me,’ his laughter brought me a strange joy since he was slowly detaching from his initial state. ‘Seriously now, it was made at my specific request. I needed a place where to feel best, especially since I don’t usually leave the house.’

‘You don’t? How come?’

‘Just not a fan of the outside world. Besides, I only need a laptop to control everything around me.’

‘You can’t control everything.’

‘Maybe not me, but my money can. I just sign a cheque and things get solved.’

I didn’t continue, just lost myself for a short while in my world. If things could be that easy in my case. Write something on a piece of paper and all problems solved.

‘What’s wrong?’ My absence was quickly noticed.

‘Nothing regarding this night.’ I wasn’t going to burden him with my own problems when he could barely carry his own.

‘I have time. Try me.’

‘You have enough burdens of your own. I can’t now.’

‘Ok, ok... I didn’t want to upset you, but it seems I’m best at this job.’

‘On the contrary.’

‘Don’t tell me that you discovered the bundle of joy secretly hiding inside of me,’ he cackled.

‘At least I got you to laugh.’

‘Yes indeed,’ a genuine smile raised the corners of his lips. ‘So, tell me about you. What gets to you? What makes *you* smile?’

It wasn’t about me in so long that (far as) his question seemed to be addressed to a whole different person.

‘Not that many things make me smile lately.’

‘Maybe I could try and change that.’

‘Oh, what *did* you have in mind?’

‘A big screen TV and a comedy show.’

‘You really are The Joker, aren’t you?’ I laughed at what went on through his mind. I knew from the start that there had to be something decent, good within him, and I was just unveiling it, one step at a time.

‘It seems that the villain made you smile.’

And that is what he was. The most delicious villain of them all.

We must have talked for hours, losing track of time, that until my eyes began gradually closing despite all my efforts to keep them open.

‘We should go to bed,’ Ferris stood up from the carpet and offered me his hand to follow.

To be honest, I dreaded this part, awkward and embarrassed at the same time while thinking about how exactly was I supposed to act.

‘Do you want me to give you something to change into?’

‘No, I brought pajamas.’

‘Ok, I’ll go to the bathroom to get out of these clothes and give you some privacy,’ he disappeared through a secondary door, leaving me all alone.

I rushed to change, closing the pearl buttons of my navy-blue silk pajamas at the speed of light, though my choice for the evening didn’t seem to agree with him.

‘Some granny is crying after her pajamas,’ Ferris spoke as soon as he entered the room, dressed in a pair of black shorts and a tank top that left a few tattoos to sneak beneath the material.

‘Was this the charming part of you?’

I was far from choosing a seductive type of nightwear, especially since I didn’t want to encourage any other type of behavior, though my remark only managed to get me in trouble. The knee-shaking kind of trouble!

‘I’d like to take you out of those clothes and get you wearing my own. To know how it feels to be so close to me.’ He took a few steps, reaching my side ‘That was the charming part of me... The one that told the truth. ‘

With one hand he raised the quilt off the bed and in one gesture, invited me to get in.

Shit, we were sharing the bed. For a second I had hoped to get the couch.

‘Don’t worry, I’ll stay on my side,’ he slipped between the sheets and arranged his head on the pillow. ‘But I do want to ask you something before I’ll let you drift off.’

‘What is it?’

‘Where did you go earlier? When we were in front of the fireplace? What troubles you?’

I wasn’t entirely sure if I should answer or not, but something made me do it, even if this was wrong of me. I couldn’t carry the burden alone and needed even for a second to share it with another living soul.

‘Too many things, for my own good,’ I let out an involuntary sigh. ‘I’ve left my hometown to make a new life

for me and my family...at least for a part of my family. My sister, Natalie, and my brother, Sebastian. Though I couldn't bring them here until now, and my time is running out. It's complicated. I would need to work day and night for a month at The Pleasure Room, only to pay for rent, the Academy, and my brother's hospitalization since the insurance doesn't cover it as long as I'm not his legal guardian.'

'What is his illness? What's he suffering from?'

'Kidney failure. He's been on a transplant list for ages, but he's getting nowhere with the Elite having priority. He's on dialysis almost daily-', I paused with the days shared by his bedside becoming living memories in my mind. 'I'm sorry, I can't... I can't.' I needed to stop, even if initially I thought that I could do it. My brother's illness was always a delicate subject to me and taking his pain on me again would only bring me to my knees completely.

'I'm sorry, I didn't know this would upset you.'

'It's ok... It's just a sensitive subject.'

'I think it will be better to let you sleep,' his hand rested on my face for a second, then arranged some loose strands of hair that were falling over my eyes 'Good night, Bea.'

'Good night,' my eyes closed under the burden of my thoughts and I managed to drift away.

It was dawn before I knew it, yet this didn't get me to wake up. It was Ferris's arms, clenched around me so tightly that I thought they would stop me from breathing. His body was almost curled into a ball surrounding me while he kept mumbling words I couldn't understand.

He was having a nightmare, one that made it seem impossible for me to wake him up from.

Shivers of cold sweat were rolling down his forehead while a horrific tremble ruled his limbs.

'Ferris... Ferris...', I called him to come back so many times that my voice lost all power 'Ferris, please!' I begged, catching him between my arms, wrapping my hands in his hair until his eyes slowly opened 'It's ok... It's ok,' I murmured

keeping his head against my chest until the fearful tremble began losing its intensity.

‘It’s ok,’ I repeated letting my body slip on the mattress until I could face him with fingers still intertwined between his brownish strands.

‘I’m sorry, I...’ he spoke with a hitched breath, resting his forehead against mine, while he fought to chase away the last of his demons. ‘This didn’t happen in so long,’ he whispered, rolling his thumbs over my face as his heartbeat was pumping against me so powerfully that I thought it would escape his chest.

‘It’s over,’ I murmured impossibly close to his lips as the nightmare might have been over but left room for primal magnetism to ignite.

Suddenly it was too hot between the sheets and the pulses of his heart seemed to also have an effect on me as the craziest rhythm was humming in my head.

He was the fucking devil and I was gladly burning in his hell, crashing my lips on his to follow an instinct I never knew was within me.

I should be scared of him. I should be terrified of the thought of even being in the same room as him, but in his presence, my own sanity was slipping away.

It didn’t take long before the role reversed and *his* kisses began devouring me, chewing on my lips, causing electric waves to run through my body. I didn’t want to stop, yet I feared that he wouldn’t stop at the same time. A groan of desire throbbed inside his throat as his tongue moved against mine, leaning his body weight on top of me.

Incendiary passion was making my top slowly melt away, button by button until just one was left to hold my pajama shirt together.

I was close to losing myself while drifting far away from my objectives. ‘Ferris, I can’t.’

His kisses didn’t cease completely, but gradually slowed their intensity until his lips finally parted to look at me ‘What’s

wrong?’

‘I can’t,’ I mumbled hoping that there would be a way to convince myself of these words.

‘Why not? Is this about money?’

‘No. Jesus... It’s...it’s about me.’ Impossible to explain but at the same time, extremely easy ‘I never did this, ok?’

‘Sleep with a guy you just met?’ He didn’t get the whole picture since my kind was as extinct as the dinosaurs.

‘Any of it,’ I rolled my eyes as explaining it seemed a little absurd. ‘I’d better go. It’s morning.’ I had to leave his place before the madness boiling inside the room would get me to do something that I would later regret.

‘I want you,’ he whispered, letting his gaze dominate my own. ‘Whatever this implies.’

‘Ferris, I can’t sleep with you.’

‘I don’t want you to return to the Pleasure Room. I’ll take care of you.’ That sounded good maybe in any other situation, yet right now, I couldn’t see it as a solution because I wasn’t alone.

‘I can’t do that.’

‘You didn’t let me finish. I only want you to sleep in my bed, whenever I find it necessary.’

‘I can’t do that... You will want more, maybe in a day... Maybe in two. It’s inevitable. And I can’t give you that part of me.’ The truth was that even if I rejected Brax’s offer, it wasn’t completely off the table, no matter how badly I loathed it.

‘I’ll make you a deal. I’ll cover all your expenses, rent, college, you name it, including Sebastian’s treatments. And in return, we will share a bed at night.’

‘I just told you that I can’t-’

‘I am a man, and I know myself. I can’t guarantee hands-off, but I can guarantee that I won’t cross *that* line. Not as long as you don’t want me to.’ He seemed sincere, though what I’ve experienced earlier was exactly the thing that was making



me decline. The fervor was too surreal, leading to a path of no return.

‘I’m sorry but I can’t be here any longer,’ I sneaked between his arms and jumped out of bed, grabbing the clothes I came dressed in from a chair.

‘Then perhaps I should call you for another Pleasure,’ he was trying all possibilities, confused by my burning-cold reactions. And how could he not be when I had no idea myself what I want?

‘Please don’t. I can’t return here.’ At least not if I wanted to keep my soul intact.

The darkness of his eyes became deeper as resignation set in. I had no idea if this was something special for this man or just a regular night, but the sadness spread over his face was leading me to believe he wasn’t suffering over a one-night stand. ‘Alfred should be home by now. Look for him downstairs. Just tell him where you live and he’ll make sure you get home. I’m not too good at goodbyes.’

It was better this way since this was also a difficult goodbye in my case.

I left in the search of Alfred, and as soon as I found him asked him to take me to my place. The bed from my apartment lay beneath me before I knew it as all dark thoughts were making room inside my head.

No matter what I would do, I would fail. Even if by absurdity I would accept an offer, none would be enough for me to go through with what I needed to do.

Cole had the legal background and connections, Brax had underworld links to sneak them out between the guards, while Ferris had the money that make the world go round. But even I was to negotiate with him, he still wouldn’t have been able to get me the unlimited support with the authorities or the streetwise Brax had.

Separately, they couldn’t help me, yet put together they were exactly what I needed.

If I was going to do this, I needed to assure myself of success.

I didn't need one of the guys.

I needed all three of them!

*But would that mean three separate deals with **three** devils!?*

## Chapter 9



Day one of my new life was starting today!

I initially thought it would have been when I first arrived in Echo City, but this was the day that would change my life for good.

Confused, yet never seeing things more clearly than at this moment, I needed to make the ultimate decision. It was me or Natalie and Sebastian- and that made everything so simple. There was no going back. I had to be broken to save them, there was no doubt regarding that choice.

For the first time, I dreaded going to the Academy and that was without having any installment due and pockets empty. This time I dreaded seeing Cade, even if it was one thing I urgently needed to do.

The train was set in motion as all deals will be seen through to the end. I just prayed *I* will still be here when that happens.

I couldn't fall asleep, even if my eyes were closing with exhaustion, as there was something within me much stronger keeping me awake. Panic, anxiety, and hope were ravishing my very soul.

Soon, it was time to leave for courses, even though learning was the last thing on my mind that day. Changing my clothes, I packed my bag and followed the same route I usually do, straight through the gates of EMA.

Not straying from the rules, I took the back entrance to the corridor then slowly headed towards the middle of the hallway. It was as far as I could go, at least without having all gazes locked onto me, and after the party, that was the last thing I needed.

My eyes scanned the space in search of my target, though if I come to think about it, I was the target in this case. Cole and his crew were occupying their end of the hallway and despite him noticing me, he looked away as if I bore no relevance. The moment would have brought me joy on any normal day, yet right now, I needed all of his attention.

I recognized his game. There was no chance that he would ever come to me, so taking a deep breath, *I* began walking towards him.

The Elite soon noticed my defiance, humming like a hive of angry wasps all around me. Yet I didn't care anymore, I had one goal 'Cole,' I spoke so loudly that I instantly made Ace and the other guys freeze to look at me.

'You're-, ' Nick finally recognized me but didn't get to finish his sentence before Cole intervened.

'Keep your mouth shut. You signed the fucking contract. Leave us,' he roared, clearing the space around him in an instant as everyone seemed to evaporate at his request.

'What do you want?' His blue eyes peered straight to my soul as he already knew what I was going to say. That I was about to engage myself in his twisted game, leaving everything aside in the name of the love I had for my siblings. 'Look around you, they're almost forming a line to see me. Make it quick.' He drew a hand through his thick strands of raven hair, leaning his head to look behind me where two sophomores were giggling and whispering to one another while gazing at him. Excuse me - more like drooling all over him. Though I wasn't ever to admit it, to willingly recognize

the melting power he held over almost every breathing female. It made me feel dumb, mesmerized by some pretty package like the rest of the Herd- and I was far from that... At least I hoped so.

‘I’m sorry, Prince Charming, that I’m standing in their way to the throne,’ I spat out in irony hoping that he won’t notice that lowkey my body was reacting just like the ones of those sophomores when around him. It was just my self-defense mechanism kicking in.

Dumb move on my part.

‘I would watch my tongue if I were you,’ his palms locked themselves on the upper part of my arms so tightly that I was, for sure, about to get bruises. ‘You don’t want to bring out the worse in me, do you, now?’ With the super strength those carefully built packs of defined muscles provided, he whirled us around, merging my body with the wall behind me. ‘Especially with what you’re about to say.’ Those thick lips of his leaned to reach the crook of my neck, exactly like an animal sniffing out his prey.

How the hell did he know?

Was I that oblivious? That desperate?!

‘How did you-,’ I didn’t get to finish as the tip of his tongue ran against my skin.

He was tasting me!

‘You can’t stay away,’ he whispered, tracing a warm damp line inches away from my earlobe while I gazed around me, noticing curious pairs of eyes staring at me. Jealousy, hatred, admiration. All aimed directly at me.

I suspected no one could notice what he was doing since my thick clay of curls covered his lips, but the Herd seeing him even whispering to me was almost like stepping into a new era.

The grip he had on my arms tightened to the point it became unbearable ‘Your earlier remark is going to cost you,’ he breathed heavily, barely containing his excitement as to what I

was about to say. He was certain I was going to agree, and I had no choice but to do so.

‘I didn’t accept the deal yet,’ I muttered as if I even had a way out of this in the first place.

‘Do you want us to go to my car so I can heave the words out of you,’ he smirked in full temptation, recognizing that I had no way out. It would only be a matter of seconds before I would accept.

My teeth clenched, staring into the darkness of his eyes. The blue was almost missing now, just deep black left, thick with wicked desire. I wanted to scream, to run, maybe even slap him for the obnoxious jerk he was, yet all I could do was gasp like a wounded deer. I was pathetic, but the times required me to be so.

I guess my sharp tongue didn’t get the full message ‘I can speak here, by myself, just fine.’ I was heading for trouble at 200 miles an hour, but there was something burning within me. That same fire that had gotten me into difficulty so many times before, back home, was fanning the flames that fueled my power to go on.

‘You want it, don’t you? To test me? You want the worst of me,’ he cackled with a false amusement lingering in his voice. ‘Oh, Mouse, you have no idea.’ There was something so diabolically evil in his tone that a cold chill ran down my back, leaving goosebumps on every single inch of my skin.

And yet, I chose to ignore it!

I needed to ignore it so I can go through with what I came here to do. ‘I agree,’ I breathed so hastily that I wasn’t even sure he heard what I said. It was like taking off a band-aid. Quick and painful.

‘You agree to what? I want to hear you say it!’ He was enjoying this so much that I began to feel the bulge in his pants pressing against my navel as I was breathing.

I looked around me to check if everyone else was still staring, but observed just a few rushed students walking away from the free show ‘You know what, Cole. Come on, don’t

prolong this, the classes are about to start.' I wanted to leave, but the clenched hands were still there, pinning my arms against the wall.

He didn't flinch, not even for a split second, to stop from his path and check what was going on around him. He couldn't care less about the classes, of what everyone else was thinking. He was the king here, and that applied to everyone who set foot in this college - teacher or student. His signature coldness was surfing like an iceberg hitting an already sinking ship 'I asked you to say it. Now,' he groaned, gathering the pieces of me he was about to own.

'I...I agree to let you do whatever you want with me for a month,' I trembled, forgetting an important part. 'Ex... except-', I was babbling.

'Except popping your cherry,' he hysterically laughed, as if he'd been listening to the best joke ever.

'Do you have to say it that way?' I felt it mocking and insulting.

'I can say it in any way I want, but I told you that I don't need that. I have so many other ways to have my fun,' his lips moved towards mine, pushing his tongue against the corner of my mouth 'Ways that will make you scream,' his palms clenched harder, forcing me to lean against him from the pain 'Ways that will make you beg,' he continued, sneaking his tongue deep inside my mouth with deep swirls as if he was reaching for my very soul.

I hated him...I...I *wanted* to hate him and that sick intoxication he brought along. He was evil, so deranged that he was almost psychotic, and now he owned me. A lame trick that fate was pulling at me, in another attempt to break me.

'Finances, in two hours. You sit next to me,' he ordered, and without waiting for a sign that I would obey, released me and headed towards the sports room.

I was in shock, still looking around me, trying to understand what I've just done. I was having trouble accepting the idea and even more trouble processing the information as a

whole. I was his now, certain that he'll take full advantage of whatever that function would have to offer.

### *Cole*

Fuck, I never thought she would accept, though I can't deny that I was hoping that she would. Maybe even *needing* that she would.

There's something about Mouse that makes me crave the way she fears me. That small uncontrollable tremble of her lip when I approach her, that stumbling breath that I yearn to feel against my skin.

And now I own her!

I hated that I should wait before exploiting the advantages of my new pact, but I did have something else on my agenda for the day, and as much as I will enjoy the hours to come, this wasn't a full package deal. I still had certain needs that aren't going to remain unsatisfied just because Mouse came into town.

Besides, I did have Miss Echo City waiting for me with legs spread open in the gym locker room - and that was an offer I just couldn't pass over.

I pushed the door open to find the *fuck me* smile super-tightly glued to her face. They're all the same, eager to get a piece of any dick they could find- the highest in rank, the better.

At first, I saw them as trophies. Put as many as I could on the shelf. But over time I lost interest, while I became their trophy. *Everyone wanted a piece of the king.*

I've lost track a long time ago girl *Number What* was waiting for me in the locker room. Yet I had hopes that the one today would be a little different, although that fucking desperation to get with someone that you've exchanged two words with was ruining it for me from the start. I signaled her to approach, and as soon as she did, quickly tried to find her way to my lips.

I don't kiss and tell, mostly because I never kiss them, especially not in situations like this. Let's just say I don't



enjoy having the taste of all the senior years dicks in my mouth.

Taking the hint, she dropped to her knees, eager to warm me... so eager that it seemed to have the opposite effect on my body. I didn't have much time with Nick guarding the door, so since she wasn't doing the job, I needed to close my eyes, focusing on whatever I could think of to get myself ready.

'Get on the bench,' I ordered, so I can get this over with. I needed some release, especially for what I had in mind after I've finished with this.

No prelude needed. I owned enough skills to get her on the walls without it. Not that I really cared what's in this for Miss Whatever, since I couldn't even remember her fucking name. I just slipped on a rubber and jabbed myself inside her, entrapping her body beneath me to search for relief the way I wanted.

She was beautiful, I couldn't deny that. It was the only thing that made me call her in here in the first place, but perky asses and perfect tits have long stopped working for me. There is something about that feeling of fucking an overly used inflatable that prevents me from finding satisfaction that easily.

I was pumping hard and fast, making her cries of pleasure fill the space 'Shut the fuck up before you'll get us both expelled.' In reality, no one would dare to expel me. I've done all the shits that you could think about, and no one could ever touch me. Though she didn't need to know that, especially since the sound of her voice was overly annoying me, knowing that she was finding satisfaction when I was so far away from even the starting line.

She tightened around me, and even if there wasn't anything too tight about her, for a second I thought I may get my relief. But the moment passed...and so did the next...and the next, until I found myself uselessly moving for almost an hour until the pleasure on her face was turning into pain.

*Maybe this will do it for me,* I thought to myself, turning her around to face the bench. I was thrusting deeper, harder,

trying to find something, anything, to get me to cum.

And the more that I struggled, the more it became clearer.

I wasn't fucking the right person.

Anger flushed over me as Miss Whatever was begging me to stop while I was still trying to search for my own elation through her pain.

Clenching a hand around her ponytail, I pulled her head on the back, to arch her completely, but as I took a look at her face, I realized that it wasn't the one that I wanted to see.

It was useless. I couldn't do this any longer. I couldn't do her any longer!

Without any chance of success, I just got off her and left for the showers, hoping that the cold water will help me relax. The truth is that it wasn't the first time that I fucked someone until I felt raw. It was happening more and more often, as I was starting to believe that I was searching for pleasure in places that it didn't exist anymore. Though this was the first time I couldn't cum after all that effort, and I was starting to think it was because I had something else on my mind.

*It was time to go see my little Mouse.*

*Bea*

Advanced maths. I had to go through that for the next hour when in fact I felt there wasn't anything advanced about me in those moments. My brain froze and there weren't any neurons there to process the hieroglyphs that were being scribbled on the blackboard.

'I'm so lost, Bea,' Jenna sobbed turning a few pages from her notebook where stars and hearts replaced the numbers in the equation, then began silently laughing.

I puffed, amused, and at the same time discouraged by my staggering lack of concentration. 'What are you, five? What's with the kindergarten drawings?' I asked running my fingers through a few pages to see if I was the only one in another place during this class.

‘I’m bored and I don’t get one single word out of what this bitch is saying,’ she rolled her eyes laying her head on the backrest hoping the class will be over soon, when I, on the other hand, could stay and listen to the impossible algorithms and equations for hours. Anything to prolong what was to come.

‘What’s your deal? You’re usually sipping each and every one of her words?’ I was halfway busted, but there was no chance in hell I’ll explain to another living soul what I just agreed to.

I shrugged like nothing important was going on ‘Just one of those days...’

‘Oh, you mean a Cole Clyborne day?’ Her eyebrow doubtfully raised, like she was on to something. Or maybe that was the paranoia screaming inside me.

‘Cole is....,’ I tried to explain our connection, but nothing plausible managed to rise in my mind. He’s what, my new best friend? My tutor? My boyfriend? Nothing that I could come up with would really make sense.

‘Trouble,’ she cut me off, giving me a pass from the lie I was about to say. ‘Trouble, written with capital letters... In bold!’

‘Ok, ok I got the message, don’t go over the edge about it.’ Like the turmoil threatening to break me wasn’t enough. She had to spell it out for me!

I wished she was entirely right, that he would be just that, trouble. I could handle trouble, but for me, he was so much more than an inconvenience. He was the fucking devil.

Next class, Marketing. I messed up signing in for this course since someone from the Pit could never find a job at this level. This is where the big money came from, and the social division made sure we had no access to that. Ironic, since they let us study this in college. I guess they let us hope. Because hope is the most treacherous thing. Hope kept the rebellion from igniting for now, and the Pit under total control.

I took my usual seat in the back of the classroom. No one I knew came to this course, except for the elite society. All Cole's jock *friends* were here, yet he was missing. It wasn't unusual for him to skip courses, but I found it strange that he chose to *see* me in the next one and not now.

Not that I was complaining. *Never* seemed to be the best time for this encounter and if there was any chance in hell that I would run and never look back, I would take it.

I tried focusing on demographics or whatever our lecturer was putting in the effort to teach us, but Ace's cold gaze incessantly staring at me was driving me out of my mind.

I felt so small, to the point I wanted to crawl under my desk just to avoid it. What the hell was he even gazing at with those wicked eyes!?

Yes, he had something on me, but he also signed a bulletproof contract that was assuring me he'll keep quiet about this. There was no way he would defy Vanya, and even Cole's reaction assured me of that. Though it didn't stop him from attempting to mess with me at a psychological level, trying to make me feel the tramp he now thought I was. It didn't come as a surprise since the *golden boys* saw every breathing female as that, so I shouldn't really feel directly offended for joining the pack - in his opinion.

The class ended as it began, under Ace's careful supervision and with that putrid feeling still twisting and turning in the pit of my stomach. What could happen during a course? It couldn't be that bad, could it? It wasn't like I haven't already zombied through today's classes, so worst-case scenario he will say some dumb shit and get me all twisted up.

Still, I needed to recollect myself. I was starting to be a mess and I wasn't going to give him the satisfaction of pulling the strings to my emotions. It was enough that at a twisted level he owned my body. I didn't need him to also feast on it.

I almost ran to the bathroom, stumbling on Jenna on my way there, but managed to ignore her in my rush to feel the water dancing on my face.

My palms formed into a bowl, splashing so much cold water over my face that at one point I thought I would drown. I wish I did, that way I would be spared the embarrassment of what I will need to go through.

A soft hand found its way on the back of my neck as I was still trying to use all the water of the planet to calm my nerves. ‘Are you ok?’ Jenna’s friendly voice reached my ears, only then recognizing the person behind me since I couldn’t see even see straight.

‘Y..yes. I need to get to Finances,’ I felt the question that was coming my way and I was dodging it with all costs, besides, I was convinced that the courses were about to start.

‘Class started like ten minutes ago.’

I babbled ‘What!?’ I was confused. For how long have I been here? And what was she still doing here with me?

As if hearing the questions piling up in my mind, Jenna decided to spare me the interrogation and throw some light on my present. ‘It’s Monday. I get off an hour earlier than you do, remember?’

She was right, we don’t have the same schedule on Mondays and she always ends up waiting for me to hang out.

‘OMG,’ I ran out the door, hoping that it won’t be too late for the teacher to let me in. I may not want anything to do with Cole, but the reality was, I needed everything to do with him.

‘Should I wait up for you?’ Jenn called out after me, but the truth was I had no idea what Cole’s plans were for today, and I had no intention of letting her be wrapped in them.

‘No, we’ll talk tomorrow,’ I called out, almost reaching the classroom.

I slowly pushed the door open, like a thief trying to sneak in, only I was sneaking into a class of twenty-plus people in broad daylight.

‘Excuse me for being late,’ I apologized to the teacher, hoping that she will still let me attend the course.

‘My lectures aren’t based on excuses, and if you can’t arrive on time then I don’t have words for you to hear,’ the old hag didn’t even look my way as she was speaking, as if the ultimate trash just dropped in.

I scanned the area, to find a very annoyed Cole sitting in the back of the classroom, eyes betraying every single thought. He shook his head in disapproval as if he was scolding me, but before I got to turn and leave the teacher had a sudden change of heart ‘Go to your seat, and do it fast, you’re already interrupting my class.’ Was the disproving gaze meant for me? Or for the teacher!?

‘Thank you,’ I mumbled, not having to be told twice, then headed towards the two-seater desk Cole was already at.

The pulsing jawline and clenched fists were announcing the trouble I was really in ‘You kept me fucking waiting. No one does that.’

Oops... I just have offended the *king* of EMA.

I couldn’t answer. I was bad at lying anyway and the truth would have been a complete acknowledgment of his powers.

‘At least you know your place and keep quiet,’ he muttered between his lips after a few minutes of dead silence on my end.

Big mistake!

‘You do know that the situation compels me to do this. It’s not because I’m some one-neuron bimbo who has fallen for your heavenly grace.’ I retorted, involuntarily opening Pandora’s box.

I fucked up big, and I immediately recognized it, noticing how the corner of his lips raised into a diabolical smirk.

What have I done!?

Running his fingers on the collar of his black leather jacket, he took it off, carefully arranging it on his lap. *Too carefully if you ask me.*

‘And this is exactly why I’m going to enjoy every single second of this so much. Knowing that you’ll hate every

moment of it.'

I gasped, setting a small distance between us, but it wasn't like I could exactly run anywhere in that confined space.

What did he have in mind? I was repelled, knowing that no good could come out of that inexistent conscience.

Thick strong fingers searched for my fragile ones, and to my surprise, his thumb was running in circles over the top of my hand, caressing it. What the hell was going on? It didn't take long to answer that question as his hand guided my own under the leather jacket, freezing my body on spot.

'Are you fucking crazy!?' I asked, dismayed and with my pulse pounding in my ears.

'Yes,' he casually answered, unbothered by my stupefaction, guiding my hand on top of the growing bulge in his pants. I couldn't do it, and immediately had the impulse to pull back, but his other arm wrapped itself around me, probing on the side of my breast. 'Don't complicate things for yourself,' he spoke in dead serious determination, bringing me to realize that I had to obey his will.

His palm guided mine over his erection, moving it up and down over the material and clutching to fasten my fingers against it, over and over again until my hand began moving on its own.

Drops of sweat began gathering on my temples, as I was looking all around me, feeling that everyone knew I was about to provide some sinful pleasure to the Academy's most infamous villain.

'You don't know how to unfasten a button, do you?' Cole- the jerk asked as I was lingering for more than five minutes over the jeans fabric that was concealing his pulsing hardness. I wanted to cuss him and say five thousand despising words that were going through my mind, but his hand almost resting on my chest stopped me. I had to keep quiet before our actions become even more obvious to others attending this class.

I unhurriedly lifted my hand to the hems of his jeans, uselessly trying to duck the unavoidable, then with sloppy fingers opened his belt, trying to find the button he was talking about. Maybe I didn't know how to unfasten it since I kept moving around it, trying to pull it open.

To my surprise, he wasn't mad about it, but let a delicious flicker of lust twinkle in his eyes 'The longer you let it cool down, the longer it will last.' The demonic grin was back, bringing under my observation an unfamiliar part of the male anatomy.

How the hell was I supposed to know that?

I began urging harder to unlock the button. Under no circumstances could I prolong this. Not without having a full-on panic attack.

Freeing him from his imprisonment, I glided my fingers beneath the black boxers he had on, reaching for the hardened piece of him that was so eagerly waiting for me. He was much firmer than I had imagined it would feel like, but my clumsy fingers still had no idea what they were doing, and instead of preparing for providing him the release he desired, they seemed to be stumbling on their path. Yet deep down I knew he didn't want just the release he seemed to thrive for. He lived for the adrenaline, the pumping heartbeats our indiscretion was providing, and something else too. He wanted to humiliate me, to make me feel low, insignificant.

Cole was using a successful global strategy- the smaller they feel, the harder and better they'll obey you. This attribute must run from his family heritage.

I began looking all around me again, and even if everyone else was scribbling something in their notebooks, I still felt like we were being watched.

In my attempt to do *something*, my fingers ran over the damp part of his tip, feeling the complete effect I had on him, and at the same time making him flinch and slide his chair along the wooden floor, releasing a sharp noise. Now every pair of eyes really was on us!



Sure, they couldn't see anything because of the jacket, but that dumb feeling of guilt was still within me. Did they know? Did even one know?

I stopped, forgetting to even breathe, feeling caught with the hands deep down into the cookie jar, that, until their startled gazes began turning one by one.

With eagle eyes, Cole peered straight through them, instilling a paralyzing fear into every one of their faces, and making them understand that even the air they breathe in this building is owned by him. I looked back at him, studying the ridiculous display of power, and how the Herd accepted it, obeying him without a single second of doubt.

'What did I tell you?' He whispered, throwing me the same possessive gaze.

I looked at him as if I had no idea what he was saying, but in reality, I knew what he was talking about. I was giving him time to recollect his forces and that was only extending my agony.

'Don't play dumb,' he growled as if I was attempting to insult his intelligence 'Look at me.' The final order was bringing the last pieces of his plan together.

My eyes glanced straight into his cobalt pools while my hand began moving again over his manhood.

The embarrassment I felt hit epic levels, but there was something more to this. A crescendo of pressure gathered in my mid-waist with every stroke of my hand that was causing his pupils to flare.

I glided my hand faster and faster, helped by the damp signs of his arousal. Strangely, I was beginning to feel in control as his eyes were instinctively closing and opening from the pleasure, losing the iron gaze with which he was subduing me. A false control though, since the sexual energy he was releasing began having repercussions on my own body. A deaf pain was pulsing right above that sensitive spot between my thighs while the bra I had on seemed to be tormenting my overly sensitive nipples.

I needed to end this, and since I was always a fast learner, I linked the path of each of my movements with every twitch and expression blooming on his face. I noticed how the rise of pressure was spiking his breath, and how the quick finger ran over the smooth part of his tip was making his jaw clench, building stronger his elation.

I owned his ass now. Well, it was actually the other way around, but a girl can dream, can't she?

With only a few more repeated moves, his feet buckled into the ground and the warm liquid signaling his undoing covered my hand.

The *king* got his wish and I was quite certain this was only the first of many.

Looking back into his eyes, I noticed they were more shocked than filled with some sort of relief. I was strongly expecting the last part or even a hint of *gratitude*...I know that was a good one. I must have been delusional at that time.

Still, I had a problem that needed to be solved, and with my free hand, I reached for a pack of tissues I had in my jacket, to *clear* the messy situation I had on my hands.

Cole never said a word and just expected me to be done, eyes even colder than before and fists impelling to crack under the pressure of their own grip.

'Ms. White,' the teacher called out my name the same moment I was finally breaking free from under his jacket. Shit, I was in trouble since I didn't have the slightest idea what she was talking about.

'Yes,' I babbled, not knowing what she wanted from me, but before I could play dumb and be hit with on-spot amnesia, the same disapproving shake of the head came from Cole, getting her to quickly change her mind.

'Not you, I meant Ms. Brunswick,' she mumbled annoyed, yet helpless at the same time.

What was Cole? Earlier I thought that I was imagining things and that the teacher had a change of heart to let me attend classes, even though I wasn't sure she even had a heart,

to begin with. But now...now he was displaying a drop of his power, of his authority that I was certain stretched out to the highest levels.

Yes, I regretted what I had just done. I loathed myself for it and felt so dirty that nothing could wash this away, but on the other hand, I was certain it was the right decision since he was definitely the man I needed to protect me.

‘You’re dismissed for today,’ he rose from the chair and walked straight out the door without anyone asking him a question. Who would have dared anyway?

I tried clearing my thoughts, though it was useless. I even took out a pen to get some of the notes down on paper, but my mind raced to a *whole different place*. I had another encounter scheduled for tonight. One that could hold no postponement.

## *Chapter 10*



The classes were finally over and I managed to sneak out without running into Cole again.

Brax was next on my list, but I needed to go home and change...The only problem was that I had nothing to change into.

I had to stop and buy myself a dress. It pained me to throw even \$40 on something for me, but I didn't own anything that I could wear to a club, and stopping at The Pleasure Room to borrow something didn't seem fair.

I found a black classic bodycon in a discount store and took it home to get ready for the night. Much easier said than done, since I didn't seem to be able to get one single thing right as my hands kept shaking at the thought of seeing Brax again.

Leaving my apartment, I signaled for a cab. The dress was preventing me from taking the bus since all the sleazy gazes would be set upon me, so there went another \$15. 'To Orchid Street, there's a club there. You know it?' I asked the driver since I didn't even know where the location could be.

‘Yeah, some bigshot kingpin owns it. Classy place. I took a broad there once.’

*Kingpin...* Shit. The word shook me, reminding me of his undeniable street authority, and of what exactly I was getting myself into.

We arrived much faster than I would have wanted to, while the strange sensation that I was about to face the executioners’ scaffold was grinding deep within me. But there wasn’t an option for me to remain in the cab for the rest of the night, so after paying the driver, I made my way to the club.

‘I’m here to see Brax,’ I announced to the bouncer that was standing in front of the club door, yet he didn’t seem to be the least impressed, making me wonder how many times he actually heard those words.

‘Get in line,’ the man gestured to look behind me at the line formed in front of the club.

How the hell could he get so many people from the Pitt to spend their last dimes here!?

‘Let her pass, she’s boss’s woman,’ another guard spoke as he came from somewhere behind me.

I recognized him as being the driver from the other day, but the man’s got his facts all mixed up. I was far from being Brax’s *woman*. Deal or no deal.

‘Come, I’ll take you to him. He’s at the other side of the club, underground,’ the same man offered to save the day.

‘Thank you.’ I followed him, walking beneath the neon lights until we reached a secluded part of the club. There was no one around, just the clink of doors opening and closing and maybe a pair of heels echoing through the corridors.

‘Take a left and the door will be right in front of you,’ the guard indicated just when at the same time a girl was leaving from along the exact path he told me to follow.

I gulped, watching her trying to fix her makeup as she was walking, cleaning the spread mascara beneath her reddened eyes, then checking her messed up ponytail.

It was Brax's doing, for some reason I didn't doubt that, and I was wondering just how long before I'll be forced to fill her shoes. I guess it was time to find out since my hand pushed on the doorknob, and I came face to face with the man that I needed to see tonight.

'This is a surprise. I didn't expect you would show up,' Brax raised his eyes from the whiskey glass and burned right through me. Every letter he spoke had a certain intonation to it, mixing wicked lust with superiority, acknowledging my reasons for being here and not holding back from imposing himself in front of me.

I had so many things to say, and yet so few. Out of all the deals I had to make, I feared coming here the most, not because I knew what Brax was capable of, but because I recognized what he was capable of when it came to me. The misting fire burning in his eyes, the raw unhealthy desire of a man incapable of any decent human emotions- all instilling anxiety to the deepest corners of my being.

'I may not be as weak as you think.' He couldn't sense my fear. He feasted on my fear!

'We'll see about that,' the green in his eyes deviously twinkled under thick lashes while tilting his head to examine me.

The corner of his lips lightly raised in satisfaction as his hungry gaze seemed to be unraveling every single part of me.

I never felt so exposed, so vulnerable, as if I was standing completely naked in front of him. I could so easily have seen myself turning to leave out the door with every second that passed between us, but no matter what was waiting for me here, quitting without an agreement was not an option.

'Can I have a glass of water?' I asked with what I felt were my last strengths as my throat suddenly went dry from the unbearable heat that seemed to be fueled from somewhere within me.

One of his fingers gestured towards a small table where an icebox of champagne and a bottle of whiskey seemed to be

waiting for me ‘I don’t drink water after 6,’ he grinned laying back in his armchair.

I didn’t move since I don’t usually drink alcohol, and now was certainly not the time to start, though Brax seemed to have other plans in mind. ‘Whiskey? Or are you bringing me good news and we’ll go straight to champagne?’

I hated him for the perfect bastard he was. He knew how hard this was for me and he was thriving on every second of my misery.

But I wasn’t willing to let him exploit this any longer... or at least that’s what I thought ‘I don’t drink.’

‘Pour me another glass of whiskey and get yourself one too. If you want to stay in this room, you will have a drink with me.’ As usual, he wasn’t asking, he was *telling* me, dissipating my plans of proclaiming independence.

Things were easy. On one hand, I had something he wanted, and on the other, he had something that I wanted. The only thing that made a difference is that when we draw the line, I could be replaced, but I couldn’t replace him. And that made everything so much more difficult for me. He held the upper hand, and that, in every sense of the word would cost me.

I couldn’t refuse his command, not when it meant getting a bus ticket straight back to my apartment, so with timid steps, I reached for the table and filled the damn glasses.

‘Put some ice too,’ another order that made my fists instinctively clench with anguishing frustration and contempt. Every sentence he spoke was intended to test me, and I was moments away from failing.

I brought him the drink, placing it on a coffee table next to his armchair while in my mind, I was rehearsing my speech.

Yes, I was that dumb at the moment, as the simple power of his presence seemed to control every cell in my body, numbing my mind and igniting my senses.

‘Let’s hear it,’ Brax cut straight to the point, erasing every sentence that I was preparing to say and leaving me only

with an undeniable truth.

‘I need my family.’ I sounded weak, and that was going to cost me, but all other words seemed to fade when it came to the real reason I was here for.

His eyebrows formed a frown, though only for a moment so brief that I was starting to think it was just in my imagination.

‘Take a seat,’ he hoarsely spoke, laying his head back on the armchair, unwilling to lose eye contact with me even for a second.

I turned to take a step behind me, heading towards the only other chair in the room, though before I could reach it, he decided to elucidate things for me ‘Not there.’

To be honest, I knew from the first time he asked me where that *seat* should be but willingly chose to ignore him, hoping that maybe if I played dumb, he was going to leave things that way.

Taking a deep breath, I whirled to look in his direction where very clear instructions were waiting for me as the tip of his fingers was tapping on the upper part of his leg.

There was where I was supposed to sit!

If things were any different, maybe I would be irremediably seduced by a man like him. He was the purest form of womanly temptation, created to entice all breathing souls, drawing a perfect picture of exquisite masculinity. The posture, the dominance, even the tone of his words was vibrating so deep within me that I was terrified to even approach him.

‘Don’t keep me waiting.’

Things were easy in his world. He asked and he received. No complications, no overthinking pickup lines, or planning romantic dinner dates. Just satisfying basic needs or adding to the collection as he liked to see things.

One thing I knew, I couldn’t keep him waiting any longer, so more dragging my feet than walking, I reached his side and



finally *took the seat*. In reality, I was more on my tiptoes than actually making contact with his leg, but it was the best I could at the time.

‘Go on,’ he instructed as I succeeded to follow his directions.

But was there really any necessity to tell him why I was there when I suspected that he already figured out the answer?

‘You have five minutes before the show will start, so we better get this over with.’

I guess he did want me to tell him. Didn’t manage to dodge that bullet.

But what show was he talking about?

I turned to look to my left where a large glass wall seemed to disclose another room. I haven’t even noticed it when I came in, being much more concentrated on what I came to do here than the architecture of the place, yet now that he brought it up, I did find it rather strange. I didn’t ask though, not because I wasn’t curious... because curiosity is an uncontrollable flaw of my nature, but because he had mentioned the timeframe and I felt that I needed to gather my courage for days to tell him what I came here for.

I guess five minutes would have to do. ‘I need you to get them. I want them here with me.’

‘You do understand what this implies?’ The wicked grin was back again as he tilted his head to crack the tension in his neck as if getting ready to delight himself with my misery.

I nodded an answer, eyes tightly shut trying to take in the effects of my decision.

‘Good, we’ll discuss the final details tomorrow when I’ll have all my men together.’ His tone calm, calculated, concealing all signs of humanity.

Was this it?

Was I free to go?

It was too good to be true -and I was just about to learn that when something seems too good to be true, it usually is.

I tried to stand, and spare him the *difficulty* of having to carry my weight on him when a determined hand wrapped itself around my waist ‘Did I say I was done?’ The coldness in his tone struck me, turning me into stone in his arms.

His nostrils flared out in anger, a stark warning sign of my disobedience. He knew that I was no fool and it was about time I stopped behaving like one.

With agonizingly slow movements he reached for the top button of his shirt, pulling it open ‘This shit had been annoying me all day,’ and then another button popped, revealing the black patterns so majestically covering his skin.

My gaze struggled to stay away but the magnetism of the drawings covering the defined shapes of his body was too much of a burden. And I was weak...so so weak in front of the feral display of pure masculinity.

‘Drink,’ he took my glass off the table and pressed it to my lips while his earlier words were still clutching on to me *If you want to still be in this room, you will have a drink with me.*

*No* was not an option, so with agonizing movements, I opened my mouth to sip on the liquid. I could hardly swallow, clenching my lips to stop the whiskey instantly after I could feel its taste.

‘All,’ Brax pushed the glass harder, raising it until all of its contents managed to flow down my throat. I coughed, trying to survive the burning sensation that seemed to set my lungs on fire while withstanding the bitter alcoholic aftertaste. ‘Good girl,’ he spoke with self-satisfaction, moving his hand to underneath my chin, then gently tracing a line downwards, between the curves of my breasts and stopping over my navel. ‘This burning sensation... This is what I get when I look at you.’

It was a confession, not a *love* one since this man had no love to give. But one far more dangerous- a *lust* one.

He was in lust with me!

What worried me most was that I recognized exactly what he was describing. The line of tormenting heat gradually spread throughout my body, taking hold of all thoughts and reactions. The primal desire screaming inside of me whilst in conjunction with my present situation it would be so easy to be set free.

Fighting the torching sensation with my remaining powers, I decided to ask him another question. Something that was troubling me. ‘Do we need to go to Vanya about this?’ She was still my employer after all, and we did owe her a percentage.

‘As long as you don’t get a check or cash, Vanya doesn’t care. Well, I am going to spend a great deal of money seeing this through, but it won’t count as long as I don’t give the payment directly to you’

At least that cleared things up since I was having doubts about telling another soul of the agreements I need to make to free my family.

‘But if you also need cash, I’m sure that I could think of something to add to our deal,’ he just couldn’t hold that thought to himself, probably already scheming up some new ways of owning me.

Luckily, I had Ferris’s offer to cover for that part, and no matter how much of a psychotic temperament he may have displayed, it was nothing compared to Brax’s deathlike coldness.

Nothing he could say or do could convince me to extend our deal in any way, especially since I’ve already agreed to give him such an important part of me.

‘I don’t need your money,’ my mouth got the best of me.

‘That’s not what I see, but have it your way.’ I could feel his angered voice slightly shaking, needing to offend me back to prove superiority. It wasn’t just a game with me, but the main game in his world- establishing supremacy. That’s what kept the money rolling and the loyal subjects bowing at his feet. That’s what made him *king* on the streets.

‘I’m sorry, I didn’t -,’ I wanted to apologize in some way and avoid him getting mad at me. I’m not usually the apologetic type, but getting on the bad side of his radar didn’t seem like such a good option, at least not until he would have fulfilled his part of the deal. But before I could finish my words I caught sight of a strong light coming from the glass wall.

I turned to notice large spotlights shining on what seemed to be a stage with a holstered table sitting in the middle of it. It was none of my business and since the *show* was about to start, this was my cue to leave.

‘I should go,’ I babbled, though without trying to get up without permission this time.

‘No, you shouldn’t,’ his words full of melting pathos as I was craving them and fearing them at the same time. ‘What you’re asking of me is a lot... A lot of money and a lot of time. I think it’s only fair I should see a sign that you’re as excited about this deal as I am... Call it a sign of good faith on your part.’

I knew that there was a trick. An extra deal that I unwillingly agreed to. Point b.21 in his contract, scribbled with almost invisible letters. I was expecting this ever since deciding to do a deal with a man like him. ‘What does that mean?’ I couldn’t hide the whimper in my voice as it was cracking under the uncertainty of what he had planned for the night.

‘Relax,’ his voice so warm this time that instantly wrapped all around me, melting my body onto his own under the pressure of every anguishing need that was tormenting me ever since I first made contact with him. ‘It only means you get to watch the show with me,’ he turned me to face the glass wall, raising my body further up his leg until my back rested on his chest, pulsing with each one of his heartbeats.

Suddenly, the lights in our room went down, leaving just a few tiny bulbs to glimmer in the deep darkness. Caught by surprise, my shaking feet pressed on the floor, trying to find stability yet involuntarily arching against him. I froze, feeling

the evident part of his manly arousal directly under me while his arm raised me a little further, bringing my head to rest on his shoulder.

‘I said, relax,’ his lips inches away from mine, heavy with the hardened breath, full of desire.

I was certain that he was going to kiss me, and as much as I may have wanted him not to do it, the memory of his tongue urging against mine brought a wave of liquid heat to flow down on my body.

My eyes closed once again, waiting for his mouth to cover mine, but the warmth of his lips was nowhere to be found.

I reopened them just in time to catch a glimpse of him carefully studying my neckline, then pushing a few of my strands aside, trailing a long line with his tongue from my collarbone to that cursed spot behind my ear that made me tingle with unearthly need.

I cursed at myself for being so weak. This was nothing more than a job for me, and a game for him. Things were pretty clear from the start, and allowing his touch to have any effect on me could only complicate everything.

That was it. I was strong. I had to be so... At least that’s what I told myself for almost two nanoseconds because the atmosphere in the room was going to heat up much quicker than I could ever imagine.

Slow music began playing from the speakers while another set of spotlights set the room behind the glass wall to life.

‘What is this?’ I asked looking at the stage where an astonishing blonde woman, dressed only in a tight black lace corset made an appearance.

‘Shush, just watch the show,’ his tongue skimmed the exposed part of my neck, again and again making my skin crawl with the intoxicating sensation of *him*.

I was so fucking lost into his arms, hating myself for every single second I was trembling with desire, and in an

attempt to do something...anything to take my mind off him, I decided to follow his advice and really pay attention to what was going on in the second room.

A half-dressed man with a herculean muscle frame had made an appearance while I wasn't watching, and I couldn't deny that he could easily be the object of all womanly desire... All besides me. His hands would feel iceberg cold traveling my body compared to the lava heating palms that were now prowling the defined contour of my breasts.

The woman seemed excited to see him, approaching him with luscious movements, like a wild panther stalking her prey. They had magnetism and you could see it from miles away. Her arms opened to greet him, running her fingers through the thick strands of his curled blonde hair while their mouths crashed, searching for one another in fluid motions almost like showing off their fantastic compatibility.

They were on fire, and the stage seemed to be burning underneath them. The woman broke off the kiss and followed the manly line of his jaw with the tip of her tongue, descending to the rock-like squares of his chest, all the way down to the V-line that formed the perfect arrow towards his manhood. Her knees hit the floor and a satisfied grin splattered over her face as her eyes went up to glance at the eagerness glinting in his own.

With stagnant movements, as if feasting on his excitement, she unbuckled his belt, throwing it on the floor then painfully slowly unbuttoned his jeans.

I had a feeling of what was about to happen and blushing with shame, I wanted to look away, but with the corner of my eye, I caught Brax's gaze studying me. His tongue still glided on my skin, enhancing the storm that he was building inside of me, yet at the same time, I knew he was watching over me. This was a test of obedience. One that I wasn't going to fail, no matter how hard my ego was pushing me to riot against it.

The blonde woman pushed her partner's pants down along with his boxers, revealing a very aroused part of him. No need to mention that rivers of embarrassment that ran

down on me as I watched her getting the length of his erection to disappear between her lips, with slow lustful moves, revealing him from time to time then only to lose him deeper the next second.

It was completely erotic and their game seemed to be having its effects on me. I no longer wanted to look away but was curious about what was about to happen next.

Wish granted, I guess, since only after a couple of moves, his finger wrapped themselves between the styled long locks of her hair, pulling her up, on top of the table.

With expert hands, he made her corset disappear into thin air, revealing a surged to magnificence pair of voluptuous breasts.

Maybe as a result of womanly jealousy that I had no idea about, but my mind couldn't help but compare them with my own. Sure, I had volume...too much in my opinion, but the chiseled to perfection plus she brought along was worrying me.

Completely unable to understand why or how the thought of Brax also comparing me to her was forming an unsettling knot in my stomach, and in the end, why wouldn't he, when I was already doing it myself?

Suddenly, I didn't feel so comfortable anymore, and the need to leave this place was pressing down on me. That was until Brax's palms snuck beneath my dress, pinning themselves to cup my breasts while the man on the stage seemed to be doing the exact same gestures. It was strangely arousing to feel his hands prowling on my body while the shock I initially imagined of having, was turning into decadent pleasure.

The strap of my bra fell, revealing the roundness of my chest, extracting at the same time a deep growl out of my torturer, but also instilling panic into me.

'They can't see us,' he whispered, probably sensing my anxiety, moving even more quickly over my breasts, while silently playing my silvery tips between his fingers.

My gaze returned to the stage where the beautiful woman was now laying on the holstered table, and the man was just making room between her legs. She was as eager as he was earlier, smiling as he removed the last piece of material that covered her.

Pressing her legs even harder to part, he dragged two of his fingers over the length of her center, causing her eyes to roll in primary pleasure. Her body arched instinctively as the tip of his tongue fell to follow the path of his fingers with long thorough moves, extracting moan after moan.

I swallowed the knot in my throat, wondering how that could feel on my body. What supreme pleasure could a gesture like that really bring me?

As if reading my mind, Brax's hands rolled over my hips then down to the hems of my dress, raising it just enough so you could see my panty line.

You know that saying: be careful what you wish for because it may come true. Apparently, I wasn't careful enough since my mobster's fingers were already testing the edge of my panties, moving the material against my folds and raising a tantalizing fluttery sensation within me.

'What are you doing?' I shuddered, overwhelmed by everything that was happening to me...and all around me.

'I'm not going to spoil my prize if that's what you're worried about... Just play with it a little.' So heated and so soulless, ignoring the anxiety in my voice, his fingers slipped underneath the material, gliding over my folds. 'Good girl,' he spoke again, enjoying the damp signs of my arousal.

I hated that expression. It was demeaning, and he perfectly knew that. Even the intonation of his voice when he said it, was making me be aware he knew that! It was like congratulating a dog on a trick well played. Words that were empowering him to be the master.

I fought it at first, unwilling to give him this kind of control over me, but move after move, my body began betraying every conscious thought that I may have ever had.



I looked at the stage again where the couple had turned another page and the man buried himself deep within his mate, moving so intensely that it seemed the table would break under his weight. Her face seemed to express a certain anguish, beautiful, bonding anguish and not the one that comes from pain, while the tiny drops of sweat rolling off their bodies were shining under the spotlights, heightening every emotion that they were transmitting.

I wondered if they were really lovers, or maybe just paid actors to perform on stage, but the lustful sparkle in their eyes and the united lips while slamming into one another were leading me to believe that they were more than playing a part.

And unfortunately, also in my case, it was more than playing a part...

I closed my eyes as my hips seemed to have a life of their own, arching in ecstasy with every one of his moves, making his smothered groans match my increasingly loud moans. Covering my mouth with my palms, I realized it was refusing to obey me as a tension so violent was building within me. Yet Brax didn't seem to agree, taking my hands away and replacing them with his lips.

The coldness turned to fire again as those damn fingers danced against the swollen nub that was turning me into a prisoner of desire, while his tongue was probing against mine with a tidal wave of ultimate eros.

Taking a last look at the glass window, I was fighting to still follow Brax's command, but in reality, it seemed impossible to do so. Their movement was hypnotic, yet it faded with the devastating combination that was *torturing* my body.

I watched her squirm with ecstasy while tears not of pain or happiness, but supreme satisfaction were glittering in her eyes, and I couldn't help but sense the same shuddering sensation taking control of my mid-waist.

As if feeling my oncoming devastation, his fingers began grinding on my soft skin faster and faster while his hand squeezing on my breast was approaching a thin line between

pleasure and pain. His groans were not silenced anymore but fell down my throat with each one of the gestures that were bringing my ecstasy. I no longer had control and heaven met hell as the most violent storm took custody of my body. I was trembling as all muscles spasmed uselessly trying to find the ground beneath my feet, convinced that I couldn't withstand this sensation for long.

'Brax,' I pleaded with him to stop since his touch was raising a panic alert in my system. He didn't care, just kissed me harder, with the passion he kept buried so deep within him, moving his fingers over and over again against the source of my beautiful agony.

It was game over in seconds, as I curled into a ball, crashing on his chest, giving him exactly what he wanted. I was surrendering to him.

'Good girl,' his teeth stopped to graze my bottom lip into a final kiss. He just had to ruin the moment trying to establish a dominance he already won a long time ago. Yet it wasn't enough to get a reaction out of me. I was melted into his arms while his lazy fingers twisted on a lock of my hair. It felt good, maybe almost normal, but the lights coming back to shine into our room brought a crushing reality back together.

I jumped at my feet, rearranging my dress, thinking about something to say...anything that could serve me as an explanation, though he hastily spared me of the trouble of finding my words.

'I'll see you tomorrow. Antonio will take you back to your place. I can't have you walking the streets in this condition,' he smirked, revealing the top bastard he really was.

Without saying a word, I turned to walk out the door, leaving his infatuated piece of ass behind.

In his eyes, I was no different than the girl that left the room before me... And yet, *different in all the ways*.

## *Chapter 11*



My visit to Brax was shorter than anticipated, and by the time that I got back to my home, it was still only 11 pm. Maybe late for the rest of the world, though not too late to visit Ferris. He did declare that he never goes to bed before dawn, so what point in stretching out a necessary evil? Besides, I needed to save all the time I could get.

Changing into the black skirt that I wore when I first met Vanya, and in a shirt that unfortunately had seen much better days, I decided to leave again in search of a cab. A little difficult in this part of the town and at this hour, though not impossible....after walking for a couple of streets.

This time I paid much more attention while climbing to the top of the hills. It wasn't about social classes any longer, but about the means to obtain my goal. And the higher I ascended, the closer I was to my family.

The darkness of the mansion seemed like a beautiful sonnet, wrapping around me and carrying me through divine rhythms to knock on the main door.

'Is he with company?' I asked Alfred, praying that he would be alone. I had just let my cab go and there was no way

I would find a ride back from the top of the Hill to the Pit. Besides, postponing things even for a day was something that I couldn't conceive.

'He's never with company unless I leave.' The man opened the door widely so I could step in. 'You know your way up,' he nodded, bowing his head as I walked past him, then vanishing on a long corridor that formed from the main lobby.

The stairs seemed like mountains, barely dragging my feet to move to climb them, wearing the invisible weight of the burden that now lied on my shoulders. I had two deals and just needed one more. The final one, that will get me to my goal, even if the price I was paying seemed impossible for most people.

With trembling hands, I pushed the door to open and entered his room. The same warm atmosphere of the fireplace embraced me from the first step inside the space, though there seemed to be no one around.

'Ferris,' I called, trying to decipher his location, pacing the length of the room to the balcony and see if he's there.

No answer.

Maybe he stepped out for a little, or maybe he was in another room. In any case, I wasn't leaving before I got to talk to him, so I decided to wait there.

I walked towards the sofa when the unlit candles caught my attention. I loved their flames the other day, so taking a match, I decided to light them up one by one.

'You said you wouldn't return,' his husky voice echoed from somewhere in the back, making me turn to acknowledge his presence, feasting my eyes on each divine line of him.

A dim light coming from the bathroom was framing his sculptured body as only a black towel wrapped around his waist, letting on display the wet drawings that were guarding his chest. My throat suddenly went dry as his torso seemed to have harvested all the water left on this planet.

I found myself forced to swallow the lump that was preventing me from breathing and try to mender my voice to say a word. ‘I changed my mind,’ I barely spoke, lowering my eyes to the ground so I could focus.

As usual, his sense of observation was spot -on, so it didn’t take him long to pick up on the distress that he was causing ‘I should put something on.’

‘Yes, thank you.’ More like *thank God!* since this was turning into an impossible task to complete.

The air in the room got lighter as he depleted me from his presence for a few minutes, only to reappear in an even finer version than before. Black jeans and a ripped tank top that let most of his chest on sight were luring me to walk over there and finish tearing off the rest of the material.

‘So, in what ways did you change your mind?’ His question made perfect sense since I hadn’t stated whether I was referring to continuing with the Pleasure Room or actually agreeing on his deal.

‘About your proposal, *and* I don’t want to go back to the Pleasure Room anymore.’ It wasn’t that I didn’t see the chance Vanya gave me as a tremendous opportunity, but I was certainly not able to withstand another Pleasure like one of the last three, or who knows what new *deal*.

‘You won’t ever have to,’ the promise of a man that could guarantee exactly that.

‘But I still have other arrangements I have to fulfill...at least for a while.’ I felt that I should add this part, as keeping it from him was a form of betrayal, even if it could jeopardize my final deal.

‘I understand,’ he took a moment to think things through, understanding exactly what I was saying. ‘So, I should take this as a *yes* to my offer.’

‘Yes, it’s a *yes*.’

With Ferris, it didn’t feel so difficult to tell him that I accepted, as it did with Cole or Brax, yet it felt much more difficult in every other way. ‘But we’re keeping the condition.’

‘Ok. I’ll have Alfred take you to the new apartment tomorrow.’

‘To the new apartment!?’ I thought he meant he’ll cover the rent for that apartment I currently live in.

‘It’s at the base of the Hills, but I’ll ask him if we have anything closer.’

Ferris was just counting the green houses on his monopoly board and chose Boardwalk for me.

‘In the Hills!?! I can’t live here, it’s too expensive.’

I didn’t realize that we were on a budget,’ he smiled, rolling the dice for a final time, and deciding on the winner. ‘I don’t keep track of expenses, especially not with the people close to me,’ he struck a match and lit a few candles on the table next to him, letting the flames dance in the darkness of his eyes.

A wolf in sheep’s clothes, and I knew it from the instant I entered his world a day ago... and still, an invisible power was subduing me to be his little lamb.

‘Wine?’ He asked, taking an old bottle from a collector’s shelf and removing its cork. At least he was asking, and not commanding like Brax the other day.

I know that I don’t usually drink, but tonight, I felt that I need the wine he was offering. I needed to drift off for a second, escaping reality, and he was a master when it came to that. He had his world, his safe place, and I yearned to join him in there.

‘Yes, please,’ I nodded, taking a few paces closer to him.

With Ferris, I couldn’t premeditate my moves, and the funny thing was that I didn’t feel the need to. Everything was natural, fluid like the red liquid swishing in our glasses.

‘Tell me, what should we toast to?’ He handed me the drink, searching my eyes for an answer.

There was no room for street-smart responses when it came to him. He only wanted to see what I was thinking while I was even more clueless than him. For me the toast was for a new beginning, with ups and downs, trying to get over the things that needed to be done, and focusing on the joy of getting reunited with my loved ones.

‘It’s complicated, I don’t even know what to say,’ I wasn’t lying to him, but I wasn’t telling the whole truth either.

‘How about for you sleeping in my arms tonight,’ he knew all the right words that needed to be spoken, and he didn’t waste a chance to use them.

‘You don’t have to charm me, we already made the deal,’ I didn’t want it to sound offensive, but it came out just like being that. ‘I’m sorry, I say the stupidest things when I’m stressed.’

He looked displeased with my observation, and I didn’t expect him to be different, though, once more, he managed to surprise me. His hand slipped on the small of my back, pulling me to his chest, so close that our eyes were drowning into one another.

‘Do I make you feel stressed?’ He pushed a few wayward curls off from my face and leaned his head millimeters away from our lips to touch. ‘Do I?’ He asked again, this time the movement of his mouth making it brush over mine in an agonizingly delicious gesture.

‘Just a little,’ I answered, joining our lips, stopping the world around us. The room started spinning and there we were, trapped in a loop of time, lost in small unhurried kisses.

One...two.. maybe a hundred times our lips merged before our tongues met, discovering one another all over again. It was as magical as the sparkles dancing in the chimney, and as dangerous as the fire beneath them.

His lips so warm, so welcoming, while his palms slowly glided down on my waist, removing my shirt from the hems of my skirt so that he could make room beneath it. Electric tingles lived in the tips of his fingers, moving on my skin and

turning my body into the lights that twinkle while hiding in the Christmas tree. I was numbed and alive at the same time, lost in his spell, and dreaming of the place his fingers will get to pamper next. Higher and higher they advanced until they found the base of my chest then gradually slipped underneath my bra. That piece of material seemed useless in these seconds, and for that first time, I was waiting for the moment to get rid of it. Though before he got to dispose of my burden, his kisses lost their intensity with lightning speed until his lips drifted away from mine and his palms fall back from underneath my shirt.

‘I need to step outside for a second,’ he stormed out the balcony door, letting the tempest of the wind in.

I was confused, but he had a gift of making me feel exactly that way, yet, it felt wrong leaving him alone, so I followed, hoping to get some answers for the sudden change of heart.

‘Are you ok?’

‘Yes, I just needed a smoke,’ he lit himself a cigarette, although I knew that he was lying.

‘It’s cold outside, put something on.’

‘You’re the one to talk. You’re in a tank top.’

‘I guess you’re right, but go and put a blanket on.’

I’m not sure if he just wanted a few free seconds, or maybe he really cared about me not catching a cold, but the almost freezing temperature made me listen, and snatch a blanket off the couch to put it over my shoulders.

‘Come here,’ I opened my arms the moment I returned to him, to get his body beneath the warm material- although strangely, he didn’t seem to be cold.

A smile that hid more bitterness than happiness in it raised on his lips as his arms lifted so I could catch him into a hug, wrapping his torso with my blanket, but leaving his hands free so that he could smoke.



‘So, what’s wrong?’ I asked, gluing my head to his chest, listening to the music of his heartbeats.

He puffed, inhaling the night’s air ‘I don’t know, it’s hard to explain, but it doesn’t have to do with you.’

‘It sure felt like it.’ I think honesty was the best card, although I suspected him of not playing fair.

‘Ok, it does, but it’s not something that can put on you... it’s not your fault, in any case... It’s mine. Just promise you won’t push me to talk about it.’

‘No, I won’t. Do you want me to leave?’ I felt like I had to ask since he didn’t seem comfortable anymore in my presence.

‘No... never!’ He rushed to say, although *never* seemed a little extreme. ‘I mean, I hadn’t acted like that because I want you to leave.’ the arm that didn’t hold the cigarette glided beneath the blanket, then after a last drag, was followed by the other. ‘Although you should do it for your own sake,’ a smirk appeared on his lips while something diabolical flashed in the two Onyx pearls looking back at me. ‘Better now?’ He questioned, clutching on my hips until our bodies met, then driving his lips to fall on me.

‘Yes,’ I spoke the truth. A truth that it was better to keep for myself.

‘You’re right. It is better,’ he answered, finding his place back beneath my shirt.

Such a contrast between the cold outside and the heat generated inside of our blanket where his hands were exploring every inch of my breasts as my arms were pinned on his shoulders, keeping our shelter in one place.

One by one, the buttons of my shirt were coming undone, making room for him to play with my hardened tips, causing him to roar in wild satisfaction.

Leaning towards me and dragging his hands beneath my knees, he lifted me on his waist, then turned me around to place me on the balcony balustrade so he could get better

access as the height difference between us was an inconvenience in those moments.

‘What are you doing!?’ I panicked since I was standing on a narrow stone railing at the edge of a cliff, hanging in a fine line between life and death.

As if deaf to my question, his kiss grew hungrier, releasing an untamed storm to devastate me as we were both floating on the verge of sanity.

The blood in his veins was reaching heightening speed, pacing his tongue against my own, barely succeeding to compose his yearnings.

‘Let me down from here,’ I pleaded between kisses. Still useless, speaking to numb ears as his mouth fell beneath my blanket to search for the round shape of my breasts. ‘Ferris,’ I whimpered, fearing that his actions will unbalance me.

‘Shush,’ he pulled on my hips to tighten my core against his hardness, making my skirt rise so high that the thin material of my panties was glued to his jeans.

I have never seen him that much alive as in those seconds, eyes burning with desire while raising his head for a second to look at me. ‘I need you to trust me,’ he whispered, disappearing beneath the blanket again, merging his lips with the tips of my breasts, leaning over me so much that my torso was hanging outside of the balcony, directly over the cliff.

‘Stop it, Ferris,’ I let out a muffled scream, trying to push him back as he seemed to be made of stone. My gesture only drove him further, pressing the soft skin of my chest between his lips, leaving bruises along his path while iron hands were digging deep into my flesh, steadying me against him.

His lips began moving harder and faster, hurting me and bringing me so close to ecstasy at the same time, while I felt him propping me against him, raising me almost completely off the ledge.

‘Ferris!’ I cried out while real tears were rolling over my cheeks, recognizing the madness that I saw two nights ago. It felt like I was flying and dying at the same time, terrified that

he was fucking insane but also terrified of the chill of life running through all of my body. ‘I said, stop,’ I tried to get a better grip on his shoulders, but managed to let go of the blanket, letting it slip off the balcony, and catching a glimpse of it with the corner of my eye brought me suddenly back to reality.

I no longer knew if he was playing, or genuinely wanted to hurt me, but I was starting to think he wasn’t even there anymore, as if his soul had left his body.

‘Ferris,’ I screamed as I felt I was slipping away, propelling my feet against the stone balustrade and pushing us backward inside the balcony.

The momentum unbalanced him, and in his attempt to protect me, he fell on the floor, dragging my body on top of him.

‘You don’t trust me,’ he smiled for some strange reason, whirling us around on the stone floor until he stopped on top of me, making room beneath my limbs. ‘You will always be safe with me,’ his mouth claimed mine, so slow, unhurried again, as he did back in his room, raising a thousand questions in my mind.

What was he actually doing? And what was he actually doing to me?

He was death, and he was life, slowly killing me while lifting me impossibly close to the sky.

Tears were still rolling off my eyes, as the uncertainty of whether he would hurt me or not was still there. But they were flowing for another reason too. The closeness, the union, the hands roaming my body, and the tremor between my thighs—they were unstoppable, sending me on a road of no return as he was kissing his madness away ‘It’s ok... It’s ok, Bea.’ I think he said it a hundred times until I ended up believing it. It was going to be ok...in the end.

Minutes, maybe even hours passed by us, as we remained under the dark sky moving our lips in an intoxicating rhythm.

‘You’re cold,’ his hand skimmed the crawled skin of my breasts, making him close a few of my buttons back together. ‘Let’s get you inside,’ he helped me off from the floor then walked me to the fireplace. ‘I’ll get you a new blanket,’ leaving my side, he walked to a chair and retrieved a new covering for me, as at the same time, a scary memory ran through my mind at the thought of how I lost the first one.

Sipping on my glass of wine, I turned to see where he was going since I heard him stepping away, only to find him preparing to take a place on the couch.

‘You’re not joining me here?’ I found that strange since a minute ago he seemed unable to take his lips off me- not that I would have any reason to complain about that.

‘If I was to join you right now, there would be a 99% chance that I would break my promise,’ he flashed a grin that got lost in his glass of wine. ‘Don’t worry, we will be sharing the bed tonight.’

‘Is that a threat?’ I chuckled, feeling my cheeks blush from the fireplace heat...or from the wine, can’t be sure of the true offender.

‘Only for the weak of heart. I see it as a challenge.’

He certainly had something wicked in his mind, and I just prayed, it won’t be so extreme as our moments on the balcony.

I guess I needed to pretend there’s nothing wrong with his actions so I could convince myself to go through with this as every second spent with him was making me doubt my sanity.

He is the charmer, the jack of hearts combined with the wild card, perfectly synchronized into the most dangerous weapon of seduction.

My hands began to catch color again as my body was coming back to life. I was finally warm, stretching my feet, letting the blanket slip off my back...and somebody noticed!

‘Is it better now?’ Ferris asked as if he had waited for me all along.

‘Yes,’ I whirled my body to face him, wondering when was he planning on joining me on the rug. It took me a while to warm myself, so I guessed that all manly matters should have been calmed by now.

‘Bea, I need you to do as I say. Think you can handle that?’ His voice warm, and calculated at the same time, as he was preparing to order me around, but dressed his command in pretty clothes, thinking that I couldn’t tell.

In reality, he didn’t need to do that, we had a deal. One that I had all intentions of obeying.

‘Yes,’ I nodded to confirm the answer, then raised to my feet to see what he had in mind.

‘Ok....take off your shirt.’

What!? It’s not like he didn’t see earlier what was underneath it, but it seemed a little strange that he didn’t personally come to take it off. However, I couldn’t say anything, so unbuttoning the parts that were holding it together, I let it fall to the ground.

‘Now, your skirt,’ he continued the instant I finished, waiting for me to follow through, slowly watching the material turning into a black pool at my feet.

‘Perfect, now get on the bed,’ his voice almost cracking with excitement.

Why did I have a feeling that it wasn’t curfew yet?

My body arched against the mattress, not into some overly excited gesture, but trying to hide it between the sheets.

‘You’re doing great, Bea. I’ll be there shortly, but I need you to do something for me first.’

That sounded like even more *trouble*...

Ferris positioned himself better on the couch as if trying to get a better view ‘Put one of your hands over your navel.’

‘Ferris...’

‘Shush... Do as I say.’

My eyes closed, sensing what was to come as my thighs squeezed to one another, protecting the sensitive place between them.

‘You can keep your eyes closed if you want, it’s ok.’

At least I didn’t have to look at him as he watched me.

‘Now push your hand lower.’ he waited until my hand followed his voice, and moved to the hems of my panties. ‘Now lower, underneath the lace. You know where I need it to be.’

I gasped, squeezing on my eyes to stay tightly shut while my fingers found the dampness of my folds. At least he wasn’t the one to find out what devastating effects he had on me, although I suspected this was what his game was all about.

‘You know what to do next. Or do you want me to explain it step by step?’ His voice drenched in lust, waiting for me to go on.

It was no use for words. I didn’t come from Mars, but the embarrassment seemed to be freezing me on spot while melting me on the bed at the same time. It didn’t take long for Ferris to notice and to offer again to walk me through things ‘Do you want me to say it?’

‘No,’ I began moving my fingers, slowly over my sensitive skin, even though I knew I didn’t have much chance of success. The truth is, I tried this a few times in the darkness of my room, yet without any result- almost to the point I was starting to believe that nothing could ever come of this. That, until a day ago when Brax showed me so differently.

I tried to concentrate on the path he indicated, tracing it again to find a reaction. Something to satisfy Ferris’s request and end the night.

Come to think about it, he was no different from Cole and Brax, he just had a different way of saying things, and I was certain that if I would deny him, it would have some sort of repercussions. Yet, I didn’t want to test that, not because I was afraid of an outburst, but because my body craved to obey

him. He held some invisible ropes, tying a part of me to him, no matter how hard I fought to oppose.

Something was off, and I found it difficult to put it into words without my face reddening with shame, but the only thrill I was getting was from the thought that he was watching me.

It didn't take him long to notice, as I could hear him pacing through the room with steps closing in my direction.

My hand stopped moving, as I opened my eyes to look at him.

'Go on,' he low-tone spoke, taking a place on the bed beside me, then leaning over and slipping his hands behind me to unclasp my bra.

'It doesn't actually work,' I whined, putting my shame aside, hoping that it will get him to let me stop - though the result was quite the opposite.

'It will,' he let his tongue trace the round of my nipple while his hand overlaid mine, guiding it over my skin, increasing the pressure.

Still nothing. Or at least that's what I told myself for less than twenty seconds until I felt his fingers intertwined with mine, leading an assault to that spot that made me arch in pleasure the other day.

And he wasn't falling behind.

Maybe I needed a man's touch to set me on fire and with Ferris's gifted mouth nibbling on my tips, I was burning with ceiling height flames.

The fields of Elysium were opening for me as I felt the same tightening sensation was rushing to build up under the tips of my fingers.

'See, I was right,' he whispered, raising himself to reach my mouth while he was becoming a prison for my body. Yet, I can't recall him even finishing the sentence before the most perfect torment was ripping through me.

I meowed and purred, as his clasp on my hand tightened, forcing me to brush over a place that seemed to be getting impossible to be touched. I thought it was supposed to be game over then, but he didn't let go of me, pushing me from one overdrive to another. It felt like hallucinating, drifting off to a new place where every single one of my nerves was being put to test.

He was fucking mad and he was trying to get me to be mad about him.

I was kissing and cursing him at the same time, and in a final attempt, managed to break free, squeezing my thighs so that he won't reach me again. The thought of withstanding this for a second more appeared to be impossible 'Enough, Ferris,' I whispered with the tremble in my body transferring in my voice.

'You need me,' the pain in his tone was confirming my suspicions. His ultimate goal was to control me.

'I do,' I murmured, searching for his kiss and getting him to release my hand.

It was a lie. I didn't need him how he wanted me to. I feared to need him that way! Absolutely, madly give myself to him. I needed to remain detached, and I was already losing at that game.

'I did this!?' He asked, brushing his thumb over one of my breasts, looking at the bruises he caused, on the balcony mixed with the ones I caused myself a day ago because of Brax. Though I was ashamed to admit to the second part. 'I'm sorry,' he let his tongue trail over my purplish tip, licking my wounds while tugging me beside him and pulling a blanket over us. 'I'll let you rest. Close your eyes, Bea.'

And that I did, slowly drifting towards Neverland under the touch of his lips.



## Chapter 12



I woke up with the strangest reflection burning in my eyes as if someone was pointing a bulb straight at my face.

‘What’s wrong?’ Ferris asked, sensing me almost jumping out from the bed.

I couldn’t say, especially since I could barely keep my eyes open, but after a few moments of acclimatization, my eyelids slowly parted only to see the light of.... of the *sun!*?

Was that actually the sun!?

‘Ferris...,’ I could barely call for him as I snatched the blanket off the bed and ran straight outside on the balcony. ‘Is this it?’

‘We’re much above the Pitt and the smog level, so yes... That would be the sun.’

‘I... I never saw it before,’ I murmured embarrassed, yet mesmerized at the same time. It was the most stunning thing I have ever seen, warming me with the golden rays and bringing drops of unexpected hope into my soul.

‘The blessing of my royal heritage,’ Ferris muttered as if this was much similar to a curse than a miracle.

‘I didn’t know that you are royal,’ I let out a chuckle, thinking that he was just kidding.

‘Yeah... Blue blood is supposed to run through my veins. Funny, it was still red the last time that I bled. Though I’m beginning to believe that it may be black by now.’

Oh, he was being serious...

‘I’m pretty sure it’s as red as mine... But royal, really!?’ It felt strange since less than a month ago I never even thought this kind of luxury existed, and now I’m sleeping in the *royal* bed!?

‘My grandfather was the direct descended of a king, but the monarchy is long gone. It’s only politics. Senators and governors now.’

‘So that would have made you king?’

‘A very uncrowned one, but who gives a fuck anyway? Not exactly leadership material from what you could see,’ he grabbed my waist, pulling me against him.

‘That’s not what I see.’

‘You see the lies your imagination wants you to see. The real me is the fucked-up version that you met last night.’ He was backing down again. I had the feeling that I was losing him with the anger building into his every word. But I wasn’t going to let him return to the shadows, not with the sun burning only for the two of us.

There was no chance I would let him chase me away just because he got scared, but I did need to go to the Academy ‘I need to go to EMA,’ I kissed him quickly trying not to get into any polemics that I couldn’t win, at least not with only just a few minutes left on the clock before classes.

At the speed of light, I ran back inside to get my clothes, making sure to remain a little away from the sunlight so as not to show off the *perfect* state of my shirt. I knew Ferris understood that I didn’t come from money, but I didn’t want to

give him that much authority so as he would realize how bad my financial situation really was.

‘I would like to see you tonight,’ he whispered, coming from behind me as I was fixing a few rebellious strands of my hair.

‘I will do my best to be here, but you do know that I have other commitments.’ The truth was Brax was expecting me to talk about my family- and that was a date that was impossible to cancel.

‘So you mentioned... But we need to discuss you quitting The Pleasure Room.’

‘Can we please talk about it later because I’m going to be late?’

‘You’re not going to be late. Alfred will get someone to drive you to the Academy. Now go, we’ll speak later on the phone.’ I recognized the irritation in his voice, but there was nothing I could do about it. The deal was to sleep in his bed, not for him to own my life.

‘Thank you,’ I murmured, ‘I promise that we will talk about this.’ I kissed him again then ran out the door to find Alfred.

‘A limo for the lady,’ he smiled, showing me outside to find my transportation to the Academy.

‘I was thinking more like a cab,’ I giggled, a little uncomfortable leaving in a limo.

‘The cabs are only if you need to go to the Pit. A limo would draw too much attention there. Here, it’s the other way around.’

Come to think about it, he was right. A limo was a lot more normal here than a cab.

Welcome to the land of the rich. Although my choice of clothes wasn’t agreeing with my transportation.

‘Thank you, Alfred,’ I boarded the car then descended on down the hill to reach EMA.

I almost crawled out of the limo when the door opened, trying to hide behind the driver so that no one would see me.

Mission accomplished. At least partially since there were a few pairs of eyes pointing at me.

‘How the fuck did you get hands on a car like that!?’ Jenna asked the instant I reached our side of the hallway.

Busted!

The truth seemed like such a bad answer at that time. Maybe a normal person would understand dating a rich guy for money....maybe even understand the deal. But having three demons to own you was inconceivable in any book.

I couldn’t lie either. I was terrible at it, so I preferred the silence... Yet Jenna didn’t. ‘Sugar daddy!?’ She chuckled, looking straight at me. ‘Details! Is he cute?’

I rolled my eyes.

‘Is he old!?’ She stuttered.

‘No... and yes and no...’ I guess I did owe her some answers since she told me every single aspect of her life, from the time she accidentally kissed her cousin- yuckkk, whatever the hell was that about, to the time she lost her virginity to the Math’s state contest champion -double yuckkk.

‘He’s more like a guy I’m seeing -not exclusively. And he’s not old! Middle twenties,’ Come to think about it, he was around Brax’s age. ‘I just needed a lift and he let me have his limousine,’ I shrugged, hoping that I was off the hook.

‘Are you two..? You know...’

‘I don’t know and I don’t want to know,’ I cackled. ‘No...nothing happened.’

‘Don’t tell me that you’re saving yourself for a prick like Cole,’

‘What do you know about Cole!?’ And why did she even bring him up?

‘The other students were talking. They saw you together in the hallway. He’s got his eyes on you.’

Great, now I was the main subject in the school local newspaper. You don't have to print that so it can get to every single soul walking these halls.

'They're even saying that they noticed you two at a party in the Hills together,' Jenna hysterically laughed. 'Like, are these people on drugs!? Someone from the Pit going to a party in the Hills. Imagine that.'

'YEAH, imagine that,' although my tone was losing its irony as I was realizing that it was only a matter of time before everyone will know I belong to him. 'Cole just wants to play with my nerves, and I need to find a way to avoid that.' As if such a way could exist...

'Just stay low, it's only a matter of time before a new attraction grabs his attention.'

For some reason, her words managed to upset me. It's not that I didn't want him off my back, but knowing that someone else has his attention was a whole different deal.

'Shit, he's walking over here,' Jenna stuttered while a blush color appeared in her cheeks. Just what I needed...

I pretended I had no idea about his presence -for only two nanoseconds since Jenna kept staring directly at him. And so were the rest of the students present in the hallway since *the king* has strayed so far from his end of the kingdom.

'Are you trying to ignore me Mouse? That wouldn't be very wise of you,' Cole muffled a roar as I felt his body gluing itself to my back.

'I'll better go,' Jenna tried to excuse herself, though he didn't seem to agree.

'Did I say you're dismissed?'

Who was he, the fucking principal!?

'No, I'm sorry,' Jenna almost shared a tear, showing signs that she was actually terrified by him.

My teeth clenched so tightly that I thought they were about to crack under the pressure of my wrath. It was one

thing coming after me, but quite another coming after my friends. Our deal didn't involve making Jenna's life a living hell.

'She was just leaving for classes,' I tried to find a way out for her, trying not to infuriate the Kraken at the same time.

'If I'm not mistaken, we all have Marketing.' No, he wasn't mistaken, he knew exactly what he was talking about. 'Come, I'll save you two a seat next to me.' Now he was just acting strange, and I was fully convinced that it had something to do with his supreme pleasure of tormenting every second of my existence.

Grabbing hold of my arm, Jenna glued herself to me as we started walking towards the class where the course was being held with Cole tightly on our trail 'What are we going to do?' She wobbled unsure what he wanted from her.

I didn't possess an answer either, but whatever it was, I couldn't let him have his way this time.

'I'll handle him, don't worry,' though the truth was I had no idea how. Hopefully, improvise, even if when it came to Cole there was little room left for anything other than his desires.

'Ladies first,' he showed us to two seats somewhere in the corner of the classroom as I gestured Jenna to occupy the one next to the wall, so, that I'll be left with the one next to Cole. I needed to keep her as far as possible from his tyrannical behavior, and that's exactly what I was doing.

'You're afraid of what I'm capable of,' he let a diabolical grin slide on his face, tilting his head to look at Jenna.

'Leave her alone. She's got nothing to do with our understanding.'

'Since when do you tell me what to do?'

Shit, I only managed to infuriate him even more.

'I didn't mean it like that... It's just that she's not involved in what's between us.'

‘And what is *that’s* between us!?’ The question made perfect sense in a normal world, but right now, I was sure that neither of us held the answer.

‘I know what it is between me and you... You should tell me about the rest.’ In my case it was simple, I needed legal protection and he was the one who could provide it, but when the wheel turned, I often wondered what made him so determined to chase me down.

‘You were the only one who ever said no,’ his words hit me so very much differently than I ever thought possible, fueling the last bits of my pride. I was the only one to say no to the king. Yet my ego didn’t take long to burn down, as the flame of my newfound self-esteem was instantly flushed out ‘And I’m not going to let that go so easily.’

There was no way in between from now on, and I just realized that. No matter what I would do, he wasn’t going to soften up on me and risk his own ego.

‘Here,’ he pushed a thick notebook in front of me as I looked back at him, surprised that he even carried one around. ‘Write my classes.’

‘Can’t we just copy them on a xerox machine?’

‘No. I always lose papers, so I want them handwritten here.’

Of course, he did since finding a new way of torturing me was his favorite hobby.

‘Ok...ok. I’ll write them down for the both of us,’ I groused, taking out my notebook and preparing myself to write the essentials down in both. Although I knew that there had to be some trick to this, and I was to be proven right from the first minute the teacher started his lecture. Cole’s hand magically slipped over the hems of my skirt, trying to find its way underneath it.

I guess it was just my luck that I was wearing a skirt so tight that his palm couldn’t fit beneath it. And still, he wasn’t one to give up so easily. Dropping our bags between us, he

covered his arm to advance higher and higher, roaming the upper part of my leg.

I instantly recognized this for exactly what it was. If on the other time we managed to duck intrusive eyes, this time he was making sure his gestures won't pass by unobserved. This was how Jenna fit in all of this, bringing my embarrassment to a whole different level.

'Cole...', I whispered, begging him to stop.

'Write,' he ordered, pausing for a moment, yet continuing every time he noticed that I was falling behind with the notes.

I had to finish transcribing everything on paper in time or his hand would move, slowly reaching for that spot between my thighs. It was a cat and mouse game and he was enjoying my anxiety to its very last limit.

It was impossible to concentrate, but I wasn't going to let him win, especially with Jenna keeping an eye on us out of curiosity.

My fingers were burning on the pen as all the lesson was coming together in the two notebooks, and the adrenaline rush was reaching ever heightening levels.

The skirt I had on was preventing him to reach the exact place he wanted, but it was just a matter of time before he would try to explore it again from underneath. And I wasn't going to allow him to go there, especially as every second I could catch a break I was crashing into Jenna's confused stare. Whatever he would do, she would notice and I was struggling with each minute spent for Cole not to put on a show.

The rest of the hour was a nightmare, a race against time and against my own powers. That is until the clock finally hit 12.

'You did good, Mouse,' he smiled like the devil he is while packing his bag as if nothing had happened. 'You turned me on,' he leaned to whisper in my ear, making sure to brush his lips against the erogenous zone of my neck.

What the hell was he even talking about since I didn't even have the chance to say a word or do any kind of gesture



except for that damn writing!?

Though, I didn't have time to figure out the mystery of his arousal since an open invitation shook me from the ground 'After the break I'll see you in the Chem lab.'

Why the Chem lab since neither of us was registered to that class!?

Yet it didn't take long before I found out.

It was empty.

He wanted to meet with me in an empty classroom!

Closing the door after me, I breathed with relief since he wasn't yet around. I desperately needed a second of freedom after I managed to duck Jenna and practically everyone else throughout the break.

And that I got, since Cade left himself to be expected. Not that anyone was really expecting him.

I dreaded the moment the door would open, and he'll find his way into the room. Every second passing was fueling a tremble in my legs at the thought of what was going on in his mind. But the moment couldn't be indefinitely postponed, and the dark reflection of Cole's presence slowly filled the room.

His steps, unhurried, based on the anxiety they were provoking, moving inch by inch to reach me while his lustful gaze was studying every round shape of my body.

'I underestimated you,' a whispered groan of annoyance reached my ears as the large contour of his silhouette was clouding everything in front of me.

Strangely, I found Cole mostly irritated with himself as *he* was the one who made the mistake of letting me get to that point of having any kind of effect over him, though I knew too well who was going to pay for that error.

'I've been generous today.' He traced his tongue over his lips while visibly craving my own, believing in his obnoxious arrogance that it was *generous* of him to stress me out to the point where I felt my legs almost failing me. 'Don't you agree?'

No, of course, I didn't agree, how could I ever?

But how could I ever disagree either?

So once again, I felt forced to betray my pride 'Yes, I agree... you have,' your *fucking majesty*. As you may imagine, I had to leave the last part out...

This is what Cole did best, broke my pride, trying to get me to submit to him one way or another. And if I had any trace of a doubt, the satisfied glimmer in his eyes as I spoke confirmed my initial thought.

'You know, I didn't even get to unwrap my present,' his body melted onto mine, as I was trying to back down, but only succeeded to entrap myself between him and a study bench. With slow-motion gestures, his hand sought to find the first button of my shirt, provoking an instinctive reaction to flash through me.

I jumped, almost leaning back so he wouldn't reach me, strongly under the impression that all lights were pointing straight at the recently exposed surface of my chest, even though it was almost complete darkness inside the room.

'We wouldn't want me to break one of the buttons by mistake and find yourself walking around the Academy half-dressed, would we?'

It would be hardly a *mistake*, but I quickly got the full hint.

'Relax,' his voice calm and eager at the same time, unfastening another one of my buttons.

And then, there was silence, just the throbbing sound of our breathing, as one by one, my buttons evaporated and the cups of my bra remained on sight. 'I can feel your excitement,' he murmured lifting me on top of the bench and pulling the last of the material that covered my breasts down to fully expose me.

'Are you on drugs!?' I muttered, reaching my limit. 'Do you think this can actually bring me excitement?' I just needed to blow off some steam, even for a minute, and keeping every

single one of my thoughts to myself was never my strong point.

In reality, Cole maybe wasn't as dangerous as Brax or Ferris, but the adrenaline he provoked could not be matched. And neither the anxiety!

'Oh, that mouth of yours. I told you I'll take care of it someday.' His thumb glided onto my lips, brushing them while his own parted with uncomposed eagerness. Then drifted again, applying pressure on the center as his other free hand cupped one of my breasts.

I gasped as his palm closed in, to fully weigh the roundness of my chest, and taking advantage of the breathless moment, his thumb slipped in between my lips.

I paused, gazing at him with shock as his finger began moving inside my mouth, in and out over and over again while his gaze was fascinated with every single action. He was in awe, living to witness the motion which culminated with my lips obliging and forming the perfect O.

'Fuck, Mouse. I might want to keep you,' he roared almost in ecstasy as his hard member was angrily threatening to burst his jeans, and his lips descended to trace a long warm trail over my quivering tips.

My blood was boiling with strange desire, as I felt my core tighten in the need to withstand the melted heat that was slipping through me. I wanted him to evaporate, disappear and never return... but maybe still leave me with the mesmerizing movements of his tongue and lips.

It was craving versus hate, always battling inside my mind when it came to Cole, to the point where sense would give in to pleasure.

I let out a moan as he drew my body to arch against him while still savoring the soft skin of my chest. The gesture didn't leave him cold, recognizing its impact in seconds as he decided to abandon his new playground and capture my lips. The tip of his tongue found room between the moving finger, stealing a kiss while pressing his thumb against my tongue.

Anger was an understatement when I came to realize what exactly I was doing, though I couldn't tell if I was angrier with him or with myself for savoring the intensity of the moments as if it was to be the finest piece of cake.

'I know you like this as much as I do,' his tongue skimmed my bottom lip then his head set a little distance to properly look at me 'I want you to come to my place, tomorrow after classes. I'll text you the address.' It was an open invitation into the lion's den, and if these thoughts were crossing his mind on a public domain, what he could think of in the privacy of his home terrified me.

'It's a shame that I don't have time to properly enjoy my present right now,' he gave me a small peck on the lips as regaining possession of his finger and gliding it out of my mouth. The small roar in the corridors was letting him know the time was up and no matter how eccentric he may be, putting this kind of a show in front of an entire class was a little out of his league.

'These are only for my eyes to see,' brushing his tongue on the surface of my breasts as if saying goodbye, he arranged my bra back on before someone could burst in and witness our indiscretion. 'You're in such trouble,' he mumbled in a playful tone, lifting me from the bench and setting me back on the floor. 'I'll leave first.' And before I could put two and two together he departed from the room, leaving me to fix the rest of my buttons, moments before students started flowing into the chamber.

I wish I could be angry, even cry, scream... drown in agony, or maybe just have time to reflect on everything around me, but my life was running on fast forward, burning minutes and hours with the speed of light until before I knew it, I was staring in the mirror back at my apartment, getting ready for my meeting with my personal demon, Brax.

## Chapter 13



The thought of seeing Brax was unsettling me. It always does, to the point of bringing me to the verge of an anxiety attack. There's something about him so complex that I can't fully understand. Yes, he's a psychopath, a killer, a user, fucking Evil Knieval when you draw the line, but there's something else too. Like a smoldered fire, hiding a passion so intense that it could mystify everything in its path. The silent volcano that lay within him, entrapping sheltered emotions at the point of being set free.

For some unknown reason, fighting with the last piece of my consciousness, his touch was still alive on my skin making it crawl with the vivid memory of *him*. Though I couldn't go this week to see him tonight. No, I was still on a mission, and as intriguing unveiling Brax's true nature may sound, nothing could distract me from my path.

Slipping into the same dress I wore last time I went to see him, I grabbed a jacket on my way out, signaled for a cab, and before I knew it I was in front of the club where he told me to meet with him.

‘Boss is in his office,’ the same guard that drove us to the mission rushed out to indicate his location, leading me to believe that since he was always around, he must be Brax’s right-hand man. ‘Down the stairs, then take a left through the metal door.’

How many offices did my mobster have!?

Following the instructions, I found myself in a narrow lobby with only a piece of wood separating me from my *benefactor*.

After praying to all gods that he’d have mercy on me this time, I gathered my courage and gently pressed the door handle to open. Yet, before I could let my presence be noticed, I heard voices.

They were coming from inside the room and I could recognize Brax with another man, speaking fervently about something, so before they could realize that I’m around, I pulled the door back to close it, without actually shutting it completely. The sound would alert them of my presence and draw Brax’s anger because I ruined some who knows what business deal was the last thing that I needed.

My intention wasn’t to eavesdrop. I didn’t want anything to do with Brax’s businesses, especially when I knew most of them are illicit. The last thing I wanted was to overhear something and risk ending up under the police radar, or worse.

And still, I couldn’t help it since the discussion echoed through the small hallway where I was waiting.

‘The people want a war, Brax. They’re tired and they’re hungry. With every month the rations they can put on the table are getting scarcer.’

‘I know. I feel it in the takings. Plus, some of them are loyal to me. One of their leaders came to me for financial support, promising some exaggerated interest rate on my money. Fools! Wars burn money, they only make fortunes for the winners, and in this case, they don’t stand a chance against the Elite. Sure, the royals don’t know shit about fighting, but

they have weapons and money. Just a group of mercenaries and they will get the Pit burning till the dawn.'

'What do we do then? Our investments will be at risk.'

'You have one investment, Patrick. This club and we're split in it, while I own half of the city. With all liquidities frozen in assets for now!

And people aren't in a rush to buy properties around here in case you didn't notice. Besides, even if I was to find someone to dispose of a few buildings and get some cash flow back on track, the sum I would get would be insignificant compared to what I spent on the construction. No one wants to buy a city that may burn.'

'There has to be a way to keep things under control.'

'There isn't. Best case scenario - just prolong the unavoidable, and we can sell some of the goods to survive this while still remaining on top.

We're talking more money than you and I can even dream of to support this movement. Think about it weapons, mercenaries, maybe whole armies to mount an assault on the Hills.

Impossible.

It's the food chain. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer. If they oppose, they'll wipe them off the face of the earth, and believe me, others will follow to take their place. It's Echo City. Last oasis of hope... If only they knew the reality...

Let's just cross our fingers that our business won't get that affected in the transition.'

'You're talking about eradication.'

'I don't know what it will come to, but I am talking about survival of the fittest. And right now, I have my mansion up in the Hills where no one can touch me.'

'Maybe I should leave city.'

‘And go where? Everywhere is the same. Maybe much worse. The resources are getting limited because of the pollution. Things are simple. The Elite wants lands for lavish gardens, tennis courts, and who knows what other caprices while they expect the Annelids to grow wheat into the one square meter of their homes.’

‘You think that’s the cause?’

‘I think that’s the solution. If they can find the resources to grow miles of grass with artificial light, then they can fucking also grow a carrot with them.’

I don’t know, no matter how big I am on the streets, I’m too small in this game, and I never enter battles I know I can’t win.

And speaking of battles, our meeting has come to an end. I do have something to take care of before the shit hits the fan.’

‘Anything that I can help you with?’

‘I’ll let you know if I need anything, but I don’t think it will be the case... It’s more like a kidnapping.’

‘Ohhh, ransom. I hope it’s profitable.’

‘No...not for ransom... Let’s just say retrieving lost goods.’

‘Then good luck with that. I’ll better get on my way.’

The second I heard him leaving, I backed down from the lobby, pretending I was just arriving. Under no circumstances could he suspect that I heard anything. And the reality was that I didn’t want to have heard anything of what I just had. I was just in the wrong place at the wrong time, managing to take the burden of the whole city upon myself.

Maybe the truth was I was saving Sebastian and Natalie only to doom them, but I couldn’t think like that. I shouldn’t think like that!

I would find a way through this.

At least Brax was committed to his promise, even though initially I had some doubts about his truthfulness. I guess this



was the main cause of my reticence when it came to him, maybe even when it came to all of them, though his wicked nature was making me suspect him most.

‘You’re late again,’ he roared as soon as the door opened and he noticed me approaching from the other end of the hallway.

What could I say? That I was here ten minutes ago?

I just nodded, slipping inside the office through the space created between him and the door.

‘Was that one of those womanly noddings to get me to shut up?’

‘I thought it was was a man thing, not *womanly nodding*,’ I shrugged, trying to appear much more relaxed than I really was.

‘Don’t throw some feminist crap at me right now, I’m not in the mood.’ he barked, finding his way towards a mahogany office desk then slipping into his presidential seat. Come to think about it, it was more like a throne than any seat I’ve ever seen.

‘You seem stressed. Is everything ok?’ I felt the need to ask since his attitude matched the nervous twitch of his perfect jawline.

Ninety-nine percent chance that it had something to do with the visitor before me, but I couldn’t ask him that.

‘With recovering your family...yes, everything is ok,’ he paused, staring for a second into an empty corner of the room in an attempt to clear his mind. ‘Sit down.’

I looked at the two chairs on the opposite side of his desk, though once again, I knew where he wanted me to be, and my hesitation was quickly observed ‘Don’t play dumb. You said yourself that I already seem stressed. You know where to sit,’ Brax snarled, pushing on his chair to move it away from his desk, making room for me to join him.

There was no way around this, so before I knew it, I was standing next to his muscular body, glancing into the absinthe in his eyes.

‘Here, Bea,’ he sneaked a hand beneath my knee and pulled me to get on top of him, bringing my legs to straddle his waist. ‘Not close enough,’ he growled, lifting the hems of my skirt high enough to push my thighs open, joining my core with his growing erection.

Thank God for the layers of clothes we both were wearing, or else he would have claimed his *prize* by now.

Without paying too much attention to my visible distress and flustering, his index finger wandered to the strap of my dress ‘I like this dress,’ he deviously smiled, letting it roll off my shoulder.

‘Good, ‘cause it’s the only one I have,’ I chuckled as the warmth of his lips was replacing the missing strap.

‘I’ll get you a new one,’ he whispered against my skin as his attention moved to the other shoulder, repeating the actions and disposing of the second string that held my dress together. His kisses were so different than before, as if unhurriedly searching for something on each inch of my collarbone, delighting himself with the taste of me.

‘What are you doing?’ I asked noticing the top of my dress slipping on my breasts to the point that it barely covered my nipples.

‘Do you want to explain myself step by step, because I can be extremely explicit,’ he didn’t bother to even look at me, just pushed my dress lower to hide one of my quivering tips between his lips, sending a devastating shiver flashing throughout my entire body. ‘I’m destressing myself,’ he murmured nibbling on my now hardened tip.

‘Weren’t we supposed to talk about retrieving my family?’

‘My men art not here yet.’

‘But what if someone comes in?’ I quivered with the thought, as it seemed lately everything I was doing was threatened by the idea of public exhibitionism.

‘No one comes to my office unannounced. They know better than that.’

I guess that I was the only one that didn't, since less than ten minutes earlier, I was opening his door without even knocking first. 'Did anyone tell you that you ask too many questions?'

I didn't get to answer as he caught my head from behind, crashing my mouth to meet with his. The kiss raw pure, searching within the depths of me for all of the sensations this man could bring. His tongue was spinning in delirium as both of his hands were searching for my breasts, cupping them from underneath and probing against my aching tips.

'This is cheating,' I whined as every single action was raising a tidal wave to crash inside of me.

'No, this is,' he abandoned my lips to bite into one of my hardened peeks so lustfully that he got me to almost crawl into a ball. The bittersweet chill of pain and ecstasy was spreading throughout my body, getting my legs to instinctively close, trying to protect the small drop of composure I had left.

His tongue rolled on my chest, slowly tasting the satin skin of my breasts, in long luscious slides, making me melt into liquid longing on top of him. I could tell he wasn't there anymore, just a hundred percent focused to pamper his two newfound toys.

The pleasure flashing through his eyes was so much more than just erotic, hiding utter satisfaction but most of all feral passion.

'I think we better stop before someone comes in,' that idea may not agree with my body, but exactly that impulse to arch against him on the chair was pleading with my sense to try and stop this before there's reaching that point of no return.

'You really think so,' he groaned clasping one of his hands on my breast while the other was finding its way beneath my dress. 'Let's check that, shall we?' One of his fingers glided underneath the lace of my panties, and straight to that sensitive place between my folds. 'Ohhh, Bea. Someone's been lying,' he grinned retrieving his damp finger and letting the signs of my eagerness shine underneath one of the small wall lamps hanging in his office.

I babbled, covering my face while hoping there will be some electrical meltdown to cover my shame while the clinking of his laughter was echoing through the room.

‘I really need to check that more properly,’ he whispered pushing my panties aside as his lips continued their journey over my breasts. Though time wasn’t running in his favor and before he got a chance to continue his sweet torture over my skin, a knock on the door let us know that we weren’t to be alone for long.

Jumping as if having stepped on hot coals, I rushed to rearrange my dress while Brax shook off his leg, trying to hide his *manly* problems.

‘Come back,’ he pulled me back to sit on his lap, yet this time without turning me to face him.

‘Are you insane? There’s someone at the door!?’ I couldn’t keep my mouth under control as his plan seemed totally absurd. Letting him get away with pretty much anything he wanted was one thing, but having to withstand an even more dominant version of Cole was pushing at the verge of my sanity.

‘They’re my men. Don’t worry, they’ll probably put more effort into it, knowing that you’re with me.’ Brax lifted me a little higher to glide an arm around me. ‘Come in.’

The driver, as I knew him, and another tall man pushed the door open and stepped into the dim light.

‘Sit,’ Brax ordered while the men didn’t seem at all surprised at their boss carrying me on top of him.

‘Good evening,’ they both nodded, bowing their heads as if I was of royal origins.

‘Good evening,’ I flustered, embarrassed at the temporary position as queen of the underworld. And when I say temporary, I mean just until I go out the door because I was certain that the *seat* won’t get cold before another girl will take my place.

‘Who did you talk to?’ Brad asked the driver while lighting himself a Cuban cigar.

‘I’ve talked with Showman and Wrench about coming with us for support, but they each want ten grand.’

‘You’re pricy, Fox,’ Brax looked at me while his hand advanced upwards on my leg. ‘Tell us what you think we should know first.’

‘I’ve never done this, so I have no idea what I need to tell you.’ Where could I even start? Before I came here, I was sure that I was a hundred percent ready, but it seems that I had no idea what I needed to say or do.

‘Just tell us who we need to get out for now,’ the man accompanying the driver gave me a hand before I would manage to dissipate the last of Brax’s patience.

‘My siblings. I have a sister and a brother. My sister’s name is Natalie, and she is thirteen. Brownish hair, green eyes, kinda looks like me. Now for my brother, his name is Sebastian and he’s six. Dark hair, also green eyes, but there’s a thing that you should know about him. He’s on dialysis-kidney insufficiency, so you have to be really careful while taking him out of there, shocks or sudden movements can trigger a seizure.’

‘We need an ambulance to get him here safely,’ my kingpin thought out loud. ‘Now for the people around your father. Tell us about them,’ he continued.

‘My father was a nobody, just a frustrated man that used to beat up his kids so that they could go on the streets and beg for money to satisfy his greedy needs. That’s before he made friends with some lowlifes, probably bigger screwups than him. They managed to set up a small human trafficking network. Get others to beg for them.’ I had to stop for a second as the memory of his fists throwing me in the ground was making hot crystal tears roll off my face and onto Brax’s shirt.

Before I got to regather my strengths and resume my thoughts, I felt the arm around me tighten as I realized the body beneath me was tensed at its limits ‘Did he beat you?’

‘Yes.’ The answer brought a deep frown on his face, although it had nothing to do with some newly discovered

feelings for me, and everything to do with the fact that I was his property now. Plus, his men were carefully watching, and he couldn't let something like that slip as if nothing had happened.

'Give me the address, and tell us about the location... Rooms, entries, windows,' Brax spoke between gritted teeth.

'It's on Fourth Str., the first building as you turn left. It looks unoccupied, abandoned, but our family used to live in apartment 1B. The apartment itself has two rooms, both windows facing south. Although I don't think there's where he keeps them...at least not Natalie. She said something about being guarded and the apartment could barely fit in the good days our family of five- almost impossible to set up a prison there. I suspect she's on minus one floor. That's where my father set up his new *business*.'

'Are there apartments on that floor?' The *driver* asked.

'Not exactly. It's more like a large basement with a few rooms for storage where the new *workers* used to sleep in.'

The tall man was writing everything down in a notebook 'How many people on the premises do you reckon there to be?'

'When I left a month ago, it was just my father and four or five of his so-called friends. I'm saying four or five because one of them is usually so drugged that he doesn't even count as being there.' I paused again to look at Brax who downed the two fingers of whiskey that was in his glass. He was infuriated. I could tell even from the way he was breathing, and I can't deny that lowkey I wished someone would act like this just in the need to protect me. Yet it was far from being the case. I was the only one who could ever protect myself, and at the same time, I was the one that was selling out my body.

'I received a call from my sister a few days ago, telling me she was guarded. I'm not sure what that meant because she couldn't talk for long, but I bet if it was someone familiar to me, she would have called them by name. So I suspect that

they hired new people, maybe recruited from the beggars...I don't know...'

'Entry points for the underground?' The *driver* asked.

'Only the main entrance of the building. There used to be a back entrance, but they had it blocked a while ago because of the robbers. They have several dressers sitting in front of it. You can't get in through there, at least not without making a noise..'

'Fucking perfect,' Brax muttered while pouring himself another glass of whiskey from the crystal bottle sitting on the table.

'I'm afraid it gets worse when it comes to the underground floor. It only has a few ventilation windows, but they're only big enough for a cat to sneak through there. I know because Nataly got caught between one when she was just a baby and we could barely get her out.'

'That means more men for a frontal assault,' the tall man spoke, transcending another of his ideas on paper.

'Any more *good* news for me, Princess?' Brax's nostrils flared with irritation, probably cursing himself for getting involved in this.

'I hope not... That's if the gentlemen don't have any additional questions.'

'This should do it. Just let us know if you think we should be aware of any other aspects,' the driver spoke while looking at his boss.

'What's the damage?' Brax asked, taking a drag out of his cigar.

The tall man looked at him then scribbled some more numbers in his notebook, trying to do the math 'Three mercenaries of 10k each, plus 2k I would say for the ambulance and five of our men so we don't run into any surprises.

'We need two teams so we can go in at the same time. One for the apartment and one for the underground.'

‘32 grand plus expenses,’ Brax rolled his eyes then turned to look at me as if I was the one who did something wrong. ‘Ok, go for it. Just make sure we have enough men. Failure is not an option on this one.’

‘It won’t be. I’m taking a man with me, and we’ll go there in the morning to keep an eye out on things,’ the *driver* spoke, getting up from his chair.

‘Ok, how long do you think before we can intervene?’ Brax was probably counting the days left until he got to unwrap his gift.

‘I’m not sure. I would say three to a week. We need to study a routine, patterns in their behavior, maybe even see if they take shifts in guarding. Only then we can decide on the best moment to act,’ the tall man spoke, also standing up from his chair, heading towards the door.

‘We’ll let you know as soon as we have something.’

‘Ok. I have a meeting with Ignacio in a few minutes but come back to see me in about an hour. I want to discuss something about the gambling debts at the Lucky Royal.’

‘Sure thing, boss.’ And the men evaporated through the door, leaving us alone again in the room, although in a much different atmosphere than the one at their arrival.

You could cut the tension with a knife, and I’m not talking about that panty-blowing heated atmosphere. No, it was anxiety mixed with hidden worry, and also irritation, though I wasn’t sure if it was about the money or about the plan.

To be honest, the sum was absurd and even if I was initially making the math’s on how much would I need to retrieve them, I could never think of reaching even a third of that. I should have worked at Vanya for a year to get close to raising that money.

And that was without eating.

‘Your ass is expensive,’ Brax was keen on letting me know how much money I was taking out of his pockets. ‘Over 35k with travel expenses, plus the time of five of my men.’



His hand slipped under my dress again, heading straight towards the hems of my panties ‘I’m a man of my word, but this is way more costly and complicated than I suspected. Maybe I should deserve a bonus prize.’

‘You said it’s a one-time thing,’ I whimpered, feeling his hand back between the folds of my sensitive skin.

‘And that it would be, although right now I would fuck you against this desk until you would cry of happiness.

Yet I only have one shot at this and don’t want to waste it. Who knows, maybe you’ll return begging for more.’

I didn’t answer since all I could think of was *In your dreams...*

‘And still, I need a little something extra. A test to see if you’re going to keep good on your side of the deal.’

‘I thought that I already showed you that,’ I mumbled, knowing that nothing good could go through his mind, but yet again, I took some more absurd requests into consideration ever since I decided on making a deal with him.

‘I would love to start now, but I have a meeting in...’ he looked at his watch ‘five... And I definitely don’t want to rush this.’ His hand abandoned me before things could go to that point of no return. ‘Wednesday night, at my place,’ he took another drag.

‘I didn’t say yes.’

‘You don’t have to. One of my men will come and pick you up. I don’t like you walking in the Pit alone.’

‘Awww, I didn’t think you cared,’ Oops, sarcasm on the loose.

‘We wouldn’t want you to get into who knows what kind of trouble and leave me without my payment after all the trouble I put into this. Would we?’

How is it that every time I manage to get myself into trouble!?

‘Now go,’ he pulled me into a final kiss, biting on my lower lip ‘I’ll have to teach you when to open this mouth and when to keep it shut.’ He collided his heavy palm with my ass as I was standing, making me gasp in molten pain. ‘A car is waiting to take you home.’

I didn’t answer since I was too busy cursing between my lips. Just strode out the door and into the designated car to take me back to my place.

## *Chapter 14*



The molten shaking in my knees that was stripping me of all powers was still there, reminding me of what hold Brax really claims over my body. The one thing I couldn't allow was for him to get into my mind, holding onto that last line of defense in front of the demon who owned me.

I often wonder what could be so terribly wrong with me that my body prefers subduing than trying to withstand them because no matter how many silver linings my relationship with them may bear, in the end, there's nothing aside rot supporting them underneath. I am a slave with no chains, tied to all of them in one way or the other, trapped in a perpetual game of cat and mouse.

I looked at my phone to find three missed calls from Ferris. It was impossible to keep my ringtone volume on during my visits with Brax since any questions regarding my other Pleasures were the last thing on my mind.

I almost pressed call. That was before I took a look around me and realized that I was still in the car with one of Brax's men. I didn't take an oath of total purity, but it just felt wrong calling Ferris from within this vehicle.

‘Have a nice evening,’ the man assigned to drive me home nodded while I glanced around me, noticing a yellow cab parked right in front of my apartment building. Ferris... I had to call him as soon as I got inside, yet the cab was leaving me under the sensation that he already was one step ahead of me.

There was no need to search for my keys since my apartment door was open and a few empty bags were laying in front of it.

‘Bea!’ Ferris’s butler, Alfred greeted me as if I was the one coming to visit his place.

‘Good evening,’ I looked around me, spotting two cups of warm tea sitting on the small coffee table placed in the middle of the room.

‘Had to warm them up a couple of times,’ Alfred reached to offer me one while gesturing me to take a seat on the bed since my luxurious apartment didn’t even possess a couch.

‘I’m sorry, I was... busy.’...*with selling the last part of my soul.*

‘No problem, I’m good at waiting.’ He took a sip in such a totally relaxed manner- a relaxation that betrayed his British origins. ‘I’m just surprised that you weren’t in a rush to get here and see what I have in store for you. Ferris did tell you that I would be coming, didn’t he?’

‘Yes, he did mention something about you showing me to my new apartment, but I didn’t believe it would be so soon.’

‘*Now*, were his specific instructions, so here I am, ready when you are.’

Maybe for any other living human being, escaping the Pit was the supreme blessing, and I can’t deny that my heart was trembling to open the door of my new apartment...hell, even the tiniest room sounded good, but with everything going on today, I managed to forget all about it. That’s how I caught on to the severity of the situation... of me being wrapped up

so deep in my troubles that life was moving on at the speed of light around me.

‘I brought some empty bags to assist you in packing your things,’ Alfred spoke, heading towards the door where the pile of luggage was waiting. Yet little did he know that all my life could fit in a medium-sized shopping bag.

‘I’m pretty convinced that you won’t have to do much assisting’ the faded bitterness in my voice made him realize that he was far away from his royal palace.

‘I understand. I’ll ask the driver to take a few back to the car.’

‘Not just a few...’

‘Should I leave two?’

‘One will be enough,’ I let my eyes fall to the ground.

‘I’m sure that Ferris will take care of this inconvenience immediately,’ he tapped my shoulder in consolation, assuring me that my life was about to change.

‘Can I ask you a favor?’

‘Of course.’

‘Don’t tell him. I don’t want him to feel obligated to do anything more than we have already spoken about.’ I was so far from doing this with any personal gain in mind. Now, things were only about family and responsibility, and I was living up to both.

‘You don’t know him,’ the man smiled while raising from his seat to arrange a few cushions on the couch ‘We should start. It’s already late and he was asking if you could visit him after I have shown you to your apartment.’

It wasn’t that I didn’t want to see him, it was more like a mixture of fatigue and being physically drained, but also a feeling of guiltiness towards him since I was going to go to his place while I was somehow functioning on emergency batteries.

‘My clothes are in here,’ I opened a small dresser and picked all of my things from a shelf then laid them inside one of the bag trollers.

In less than five minutes I was all packed and ready to walk out the door, carrying just one piece of luggage in my hand.

‘I’ll have that,’ Alfred sneaked his hand between the handle of the case to steal it away and escort me to our ride for the night.

It felt that I was living an entire world behind, so I couldn’t help but feel guilty that while I was heading for luxury, my siblings were still who knows where suffering. But when it came to the suffering part, I was there with my entire soul, entrapping their pain in my own heart.

‘Can I ask something of you?’ Alfred questioned while I seemed to be lost in my thoughts.

‘Yes, of course. What is it?’

‘Don’t give up on him too easily. Everyone else seems to do it too easily lately.’

And how could I ever since this deal was securing my brother’s treatment, not to mention the part where Ferris had that secret something that made it impossible to give up on him? But deep down I knew exactly what Alfred was referring to. The madness, the darkness, that special part of him that made him undeniable, and at the same time that would make you run away to the other end of the world hoping to keep a part of you sane.

‘I’m starting to think that we’re codependent to one another.’ I guess that was the truth, for some strange reason we were linked by fate, needing each other, though I often wondered how much did he need me. Was I girl number twenty-something on the disposable list, or did he need me for me- Bea?

I guess only time will tell, and that was an asset that we didn’t lack when it came to him and I. Our deal, in contrast to the ones I had with Brax and Cole, was indefinite.

‘Now it’s my turn,’ I flashed a sad smile, preparing to ask something that had been on my mind for a while. A question that I couldn’t address directly to Ferris yet, at least not without risking triggering another one of his changes of behavior.

‘Go ahead.’

‘I was wondering what happened... I know there’s a reason for the way he sometimes acts.’

‘I wish so badly that I could answer, but it’s not my place to say. This is something that he needs to tell you himself when he considers that the time is right.’

I didn’t insist, how could I when I already felt the answer before I even asked? I was just curious, hoping that maybe there was a one percent chance that he could at least give me a hint, prepare me for what to expect since I felt like with Ferris anything could happen.

‘Ok, I’ll let it come by itself,’ I spoke while turning my head to look outside the window and notice that we were climbing higher and higher up the Hills. ‘Are we going straight to Ferris?’ I asked confused since from what I could tell we were only a few streets away from his property.

‘No, your apartment is after the next turn,’ Alfred took a glimpse outside to reassure himself ‘Here,’ he announced to me on our arrival as the cab stopped in front of a three-floor mansion.

‘Here!?’ I spoke in awe, looking up at the wall-sized windows and peaking at the impressive display of wealth.

‘Ferris owns the building but had the first and second floor already rented out. You and your family will occupy the top-level.’

‘Top-level,’ I repeated words that were just stuck in my mind as if my last neuron just burned out.

I guess it didn’t take long for Alfred to notice my almost shocked reactions as every delayed gesture on my account was betraying the wave of emotions brewing within

me ‘Take a deep breath and let’s go inside. Everything is going to be ok.’

In an ideal world, this was where Prince Charming had just come to my rescue, turning my life from rags to a fantasy dream. But there was just one catch- I didn’t have a Prince Charming, I had three of them and if their physical appearance could fool anyone they came straight from a fairytale, what they held within them was as far as it got from a happy ending.

‘I hope that you’ll find the accommodation suited for all of your needs,’ he spoke as opening a double wooden door that revealed a living room the size of a tennis court.

I blinked long, trying to take in the view and struggling to realize that I was the one who was going to live there. It was all taken to the extreme as if some royal decorator has come and arranged my new living space following the most eclectic of tastes. Ferris’s mastered the element of surprise, and he was refusing to fall behind this time.

It all felt surreal. As if it wasn’t supposed to be for me; as if I didn’t deserve it to be for me. Surely every single object in the room will have a price that undoubtedly I was going to pay at some point, yet it still felt too much for someone like me. And then the thoughts began swirling in my mind, like a merry go round in which Cole and Brax and Ferris were all onboard, spinning faster and faster in my world, day after day, hour after hour, taking the last drop of strength left. The deals, the promises, the rush each one of them provoked, the sleep deprivation and the dark thoughts, the worry and the pain- were all building up inside of me, grinding me from within until my body seemed to be melting into a pool on the floor.

‘Bea, are you alright?’ Alfred’s startled voice was sounding in my ears, though I couldn’t say a single word back, just floating around on my little black cloud, losing myself to the impossible exhaustion that was steering me into a dream.

I pulled on the blanket, clutching onto it as I was snuggling into the warmest place on Earth. It felt so safe, as I was secluded into my own piece of heaven while a citrus and woods perfume was gently pampering my senses.



‘Are you cold?’ Stray fingers danced in my hair, following each strand only to twist on its tip.

Where was I?

My eyes barely opened, only to find myself where the destination for the night was about to lead me before I lost all contact with reality.

‘Ferris,’ I whispered, realizing that I was on his couch while he was sitting on the floor next to me, as one of my arms was securing my body next to his own.

‘I’m here,’ he pressed his lips on my forehead, warming up the place that he stroked with a comforting sensation that was spreading throughout me.

‘What...what happened?’ I only remembered stepping into the new apartment, then everything went blank.

‘You fainted, and Alfred called me.’ He leaned his head to search for my eyes. ‘I should have remained there with you until you regained consciousness, but I hate being out of the house for too long, so I brought you here instead. I hope that was ok with you.’

‘I was coming to see you next anyway. I guess I took a shortcut.’ A girl could still be funny, right? ‘I was just preparing to call you when I stumbled onto Alfred waiting in my apartment in the Pit.’

‘So I get that you missed me,’ he curved the corner of his lip into a smile, letting a hand slip beneath the blanket and around my waist.

‘Is there any other way around,’ I answered, although my voice was far from having its strength back.

‘Not with me, there isn’t,’ he slipped a glass between my fingers ‘Drink, you’ll feel better.’

‘Tea... It’s delicious.’ I praised the strawberry flavor that was warming up my senses, but which at the same time didn’t manage to bring me back to my normal self. ‘I think I need coffee,’ I spoke just as my hand started trembling, spilling a few drops on me.

‘I’m pretty sure that you need sleep, not coffee.’ Now he was scolding me as if I said something wrong, when in fact all I ever did was to try to keep up with my end of the deal.

‘What about you?’ I asked, knowing that he can’t sleep until dawn.

‘What about me?’ He shrugged, although I could see it in his eyes that he knew exactly what I was talking about.

‘Nothing...,’ I lifted my body weight on my elbows so that I could try and wake up a little from my trans-like state.

‘Come here,’ he gently pulled me, making me roll off the couch and join him on the floor, bringing me on top of him. ‘Tonight I want you to get some rest,’ his head gently leaned back on the carpet where he found a place to lay, just so that he could take a better look at me.

‘I’m not the best company, am I?’ The clouds of doubt were raising in on me as I was realizing that it was becoming harder and harder to keep up with my end of this deal.

‘Why would you ever say that?’ With careful moves, he tugged my legs on both sides of him until I was straddling his lower waist between my thighs, pressing my core directly on top of his hardness. ‘I love your company,’ he moved from beneath me, grinding on the spot that was already craving for his presence. ‘And I’m starting to think you already noticed how much I really *enjoy* it,’ sneaking a hand on the back of my neck, he heaved me lower to meet his lips while my hips had arched instinctively to meet him.

‘I told you-’

‘Did I ask for anything?’ He cut my words right before I was going to remind him of our terms.

‘I was just minding my own business on the floor when you decided to attack me.’

‘Aaawww, poor innocent Mr. Ayers being shamelessly attacked just to be seduced by the evil witch.’

‘I wouldn’t go that far... You’re not evil, though I hadn’t decided on the witch part yet.’

‘How come?’

‘You seem to have an inexplicable effect on me... Dark magic, I presume.’

‘Just when I was about to say the same thing about you, Mr. Warlock.’

‘Then it must be karma,’ he raised his head from the carpet to kiss me, while my lips eagerly met his, melting into the throbbing rhythm of our bodies.

It was all slow and fast, burning minutes while letting them infiltrate within us, as his palms were gradually exploring every part of my body.

‘Go take a hot bath and I will be waiting in bed,’ he let the back of his finger slip over my cheek, probably sensing that although the atmosphere was becoming incendiary between us, I could barely support my own body weight.

It was just what the doctor ordered, especially since my batteries were having just a few final sparks left until their dying breath.

‘I’ll give you something to change into,’ he helped me up then paced towards his walking dressing room from where he returned with an oversized tank top. ‘No match for your granny pajamas, but it’s the best I can do on such short notice.’

‘This has like 90% less material than my granny pajamas used to have,’ I crossed my arms, seeing right through his *wicked* plan.

‘Do you want me to ask Alfred to loan you one of his? I’m pretty convinced that he must have a museum-like piece from last century laying around on one of his shelves.’

‘No need for a midnight intervention, but you have to admit that my pajama had its charm.’

‘Cockblocking doesn’t equal charm,’

‘Oh, so that’s why you were so eager to take it off,’ I giggled, snatching the tank top from his hand then, heading to the bathroom.

‘Don’t light that match, Bea,’ he playful threatened me while I closed the door of the bathroom.

Throwing my clothes on the floor, I slipped into the hot water, trying to let all my worries dissipate into the steaming vapors that were flooding the room.

I have to admit that he was right, a hot bath was exactly what I needed, but not the best possible option for me at the moment since my body was still having trouble keeping me awake.

It couldn’t have been more than fifteen minutes that I wasted in the bathtub, and still, as I stepped out, I realized that my clothes were gone, leaving me with just Ferris’s tank top to serve as a full pajama set.

‘Are you ok in there? Do you need help?’ Ferris decided to ask just as I was returning to the room. ‘That answered my question,’ his sculpted lips showed off a smile.

‘What happened with my clothes?’ I muttered, a little annoyed that I couldn’t find any piece of underwear.

‘I gave them to the maid to get them cleaned by the morning.’

‘Then can you please give me a pair of shorts?’

‘No,’ he casually answered, taking a few steps in my direction.’ Don’t be so stressed, just trust me,’ he took my hand, leading me to the bed.

But how could I trust him when last time he asked me to do so we were floating over the balcony!?

And still, the silk sheets were calling me, waiting to caress my body, and at that point who was I to resist? Besides, my hand was tightly secured into Ferris’s by now, who made sure I found myself a place on the bed next to him, tightly cuddled onto his chest.

Small kisses soon began melting in a suave line on my neck while daring fingers sneaked to raise the hems of my tank top.

It was all too much...fighting him...fighting the will of my body and ultimately fighting to keep my end of the deal with Brax. Too intense... too abundant in emotions that eventually I couldn't keep them all bottled up within me.

Tears began soaking the bed sheet as my eyes tried to hide against his chest, searching for as little comfort that I could find. I was drained, tired, exhausted and at the same time left to bear the weight of my three promises. The three deals. The three devils that now rule over my world. And it was too much... Too much for my tired body which has been deprived of a decent sleep for too long.

Still, my motives weren't clear to Ferris, and he took this as if being his fault 'You're crying!? What's wrong? Do you not like the way I touch you?'

I didn't have an answer since there shouldn't have been a question in the first place. My body was helplessly burning under his fingers, losing track of reality in his embrace. And that's exactly what was depleting the last drop of power left. This slowly maddening rhythm in which I fought with my own cravings, along with the thoughts turned towards my other two *kings*. A cumulus of everything in between, crowned with the guilt I felt that I couldn't be totally present here for Ferris, even though we shared a bed.

It was never my intention that he would see me cry. I just wanted to crawl into a corner for even just an hour and be completely alone, yet with each minute spent, I realized that wouldn't be possible any time soon.

'What's wrong, Bea?' He insisted, as my face was still buried deeply onto his chest.

'I'm sorry... I'm sorry,' that's all that I could say as he was becoming my only refuge, hanging onto fake hopes of normality.

'You're just tired,' he whispered cupping my face to look at me. 'I don't care about the rest.'

'You would...,' I breathed, feeling that I should be honest with him. Of all the guys, he seemed to be the only one

with a soul- as broken as it may have been. ‘I still have other agreements.’ I know that I told him before, but I felt that he needed to know that they won’t end with my decision to leave The Pleasure Room.

‘I remember our deal, besides, I’m not afraid of competition. But I do want to talk to Vanya tomorrow about the compensation needed so that your resignation will run smoothly.’

‘I should go in tomorrow and tell her myself.’

‘There’s no need, she’ll come here tomorrow evening to discuss things.’

‘She will!?’ I was a little confused since she didn’t seem the type to do house calls, but then again Ferris was deserving special treatment.

‘Yes, but I don’t care about her right now. I have much better things to focus on,’ I felt his palms slip beneath the blanket to lift my tank top above my hips, leaving me naked in my lower part.

‘Ferris,’ I spoke with exhaustion while squeezing my legs together, realizing that I had a very long night coming my way trying to withstand him.

‘Shush, I know the limits. All you have to do is to close your eyes and get some rest,’ he pulled a strap over my shoulder, then the other, pushing the top down to my waist while I was still hidden away beneath the blanket.

‘How could I rest?’ I giggled, as his words and his actions weren’t related.

‘Easy. Just close your eyes,’ his lips quickly brushed on mine into a good night kiss while his thumbs fell over my eyes to get them to close. ‘Good night, Bea,’ his words danced over my flesh as he disappeared under the blanket.

Now how could I rest when his lips seemed to be slowly skimming the surface of my skin, searching for my tips as the metal piercing from his tongue was moving in circles to fondle them?

‘I said sleep, Bea,’ he muttered from underneath the cover as my body tensed to its limits.

I tried closing my eyes again, savoring the way he was playing me like the finest Stradivarius violin, letting his heaving breath flow like the summer breeze on my skin.

It actually felt so delicious, surreal in a way, as his sweet caresses were making me feel so special. Losing count of the kisses, I finally felt myself drifting to sleep, though before I could finally reach my dreamland destination, an electric lightning bolt that overcharged within me almost brought me to jump on my feet.

His quick tongue was pressing that damn piercing against my navel, charging me up and dropping me on the floor at the same time, sending a wave of crazed longing to flow straight from my belly button to reach for my core. I felt jolting with need as that erogenous place between my thighs was damp in fervid expectation.

‘Sorry for that, I got carried away. I promise to behave,’ he pushed the blanket to have a quick look at me then disappeared back, decreasing his actions to a much slower rhythm.

It seemed impossible, but fighting with my body, I managed to calm my senses, as I knew exactly how things were standing. It wasn’t a mistake, but a demonstration. One that was almost about to get me to welcome him to completely have me. A master’s touch, shaking an already trembling leaf, and even against my will, bringing me exactly where he wanted me to be *-under his spell.*

## *Chapter 15*



The night passed, and the delirious lips hadn't left my body, sensing them between sweet dreams and total relaxation. At first, I thought it wouldn't be possible for sleep to find me, but besides the storm brewing inside of me, Ferris seemed to also have a therapeutical effect on my mind. He was my healer, and fountain of energy since by the morning I was feeling like brand new... Except for my conscience, but they didn't have enough therapists in the whole city to ever fix that back to a place of normality.

'Morning,' I opened my eyes just to find the most amazing smile gleaming back at me while wandering fingers were still moving over my body. 'Haven't you slept?'

'I have all day...while I only have you at night.'

'Someone is greedy,' I let my arms wrap around his neck while I whirled in search for his lips.

'Teaser. You only kiss me because you know you have to leave in the next five minutes.'

Was it that late? I don't remember sleeping for that long in ages.



‘Thank you,’ I kissed him again.

‘If you’re thanking me for this, what will you say tonight?’

‘I was thanking you for understanding me,’ I chuckled. ‘But what’s tonight?’

‘You’ll see... After the meeting with Vanya.’

‘Oh, yeah... I forgot all about that,’ not that I was too eager to give her the news, but I needed to let her know what was my decision. It was the fair thing to do as she was the only one who offered me a chance when no one else would. ‘Now, I should go...’

‘Of course, you should. Wouldn’t want you to be late for classes,’ he spoke ironically, and with good reason, since his money could get him any degree he would desire, while I had to work hard on it, in hopes to eventually have a chance in getting a decent job.

‘I didn’t go through all that trouble, just to give it all up now.’

‘Of course not, especially since they just cashed in on your final installment. Go make use of the money,’ he playfully scolded me, revealing at the same time something that he *forgot* to mention.

‘You paid for my Academy fee!?’

‘Wasn’t that our deal? Why are you so surprised? I told you that I will take care of everything. Just ask and you will receive.’ He kissed the top of my head, hiddenly making a statement of his powers.

‘Thank you,’ I merged my lips with his, then slipped beneath the blanket, and wrapped myself in a sheet I took from the bed, raising myself to my feet in search of my clothes. ‘I really have to go.’

‘Can’t wait for a Saturday morning,’ he laughed while I was still spinning aimlessly around the room. ‘Hold on. I asked for some new things.’ Before I knew it, he was out the door, leaving me to wait for his return since there was no way

I could leave the premises in only a sheet.

Luckily, it didn't last long before he returned, carrying a few pieces of clothing and a shoebox.

'I had no idea what to get you, so I asked for my maid to buy something...', he spoke while arranging the clothes on the couch. 'I'll be on the balcony while you get dressed.'

Checking that he left, I started searching through the small stack of materials, to discover a few essential pieces of underwear, a blue pale dress, and a jacket. Elegant enough for the Academy, yet not stepping over the limit to turn me into the First Lady. Perfectly made to fit me.

I whirled in the mirror a couple of times before he returned to the room. I know that he seen me naked in one way or another, but never in broad daylight, so his decision to give me some privacy was making him grow on me.

'What time will Vanya be here?' I asked to ensure myself that I could return since I did have to pay a house call to a certain someone...

'Later tonight... Nine, maybe ten. She didn't say.'

'Ok, I'll be here by then,' I rushed to kiss him again as he slipped something between my fingers.

'Keys to the apartment,' he winked letting the rays of sunshine on the sculpted shapes of his face.

The rest of the day went by rather quickly, while luckily for me, Jenna was the only one who noticed the luxury brand of my new outfit, convincing herself this time that my *sugar daddy* is living up to his name. There was no point in denying it since it was all too obvious. The luxury transportation... the clothes... I just prayed that things will remain the way they were. That I was to remain invisible, not attracting intrusive looks.

I didn't have much time to think of that, since skipping the last few classes I took the path to Cole's residence. Getting on the bus, I ventured to search for the address that he texted to me a day ago, discovering it to be just a couple of streets

away from my new location. An impressive mansion, much larger than Jason's, showing off even greater luxury.

But there was a trick, a small detail that was betraying the momentarily dead-end that his family had stumbled upon. Small marks of dilapidation were blooming over the facade of the house, a sign that wouldn't have been left unattended by the usually vigilant eye of the Elite, especially when it were these details that set out their rank in society.

*I'm here.*

I texted him the second I arrived since I didn't know where to head out to and getting lost around the place didn't seem like a good idea.

*Up the stairs, third door on the right. I left the front door open for you.*

My phone lit up with his command as my feet soon move to follow it.

The place was almost similar to Ferris's when it came to impressive decorations, on a smaller scale, but still, you could see in every corner the opulence it meant to display.

Following his instructions, I found myself pushing open the door to his room. I had no doubt about that since the hurricane that seemed to just sweep the place was elucidating the mystery of who was the owner. If it had been a mystery, to begin with.

I looked at the pile of books thrown on the floor next to some worn sports gear and a baseball bat, hoping somehow that maybe he called me here to clean his room since the space was in such desperate need of that.

Though I knew all too well that it was far from his intention. Things never were that easy when it came to Cole, and today wasn't going to be any different.

'In here.' Recognizing my presence, the king himself roared from behind a wooden door located in the opposite corner of the room.

Taking a moment to get myself together, I paced towards the additional chamber he was in, unsure if it was a dressing room or a bathroom. Yet it didn't take me long to discover its identity.

The image almost left me breathless, forcing me to remain frozen in the doorway.

He was divine. So stunning that it couldn't have been anything but pure evil laying within him. No angel could have ever made this, besides a fallen one- Lucifer himself. Nothing but an astonishing display of muscles and tattoos were covering his torso, letting every drawing majestically reflect itself in the blue mirrors of his eyes.

For a second I forgot to breathe, helplessly staring at his body as the last power of conviction lingering within me was fighting with the primal instincts they were ravishing my very being.

And still, the fear was still there. That tormenting anxiety knowing all wicked thoughts that go through that devious mind of his, especially since he was waiting for me half submerged into the bathtub.

'Close the door behind you,' he ordered, letting a dangerous grin bloom on his face.

I hurried to follow his request, not because I had some hidden urge to submit to him, but because I worried about the consequences in case of a rebellion on my side.

'Lose the dress, Mouse,' he ordered, immersing himself a little more under the water, relaxing every tantalizing muscle of his body.

'Why?' I quivered, afraid of his plans for the day.

'You'll see. Just do it before you make me get out and get the job done myself,' he muttered since the *servant* didn't comply in due time.

'Arrogant piece of-' I cursed between my lips, though was interrupted right before I got to finish the sentence.

‘So rebellious, when I decided to be so generous with you today,’ his tone so ironic that immediately stirred a rush of panic to race through my body. ‘Now, make it fall.’ It was an ultimatum to still be able to get a chance at his *generosity*. Whatever that meant. Either way, he was the one leading this game.

Without lingering to think about it any longer, since this would have had the same result, either way, I unzipped my dress and let it slowly slip at my feet, remaining only in my underwear as he was scanning every inch of my body.

‘See, you can obey,’ he was getting on my nerves again, driving me to the point of a breakdown, knowing that there was nothing I could do to defend myself. ‘Now, come here, Mouse,’ tapping a place somewhere in the middle of the tub’s border he called for me to join him as my eyes couldn’t help but widen from the shock.

What the hell did he have in mind this time!?

Barely making a few steps, I reached the bathtub side, lowering my eyes to see where I could put my foot to step into the water. Though I didn’t get too far in following his command since my sight stumbled upon something that made me blush with uncontained shame. He was completely naked! Now, I know that people don’t usually take baths in their bathing suits, but I guess I watched too many movies since I was hoping I would have some accommodation time on my hands. Yet Cole seemed to get straight to the point when it came to human anatomy, probably because he had all reasons to preen on his perfect construction.

And still, I froze, having never been so close to a naked man before.

‘You can look because you’ll get to touch sooner or later.’ My reticence was shortly noticed by his vigilant nature ‘Or, maybe not... I was just saying that I was thinking about being generous iff... You’ll kiss me.’

‘Kiss you!?’ If only things would be that simple.

‘Yes. It’s easy. You’ll kiss me, and we will play a game that could bring you your freedom.’

I knew that there had to be a trick somewhere, but it couldn’t hurt trying since he would make sure his will would be done anyway.

‘You just have to do it like you mean it.’

And this was the tricky part, as I didn’t have enough trouble already telling my heart and my mind not to listen to my body, now I had to real/fake that I would be enjoying sharing a kiss with him.

Without a second thought, so I wouldn’t change my mind, I leaned over the tub and searched directly for his lips, pushing my tongue between them to explore each corner of his mouth, discovering that small piece of pierced metal that will cause me so much anguish from now on. It felt so real... I let it feel so real that small moans managed to merge with his lustful groans as his hand cupped one of my breasts causing a delirium of restlessness to spread throughout me.

‘Mouse,’ his eyes drenched in lust. ‘Now pick a number between one and ten.’

Shit, he was serious about this. He really wanted to play a game!?

And somehow I felt that no matter what number I would have picked, I was to be declared the loser from the start. Cole didn’t seem in any way to ever enter a competition that he can’t win, yet still, there was that one bet that he lost. The bet that brought us in this situation in the first place.

‘Seven,’ I answered, thinking that it’s best to be somewhere above the *in-between* section.

‘Lucky seven,’ my choice brought a large grin on his lips ‘You’re making things too easy for me,’ his smile enlarged as he was just about to explain the rules of *his* game. ‘I had chosen a very easy game for today. It’s simple. You just have to withstand me for 7 minutes.’

‘Withstand you!?’ What did that even mean, I quivered, knowing that nothing good could ever come out of this.

‘Don’t worry. I’ll walk you through it.’

How thoughtful of him, when sympathy seemed to be the feature he lacked most.

‘Hop into the tub,’ he offered me his hand to join him there, when all I ever wanted was to run away. Another piece of me was to be broken that day and he was just about to feast on every single sign of my anxiety.

Following his directions, I stepped into the tub, placing each of my legs on either side of his hips, though without drawing my body lower to take a seat.

Little did I know that this was exactly his plan.

‘Good. You’ll need to stand for this one,’ he darted me the most devious glimpse I’ve seen, driving his hand to the hems of my panty line.

I had an idea where this was going ‘Cole...’

‘Don’t rush, you’ll get to call out my name in a few minutes,’ he flashed his tongue between his teeth to play with his piercing while my eyes seemed to roll out of my head. Arrogant devil.

‘In your dreams.’

‘No, I will be in *your* dreams, Mouse. I will make sure of that in around... seven minutes.’

‘So, if I win, you’ll leave me alone but still help me with the custody?’

‘Yes. I’ve already talked to my father about it. It’s being taken care of as we speak.’ He seemed serious enough for me to believe him. I’m not sure why, but even if he was evil in every other way, I had a feeling that when it came to a promise, he was a man of his word.

‘But if you lose...’

‘If I lose?’ I was only thinking about winning since the prize was so attractive, but I needed to take losing into consideration, even though it was inconceivable that it will be one of my options.

‘If you lose, you’ll get to take care of me,’ he looked down on himself through the water, gleaming at his eager limb. ‘And Mouse, you will need to do it like you enjoy it. Exactly like you did with that kiss.’

All dark clouds were raising in on me as the notion was making my stomach twist. He was serious about it! And even though the thought of such a request crossed my mind, I was never quite ready for the moment to come.

But I didn’t need to think like that. I was going to win this. I was going to be free again from his deal after the next *seven* minutes!

‘I will even play nice and give you a minute heads start,’ he spoke reaching for his phone to set the timer, and in the next few moments placing the device back on the tub’s border, with the seconds counting downwards.

It was game on, as all lustful desires were reflecting on his countenance, bringing his arms to draw me closer to him as his lips leaned to kiss the thin material of my panties.

All I could think about was how badly I should hate this - his touch, his selfish ways; while my body seemed to be working against me.

His teeth gently grazed my panties, drawing them slowly down over my thighs, revealing the place he craved so badly to explore as an electric storm seemed to be igniting within me.

‘You have twenty more seconds to relax,’ he flashed that fucking piercing again straight after looking at the countdown on his phone -6:20.

But how could I ever be relaxed at a time like this, when my heart seemed to have moved into my ears, pumping so loud that I was convinced that he could hear it.

Before I knew it, the time was up, and his tongue slipped between my folds, brushing to search the full length of my core ‘You’re already so wet. This is going to be too easy,’ he smiled again, disappearing between my thighs again to move the metal in his tongue over that so needy nub.



I was in so much trouble, and I knew it from the first second. If when he first spoke I was convinced that no matter what, I could pull through this, now I seemed to be drowning in the 10 inches of water laying at my feet as his mouth was majestically working on me.

My eyes stared at the countdown, trying to focus only on the passing seconds, but each one of them seemed to be bringing a new sensation, building an anguish impossible to break.

Cole was groaning loudly as he was feasting on his gesture with his cat-like tongue, so deliciously rough that it was igniting every cell along its way.

I was in agony, and I was in ecstasy. 2:22 not sure if that was a good or a bad sign as I caught those exact numbers on the chronometer, but I couldn't help but curse myself for not choosing 2, the day of my birthday. I would have been saved by now- or maybe not, because the instant he noticed me looking at the phone, his eyes also turned at the countdown. He was running out of time, and the concept of not winning did not fit with his plans, so without a second thought, his lips merged to nibble on my nub, removing me of all powers.

It was too much for me to handle as wave after wave of ecstasy were shaking my very last cell, weakening my knees to the point they turned to jelly. And then the finale blow under the belt -as he decided to slowly bite on my swollen flesh, bringing the hurricane that raised inside of me to finally break me. 'So sweet,' he whispered, finding the signs of my uncontained exhilaration. 'Your tough, Mouse. I wouldn't have suspected that you would last more than 3 minutes,' he spoke as if in a blur while I found myself shipwrecked on his chest. I had lost, and the ticking of the phone was announcing my failure somewhere around a minute after my body was wrecked by euphoria.

'My turn,' he preened on my failure, drawing his body backward to hop onto the large rim of the tub. 'Like you mean it, remember?' The words seemed to be stuck in my mind since, in the end, it was a fair game. I lost.

‘Can we turn off the lights?’ I spoke, barely glinting at his aroused hardness that was so ready for me.

‘Funny how you didn’t want them turned off while *I* was attending you.’

I didn’t even realize what was happening, let alone figure things out to turn off the lights. It’s not like I dared to look at him anyway, when the embarrassment was hitting epic levels, pointing my eyes to stare at the timer...

‘No, we can’t,’ he continued annoyed by my request ‘I want to see you. I want to see you enjoy me.’

Like that could ever be possible...

I looked at him with disgust lingering on the top of my tongue. Yet, when it came down to what was happening, it was my choice. I knew what I was signing up for.

My head bowed in slow motion in search of his tip. Truth be told I had no idea what I truly needed to do, let alone enjoy it. I just gently made his length disappear between my lips, remembering the actions the blonde back at Brix’s glass room made to get her partner to ecstasy.

I needed this to be done with as soon as I could, so I was taking all precautions to do just that, guiding myself after each one of his groans.

I began moving up and down, gliding my tongue along him with each motion I made, slower at first, then faster and faster until his hand wrapped itself in my hair, guiding my exact moves.

He was mine now, and even if he was controlling my body, for a few seconds I was the one in control of him, having the *king* in complete need of me.

In reality, I always thought that I would find this repulsive, forcing myself to resist the moments I needed to bring him to euphoria. but somehow, these exact moments, reflecting on each one of his facial expressions were low-key making me enjoy this. After all, he was so satisfied by making the same gesture just minutes ago.

With each one of my glides, I could see him become weaker and weaker, almost shocked by his body reactions ‘Look at me,’ he roared on the point of breaking, holding me in one place for a second to take a proper glimpse of me. Though I refused to look as all embarrassment flushed down on me, ashamed of the degrading position I found myself in. Still, by the lustful twinkle I found seconds later gleaming in his eyes, I was miles away from that ‘Eyes up,’ he ordered again and I couldn’t deny him any longer.

He had a message that I needed to hear loud and clear, infiltrating it into my system ‘I’m starting to believe that I will need you for much more than a month,’ he spoke ferally craving for me the moment my eyes raised to crash into his.

I just climbed the first steps to conquer his kingdom, yet I knew all too well that this particular *king* had a heart of stone.

His hand began moving again, guiding my head along with that perfectly shaped V-line thrusting against me. He was so close. I could feel it with his every throb, roaring his approaching release as one of his hands sneaked beneath my bra to play with my aching tip.

Suddenly, he pulled me in closer, jabbing himself so hard that I couldn’t breathe, with delirious movements building in seconds the bases of his release. I couldn’t withstand his hunger, trying to push him away even for a split second to catch my breath. Though it was impossible to move from his clutched hand as if I was only a rag doll in those moments with hot tears springing from my eyes, ruining the faded hints of makeup I had worn that day. The devil was feasting on my anguish, finding his strongest ecstasy between my tears as he continued to move, letting his warm liquid fill the insides of my mouth.

I instantly shook my head to be set free to dispose myself of the evidence of his elation, though the second he slipped himself out, he brought a hand under my chin to close back my mouth. His head shook in sign of a no, as I was to follow in his steps and swallow that liquid part of him.

Bolts of anger darted from my eyes, yet with no use as his hand didn't release me before he considered the entire job was fully accomplished.

I rose out from the water, searching for my drenched panties in the tub, then slipping back into my clothes.

'Are we done,' I asked while looking into the mirror, trying to stop the tears from running down my face and somehow fix my makeup.

'For the day. I'll see you tomorrow at school,' he spoke in total relaxation, drawing his head back to rest on the tub border and enjoying that lingering satisfaction still residing in his veins.

And in a way, I envied him as I was trying to get my shaking legs to abandon the room, even though remaining there with him was not even an option. His mind was as devious as it got, and it was only a matter of minutes before he could come up with the next *game*.

## *Chapter 16*



I loathed him. I hated every single cell of his arrogant nature. And still, that shaking sensation lived inside my body, reminding me of the devastating power he held over me. Not by contract, but by human nature.

Rushing down the stairs, I could only glance straight at the entry door, wishing to leave his house even before I needed to catch my next breath. Yet, something stopped me. The walls were echoing from an argument, while screaming and shouting could be heard coming from the living room.

I should have left. Lived in total ignorance for as long it was possible, though the instant decision to stop on my way was the one element about to put all wheels in motion.

‘You bastard. I’m getting a divorce!’ A woman yelled, forcing my curious nature to venture towards the place the arguing came from.

Yes, I have many qualities yet eavesdropping seems to be my greatest flaw lately.

‘Where have you been!?! Have you been at the roulette again? You’ve already driven this family to ruin.’

‘Shut up before Cole hears you! I wasn’t at the fucking roulette!’ A man’s voice answered in an angered tone. ‘Our son asked me to take care of a custody problem for his girlfriend and I was handling it with the mayor all morning.’

A weight had just been lifted off my chest as the certainty of Cole’s promise was coming through, washing away just a little of that horrible guilt feeling I was having over what I just did.

‘Girlfriend!? Why is it the first time I hear of this?’

That must have been Cole’s mother asking.

‘Because you tend to overreact and ask all sorts of dumb questions. That’s why neither of us told you.’

‘Then, if you’re having a breakthrough of honesty, why are you so afraid to confess to him that the money isn’t coming back? There is no governor or senator or whatever lie you told our son. You didn’t invest our money in the next election. You invested it on a goddamn white ball hitting 13 black. And you lost!’

‘Shut up, Debrah. He will hear you! I still have connections. I will make the money back in no time, especially with the riots only one step away from breaking.’

‘You’re the same gullible fool, Frank. The riots will break us, not build us.’

‘No. We have Elite blood running through our veins.’

‘What use is there for it if it’s not supported by money? We’re most likely to be thrown in the Pit with the rest of them. To become slaves of the Elite!’

We must prevent this, not stand by it. Just think about all the people that will die in the wars.

It’s inhuman to turn the already poor Annelids into slaves. Haven’t they suffered enough as it is?’

‘That’s the problem. The Annelids want more when there is getting less and less to give.’

‘This won’t be a solution. There will be too few of them left. And then who will work for the Elite? Us!?’

‘Not us, Debrah... But the word is they want to enslave everyone who can’t claim royal origins. Even the ones on the Hills. The governor is talking about hiring mercenaries to see his plan come through.’

‘You have to talk him out of this. He listens to your advice. You’ve been friends from kindergarten.’

‘Money is the only thing that drives him on. And that’s the one thing I lack at this moment. Besides, if the riots ignite, there’s nothing stopping this.’

‘We have to do something while you still have power over them. Before they find out about our financial situation.’

‘Like what, Debrah? Enlighten me,’ the sarcasm in his voice matched the one of his son’s.

‘I don’t care. You didn’t ask me when you bet away all our fortune. Go back to the casinos and ask for a refund. Just get us out of this!’

‘Do you think it really works that way?’

‘Then maybe you should tell Cole. He has colleagues in high places, and he knows all your well-connected friends, some even better than you do. You keep talking about getting him to step into your shoes. Maybe it’s time to ask for his help.’

‘All his colleagues and friends will turn their backs on him when they discover that he’s broke. It’s the way the world works. We don’t have real friends up in the Hills. Only acquaintances.’

The sound of an opening door alerted me to the reality of my current surroundings. Not a great moment to meet the parents, so before I got a chance to have my cover blown, I ran out the door, searching for my momentary freedom.

Was what I just heard true? Were we on the verge of slavery, or worse, extinction?

I couldn't comprehend this at that moment. Just left to go straight home. To my new home, that is...

It was the first time I was alone in here and the grandeur of the place didn't cease to amaze me.

I finally set out to find how many rooms it hid, only to discover that my *apartment* was almost a mansion on its own. Five luxury bedrooms, including a master one, who knows how many bathrooms and closets, and the grand *pièce de resistance*- a rooftop pool. All for me, and for my family...as soon as I will be able to get them here.

And then, there I found it. A room of magic filled with outfits handpicked especially for me, in an exquisite display of dresses, shoes, and whatever accessories can cross a person's mind.

The most spectacular piece of furniture on view, was a glass cabinet filled with extremely sexy items of lingerie, each individual one carefully arranged on its own hanger, showing off the fine materials they were made from. Either Ferris didn't get the message, or he enjoys torturing himself because one thing is for sure, he won't be getting to take advantage of the full package that fine pieces of lingerie like these should bring about.

I decided to try one of the teddies on, admiring in the mirror how it perfectly wrapped to fit me, and soon, choosing to keep it on, pulled an emerald green dress over it.

In no time, I was in the limo waiting for the three minutes it took me to get to Ferris to pass and finally reach the end of the line for the evening, even if the night was far from being over.

That feeling of concern was still living within me, ruling my world and slowly pulling humanity's pain upon me, even if it wasn't the right time to stop and think of that.

My mission came first.

My family came first!

There was nothing much that I could do anyway. I had to sell my soul to save *two* people. Imagine a whole city!



Besides, it had only been my home for a month or so, and what I found laying here, before me, was far from worth saving.

I had to let the thought go. I couldn't have this responsibility on my hands too. It wasn't even my responsibility ...Was it!?

'Wow, you look stunning,' Ferris's voice brought me back to the real world as I found myself in the middle of the hallway, with warm arms coming to get a hold of me. In no time, I was safely resting upon his chest, floating in our madness so far away from everyone else.

I was a fool, tying myself with an invisible blindfold when it came to him, refusing to see the obvious, and willingly losing myself in this spell. Maybe he was my only refuge on this stormy sea, maybe he was just hope, when I had none, but he was giving me strength whilst at the same time, gradually breaking me.

'Come, Vanya is waiting,' he spoke, only after having crashed his lips on mine, making sure that I remain trapped under his charm.

His arm glided over my waist, guiding me towards the other end of the lobby, through a large corridor and into an elegant saloon.

'Good evening, Vanya,' I nodded, acknowledging my boss's presence.

'Bea, so nice to see you,' she shifted from her seat to look at me while Ferris invited me to take a place on the sofa, next to him.

'Wine for the ladies,' as careful as every time, Ferris made sure all of our glasses were quickly filled with Dionisio's liquor. 'Now that everyone is here, we can go on with our evening,' he spoke, lighting himself a cigarette. 'I wanted to put all cards on the table so that are no doubts, or any further claims will later appear from either side.'

'Bea can quit whenever she likes. I never kept anyone by force... But, she met you during a Pleasure, so I do have the

right to a commission out of any material earnings resulting out of that.’ Vanya was a businesswoman and I did not expect anything less of her.

‘That’s exactly why I called you here tonight. Have you brought the contract?’

‘Yes.’

‘Ok. I want it to be stipulated black on white that all rights and fees will be fulfilled in full and final payment with this check.’

Ferris pushed a wrapped paper in front of her, and as soon as Vanya opened it, her eyes glinted in surprise.

There must be a lot of zeros scribbled down since she was not, by far, the type to ever let herself be *surprised* by anything.

‘That’s a generous sum,’ she uttered, returning to put a pen to paper, signing the contract. ‘All claims solved,’ she smiled, pushing the papers back to me to also sign.

In reality, I regretted parting with her. Vanya may be tough, but at least she was one of the few people truly honest with me.

The papers were signed on both sides, eliminating all concerns regarding the termination.

‘If you ever want your old job back, you’ll always be welcomed to come and look for me.’ The door was still open, but even if it was the only place where I found solutions to my problems, I was certain that it would be the place that will totally break me if I was to ever return.

Ferris seemed to agree ‘She won’t return,’ he muttered, throwing her the coldest look he owned. I belonged to him now and there was *nothing* that could change that.

‘As you say. These are murky times. It’s better to have friends everywhere than enemies.’ Vanya was making sure to keep the connections, especially with a man of his worth.

And even Ferris seemed to take the diplomatic path, acknowledging Vanya’s hidden assets. She may not have his

fortune, but information is power, and can sometimes be of greater value than a generous bank account ‘Yes indeed. It wasn’t meant as an offense. It was only a statement. Bea won’t need to return to The Pleasure Room.’

‘I’m always happy when one of my employees finds a better path,’ Vanya smiled, tilting her glass of wine as a small toast for the new life waiting for us. ‘I’ll be leaving you two to celebrate,’ she stood up to leave.

‘Thank you for everything you’ve done for me,’ I followed, to walk her out of the room, witnessing her make the most uncommon gesture.

Catching me into a parental hug, Vanya kissed both of my cheeks, drawing me closer to her chest ‘Be careful with him.’ A piece of advice that left me breathless, staring into the ground long after she left the room. She was by far the least likely person to ever do that, so the warning had all reasons to be heard as loud as it was intended to be.

I’ve always ignored my instincts when it came to Ferris, mostly because he had his special way of convincing me that it’s only a figment of my imagination, not with words, but with warm gestures. Or maybe I was just a sucker for affection after being deprived of any for so long. I didn’t even know any longer, even though I’ve always felt when it came to him that the darkness outshone his light.

Though who was to say that you can’t thrive in the dusk?

‘Is there something wrong?’ Coming from behind me, his warm lips fell to crash on my neck, leaving a long trail of goosebumps along their way.

‘Nothing,’ I turned to cast him a smile that I didn’t truly own, then leaned my forehead to be buried into his chest as he would catch me between his arms.

‘Bea,’ he held on to me to kiss the nape of my neck over and over again until he managed to make the world around us blur again. ‘Are you sure you’re ok?’ He whispered while setting a little distance to be able to properly see my reaction as I answer.

‘I guess I may be more *damaged* than you initially presumed,’ I answered while drowning in unknown sorrow.

‘If that is the case, I have the perfect remedy for that. Wine,’ he pressed the glass to my lips, making sure it remains glued there until I drained all of its content, following my gesture just so he could refill them seconds later. ‘Wine and good food,’ he took my hand, guiding me towards his room. ‘You don’t mind if we dine in, do you?’ He spoke in a delicious tone as soon as we reached the bedroom, showing me to a seat on the rug in front of the fireplace where an indoor picnic was elegantly laid out, waiting for us under a silver candlestick.

‘This looks delicious,’ I uttered, raising the lid from over the plates, and discovering the most appetizing dish, while at the same time my stomach was reminding me that I hadn’t eaten for who knows how long.

‘*Coq au vin* prepared by a Michelin star chef,’ he winked as if he just pulled out the heavy artillery.

‘Oh, more wine!?’ I giggled.

‘Wine is good for the soul in any combination. The more, the merrier,’ he tilted his glass, emptying it again in one sip, then waited for me to follow, even though the liquor didn’t seem to flow so smoothly down my throat as it did on his. And even with this, by the time we finished dinner I was on my fourth glass, feeling the hypnotic glow from the fireplace invading my whole body.

It was like I was burning from within, as the dress I was wearing seemed to be tightening on my breasts, making them ache to be set free.

As if sensing my anguish, Ferris spread his hand for me to join him, calling me to sit, stretching my feet in the opposite direction from his so that I could face him.

‘What else for tonight?’ I asked, not really wishing for a surprise, but for that mesmerizing feeling of knowing his body incredibly close to mine.

‘Whatever you desire,’ he tugged the dress over my shoulders, assuring himself of access to explore the new piece of lingerie I had on. ‘Whoever bought you this must have had excellent tastes,’ he whispered, leaning in to taste that swollen flesh right above the cup of my bra.

‘Tonight is my turn,’ I pushed him back, beginning to unbutton his shirt as a lust I never felt before was tormenting me. I wanted him. I wanted all of him in every way I ever thought humanly possible.

One by one, the buttons evaporated, setting free, a spectacular display of inked muscles, so appealing that my tongue couldn’t help itself but have a taste. There was something happening to me as desire was replacing all rational thought, living those moments only to take as much as he had to share with me- body and soul.

With perfect precision, his hand tangled itself between my locks as I was tracing each firm line of his chest only to boost that throbbing sensation that was dampening the zone between my thighs. Maybe it was from the alcohol, or maybe the alcohol was just a fuel to ignite my deepest cravings, but I was lacking all inhibitions, driven by his hitched breath to enjoy that taste of him for as long as I could.

Though something stopped me, almost waking me up from my beautiful delirium as I stumbled upon two scars that crushed my soul. Two circular wounds that lead directly to his heart made me instantly dampen them with crystal tears. Were those healed bullet wounds!?

‘What are these, Ferris?’ I asked with my voice drowned in sadness, thinking of all the misery he must have gone through.

‘Something that I won’t let ruin my evening. They have ruined my life once already,’ he refused to let me waste any more time searching into his past, preferring to focus on the *immediate* future.

I was high in the air before I realized what was happening, being carried by my *royal highness* straight to bed.

‘That’s a smooth way to hinder my interrogation,’ I giggled as I felt my dress slipping off, even before my body rested between his sheets.

‘I know much smoother ways,’ his body came on top of me, caging me between the strength of his arms and his undeniable lips. Yet this was my time to take the lead as I moved my hand to reach his belt, seconds after a drop of realization at what exactly I was doing suddenly kicked in.

As if recognizing my plans of retreat, he quickly caught my palm, guiding it straight to the place of its initial target, making sure that this time it wouldn’t miss.

My lips stopped moving, feeling the strong effect I had on him as his hardness was eagerly awaiting to break through his jeans.

Time froze as I glanced straight into his eyes, stroking the whole length of his masculinity through his pants.

Everything felt so free. I felt so in control, so different than with Cole. It was a whole new sensation, giving me such thrilling satisfaction of bringing him pleasure. But at the same time a fragment of reality came crushing in on me ‘You know that I still can’t fully... You know...’

‘Don’t worry, we’ll improvise,’ he grinned as the blueprints of a new plan were already set out in his mind.

I did trust him, and having a clue of what he was talking about, I proceeded to unfasten his jeans, pushing them down and leaving him in his boxers.

‘I’ll be...around,’ he laughed, letting the top of my bra fall over my breasts and leaning his head to taste the newly exposed skin, pulling me back into the arms of that intoxicating feeling that always arises around him.

Reaching for the part of him that hid beneath his boxers, I didn’t stop until he let out a long groan, satisfying my need to know that I could please him. He was mine now, and as the single benefit I got from my experience with Cole, I had a very good idea of what needed to be done. Though what I didn’t

take into account was the hand that snapped the staples off my teddy, reaching for the very aroused part of me.

‘You were waiting for me,’ Ferris felt the need to state the obvious as his fingers instantly glided across that area of my body that was creating such noticeable signs of the effect he possessed over me.

As usual, I didn’t answer, just stroke him harder, traveling his full erection with every dance of my hand, over and over, driving his fingers to move in the same rhythm, extracting bit by bit that sweet anxiety to build within me.

Unwilling to lose ground, his tongue paced to circle my rosy tips, nibbling them gradually into ecstasy until they became so sensitive that each one of his whirls seemed to be reflecting directly into my core.

I felt like I needed to completely surrender to him, but at the same time, I needed to see him at least partially roaring in satisfaction. And that thought kept me going, kneading his length faster, only stopping to brush my thumb on his tip with each complete motion. It seemed to be working since his groans were becoming louder, yet completely hindered by my moans. I was moments away from floating in ecstasy, yet he certainly had a slightly longer endurance time than Cole, at least compared with our classroom adrenaline ride, and that was slowly worrying me as my body was preparing to cave in.

Feeling that I was close, probably from my restless hips that were arching into the mattress, he returned to my lips, sneaking his tongue inside to properly kiss me. I was almost lost, though I couldn’t let that burdening pressure control me, not before I made sure that he was ready to join me.

Gripping him stronger, I slowed down my rhythm, turning my moves into much wider ones, only gradually increasing the speed until that unavoidable elation was reflected in his eyes. I instantly relaxed, allowing myself to thoroughly lose myself in his game, as my hand continues to shift over him until my feet were moving aimlessly into the sheets, trying to find something, anything to support me as an anchor. Yet, I didn’t let him fall behind, getting him to jolt

away from my touch as that tightening sensation overcame him, forcing him to find his release in heavenly unison with mine.

‘I’m starting to believe that you cheated,’ he protested with his face over the mattress, still trying to control the effects of his recent ecstasy.

‘You did say improvise,’ I smiled, raising the sheet to fully cover me.

‘You’re right,’ he grinned all over again as the alcohol seemed to just be settling in my mind.

‘Why are you showing off your fangs?’ I asked, sensing the immediate *danger* as my body seemed to still be craving for him. But how could that even be possible since less than five minutes earlier he just attended to my urgent desires?

‘Nothing important, just to say goodnight,’ he disappeared under the sheets, pushing my thighs apart, to flicker that tongue piercing in a long trip over my once again needy flesh.

It was the same damn fire, igniting all over within me, as I was starting to think that tongue piercings were part of my blessing and my curse.

‘I guess we had better stop,’ he returned so fast that the room was still spinning as my body seemed to be truly aching for him. My ovaries were about to explode, as my torment had just become real.

‘Don’t stop. I want to be yours,’ I moaned throughout the impossible yearnings, whirling to fully face him while my own hands cupped my breasts that were terribly aching without him touching them.

‘I can’t. Not tonight. You had too much to drink,’ he kissed my lips then tugged me into his chest.

‘You said whatever I desire. I desire you,’ I whined, still unable to let go of my cravings.

‘If only things were that simple, but I promise that if you don’t change your mind tomorrow after the wine leaves your



system, I will fulfill every single one of your fantasies.’

That sounded perfect in the foreseeable future, but right now, he was just pouring salt on an open wound... Who could wait for tomorrow when my body was screaming to melt under his touch?

‘Good night, Bea,’ that damn line again, ending my evening in complete mystery, leaving me like a fish that slowly finds its demise on a bank of sand.

## *Chapter 17*



The room was spinning, the bed was spinning and I was spinning along with them as my head seemed to be tightly tied to my pillow.

‘Take this,’ I recognized Ferris’s voice as a hand appeared in front of me, opening to reveal a white pill, but as much as I wanted to move, my pupils seemed to be the only things working inside my entire body. ‘I have orange juice,’ a glass appeared in front of me, swirling an orange liquor. But how on earth was I supposed to change position until my lips would be able to meet that glass!?

Impossible, I thought, until Ferris’s large torso leaned on me, helping me up on the pillows. It felt like an earthquake, breaking every cell in my body. ‘The wine got to you,’ he laughed, rubbing last night’s mistake in my face as if I didn’t already feel the consequences enough. ‘But I lived for every second of it,’ the memory of me, lustfully unzipping his pants rapidly brought color to my pale cheeks and by the wicked grin so proudly displayed on his face, he was referring exactly to that moment.

‘Never drinking again,’ I mumbled, convinced that I won’t set my mouth on an alcohol glass ever again.

‘You’re drinking this though,’ he put the glass on my lips right after slipping the pill inside my mouth. ‘Now, sleep for another hour. You’ll be as good as new when you wake up.’

I’m not sure if he was talking from personal experience, but he seemed to know exactly what he was saying, talking about, turning his words into my commands.

My eyes closed as if I had been awake for days before, allowing me to find that all too desired rest once again.

I wasn’t entirely sure what time it was when I woke up, but it was dark again. What the hell had happened!? And where did my day go?

‘Ferris!’ I called out for him as soon as my eyes were fully open, desperate to understand how I managed to sleep for an entire day.

‘I’m here,’ he quickly returned from the balcony, putting out his cigarette to take a seat next to me on the bed.

‘What happened? What time is it? Why did I sleep for so long!?’ The questions just kept rolling as a sudden state of anxiety was taking over me, but at least the alcohol fumes seemed to have dissipated and my body was resuming its normal functions.

‘Slow down. It must be from the fatigue mixed with the wine. It’s actually my fault. I shouldn’t have left you to sleep for so long, but you seemed to need the rest so badly.’ He brought his hand to slide through my hair, tugging a few loose curls behind my ears.

‘My clothes...my phone,’ I rushed to stand up, roaming around the room to find them, completely unaware where I had left them.

‘Why are you in such a hurry to get dressed, I’m pretty sure the Academy courses are over by now?’

‘Ferris, I still need to leave,’ I called out to him as soon as I took hold of my dress, slipping right into it while I was

staring at my phone. Six missed calls from Brax and a voice message. I was in deep-shit trouble as we speak.

‘I was actually hoping you’ll join me on a short business trip. I have to go to the next town in the morning, and I hate being out of the house. Your company would do me good. Besides, it’s only for a couple of days. I’ll talk to the Dean myself if that’s what worries you.’

‘It’s not only about the Academy...as I told you, I have other...agreements as well,’ my voice almost whispered, ashamed to admit whatever that might imply.

Exactly as I was expecting, his dark eyes flared with a chilling gaze that pierced through to the deepest place within me. It was jealousy coated in doubt, though no matter what he felt or what I felt for him in those seconds, I couldn’t change my mind. ‘My family will be arriving here soon. Maybe even in a couple of days. I need to be in town when that happens.’

Still, no word left his lips as I decided to completely seal them with my own.

‘I wish things were different,’ I whined, catching his torso between my arms with the thought of the voice message on my phone was sprawling my mind like a hurricane. I needed to get out of there, no matter what damage I may cause in the end. We had a deal and I, so far, was keeping my part of it the best way I could.

‘Things will be different at some point, I’m sure of that.’ his smile suddenly reappeared, though lacking any real sign of warmth. It was as if I said some incantation to cast him into a spell... A spell that I was starting to believe I was no longer a part of.

‘I’ll call you tomorrow. I promise,’ smashing my lips on his again I pulled him into a final kiss then ran out the door without looking behind. I felt like Sodom and Gomorrah, one last look, and I will turn to stone when, in reality, my heart was supposed to be of stone to go through with everything I did by now.

The second I closed the car door behind me, I pressed the phone to my ear, hitting voicemail. One message from Brax.

***You must not care as much as you pretend about your family.***

His tone so full of anger that it immediately instilled a trembling sensation into my flesh. I felt the car wasn't going fast enough, even if there was only a three-minute drive, and the second it had stopped, I jumped right out, walking straight to my new apartment.

I must have called him five times before his ego finally let him answer 'What the fuck do you want?' He barked as I was already an hour late to our *date*.

'I'm sorry,' I whimpered, hoping that my mistake won't have consequences that will affect the mission of bringing back my family.

'Yes, you will be,' a threat that I knew held ground.

'I wasn't feeling well.' But I kind of forgot to mention the part where I was too drunk to get out of bed.

'Oh, really!?! My driver was in front of your apartment for an hour. When I saw you weren't picking up, I asked him to go inside, but surprise, you weren't home.'

'I... I don't live there anymore.'

'You don't!?!' Seemed that the mighty Brax left out a detail.

'No... I live... I live in the Hills.'

'This has to be good.' I could sense him from the other end flaring his nostrils.

'There's nothing good about it. I just have other... arrangements. Nothing that could affect our *deal*.' In the end, that's the only thing he cared about, that his *payment* would still be intact when the time would come for him to claim it. 'I could come now if you still want me to,' I lowered my tone to a more seductive one, hoping that I will get him to soften.

‘There will be consequences to this. No one keeps me waiting.’ As long as *the consequences* don’t affect your *their* part in our deal...,’ I was the only one responsible for my mistakes.

‘No... they won’t be affected,’ he growled as I could feel all devious thoughts forming in his mind. ‘Text me the fucking address’ - and he hung up, leaving me to stare at my phone.

In less than five, his jeep was parked outside my window, though before I got a chance to get out the door, someone rang my doorbell. It was one of Brax’s men, holding a large white box with an extremely elegant cherry flower pink ribbon. Whatever was in the box must have been expensive, which left me to stare at it, almost shocked.

‘Boss asked to give this to you,’ the man handed me the package ‘That was before he put my phone on fire, but since he gave me no other instructions regarding it, here it is.’

‘Thank you,’ I spoke, unsure of what exactly I needed to do with it, though before I walked out the door, I decided to open it.

A note quietly waited on top of some pink luxury wrapping paper.

### ***An upgrade to your dress***

Putting the note aside, I tugged the wrapping, only to reveal an exquisite black dress. Handsewn crystals were decorating a bustier top, exquisite lines were shaping a perfect knee-length piece of clothing, while beneath it laid a pair of black stilettos. I recognized the brand as being one of high value, as I did have a few other pieces from the same store waiting in my closet, yet this dress held a different meaning.

Even though I would hate to admit it, with Ferris this gesture wasn’t an uncommon one, and I suspected of not being the first with an over-the-top wardrobe, or the first spoiled with a few expensive gifts. Let’s just say that his more romantic nature was leaning towards being the type to do this... But when it came to Brax, things were oceans apart

from a gesture of this nature. Sure, he gave me a gown before, but that was only business. He needed me to wear that golden dress, while this time... This time he gave me the dress with his heart, and that's exactly why the piece of clothing I held in my hands conveyed more meaning than my whole dressing room. The present wasn't with a hidden purpose, he didn't need to seduce me since I was already his. And to put my mind at ease somehow, I was starting to believe that he wanted to take me to a public place and he would be ashamed of my usual clothing. That must be it! A present that would still serve him somehow as he was unwilling to spoil his image with me.

Gathering my strength, I ran to the bathroom to change, slipping between the straps and crystals, fitting the dress and the red sole stilettos. In less than ten minutes I managed to turn the ruin I was posing as earlier, into a princess. A red-eyed princess since the alcohol effects hadn't fully left my system, but still...

'I'm ready. Take me to him,' I let the driver know the instant I walked out of the bathroom, and before I knew it, we were boarding the jeep so he could drive me towards my final destination.

As I observed, Brax's house looked extremely glamorous at night with imposing lights underlining every line of exceptional architectural design, making it resemble more to one of his art pieces than an actual home. Certainly, a place worthy of the Hills, even if the man who owned it had strayed so far from the Elite etiquette. Or maybe he was just like them, separated only by origins, but both sharing similar goals or means.

Climbing the front entrance stairs, I glanced around me, searching for guards, though I didn't seem to find any. Without additional company, I decided to knock, patiently... or most likely impatiently waiting for someone to open the door. Yet minutes passed and nothing happened. No sign of anyone coming my way. I just needed to wait a little longer, but after my third attempt of knocking, I decided to turn the door handle and let myself in.

Already familiar with the place, I ventured to look into the living room and see if Brax was actually there since it was a little strange for him to have called me here without actually being home.

But maybe I shouldn't have done that. Maybe I should have just turned to leave when no one answered, or hadn't even come into his place at all. Perhaps I should have just tried to fix things in the morning, because Brax was *gone*, leaving a steaming dragon to occupy his body.

I found him sitting on a sofa with a large whiskey glass resting between his fingers, and his mind lost to an entirely different place since his gaze was fixed on a closed widescreen tv. There was something extremely attractive about his madness tonight, making me realize that I was starting to be a sucker for muscles wrapped in a fine Italian suit... Or maybe I was the one that was losing their minds.

'Brax...', daring to call him back to reality, I unwillingly managed to draw his wrath over on me.

'Shit, I forgot about that,' his eyebrows shifted into a frown, noticing the way *his* dress was wrapped around *my* body.

'Thank you. It's amazing,' I smiled, not knowing how exactly I should react after receiving such a gift from him.

'You already *thanked me* with your behavior.' The disappointment in his voice answered my questions, reminding me exactly how much I had fucked things up tonight, risking the future of my family

One thing was clear, I wasn't even close to being out of the woods yet.

A sudden sound of shattered crystal and porcelain clicking together came to my attention, making my eyes shift to the opposite corner of the room and noticing an older woman cleaning up some broken plates and glasses from the floor. An insane rhythm began pumping through my veins as I glimpsed a round table for two having been thrown next to a



large window with scraps of food and a spilled bottle of champagne covering a white mohair rug.

‘I had plans for tonight,’ his words cut straight through me, assuring me that any fervor that had been present earlier in the room had died because of my disobedience.

No public place, I guess... The dress was just for *me* and *him*. That was a thought that brought a strange anxiety to sneak into my head. My failure was of epic proportions, slaughtering any attempt Brax probably will ever make to ease up on me.

I was now back at square zero, or maybe even worse, judging by the morbid emptiness of his eyes. All human feelings were pushed aside, bringing only sinful desires to take their place.

‘Lucia, you can leave now,’ he barked, speaking to his maid, without turning to face her.

‘But Senior Brax, I haven’t finished,’ the woman answered, almost terrified that her time was up.

‘Did I ask you if you were finished?’

‘No,’ her eyes met the floor.

‘Leave!’ -was his final word before the poor woman ran out the door, grabbing her bag on the way out.

Should I be as scared as her, or maybe even more? I had every reason to be, but the image of the crumpled table couldn’t leave my mind.

I hurt him, and I was damn sure that only moments separated me from learning the full price of my mistake.

‘Let’s get this over with,’ he only moved his eyes to look at me, downing the glass of whiskey in one sip ‘Get down on your knees.’

That was it.

My punishment, or maybe his plan all along, but if even Cole managed to dress up as a game of chance, with Brax things were completely different. He wanted - he received,

even if tonight I may have held a small chance of changing that. Now it was gone, and I acknowledged what needed to be done, letting my knees hit the rug in front of him.

With shallow breath, I reached for his jacket, slowly pushing it on the sides so that I could gain access to the buttons of his shirt. At least this was the one part I was going to enjoy tonight since the tanned skin and the defined lines of his chest had always been so alluring to me.

My tongue leaned in to explore his gym sculpted body, relishing itself with the mutters leaving his throat as the skin was crawling along my trajectory.

My own satisfaction was quickly observed, and even if the pleasure I caused him was much too obvious, he preferred refusing it just to prevent me from obtaining any pleasure while doing this.

It was a punishment, after all, a full display of his evil forces.

‘When I asked you to get down on your knees do you think this is what I was waiting for!? Unbuckle my fucking pants.’ He was treating me no differently than any other one of his cheap fucks, and this time, in his eyes, I deserved it. Yet I froze for a second, hurt that the man who managed to have just dug a tiny tunnel into my heart was now shoveling it back with rocks. ‘Do it, Bea, or do you want me to tell you step by step what needs to be done!?’ Why do all men want to give precise indications to women? If by any chance I couldn’t handle this, I would follow Ferris’s advice- improvise, even if when it came to Brax there was not much room for that.

What else was there to be done but to follow his exact commands since any signs of humanity had left him already as I came face to face with Brax- the cold-hearted mobster?

My hands were shaking on the metal belt, trying to control that screaming sensation igniting in my throat.

I hated him and I hated myself for not being able to shake that feeling of sorrow for what those shattered plates really meant.

Pulling Brax's pants over his knees, I revealed the cross and thorns tattoo covering his entire left thigh. Such a fine irony of the situation I found myself in, when, in fact, there wasn't anything holly about this man.

I looked up at him, straight into his eyes before I disposed of his boxers, hoping that I would find clemency. Of course, he had none to give, though what surprised me more was that I couldn't spot any sign of excitement or satisfaction either. His gaze, so much different than Cole's, bittered with the trace of my mistake, although I was suspecting he didn't consider it to be mine any longer. He was blaming himself for *his* momentary weakness, maybe even for the overpriced present, and that was just making things a thousand times worse. And still, there was a part of him betraying any internal reaction that human anatomy could not hinder. That all so eager hard portion of him, that twitched under the touch of my tongue even if his hollow eyes were forcing themselves to remain unburdened by the erotic pleasure I was slowly building.

Without a proper idea of what needed to be done, I closed my lips around him, moving over and over again, hoping I could find any pleasure within his own. Though nothing seemed to happen as his countenance remained impenetrable, and his all too chilled reactions were making me stumble over my movements. I suddenly became all too aware of what I was doing, ashamed and humiliated by the all too mechanical gesture, slowing down, movement by movement, as guilt and despise was turning everything into a molten pain.

Brax probably sensed it, and after pouring himself another glass, he let his hand search for a spot behind my head, tangling his fingers between a few locks of my hair. I felt him move from his seat, guiding my lips to meet his thrusts, amplifying their effects while his nostrils flared in evil satisfaction. It was all too clear. He wasn't searching for pleasure, he was just punishing me, harder and faster, draining the very air out of my lungs, until I felt that I could no longer breathe.

With the last of my powers, I pushed him away, trying to fight that gagging sensation that was almost making me throw

up.

‘Relax, so you won’t choke,’ he smirked, as that was exactly what he was trying to do, making me feel the full extent of my error.

Though this time, I couldn’t fall too far behind, and my mouth got the best of me again ‘Fuck you!’ I grunted, even if, in the next second, realized that the slipped words will probably aggravate everything.

‘No Bea, that would be my job.’ Without leaving me with a second more to rest, he pulled my head back to take him in, as he began to move against my mouth again. ‘Good girl,’ he groaned, while I suspected he knew exactly how much I was hating the way he said that. It made me feel cheap, and that was his ultimate goal! To own the last drop of self-esteem left in me.

It should have been enough to make me hate him.

I *should* hate him, right!?

Though somehow this seemed to be a question that didn’t even need to be asked, while *I* was, for some reason, asking it.

Move by move, something was happening as his breath was losing its repressed pace, and the grip of his hand loosened to the point that it was merely resting on the back of my head.

Maybe he considered my punishment complete, or maybe he couldn’t fight that feeling any longer, but a tightening expression emerged on his face as he wasn’t in control of the pleasure anymore. *The pleasure was controlling him.*

I watched that mass of muscles move beneath the suit as his chest was struggling to focus on my rhythm, so fiercely that he seemed like a bomb ready to explode in any second. And at the same time, my body was reacting, led by his ecstasy, molten crying with the need for him to touch me. Still, his next gesture was so far from that. Taking his hand off me, he downed the contents of his whiskey glass again, and instead of placing it back on the small table next to him, in one move,

he hurled the furniture across the room, scattering the crystal decanter and its contents all over the floor.

‘Get up!’ He growled, catching my arm to set me back on my feet, then quickly pulled up his boxers, leaving his pants and jacket to fall on the floor.

Without a word, he turned to walk towards his bedroom, and after a short second to clear my mind, I followed, even though he didn’t instruct me to do so.

His shirt must have lost itself somewhere on the way since by the time I got to the bedroom, he was laying on the bed, dressed only in his underwear.

‘You can... resume,’ he pointed towards his *unsolved* problem, waiting for me to continue doing something about it.

At least the light wasn’t on in there. That was providing me with some privacy, and as I was about to discover, I was going to need a lot of it!

I pulled on his boxers again, leaning to hide him between my lips, yet only after a few short moves, I felt him changing position while one of his hands was securing my head on that same spot as it did earlier, and the other, clenched on my leg.

With my mouth still serving him, he whirled me around until my thighs became wrapped around his neck, proceeding to explore the delicate lines of my underwear. I wanted to have a reaction, any reaction, tremble, be shocked, say a word, but his hand was not moving, making sure that my mouth remained occupied.

Without a warning, I felt my dress being lifted over my waist while my panties were being pulled aside to make room for the dampness of his tongue.

The longing pierced through me as my hidden desires seemed to come to life, the way that only Brax can precisely bring them to reality as if reading my mind.

The moment caught me by surprise, making me stop for a short moment to figure out what exactly was happening to me. Though Brax didn’t let me fall behind for too long as he

pushed himself towards me, then resumed to thoroughly explore the full zone that begged for his attention.

I found myself in the strangest place as all my body reactions were amplified with his every thrust, working together as one while his devious tongue seemed to be an expert at draining me of all powers. That, until an unexploited spot, came to life.

‘Brax,’ I whined, feeling the tip of his finger checking on his *payment*.

‘Shush,’ he jabbed himself back, letting his finger advance just a little until he caught on to my discomfort.

I stiffened, unsure of what exactly he was doing, as his finger slightly moved at my entrance, pacing the lustful rhythm of his tongue.

‘It’s ok, Bea. I’m just playing,’ he continued kneading my swollen nub, bringing me to realize that something had unexpectedly changed.

He was *playing!*?

What had happened to the steaming dragon?

Did I tame him?

Highly unlikely, and yet, the *good girl* was gone and I was *Bea* to him.

I didn’t get to linger on these problems, before the stormy waves ruling my world had turned into a tornado, dragging that unbearable pleasure of him completely owning me.

I was lost, spamming without any power of control as I felt at the same time, the sweet liquid of his release slipping down my throat.

Floating around the room, I was uselessly trying to recover after the most intense experience I ever felt. It was a whole new level of everything, bonding me to him in an unexplained manner.

What surprised me most was that I knew he was sensing it too since he managed to suppress all anger, making room

just for the two of us.

Setting a small distance between us, I leaned my head to properly look at him, though couldn't figure out exactly what was reflected in his gaze, as in an instant, he smashed his lips on mine, feverally searching for the taste of himself inside my mouth.

A kiss I never felt before, unveiling the last unexplored corner of my heart, and altogether, unveiling himself in front of me for the first time, even if for only a moment of total weakness.

I saw desire... I saw passion, but most importantly I saw a glimpse of a feeling that even he didn't know he owned.

And then, the tiny spell broke.

Suddenly, he stopped, arms shaking as he was about to lose all control, while his lips formed into a thin line, bottling back inside everything he almost succeeded in letting go.

'You can sleep here tonight,' an offer that I was certain not many received, but as always a sword with a double edge when it came to him 'I need to return to the club anyway.'

Leaving the bed as it was burning him, he walked into his dressing room, then walked out in a completely new suit, as if a whole day had passed us by and nothing had happened.

The Brax I knew was back.

I wasn't entirely sure if I was regretting it or not. It sure beat the dragon version of him, but what about the passionately torching one?

'I'll be claiming my payment in two days.'

Yup...he was a hundred percent back!

## Chapter 18



I wasn't going to sleep in his bed, especially not without him present...and certainly not after the way he had treated me.

I just needed to be alone after a night like this, sleeping between my own sheets- not that any set of sheets really belonged to me. Nothing belonged to me anymore, not even *me*.

In reality, I was anticipating things to get a lot better for the rest of the night, but it seemed that the first evening spent away from Ferris's bed didn't feel as good as I was expecting. Maybe it was just out of habit, but I had an impression that *I* was under the *habit* of missing him.

My presence or the lack of it at the Academy was quickly missed, and I was getting reminded of that with every person I met.

'You scared the hell out of me,' Jenna hugged me as soon as I set foot into our part of the hallway. 'I was beginning to think that your benefactor did something to you. I was one step away from asking for a phone to call you.'

'What could he ever do?' I laughed 'He's not that bad,' ... I think...



‘What happened? You never missed classes!?’

‘I overslept... For an entire day...’

‘Who does that?’

‘Someone who drinks too much wine,’ I laughed.

‘How much? Like a wine cellar?’

‘I can’t really remember. Four, maybe five glasses.’

‘Oh, you’re right. That is a lot... for a toddler,’ Jenna laughed, after all, she was probably much more involved in the high school drinking games than I ever was.

‘Then I guess I am a toddler,’ I shrugged, heading to the first class, though not without her careful supervision since we were sharing a study bench.

I think that I got to answer more questions than those asked during the course, as Jenna’s interrogation seemed to go on and on for the hours to come since I had the misfortune of sharing more than half of the day’s courses with her. Though I didn’t let her know anything in particular, just small drops and hints that were very far away from forming the complete puzzle. What could I say anyway? That I’m seeing three men, my personal harem!? That I have sex in one way or the other with all of them, though surprisingly, I’m still a virgin!? Highly improbable.

Altering the truth was a lot better than sharing it in this case, so without too much thought put into it, things were going to stay that way, indefinitely. The only thing I did regret was the girl time shared with her. I enjoyed that the most, but now, due to my commitments, I was ignoring it completely, even though she asked me to hang out on numerous occasions.

Yet, she did understand my position since I implied between words that it did have something to do with recovering what’s left of my family.

The hours eventually passed and just before I was preparing for my last one, a decisive hand came from behind me and pulled me into a janitor’s room. For the first few seconds, I was convinced that this was one of Cole’s games,

though as the lights went on, I discovered it to be someone much more dislikeable than him - Ace. His athletic body was blocking the entrance as a despicable grin spread all over his hyena face.

‘What’s the meaning of this!?’ I screamed, still with the hopes it was one of Cole’s games, although inside I knew the truth.

‘I want some one-on-one time with you. Or would you prefer me to hire you directly from The Pleasure Room?’

‘You know the limitations of my job. Now, let me go.’ I tried to get him to move so I could leave, but there wasn’t a chance in hell that he would budge and allow me to pass.

‘I want the same treatment as Cole. I can see it from the way he looks at you. He wouldn’t give you a second of interest if he wasn’t fucking you.’ Ace took a step closer to me as his eyes were drowning in the most despicable lust I ever witnessed. ‘You can’t be an expensive bitch since I know he no longer has money.’ I could tell from the way he said it that he didn’t just desire me. He was doing this because he loathed Cole, his *friend*.

Taking a step further he pushed me against a shelf. All plans of escape ran through my mind, but the second I began searching for something to hit him with, the door opened, a hand appear through its crack, and dragged Ace out, back into the hallway.

It was the angriest devil of them all, as by the time I managed to get out, an avalanche of fists and knee blows to his ribs were falling over Ace. Not that he didn’t deserve them all, but the overzealous nature of my *king* was threatening to turn everything from a well-deserved correction to a full-blown slaughter.

I may have been the damsel in distress this time, but I couldn’t let him go to jail just for protecting my honor... especially after he was the first one to make sure that I didn’t have any left.

Jason and Nick screamed at him to end the madness, though nothing seemed to get him to stop. He was killing him! That was before I took all my available courage and jumped on top of him, climbing on his back in the ultimate attempt to get him to stop.

Blinded by anger, I don't even think he even realized who it was, that, until shaking his arms to escape from the unwanted assistance, he managed to thump me with his elbow, sending me straight on the floor.

I guess he did hit me in the end...

A roar of rage interrupted everything, as Cole left Ace almost unconscious on the floor, then began walking in my direction, catching my face to turn it his way.

My lip was broken on the inside, and I could feel the blood on the tip of my tongue, as his thumb sneaked inside my mouth, searching for the place the sweet liquid was springing from. Retrieving his finger, he placed it in his own mouth as if savoring the taste of my blood.

'Walk with me, Mouse,' he gave me his hand to help me stand up, then began walking towards the parking lot as if nothing had happened. But even though beating some student during a break was not an uncommon thing, smashing Ace's face, was.

'Where are we going?' I asked, hardly managing to keep up with him as he was heading towards his car.

'Mommy wants to meet you,' he spoke ironically, opening the driver's door so he could get inside the car.

'Tonight!?' I was panicking as a century heads-up would have sounded a lot better.

'Now,' he shrugged as if he couldn't give a fuck about what will happen. 'Did you manage to get your family into town yet?'

'No... Not yet.'

'Then you don't have any reason to say no to her. I told my father you are my girlfriend so he won't ask too many

questions about helping you, and now I got stuck with my mother on my back. I know her. She won't back down before she meets you.'

'In exactly how much trouble am I in?'

'Never brought a girl home, so I'm also treading on new ground. My father does anything I ask without too many questions, but when it comes to her, she acts like the prosecution.'

'What if she asks questions? I literally don't know anything about you.'

'Do you really think that at our age my mother would expect you to know anything except for what my dick looks like!?'

That part was surely covered for.

'What if she asks about me. About my not-so Elite origins...'

'Chill down, Mouse. You can tell her you come from the Pit. It's not like I'm going to marry you.'

Wow, that hurt, even if it wasn't supposed to. I was screwing material, but definitely not a wifey one.

'Now stand still and let me see what damage I have done,' he caught my chin in his palm, holding my head motionless so he could sneak his tongue between my lips, and kiss me so unhurriedly that I was beginning to ask myself if I was still kissing Cole.

'It's better now,' the certainty in his voice made me laugh.

'Did you heal my lip with your magic tongue,' I giggled, amused at what an exceptional opinion he had of himself.

'You know my tongue is magic. You couldn't resist it for more than five minutes.'

My face turned fiery red as he flashed me the tongue piercing again, reminding me of the precise way he used it.

It felt so similar and yet so different from what I had with Brax because when it came to my mobster, he had a certain way to turn from the Antarctic cold to the torching heat of a volcano, firing an unprecedented passion. And still, Cole was not to be left behind since the tormenting twist of his games was dissolving me into a tempestuous beat, appealing to a wild side of me, unexplored before.

‘Cat got your tongue?’ He grinned again, merging our lips and sneaking his tongue inside just to bite on my own. ‘Oh, I guess it did, Mouse,’ he stopped to dart all the shady thoughts sprawling his mind, straight into my eyes.

‘You said your mother was waiting,’ I felt I had to remind him since things were slowly slipping into a direction where I would become his slave again, and bringing him on the road to happiness in the Academy parking lot was not on my goals list.

‘Anxious to meet the parents, I see,’ he laughed, getting back to the real world, probably reminding himself that dear mother was waiting. ‘Wish granted,’ he turned to face the steering wheel, driving off in a rush for his home in the Hills.

At least, I didn’t have time to get chicken feet in the minutes spent between evading his plans and holding on to dear life because of his racing car driving.

In less than ten minutes I was to face the mother.

Lucky me!

Next thing I knew I was retracing my steps from two days ago, only this time I didn’t get to take the stairs, but stopped in the living room, escorted by Cole’s hand that seemed to be stuck on my lower back, testing from time to time the shape of my posterior.

‘Cole!’

‘Don’t be in such a rush. You’ll get to visit my room a little later,’ the devil smirked, knowing all too well that me calling his name wasn’t about some need for some one-on-one time, but because of him testing the limits every single second.

‘Your maid should be the one to visit that,’ I grumbled, remembering the ultimate chaos in his room, but leaving an aspect out of the equation.

‘This isn’t fucking Buckingham Palace,’ Cole moved his hand to find a strong grip on my arm, making me realize that I may have touched a soft spot since his family probably could no longer afford a maid.

I, of all people, messed up. I had become so accustomed to all the personnel I noticed in Jason’s and Ferris’s house that, in my mind, had assumed that it would be the same in Cole’s case.

Mistakes seemed to rule my world lately, as everything I did threaten to anger at least one of my *kings*.

‘You must be Bea,’ a warm voice cut all replies short, forcing me to turn my gaze towards the opposite corner of the room from where an elegant woman was entering, holding a tray with biscuits and tea.

‘Yeah, girlfriend of the year,’ Cole’s irony could be sensed from miles away, especially since the term *girlfriend* was more of an offense than of pride to him. He was, by far, not doing this from the goodness of his heart, just forced by the circumstances since he did promise to honor his side of the deal.

‘Yes, I am Bea,’ I nodded, slightly bowing my head.

‘I am Ms. Clyborne, but you can call me Debrah. My son is incredibly cranky. I’m starting to think he was born this way, but I guess you already noticed that’, she glimmered a smile, examining me from head to toe.

The dress I was wearing couldn’t betray my origins, but it was only a matter of minutes until she will find out who exactly was she dealing with. After all, this was why she called me here in the first place, to get information.

‘I’m starting to adapt,’ I answered, looking over my shoulder, directly at him.

Placing the tray on a coffee table in front of the couch she took a seat, gesturing us to follow.

‘Don’t you two get too comfy. I’m supposed to do something with Nick in a couple of hours,’ Cole grunted.

‘*Something...*’ his mother rolled her eyes in annoyance ‘He never tells me what he does all day. I didn’t even know you existed until two days ago.’ I could sense the disappointment in her tone, as no one seemed to be able to control Cole. ‘Bea is my guest for dinner, so if you have *something* to do with Nick, you better go now and return in one hour. Leave us alone for some girls’ time.’

As good as getting rid of Cole was, even for a few minutes, girl time with his mother was scaring the shit out of me.

‘Not exactly my plan, but I could work with that. *Chatting* isn’t my thing,’ he got up to leave even though I was desperately squeezing his hand, begging for some support in front of the new challenge that was undoubtedly waiting for me.

Was he really dumping me there, after less than one minute from meeting his mother!?

‘I’ll be back for dinner. Hopefully, dad will be home by then too so I won’t be in minority.’

‘Are you sure that you have to go?’ I asked the big bad shark, feeling like a fish thrown out of the water.

‘If you can handle my son, I’m sure that you can resist an afternoon with me,’ she chuckled. ‘You’re excused, Cole.’

‘Don’t remember asking,’ he growled, taking the path that brought us here.

‘My son is.... rude. I need to be honest. I’m pretty sure that you have noticed by now. He’s not the type to play pretend just because he found himself a pretty girlfriend.’

‘No, he is not,’ I shook my head then took a sip from the cup.

‘Not originally from the Hills, are you?’

Wow, straight to the point.

‘How could you tell? Am I holding the cup the wrong way?’ That was the only explanation that came to my mind since I had been less than ten minutes inside the room.

‘No. Nothing that oblivious. My husband told me about you coming from another town... And about the custody.’ I already knew that part, but admitting to eavesdropping on the *meet the parents evening* might not make such a good impression.

‘Is that ok with you? That your son dates someone from the Pit?’

‘I see no difference between humans, unfortunately, I can’t say the same about my other friends, but you don’t have to worry about that. Yet, I won’t be a hypocrite and tell you that I would ever want to go there. However, I do admire you for your strength of surviving in such a place.’

‘Thank you.’ There wasn’t any sign of insincerity in her words as the woman was starting to make me believe that Cole was not her child, since nothing from her genes seemed to have been passed along to him.

‘Now, let’s leave the discrepancy between the two social systems behind. Tell me about the Academy. What courses do you attend?’

And I did tell her, talking for more than an hour about who knows what teachers and seminars, that until the oven clock rang, letting her know that dinner was almost ready.

That was about the time Cole returned, followed shortly by his father who seemed as pleased as his mother at my presence there that night.

I guess they had given up a long time ago all thoughts of Cole ever acting like a normal young man, and I was just bringing back hope. Little did they know that I was just the main pawn in the most devious type of pact.

Though this wasn’t the only deal I needed to honor, and there was a certain someone that I still had to call. Excusing myself, I left for the bathroom, hitting the phone’s green button the second the door closed.



‘Hi,’ I spoke in a whispered voice.

‘Good evening, Bea. Is everything ok? Why are you whispering?’

I paused, unable to come out with a lie, yet at the same time, not wishing to do so.

‘It’s ok. I understand.’ *But did he really!?*

‘When are you coming back, Ferris?’

‘Two, three days top. The board of directors must have thought I died since I always talk from my laptop. Now they can’t get enough of me. I think I have had a note from every unsatisfied man in a suit that ever entered my company.’

‘That bad?’

‘It does really matter. I know someone that could quickly help me forget all about them.’

‘Do I also know that person?’ I was entering his game, to help break a little of his boredom.

‘You might. I’m talking about a green-eyed she-devil that happens to belong to me.’

‘Is that what you consider, that I belong to you?’ The thought scared and flattered me altogether.

‘Don’t you?’

‘I do belong to you... But-’

‘But I don’t want to hear the rest,’ he cut me off, unwilling to hear the whole part of the truth. In the end, this is what he did best, keeping only the fragments of the reality that suited him, ignoring all the rest. Though maybe this time he should hear it, when the complete phrase should have been *I belong to you, and to two other people.*

But it wasn’t the right time to insist on the subject since I could hear distant steps closing in on me from the hallway.

‘I should go...,’ I rushed him, not knowing who was coming my way, and not wanting it to look strange that I had to go to the bathroom to talk on the phone.

‘I’ll call you tomorrow. I may have a surprise for you,’ his voice hoarse as if brewing a wicked strategy.

‘I’ll be waiting,’ I answered, rushing to hang up the phone.

And I was right to do so, since in the next second the bathroom door opened, making room for Cole’s massive figure to enter the room.

‘What are you doing in here? Are you crazy!?’

‘You keep asking that question as if you didn’t already know the answer,’ he spoke, advancing to melt his body next to mine. ‘As you may have noticed, I’m keeping my end of the deal.’

‘Yes, I did notice. Thank you, now let’s go,’ I tried to walk by him, but the confined space was not leaving me with much room for such a maneuver.

‘You go when I say,’ he extended an arm so that I couldn’t move. ‘You know, I did enjoy it when you kissed me in the upstairs bathroom. It doesn’t happen too often lately. I don’t particularly like kissing, but with you, it’s different.’

I could feel something evil coming my way, though I was more than confused by the extremely tight timeframe he had on his hands.

‘I want you to do it again. Like you mean it.’

Shit, I hope he only meant the kissing part, and this won’t be a repeat of our last indiscreet bathroom encounter.

Definitely not getting the psychopath genes from his parents.

Rushing to get this over with, I crashed my lips on his, quickly sneaking my tongue to search for his own, though before I could *swipe him off his feet*, he bit my lower lip. ‘Like you mean it, Mouse,’ he barked since I was breaking his command. I was in a hurry to get out of there and that was obviously detracting from my *performance*.

Ok...like I meant it. I brought my bodyweight against him, fusing both our bodies while our mouths were searching

for everything that kiss should mean. Passion. Lust. Pure adrenaline.

‘It’s better now!’ I stated, stopping to look at him.

‘Did you cure my moody temper with your magic tongue?’ He cackled, securing me next to him with one of his arms. ‘Again!’

And there I went again, moving on his lips until his breath became hitched with lust ‘Lower.’

This time I was the one biting his tongue, hearing that impossible command.

‘Do you want to get me to fall for you?’ He raised the corner of his lip into a smile that I could bet partially hid the truth.

‘It would imply you had a soul or at least a conscience.’

‘You’re right on this one. I don’t. Lower!’

And lower I glided, lifting the black shirt that he had on, making my lips dance on the black drawings that covered his chest. Then lower, brushing over the muscles of his ribs...and then lower, straight over his navel, making him almost bow in front of me.

‘Shit, Mouse. We may not make it to dinner,’ he spoke, catching my ears between his palms as he slowly lifted me to face him. ‘We’ll keep the best for later. I know you’re wet by now.’ His hand fell to crash on my posterior, assuring himself that I had a heads up to leave the bathroom.

Such a charmer this one...

He returned to the dining table a couple of minutes after I did, at least trying to maintain some appearances.

Despite my personal guard, it was a nice evening, reminding me of the family warmth that I craved for so long. Not to mention the home-cooked meal that, even if it didn’t have the Michelin stars hanging above it, was as good as my mother used to make.

Except for the bathroom rendezvous, everything about the evening instilled me with hope. Hope that I had

unconditional support when it came to his parents, even if they were unknowingly offering Cole the weapons he needs to fully control me.

Of course, as there was a curse that hung over me, something had to go wrong at some point, and after I helped Debrah serve the desert, it was time to leave... Or not.

‘You can stay the night if you like,’ his mother offered to accommodate me through the night as I felt an imaginary palm brutally slapping my face.

‘Oh, thank you, but I should really head home. I have to wake up early in the morning to get to the Academy.’

‘I’d like if just for once my son would say that,’ his father cackled.

‘Then, maybe Bea will manage to wake me up on time tomorrow,’ Cole let his fork fall on the table, making a loud clinking sound.

‘I shouldn’t spend the night...’

‘We’re all grown-ups here. I know how you are at this age. No one believes you would abstain until marriage. No one would even believe you if you two would say that you went further than the second date to-’

‘Debrah...,’ Mr. Clyborne interrupted his spouse. ‘You’ll have to excuse my wife, Bea. Sometimes she can’t help herself from speaking exactly what she is thinking. And the wine helps!’ The man pointed towards her empty glass, which strongly reminded me of my own night between the grape juice.

‘I’ll make up your bed. My son certainly doesn’t know how to do it.’

‘The bed I sleep in is just fine,’ Cole grunted.

‘See what I was saying. I’ll take this to the kitchen then change the sheets.’

‘The sheets are changed,’ Cole grumbled taking my hand and leading me towards his bedroom.

‘I should help her with the dishes,’ I whispered.

‘She’ll handle them this time.’

‘Cole...’

‘Don’t make a fuss about it. She sees you like a stray puppy. That’s why she asked you to stay the night. So you don’t go back to the Pit, not because you are my *girlfriend*.’

‘At least she has a heart,’ not that I ever want anyone’s pity, but people who truly care are so rare, and if this was her chance to show this, then so be it.

Still, there was a question that was troubling me ‘And you? How do you see me?’

Amused, and honest at the same time, he guided me to his room, offering me an answer I suspected long ago ‘Through the eyes of the big bad wolf.’

## Chapter 19



Strange enough, this time Cole's room was much more ordered than the last time I was here.

'Wow, what made you clean up the place?' 'I did it for you, *my love*,' his mocking tone assured me of exactly the opposite, though it was a little strange that he cleaned his room.

'Always a gentleman,' I flinched my nostrils, proving to Cole that the tone doesn't only belong to him.

'I'm happy that you noticed. Now this gentleman wants you to kiss him again. You know the rule-'

'Yeah, like I mean it... Why are you even doing this? I'm not even sure that you enjoy it.'

'You have no idea how much I *do* enjoy it. I love how your eyes flicker in repulsion, not because you hate the feeling of searching my mouth, but because you hate to be told what to do.'

It was a certainty, he was the most devious type of demon, always coming up with a new way of torturing me.

‘Then, let me humor you,’ I took a step closer to him, and once again merged on his lips. Like I meant it. Like he wanted me to. Like my body was about to catch fire.

‘A week ago, I never thought that someone would ever share my bed.’

I get that a lot lately, but I couldn’t really go into that conversation.

‘Maybe I should leave then.’

‘Leave now? After you just cost me my best friend?’

‘You call him your friend!? I didn’t ask you to defend me.’

‘You didn’t have to. I know him, he wouldn’t have stopped until he got what he wanted.’

‘Kinda like someone else I know.’

His palm fell heavily on my posterior that I couldn’t hold in a small scream.

‘Your mouth always gets you in trouble,’ he let his hand glide on the spot he hit, clasp on it so tightly that the pain began echoing through all my body.

‘I’ll scream!’

‘Do it. Looking forward for a reason to gag you,’ I could tell how wicked fantasies were dancing in his mind as he was pushing me towards the bed.

His hands drove down my back to unzip my dress, though a detail caught his attention, making him almost stop before he began.

‘This one is expensive. Who are you opening your legs for to receive a dress like this?’

‘You don’t have a right to ask that question as long as I am standing here because of a deal.’

‘Really. Is that the only reason you’re standing here?’ His palm glided on the small of my back as his eyes began burning with a madness I have never seen before.

‘Y...yes,’ I mumbled, trying to push him away, but with no success... And maybe even the words I was speaking were not completely honest.

‘Are you still afraid of me, Mouse?’ His breath so thick with a passion that had my body vibrate in temptation.

‘I never was.’ This time, I was lying. I didn’t want him to smell my *fear* because he thrived on *fear*, although, now I not only fear the wicked ways of his mind, I also feared my own when around him, hating myself for enjoying even a second spent together.

‘Don’t lie. I can tell when you’re lying. I hate it when you’re lying!’ he grunted. ‘You see, when it comes to you, I’m honest. That is a feature you could learn to appreciate about me.’

If I was to put cards up on a table. he never gave me a reason to doubt that, even if in the beginning I suspected him of not going through with his part of the deal. Yes, I knew he has the manners to help me, but I wasn’t sure if he had the heart.

Still, he was entrapping me in his illusion, though not tightly enough to make me want to stray from my path ‘I’m not opening my legs to anyone.’

‘You will open them for me.’ Without wasting another moment, he drove his palms beneath my knees and lifted me to his waist.

‘What are you doing?’

‘Spending time with my *girlfriend*,’ the term was so bizarre coming from his mouth that it almost made me laugh. ‘Lights off,’ the light sensor followed his command, leaving us in complete darkness, as my legs were forced to brace themselves over his waist, feeling my body leaning to reach the mattress.

Strangely enough, his mouth was searching for mine through the darkness in slow, unhurried kisses as his body came to rest on top of mine.



He was enjoying this in a very different way than he did the other times, and with every single move I could feel control slipping away from him.

My dress rolled completely off my body as his hands yearned to explore my breasts, roaring with all sorts of guilty pleasures as I also began searching for his lips.

‘For just how long are you going to boil me?’ He asked as he began moving against me with primal desire, igniting his groin was grinding against my own needy flesh, still wearing his jeans and I, my panties.

‘You were dry-humping people in kindergarten. What was so wrong with you!?’ I laughed, biting onto his finger. ‘I’m sure that you can pick someone from the *line* that always forms behind you to solve your *problem*.’

‘My *problem* needs special treatment.’ I felt his jeans slide off as his kisses intensified their pulse and that insane friction on my panties was damping the material.

‘Cole, I didn’t say yes,’ I whined as I felt him creating an undeniable delirium, moving his lips to search for mine as if his soul, not just his body, craved me.

‘Ok...’

Ok!? Nothing could be *ok* when he says ok... No... This time, he was ignoring me completely.

In one move, the lower part of my lingerie was snatched away, leaving his hand to play on that so easily aroused part of me.

‘I *need* you tonight,’ whispered words that revealed a juncture of letters so uncommon for him to say. He *needing*, as opposed to him wanting something or someone.

‘Cole, slow down,’ I could feel him instinctively jab himself against me to the point I was beginning to think that with his next thrust he will be inside my body.

‘God, you feel so good, Mouse.’ Should I repeat his statement? Because our chemistry was sky heightening, lifting

me from over the bed and raising me so high that I was becoming certain that had a cosmic connection with him.

A sudden move made me aware that he had just become completely naked, and although my mid-waist craved to learn the new sensations he may bring, -reality came kicking in. ‘Cole, what are you doing!?’ I was startled, pushing his weight away from me, as I was trying to escape to the other side of the bed.

‘Obviously a mistake,’ he muttered, annoyed that I rejected him in this way, especially since he let the word *need* slip between his thoughts and straight to my ears. ‘Go to sleep,’ he ordered, allowing me to remain in my place then turning his back on me, as my eyes filled with tears.

I wish I was the one to decide how I spend my life. The one who gets to choose who she kisses...who she shares a bed with, the one who says *no* and the one who says *don't stop*. The one who makes her own mistakes. And if it would come to mistakes, Cole... would occupy one of the top spots on the list of those.

I fell asleep, although I felt him tossing and turning all night long, just as if the bed didn't belong to him. Or maybe it was from the company, who knows?

The certainty is that I did manage to infuriate the last of my *kings* as if I had a special gift of doing just so.

In a way, I felt guilty. I should feel guilty if I have a drop of normality left, not because I angered them, but because the time spent alone with the guys was starting to bring me a strange excitement. Now guilt was replacing whatever form of disgust I had felt. Though little did I know that my missteps will gradually bring me back to the exact path I should have taken in the first place.

I only opened my eyes in the morning, to stare into that perfectly carved face of his, waiting to admire the blue cobalt of his eyes as they opened wide. And they did... ‘Stop staring at me. You don't want me fucking you, but you pull some psycho shit on me to watch me sleep. And they say I am the one who should get his head checked.’

Wow, someone woke up on the wrong side of the bed today.

‘Get dressed, we wouldn’t want Miss Goodie Two-Shoes to be late on my account,’ he growled, walking to the bathroom from where he came out dressed for the Academy. And so was I, since in the minutes he spent in there, I had time to get fully ready for courses, although courses weren’t exactly what I had in mind for the day. I felt off, confused, maybe beaten, and the final encounter of the night was slaying me of all powers. I was going to see my family, and I was going to end my part of the deal with Brax at the same time. Though at what cost? Not only the price of my body but with the price of my will. I wasn’t the one who would get to choose, and who knows, maybe with this gesture, my king of the underworld was stopping me from exactly choosing *him*.

It wasn’t long before both me and Cole were in his car, heading to the Academy, racing through the streets as he was competing in the NASCAR races.

‘Please slow down.’

‘You already used the *request of the week* last night. I get to do whatever the fuck I please now.’

Ouch... Someone was pissed off.

‘To get to do whatever you want to would imply that we would both make it there alive.’

‘We will, don’t worry. I won’t let you get away that easy. I’m far from being through with you.’

I took his words exactly as they sounded. A threat! One that I was sure he will make good on.

‘Come,’ he barked as soon as we got out of the car and I was heading towards the back entrance to reach my side of the hallway.

‘Where!?’ I spoke in total confusion seeing him catch the upper part of my arm and, almost dragging me to the front entrance.

What on earth was it going on?

I shortly received the answer to that question as before I could realize what was truly happening, I was walking beside him, right to the main end of the hallway.

‘Why did you bring her here?’ I could hear the confusion in Nick’s voice as we walked past him, as he spoke out a question that I was just about to ask myself.

‘Shut the fuck up, Nick,’ the *king* ignored him, guiding me a few feet away from the small group of students Nick was a part of, while I could see all heads shifting to look straight at me.

‘I have a present for you, Mouse,’ he whispered as he turned me to face him, making me aware of all the wicked thoughts that were deviously glittering in his eyes.

His hands locked on my waist so tightly that I felt I was losing all drops of oxygen, forcing my eyes to raise and look at him, acknowledging his next gesture.

But it couldn’t be possible!

Why would he ever do *that*!?

In slow-motion, his head tilted, unhurriedly advancing towards me, not because he wasn’t in a habit to rush things, but because he wanted me to live through every last second of it. To fear every second of it! He was inches away from my face, melting every beating cell with his intoxicating cologne. And then it happened!

He brought his mouth to meet mine, publicly claiming me as his. Sure, it wasn’t the first time that we kissed, but this... this was a whole new beginning, not necessarily for us, but for me.

‘Say hi to the fans, Queen B,’ he whispered in my mouth, installing me on the throne next to him.

The kiss was exactly the coronation, offering me with one single touch of the lips supreme power over all Echo City Academy.

A power I didn’t want.

A power that *he* knew I didn’t want!

It was far from being a present. It was a punishment and a curse, taking me out of my corner of anonymity I loved so much and throwing me straight into the strongest spotlight.

He was willingly throwing me to the wolves, watching amused, to see if I was to be ripped in pieces, or I will come out leading the pack. Not that he would care, either way, he would have drained me of whatever he was after by that time anyway, then he will return to watch as an outsider at his own game.

‘This isn’t a present, and you know it!’

‘Do I? Maybe I was just letting my feelings for you get the better of me,’ he cackled as if he just made the best joke possible.

I didn’t answer, just left, knowing exactly what he just brought upon me. I was his *Cinderella*, from rags to riches with that very kiss, and now I had to stay away from all the witches who were to envy me. But the trick was, I also ruled every single one of them now.

I couldn’t handle the day at school, at least not with everything going on lately, so I left for home right before the first class began.

My clothes hit the floor the second I entered my apartment, heading straight to my walk-in shower. Funny... walk-in shower when my old apartment was a walk-in bathroom of its own since I could bathe wherever I wanted with my *tub* being a small metal basin that I used to fill from out of a barrel.

How many things have moved on in such a short time, and yet, how happy I would be to still have the life I lived two years ago, alongside my family. Though I mustn’t think that way, especially now when everything is set to change again, and by tomorrow, I have all chances to stand with them right here, in my living room.

My fingers were running through the dresses, searching for something to wear tonight, although I was thinking about wearing my old clothes since going to Brax dressed with something Ferris has bought me just didn’t seem right.

Before I got to decide on the outfit, I could hear my phone ringing, letting me know from the ringtone that it was Ferris.

‘I hope I’m not interrupting your classes,’ as thoughtful as ever, he was first checking with me.

‘No, I actually came home earlier today.’

‘Is everything ok?’

‘Yes, I’m just nervous. I guess, tomorrow my family may come to town.’

‘That’s great news.’

‘Are you returning tonight...I don’t think I can come to visit you if you do... I’m sorry.’

‘It’s ok. I have other plans for tonight anyway.’ Even though his tone wasn’t implying anything, the thought unsettled me, building an abyss to form in the bottom of my stomach, spreading to swallow me whole.

But I couldn’t react in any manner. I had no right to, especially since I was the one setting out the lines. I had other *arrangements*, so why couldn’t he?

Maybe the shock hit me so strongly since I considered him out of all three to be the most unlikely to find another companion, or maybe it was because for him I was brewing some kind of sentiments... And then again, there could always be the chance that I am wrong, and the *plans* were involving something completely different.

Though I couldn’t ask. I had no right to, and asking could only increase his own powers over me.

‘I understand,’ was the only answer I could provide, even if, in reality, I didn’t understand a thing.

‘We’ll make plans for the next days, share you with your family, maybe squeeze me in sometime after midnight,’ I could feel it from his tone that his plans were referring to a certain something that he left unfinished due to my *inebriated* condition.

‘Maybe I’ll squeeze you in for an entire day. If you would like to meet my brother and sister, that is if you-’

‘That sounds amazing. Hold on, there’s someone on the other line.’

‘Ok...’

‘On second thoughts, I’ll call you in a half an hour. You aren’t leaving anywhere are you?’

‘No, at least not for a few hours.’

‘Just make sure to pick up.’

‘I will,’ I giggled sensing a masked excitement in his voice.

I think I must have dozed off, cuddled on the couch waiting for him to call me since the phone seemed to have rung straight after I had closed my eyes, although the clock on the wall was showing me a different hour.

‘Sorry I was late. I didn’t want to call you from the car so I waited to reach my hotel room.’

‘It’s ok. I fell asleep on the couch anyway.’

‘Did I bore you to death?’

‘Not a chance.’

‘Then the opposite?’ He asked in a throaty tone, that was instantly sending me into a certain zone, making my back slightly arch on the couch and my ears pay extra attention.

I shall call it *the Ferris effect!*

‘Yes, the opposite. You never bore me. Maybe put me to sleep,’ a laugh escaped my lips, ‘But never bore me.’

‘So I get that you miss me?’

‘Yes,’ I groused, realizing exactly how much I wanted his arms to replace the couch, and maybe making sure that his *plans* for the night won’t lead to anyone else occupying my place in his bed.

‘I want to see how you miss me.’

‘I’ll draw you a sketch,’ I made fun of him because unless he had some satellite spying on me, it was impossible to see me.

‘I have a better way.’ As he finished his words, there was a knock on the door. ‘Answer it.’

And I did, coming face to face with a delivery man ‘Sign here, please.’

Next thing I knew, a small black box was in my hands, waiting for me to open it.

‘Go on,’ Ferris confirmed.

I opened the package, revealing a state-of-the-art phone.

‘Did you get it?’

‘Yes, but I already have a phone.’

‘No offense, but that wasn’t a phone. Maybe they’ll take it as an artifact in a museum.’

‘Really funny...’

‘I always am. And as for the very *fun* part, I want you to take your sim card out of this phone and put it into the new one. You don’t have to do anything else but hit call. I made sure every setup was already completed, including putting in my number, so I’ll be waiting for you.’

‘Right away,’ and I hung up, replacing the cards, just as he told me to, then hit the call button again.

‘That was quick,’ I could feel his smile from the other end. ‘Now I really want to see how much you missed me.’

‘I’m not too good with these kinds of words.’ in my world all feelings must be kept hidden, therefore confessing them to any other living being seemed impossible.

‘No words. Show me. Switch to camera.’

What was up with him?

‘Done,’ I put my tongue out as his image appeared on the screen.

‘You look so pretty today.’



‘I just woke up, I’m *pretty* sure that you’re just being polite right now.’

‘No, I just love the way you look in the morning.’

‘Please, sell one of my dresses and get yourself a pair of glasses,’ I threw him a smile, as I was raising on my elbows to get up from the couch.

‘Don’t get up. Stay there. The way the light hits your body is amazing.’

‘Awww, do you want to take a picture of me? Let me fix my hair.’ I was in a funny mood, although I was starting to believe that he wasn’t laughing.

‘What are you wearing?’

‘A bathrobe.’ I still hadn’t managed to find myself an outfit so I remained dressed in what I was in when I got out of the bathroom.

‘Show it to me.’

‘You want to see my fluffy robe!?! Ok...’

I lifted the phone so he could see me from above.

‘I’m pretty sure that I have a sleeping mask with a fluffy Koala bear. You must know it since I guess you bought it. Do you want to put that on?’ I was still amusing myself, when, in fact, things were as serious as they get.

‘No, Bea. I want you to open the robe.’

His words made me glance straight at the screen, trembling at the way his eyes were gleaming with that gaze I noticed before I left, only this time it was spiced with uncontrollable lust.

‘I... I’m not wearing a bra.’

‘I was counting on that.’

‘Ferris..’

‘Don’t make me use my prerogatives.’ I couldn’t if he was just having fun or he would make sure I followed his plan.

I was hoping for the first option, but then again, a stubborn heart can blind you sometimes. ‘Do it, Bea.’

I gulped, swallowing the knot in my throat, then lowered my hand to unfasten the string that held the robe together, but as if it was playing in my favor, the piece of material wouldn’t fall open and just stuck to me.

‘Push it aside,’ the instructions kept coming, just as I thought I may have a small chance to escape. Yet there was none, and the next gesture I made, left the plush material falling away on the sides, revealing my breasts. ‘You make me want to be there so badly to touch you.’ His thick tone brought a chill racing through my entire body, only stopping right at the last place where my flesh was still covered.

‘Then maybe I should cover myself back up so I don’t raise your appetite,’ I brought my hand to pull my robe back together, but he stopped me.

‘No. Drag your hand lower.’

This was no good, and I knew it.

‘You know where.’

‘Are you kidding me!?’

His head shook as a *no*, making me perfectly understand where he was going to.

‘Don’t make me do this.’

‘You’ll thank me later.’

‘No, I won’t. I’ll probably never speak to you later.’

‘I have faith in myself. I have my ways. Now, ....go on...’

Seeing there was no room for changing his mind, my hand fell lower, reaching the hems of my panties, then slowly sliding beneath them.

Maybe I could fool him.

‘No. Take them off.’

Shit!

‘I can’t let you see this.’

‘Oh, you will let me! Lower the phone, and take them off.’

‘You are sick.’ I whimpered, with half of my mouth telling the truth.

‘You have no idea. I’ll show you someday,’ he grinned. ‘Now, do as I say. On second thoughts, put the phone on the couch pillow... So I won’t stress you to hold it.’

‘So thoughtful of you,’ I growled, yet following his instructions since there wasn’t much else I could do.

‘I just want to enjoy the show.’

Jesus, he was no different from Brax in these moments!

Acknowledging that there is no way out of this, my fingers began moving against my folds, searching for even the smallest sign of dampness, but there was none, it would appear to be completely gone.

I tried again, and again until the useless movement was beginning to irritate my nerves, knowing that nothing will happen. ‘Ferris, I can’t. You know I can’t...’

‘Close your eyes, Bea. You are so fucking hot right now.’

‘I closed them.’

He instantly felt the annoyance in my voice ‘Stop pouting and listen to me. Imagine that your fingers are my own. That I am the one touching you,’ he paused, leaving me time to get into the *zone*. I wasn’t sure it was going to work, but I needed to try to end this *horrible ordeal*.

‘Now, move them as you would like me to move. Like you would lead my hand.’

My fingers soon started skimming my skin, searching for the zones that brought me the greatest pleasures and working on them, slow at first, then faster, hoping to at least get the dampness I needed.

‘I’ll tell you where I would be... A little higher,’ he was guiding me to a different zone from where I was grinding my fingers, right above my nub. ‘A little faster.’

It may have been impossible, but somehow he seemed to know my body better than I did, sending me to a spot that instantly made my feet buckle into the couch beneath me.

‘Perfect,’ the excitement in his voice seemed to be reflecting within me since every one of his words seemed to be sending me closer and closer to ecstasy. ‘I could tell you one or two tricks, but I will keep these to myself for now. To make you melt next to me. Would you like that?’

I didn’t answer, mostly because I was preoccupied with my current assignment.

‘I asked if you would like that?’

Why do men always think they should receive answers when they deflect from answering women so many times.?

‘Yes... I would.’ Tell the truth and nothing but the truth, as my own voice cracking under his guidance was pushing me to the verge of falling apart.

My rhythm was sublime, finding the perfect balance to shatter my inhibitions and discovering a way to be set free ‘It’s my hand, Bea.’ The thought left me wanting to dream of him being next to me, finding my beautiful rapture, and at the same time, allowing him to strengthen one of those invisible strings that were wrapping around me to tie me to him.

‘I’m starting to think that the phone was the best gift I could ever get you. Pretty tough to outshine this one. But I’ll try.’

My moment of joy was quickly noticed as it seemed he was offering me my moment of shame.

‘I never want to speak to you again.’

‘You say that now, but wait till I get my hands on you.’

‘Goodbye, Ferris,’ and I hung up to the sounds of his laughter, letting the dark part of his temper still have tiny sparkles of that special afterglow residing within me.

## *Chapter 20*



My limbs were trembling long after I hung up the phone, while my body was unable to move or even stand. I was angry with Ferris, and I was even angrier with myself. I was beginning to feel how I was intentionally blinding myself when it came to him, yet still unable to prevent it. There wasn't much I could do anyway, just shut my eyes tightly and wait for my journey to be over, and all my efforts to finally be repaid.

I think it was around seven in the evening when I woke up again, shifting my eyes directly on the window only to notice it was dark outside.

In reality, my body was refusing to move from the spot as a way of protesting against me when the final hour came.

Regrouping my strength, I walked to the dressing room, trying to finally decide on what to wear. There was still no sign from Brax. He was supposed to text me the hour or at least the place to meet him, but nothing has lit my phone screen since I talked to Ferris until now.

Maybe he got caught up with business and just forgot, or he just needs to postpone the date, although deep down, I was

hoping he wouldn't do that since I desperately wanted to see my family.

Without any idea where I was going, or even if I was going to meet Brax tonight, I slipped into a red satin nightdress and put on its matching robe.

There was a 90% chance that I'll wear one of the dresses I had on during my last encounters with Brax- either the one I purchased, or the one that he bought for me, but I was to reach a decision about that when I have a sign from my kingpin.

I decided to wait a little longer. There wasn't much else I could do anyway, so for the first time in a long time, I turned on the tv.

*'I am Legacy Abbot, and I give you the Echo city evening news,' the anchorman spoke as it seemed I had turned on just in time to catch up with the latest events. 'This time, we'll start with the most important news of the evening, which we'll continue debating with a few special guests later tonight.'*

*An artisanal bomb was detonated an hour ago in the Hills, destroying the front lawn and a few first-floor rooms of the house owned by Mr. Delarose.*

*We are still uncertain if it was a threat or just a failed assassination attempt, but this terrorist act won't pass by without any consequences. Mr. Delarose is the main pawn in the City Board, some even considering that the mayor reports directly to him.*

*This act is speculated to be a war declaration from the so-called Annelids-'*

A knock on the door interrupted me from watching the complete news, but, unfortunately for *all* further events, I got the essentials.

One of Brax's men, I presumed and I wasn't even dressed. I'll just tell them to wait since his boss can't even find three free seconds to send a damn text.

Or at least that's what I thought, which led me to be unable to hide my surprise the very second the door opened 'Brax!?'

Yes, Brax himself came to *visit* me at this time, although if it wasn't for the signature way he held his cigars and those to-die-for absinthe eyes, I could barely recognize him.

He was different, not in a bad way different, just like a mesmerizing dream when I believed that he couldn't get more good-looking than he already was.

There was no suit this time. Just a black t-shirt and black jeans and jacket, leaving me to see him, for a split second, like a normal man. And he was sublime. A male model or perhaps a tv star at my doorstep. Though I knew better, and the normality he was displaying was actually scaring me to death.

'Were you expecting anyone else?' He asked, utterly annoyed that I didn't invite him in the second I opened the door. I guess his new looks have deprived me of my manners.

'No... I wasn't expecting anyone. Not even you. Maybe I was expecting your car, or a phone, but certainly not you.'

'So are you going to keep me at your doorway since I don't have a written invitation?'

'No, of course not. come in.' I took a few steps backward to make room for him to enter as I couldn't take my eyes off him. Such a huge difference!

'You're staring.'

'Well, I have reasons. You look different.'

'Yeah... I've been away on business and will be leaving again soon.'

'Soon... I thought...'

'Soon as in a few hours. Don't tell me you thought I would stay the night and cuddle with you.'

I wasn't sure what was wrong with him this evening, but his clothes weren't the only thing that had changed.

'I don't need your pity, Brax. I need your help.'

'And I need a drink. Do you have any in the house?'

‘Wine,’ I pointed towards a small display shelf where a dozen properly aged bottles of wine were waiting. Thought after my latest experience, it will be a while before I put my lips on a glass of that liquor again.

‘Wine is for the ladies. Anything else?’

There was a bar, but I never had the curiosity to open it. I guess now was the right time to do so. I walked to the wooden handcrafted sculpted furniture and pulled open the door that hid the drinks from sight. Gin, rum, vodka, champagne, and a vast selection of pretty much everything, though not whiskey, his favorite drink.

‘Vodka?’ I asked unsure of what to bring him.

‘That will do. Search for the largest glass you have, and fill it. We need to talk business first.’

He paused as if he had something on his mind. ‘And fetch a glass for yourself.’

‘I don’t want to drink.’

‘Did my request sound like a question!?’

The arrogant bastard thinks the world should bow at his feet.

‘No. It didn’t.’ I poured two drinks in different size glasses and then handed him the largest one as he *requested*.

‘Quite a place you got *for yourself*. Did you make a *deal* for it?’ I knew where he was going with this, and it was fine by me. It was the truth anyway. ‘Who’s the lucky man?’ Jealousy or envy. Couldn’t quite tell.

‘I can’t give you his name. It wouldn’t be fair.’

‘*Fair*...right.’ He took the last drag out of his cigarette ‘I don’t give a fuck, as long as he’s not screwing you.’

‘He’s not.’

‘Well, in a couple of hours you’ll be free to do whatever you please.’



‘Yes...*free*,’ the word seemed so bizarre now since I will probably never be free again. My nights will belong to Ferris while some broken pieces of me will belong to all of them. They all took a part of me, turning me into a pretty little ceramic decoration that wears the signs of being dropped on the floor.

What I found more than strange was that a man like Brax didn’t try to find out any more about whose house this was, especially since I know information meant power in his world. Information is everything, no matter how big or small. Though, this time, it was like he was preventing himself from caring. Taking all precautions to assure himself that he knew nothing more about me than he needed to.

‘What happened to your hand?’ I asked, looking at a white cloth wrapped up over a bleeding wound that looked like it extended to all of his knuckles.

‘Rough day at work... The fucking riots are doing my head in.’

‘I’ve heard about them. News about a bomb attempt was on tv earlier.’

‘Yeah, well soon that’s all it’s going to be on tv. You know, you’re bringing your family into a burning town.’

‘I’m taking them out from a burning town.’

‘You’re right. It’s probably the whole fucking world that is about to catch fire.’ For the first time, I saw fear and concern in the eyes of the man that showed none before. Things were serious. A matter of life and death, and I could feel him losing ground since this is a war that won’t leave him unaffected. ‘So, when are your men going to get them out?’

‘Tonight,’ he took a step in my direction, placing his empty vodka glass on the sofa’s arm.

‘I was expecting to see them...before...’

‘Before I get to have you? Is that it? You don’t trust me, is that it?’

‘I...I do. I just want to know they’re safe.’

‘I’ll make sure they’re safe no matter what. That’s a promise I make to you.’ With one more step, he closed in the distance between us, making my heart pump so loudly with the sound of my own blood racing through my veins that I was beginning to think he could hear it while trying to evade my chest.

‘I need this now,’ he pushed the robe off of one of my shoulders letting it slowly slip to one side, exposing my collarbone. ‘I may not return to claim my prize’

‘You’re going with them?’ I was more startled than surprised that he was going to join the mission. In a way it made me feel a hundred times safer for them, but on the other hand, it gave me more reasons to be worried. More people to be worried about!

‘If you want something done right, you’d better do it yourself. And this has to be done right!’

‘So, I guess we won’t be seeing each other after this.’

‘You will come searching for me.’ Ugh, that arrogant attitude again.

‘Brax... I won’t, and you know it.’

‘Then you’re smart,’ he spoke pushing the other part of the robe off my shoulder.

‘Untie it,’ he meant the cord that still held the clothing together, and since his wish was my command, the next second the material was a red puddle at my feet.

It felt surreal as his lips weren’t searching for mine yet, but instead, the green color of his eyes was analyzing each feature of my face. Almost as if he was drawing a mental picture, immortalizing this moment. Maybe that’s what he does with each conquest he crosses off his list, thoroughly scans them so that he can keep them all stored up in a place where no one else but him can reach.

‘Where is the bedroom?’ He asked in a heavy voice, looking behind me like he was trying to guess the right door.

‘Here,’ I turned to walk in front of him, leading him to a corridor, and then towards the bedroom. ‘It will be ok. Won’t it? Everyone will be ok. Right?’ The worry that was consuming me from within forced me to ask.

‘They will be here as I promised.’

‘I was asking about everyone, Brax,’ I spoke, stopping in front of the bed and trying to lead my eyes to find answers while gazing within his.

‘You will probably hate me by the time I walk out this door. So *everyone* won’t be of your concern. And that’s ok... You hating me. It’s not love I am searching for.’

‘Then what are you searching for?’

‘Satisfaction. Physical pleasure.’

‘You can find that every day of the week with much less trouble. Maybe you should search for the truth. Because I’m beginning to think that you’re lying to yourself.’

‘Maybe *you* should search for the truth, because I’m beginning to think it is you who is lying to yourself, Bea.’

Was I? Probably fooling myself so I can cope with what needed to be done, creating a false illusion of what things could be, just so that I won’t see them for what they really were.

‘You’re right. Maybe I am,’ the bitterness in my voice didn’t remain unnoticed, still, his hand raised to find my neckline, tracing a fine path from under my ear to the strap of my nightdress.

I think I stopped breathing, prisoner to this feeling, so different from anything I ever experienced before.

His lips soon followed in the path of his hand while his tongue pressed against every inch of my skin impossibly slow. In a way, I wished things would have stayed that way, wasting all the time on the clock before he got to leave. But that was just the mad part of me, the masochist side that was determined to torture my soul to its greatest extent.

A gasp could not be contained as I felt his hand clutch impossibly tightly on one of my breasts, tugging the dress aside to search for the primordial flesh-on-flesh sensation. Without even having a second to think about it, my body seemed to follow some self-defense mechanism and tried to set even the slightest distance between us, but with his palm still grasping on the location, I only managed to force him to tighten the grip, hurting myself.

‘Bea... All sorts of shits have been happening to me today, so I will need you to behave so things won’t get out of control. Ok?’

‘Ok,’ I nodded out of fear, as the pressure he held on my breast reduced, and his thumb began slowly moving, skimming my hardened tip.

‘Good,’ his lips descended to attend the round shape he just mistreated, lustfully moving his mouth on its entire surface and making sure he was to nibble on my tip until that place between my thighs tighten as if about to explode, getting my legs to press together in the most useless attempt to subdue the craving that had begun controlling me.

And the dress slipped lower, abandoning my body and cradling at my feet as his hands and lips were so focused on my chest that I felt I was going to melt alongside it. Then his mouth slid lower, reaching for the side of my ribcage, gliding as it brought upon me an unthinkable sensation of arousing darts, tingling, and at the same time leaving a trail of goosebumps on my skin. How could I remain still when my body wasn’t obeying me any longer?

‘What did I just say?’ His grip so hard on my waist that will certainly leave signs in the morning, as he had crushed me to him, digging his teeth to graze my flesh while a few of his fingers strode over the material of my panties to move in their desire to bring me uncomposted pleasure.

I replaced any answer with a tremble as a shiver ran across my body, making me almost cry out in both anger and helplessness. But what ate me alive was that I wasn’t helpless when it came to Brax, I was helpless when it came to *me*,

unable to control my interior reactions. Unable to hate him! Yet somehow totally able to allow his lips to ignite the very last cell of my body.

Then he decided to break me, with magical incantations made by the twists of his tongue as he was writing them along my skin, descending directly to my navel, while at the same time gliding his hand somewhere around the hems of my panties.

I low-key feared what was about to happen since I knew from Ferris that his tongue was going to press against my belly button, creating that lightning bolt again to split me in half and reach directly towards my very core. What I didn't know was that at the same time his fingers would push my panties aside, sneaking between my folds and grinding over that tiny part of me that would make me instantly bow in front of him. And that I did, slayed of my powers, I let my palms fall on his shoulders for support, taken by surprise from the quake he was raised within me.

I was expecting him to be angry, infuriated by my lack of control, but in response, he raised his eyes to glance at the tremor my own two orbs reflected. 'It's ok, Bea. It's ok....,' he let out a devious grin turn his fleshy lips to a thin line, letting his fingers play between my damp flesh as his tongue was going up again to taste the curves of my breasts again.

Between the nibbling of my nipples and that intensifying sensation in my throbbing core, I found myself being lifted on his waist, then slowly put down on the bed, as my beast came on top of me, full muscle tensed, arranging himself in the tight grip of my thighs.

Hauling the shirt over his head, he threw it to the floor, returning to my needs even before he got a chance to take his next breath.

'I forgot about these,' he meant my panties, but the problem was quickly solved as he raised my legs over his hips to tug the unwanted material over my ankles, and at the same time to unbuckle his belt.

The sound of the metal coming undone brought me to my senses, as I was becoming all too aware of what was to happen next.

‘Did you bring.... You know....,’ I was such an idiot that I was too embarrassed to even ask.

‘A rubber?’

Brax and his mouth... Always straight to the point while the conversation seemed awkward to me. ‘I don’t want to use one with you,’ he looked at me as I was the forbidden fruit and he was about to enter Eden’s garden. ‘But I do use one with everyone else, so you don’t need to worry. When is the last time you had your-’

I cut him off again ‘I’m on some pills. My doctor prescribed them to me to fix some.... how should I say this? Monthly issues. But they serve other purposes as well.’

‘Good, cause I want things to be perfect,’ he spoke with a hindered breath, leaning on top of me as I felt his pants slip over his feet.

*Perfect!?* He has a lot to learn about what perfect means.

Before I got a chance to get awkward and embarrassed as I usually do, his lips regained their position, and so did his hand, moving even stronger as if deciding to make me squeal in seconds with ecstasy. That was before he drove one of his fingers to glide within me.

Instantly, I arched against the mattress, buckling up to try and endure him, though the second he felt me tense, he raised his head from over my chest to glance straight at me.

He was beginning to move slowly as the discomfort was preventing me from finding pleasure in any of this, even though when it came to provoking pleasure, I did not doubt that Brax had a master’s degree on the subject.

Another of his fingers slipped inside me, stretching me to the max, as I was feeling that he was about to tear me in half. I couldn’t see him anymore. I couldn’t see anything. I just needed to close my eyes and survive this.

‘Look at me,’ he barked, quickly bringing me back to my senses to stare into the depths of the absinthe color of his wicked eyes. He was searching for something within the lines of my face. Maybe it was the way my lips were parting as I was trying to deal with the pain his grinding within my walls was causing. Or, maybe it was the way I was clenching my teeth as I felt him so intimately close.

Although I could notice flickers of anxiety glittering in his eyes each time I sketched out a gesture.

But as I come to think about it, he was probably waiting for something... Yes, that was it! He wasn't there for my anguish, he was there for my ecstasy, as his thumb moved over my throbbing nub sending a whole new sensation to race through my body. Something was leading the pain to the way to pleasure, and with each move, my body seemed to be relaxing while my breath was becoming shallow.

And, when it was time, I felt him move to dispose of his boxers, and with one long move, replacing his fingers with the part of him that wanted me so badly.

That impossible to bear sensation was back again, chasing away the elation and bringing back that quiet anguish, making me at the same time wrap my arms around the broadness of his neck. I hoped that would get him to stop, but he didn't, he just kept thrusting over and over while my head buried itself against his shoulder and one of his palms clenched around it to keep it there.

I could hear his jaw clench, teeth almost breaking under their own strength as my own teeth were sinking into his flesh, feeling that moment when the wheel will turn again impossibly close.

Though one thing was bothering me even more than the fact that this moment wasn't of my choice. He seemed to be avoiding my lips since, the moment he entered that door tonight, he never kissed me once. Perhaps it was my paranoid nature, but I had a suspicion it had something to do with him not wanting to get involved... catch the plague called *feelings*. Whatever danger I may pose to him, he was removing second

by second, removing all sorts of sentiments from the room with every single one of his gestures.

And still, no matter what my mind wanted to believe, the fluttering tingles beneath my waist were letting me know that my body wasn't agreeing with the rational part of me, forcing me to realize that it switched to the enemy lines without showing off a single form of regret.

My teeth seemed to not be needing his shoulder for support any longer, although leaving a red trace to tattoo itself next to some black drawings marked on his skin.

As always, he took advantage of the moment and shifted his head lower to reach for my hardened tips once again.

Everything felt as in a dream, but so real altogether, as he was so mesmerizingly close to me. Like a part of the puzzle that's been missing all along.

Sure, I know that it was just me thinking that way, but at least for a few seconds, I needed to believe it's true. To find a reasonable explanation for what I was doing, except for the reality. I was an exchange currency in a deal.

I felt him move as a tidal wave crashes on the rocks, over and over again, with lost breaths and eyes tighten, until I couldn't breathe myself.

My feet were aimlessly searching the sheets. My limbs only tangling more the further they stretched into the sea of silk, until all power was lost, and I was becoming clay in his hands.

Probably sensing I was losing all my strength, he caught me in an embrace, raising my body until he was sitting on the pillows, and I, with my knees gripping both sides of his waist, on top of him.

He seemed even larger from this point, so big that I couldn't even move- though that wasn't a problem since he decided to do it for me. Gripping my waist, he was handling me like a snowflake, guiding my body to move against him slower, then faster, until feeling him inside was becoming a pleasure I could barely handle. And yet I still craved for every



single move, each thrust to make me discover what I was *missing out on*.

But, as usual, his unique nature had to blow things ‘Good girl,’ he barked with the satisfaction of the man who knew exactly what he was saying,

‘Fuck you, Brax.’

He suddenly stopped, taking his hands away from my waist and placing them on the sides of his body. ‘Go ahead, do it. Fuck me!’ He spoke waiting for me to go through with my words. ‘Move,’ he ordered again, using all his specific accent of superiority. Though this time, I couldn’t help myself and driven by the situation I was in, I let my palm fall over his face, filling the room with a powerful clasp.

Maybe I was utterly insane, but I wanted to do it again, bring some sense into him, though the second time, he caught my hand, drawing it behind my back as his lips finally came crashing down on mine.

He was devouring everything I meant, and I could feel that vibrating like two magnets when uniting. Stronger and stronger with every time he was pushing himself inside of me, flexing that impressive mass of muscles to keep me moving against him through faded moans and victory groans, as tiny drops of our sweat were moistening the sheets beneath us. It felt good. It felt like we were supposed to do this all along. Like our bodies together were designed to do this all along!

There was passion and there was lust. No one could deny that, while for maybe the first time, I saw another side of Brax. He was kissing me like there was no tomorrow, entrapping a part of us forever in this room as for that moment in time, he wasn’t *fucking* me, as he liked to say, he was making love to me.

The fire I knew that burned within him was torching me with its lava heating flames. Consuming me. Breaking me. Building me!

It was so far from being a deal in those seconds, the same way we were far from ever being two strangers. The ropes of

fate were tightening around us with every moan of incoming ecstasy, with every kiss that wasn't in any way mechanical, but heartfelt.

But then he broke off his lips from mine, shaking his head as if some kind of monster got inside of him, losing something in that short second from when he had disappeared until he returned to me.

His mouth was far away to reach me, as he whirled us both until my back was resting on the sheet and he was on top of me again, staring straight into my eyes, trying to establish total domination over me.

'Look at me,' he groaned between that unthinkable tempo he was setting in our bodies, though my eyes were refusing his command, being driven by a much stronger force to wander across the room in search of something, anything to keep the tormenting rapture that was building inside of me under control.

'Fucking look at me,' he barked again, driving his hand under my chin to get me to face him.

I recognized exactly what he was doing, searching for that pleasure to ignite inside of me again, gathering the results of our carnal encounter, yet at the same time, casting away all feelings.

Once more, he was ice cold, searching for only what he came here for, making me realize that no matter what will happen today or tomorrow, or maybe for the rest of his life, he won't ever let anyone in.

A tear rolled from the corner of my eye, rolling off my face and dropping on the sheet as I was beginning to feel sorry, though it wasn't for me. I felt sorry for him.

In a way, I wished to stop him from obtaining what he wanted, not provide him with the satisfaction of seeing me enjoying this. But he kept working on that damned spot that made me disintegrate, faster and stronger while the darkened gaze with all primordial thoughts was forcing my own body to betray me.

Against my wish, I felt myself tightening around him as waves of sinful euphoria were running through me at the same time as his deep long groans filled the room, breaking eye contact and bringing him to push his head against my shoulder as the same waves were devouring him.

Maybe the foolish girl inside still had hope in the world, in the people around her, or maybe it was just the heat of the moment, but only a few minutes after it was over, I had to ask ‘Would you stay for a little longer?’ Even though I knew where he needed to go, I wanted him for a little more for myself. I knew he had a few more hours before he needed to leave to get them anyway.

Though my question managed to do exactly the opposite, as in the next second he was pulling up his boxers and pants as if I had just burned him with my request.

‘Bea, there’s something you should know about me. I am a monster, and people don’t love monsters. They fear them.’ His shirt was back on, as he was heading to the door. *‘I’ll return with your family.’*

## Chapter 21



I think I remained there for hours. The hours I wanted him to lay with me. I may even have cried a little, but then something beyond crying came, a silence that was bringing me closer to Ferris's madness. And maybe I needed that, considering the alternative.

What's done was done, and nothing could turn back the clock, so I just needed to go further, but it was so much easier said than done when the extra hour spent in the tub has made me feel even more used than I already felt.

I was broken, but I was soon to be whole with only ticks on the clock separating me from seeing Natalia and Sebastian again. It was going to be some time in the morning I suspected, although I couldn't tell yet. The only thing I did know was that it was impossible for me to find sleep.

Standing up from the tub, I decided to do something with my time, though deep down I already knew what I was doing with *my time*. I was letting my heart break because of Brax, as the sensation of him still being around was resting between my thighs.

Knowing I had some lounge joggers somewhere in the dressing room, I went and put them on along with a tight shirt

and a zip up black hoodie.

No more seduction for the day. I think I may have overused my share...

I walked into the kitchen to make something to eat. I wasn't hungry, but I was preparing something for my family when they arrived, and the selection was so wide that I couldn't even decide. These days, there was a person named to fill out my fridge with everything you could think of. I didn't even see him or her, and if I didn't know better, I was to believe that food may even magically grow there. It was like in a spell, after all.

*A spell that I had just broken.*

Oven pot roast with beef and vegetables. That's what I decided to make, not because I wasn't 100% sure that they would prefer some French fries, but I didn't want to spend time in the kitchen when they arrived.

I needed to do this. I needed to make things seem normal, like they were just out on a short vacation, and were coming back home. Yes... That was it. Just out for a while, and returning to an improved version of their home. Everything will go back to normal. Cole's deal will end soon, and then there will be only Ferris. I can handle him. Or maybe I can't, and we'll let fate decide. One thing for sure, I was walking into a whole different era. For one last time.

I was just done in the kitchen, returning to the living room to turn the tv on when a large thump was heard somewhere in the distance, followed by a tremor that shook all the windows of the house.

I fell on the floor, covering my ears, trying to understand what was happening when I heard a roar outside. Crawling to the window, I realized that people were leaving their apartments to see what was going on as a large cloud of smoke was rising in the distance, a few streets down the hill from mine.

I didn't get to leave my apartment and ask around, as I spotted a police car traveling the street with a megaphone.

***Everyone, please remain in your houses for your own safety.***

*We have the situation under control.*

*Please return to your homes!*

The message went on and on as people were returning to their homes, leaving just the mysterious cloud of smoke to fill the air.

I guess the tv was my only option, and I was right to turn it on as a special edition of the news was just beginning.

*‘Good evening, I’m Legacy Abbot, and I bring you a special edition of the recent events from just a few minutes ago. It seems there has been another explosion in the Hills. A team from our news is already heading to the location of the fire where it is believed that the police chief’s car was just blown up by a terrorist rebel group.*

*We received assurances that everything is under control now...but then again, we received the same assurances before when a similar bomb was planted in the Hills.*

*This looks like a declaration of war, and in a few moments we’ll go live with the mayor who’ll give us a few words about the **official** version of what is going on out there.’*

I didn’t get to listen to the mayor or his made-up lines, as my phone immediately lit.

I ran towards it, hoping that it was Brax with good news, but instead, I found that the one calling was Ferris.

‘Are you ok? I just heard about the explosion.’

‘News travels fast.’

‘Alfred called me. He said that he can see the smoke from the house.’

‘They just said on the tv that it’s ok now. It has something to do with the rebels.’

‘I’ll send two men to check the area. I have more than I need at the house. They will be there in a couple of minutes. Or if you want, they can escort you to the mansion.’

‘I can’t. My family is on its way to town.’

‘That’s great news. But all the more reasons for security.’

‘Ok, send them, please.’

‘I’ll make the call now.’

‘Thank you, Ferris.’

‘We’ll talk tomorrow... and Bea, if there’s anything you want, just ask.’

‘I will.’

I closed the phone, getting back to the news. The world rebellion was instilling a molten fear inside my veins. The revolution was about to break and I was bringing my siblings into the battlefield.

I think I watched the news until morning. Seeing the witness’s testimonies about the rebels, then hearing politicians lie, and so many people expressing so many different opinions that I didn’t know what to think anymore. But one thing my mother has taught me.

*The truth is often found only between closed doors.*

And if that was accurate, then almost everyone I knew was in deep shit. Including me!

A strange idea was forming in the back of my mind. Similar to one of the strategies rich people play on board games. Though I cast it quickly aside, in the need to focus on a whole different thing.

The dish was ready, and as if knowing it was just out of the oven, the doorbell rang, forcing me to swallow the gulp I had in my throat ever since Brax left.

I twisted the key and pressed the doorknob, praying to all saints I knew that they were safe. In a way, I wanted the door to open immediately, but in another, the fear of what will happen when it does was making me almost collapse on the floor.

I pushed it anyway, gathering all strength I had to face the truth.

*Brax was right. He did it!*

**HE DID IT!** I screamed, as two pairs of arms instantly wrapped around me.

It was them!

Natalia and Sebastian!

***My family!***

I think we were all collapsed on the entrance hall's floor for good minutes, holding each other and only parting from the embrace so I could look at their faces from time to time, still unable to believe it was them.

'I'll be leaving, Miss. If you consider everything to be ok.'

The voice stroke me as strange, especially since the word Miss wasn't in Brax's vocabulary, and as I raised my eyes to look in the direction it was coming from, I understood the reason. It was the *driver*, and not Brax.

'Where is Brax?' I asked.

'Boss had an emergency and had to stop at another location.' The man spoke, confirming my suspicions. He didn't want to come and bring them himself because he didn't want to see me again.

'Thank you. That will be all,' I nodded as I received all information I wanted.

I wasn't going to let his absence cloud my day. Not this of all days.

'Let's get you two inside. It's not that safe here lately.'

'I know,' Natalia let out a sigh.

'What do you mean *you know*?'

'I saw cars as we entered the city. Cars filled with men moving in and out. Sad men. *Bad* men, Bea.'

'It will all be ok. We will be ok. I'll see to that. Now, smile. We're together again and nothing - I mean NOTHING can break us apart any longer.'

And I will make sure of that!

I must have used all hugs available in my system in those hours as I couldn't satisfy my need of feeling them close. But there was something that was worrying me 'Did they hurt you when they took you out of there?' I asked my sister, noticing a



few bruises on her face and the uncovered part of her arms. Though the bruises didn't seem so recent.

'No... I tried to run. A couple of nights after I talked to you on the phone. I didn't want you to get in trouble because of us, so I tried to escape when one of the guards was sleeping. I didn't even make it to the door... And this,' a crystal tear ran down her face. '...this was my punishment, she lifted her sleeve high enough to reveal an almost open wound that was going from the elbow to her shoulder.

'What the hell is that, Nat!?' I felt I couldn't breathe as my blood was boiling so strongly that it was beginning to think it will burst through my nose. 'Who did this!?' I screamed so furious that I was only seeing red.

'Our father. When he found out, he pushed me against a wall, but there was a metal sheet going out in one of its corners. I cut myself on that, so then he had beaten me for injuring myself and making my *market value* drop.'

'Jesus!?'

'Bea, it's ok. It doesn't hurt that much anymore.'

'It doesn't hurt that much anymore!? I'm going to kill him! End that miserable life of his for good!'

'Bea,' Nat whispered, rolling her eyes in Sebastian's direction, who was looking straight at me.

'Sorry,' I let my palm fall over my eyes. Maybe I've been around Brax for too long...

'Or maybe he's already dead? I didn't get a chance to ask what happened back there,' I whispered so that this time Sebastian couldn't hear everything.

'I'm not a child, you know..., ' he muttered.

'Oh yeah, what are you then?'

'Old enough to be involved in whatever is going on here.' Sebastian always had an attitude, and apparently, it didn't remain in our old town.

'Seb, *I* am not old enough to be involved in whatever is going on here...' And the truth - I wasn't!

I was just winging it, one day at a time, living life as it came...living the life I created as it came. 'But now that you're old enough, I guess you don't need the brand-new remote-control car that I just bought for you. It was waiting for you to play with it on my bed, but I think I'll have to return it in the morning... Since you're *old* enough to stay here.'

'Come to think about it, you two are boring,' he giggled, running around the house since he didn't even know where my room was. He'll find it...

Although I needed to tone him down a little 'Stop running!' His condition was far from allowing him to jog. 'Go ahead, Nat. Tell me. Tell me what happened.'

'I don't know much. All I know is that I heard loud noises, then gunshots.'

'Gunshots!?'

'Yes. A few. And then two men came and put some blankets over our heads. Next thing I know, Seb and I were in an ambulance, where one of the men took the blankets off and told us that everything is going to be ok. We were to meet you in a few hours. Then he got out, probably to go in another car.'

'How did the man look like?'

'He looked like God placed two emerald jewels in his eyes.'

'It wasn't God, trust me on that.' ... Brax... 'What else did he say?'

'Nothing else. He seemed like he wasn't feeling too good.'

Too much sex must have got to him...

'Ok, Nat. Thanks.'

'You know him, right. Who was he?'

'One of the men who saved you, nothing more.'

'A good man...'

'No...Not a good man.' I couldn't get into this now, even though I was the one that started the subject.

'Is he the one who got you this apartment?'

‘No.’

‘Who did then? Your boyfriend?’ And interrogation began.

‘Not exactly. You know what, Nat. I think there’s something on the bed for you too.’

‘Do you think I’m Sebastian? I can see what you’re trying to do.’

‘A new dress.’

‘Not giving in until you answer my questions.’

‘New shoes.’

‘Not interested. I’m not moving until you answer.’

‘And a large bag of glittery notebooks, pens, and who knows what’s in there.’

‘Ok....BYE!!!’

She was running faster than Sebastian, searching for the presents I got for them out of the money I had left from the Pleasure Room.

I let them enjoy the gifts for a while, then called them to dinner, which had already turned into breakfast since the sun was high in the sky.

They were exhausted and so was I. Drained of all powers, but it didn’t matter anymore. Nothing ever mattered as I would do it ten times again just to live this moment.

‘Let’s get some sleep,’ I spoke as soon as the dishes were done. ‘You both have your own room.’ I couldn’t get another word from that point on, at least for a few minutes as their cheers lasted ‘But can we please stay in one bed today? Like we used to?’

I needed to know I’m not alone anymore.

‘Yes, sure,’ they both nodded with large smiles plastered across their faces.

‘Nat, we’ll sleep in your room. Your bed is larger than Sebastian’s.’

I couldn’t be in my bed. At least not for today.

‘Why does she get the bigger bed?’ Seb retaliated.

Here we go again. I may be a masochist, but I missed this part.

‘Because I’m bigger!’

‘It’s not because she’s bigger. It’s because you need more room to play ball. So, a smaller bed leaves you with a bigger room.’

‘I win either way,’ Nat was just adding fuel to the fire.

‘No one wins. Let’s go to bed before you’ll both be sleeping in the living room.’

It didn’t take long before we were all heading to Neverland, holding one another as we used to, just as if nothing has changed- when in fact everything had.

They were here now. They were mine now, leaving room for something that I just kept bottling up inside to surface.

I needed to protect them, and it was time to face the truth. I knew things, although I was ashamed to admit how I learned them, all pieced together were leading to a greater scenario. I had a responsibility. To my family, but also to the world since I decided it was fate that wanted me to know the things I do.

There was an end coming our way, and I was one of the few people that had the knowledge and the means to try and prevent it. Even if I failed, even if there’s nothing left of me after this, it was my burden, and I needed to know I did everything possible.

But for the night...or this day, I just closed my eyes and found peace in a time of war.

Ferris called at one point, late in the afternoon, just about when we were getting back to telling stories and playing silly games. I wanted to invite him over. It was his place, after all, but something made me ask him for one more day just with my family. I needed to spend the night alone. I needed to reflect on things, and on my greatest flaw. I took everyone’s pain upon me, as *empathy* was turning into a critical condition in my case.

They say everyone has his or her’s moment of greatness. Well, this was mine. Or maybe it was madness in my case, who

knows? But I was going to change everything around me! Though for this I needed them all!

The next day, I asked Nat to look after Sebastian in his room for a while. I was expecting some visits...let's just say not that appropriate for family time.

I had to insist with a few phone calls to get my green-eyed mobster at my doorway again, and even if I wasn't a hundred percent sure he would show up, he surprised me.

'What's this about?' He asked even before coming inside the apartment while lighting himself a cigarette.

'I will explain in a minute, please come in,' I lead him into the living room, noticing that he had a little limp in his left leg as he was walking 'What happened?'

'Work accident.'

'Is this from when you went to recover my family?'

'Is this why you asked me here today?' He muttered, taking a drag out of his cigarette then looking at his watch, forcing me that way to stop pushing him.

'I want you to meet someone.'

'Who, one of your fuckboys?'

'You should know better from the other night that I hadn't *fucked* anyone besides you, Brax.'

'Yeah...'

'I need to tell you something first. That is to clarify the reason we are all here for. This is not a cock fight. This is about what's going on out there. In the streets.'

'What do you know about what's going out there?'

'Much more than you could ever think.'

That got his attention as his eyebrows raised, eyes pointing straight at me.

'I'm listening.'

'I have a plan. A plan to stop this.'

'Who said I want it to stop?'

‘I say. It will affect you and everyone around you.’

‘I’ll adapt. I always do.’

‘Not this time, Brax. Please listen.’

‘I would be out the door by now if I wasn’t.’

‘I will need *all three of you* to do this.’

‘All three of us?’ Yes, I know he had no idea what *all three of them* meant, but he was about to find out.

‘Yes... All three of you. Due to The Pleasure Room, I had two other deals beside you, but I guess you already know that.’

‘There’s a complete report of every second of your life since the day you met me by now. It’s sitting on my desk. I didn’t open it. You know why? Because *I don’t care*.’

‘Seems fair. Then you will probably get the short version of that really soon.’ I was playing cards up on the table since from this moment on, this is how I needed them to play too. ‘You see, on an individual level you are weak.’

‘Weak!? Are you kidding me?’

‘Listen, please.’

‘Weak in front of everything around you. You all are weak alone. But the powers of all three of you combined...’

‘I’m one minute away from leaving.’

‘I’ll find someone else then. Probably make another deal... I don’t know. My family is still not safe. And you know I would do *anything* to keep them safe!’

‘None of us are safe anymore. You have ten minutes before I start asking for things in return for my time.’ As always, Brax needed an extra currency.

‘Deal. Ten minutes.’

‘You all have strong attributes. Together, we can fight this. Everyone has a part -finances, political connections, underground connections. You will need each other. Like I need all three of you.’

‘Who are the *three* of us? That’s what I want to know.’

‘I’ll show you, though one of you is a little late, I’ll save the introductions until he arrives. This way,’ I opened the door that led to a dining room for guests. A room in which Ferris was already waiting.

I talked to him earlier, and asked him to come, though without telling him much of what was happening. Same with Cole, who was proving to be a little late. Probably to make himself look more interesting. But that didn’t even matter anymore. I just needed him here before Brax gets pissed off and leaves.

**‘Ferris!?’** The surprise in Brax’s voice made me pay full attention as he seemed to know my royalties’ name without me getting a chance to say it. ‘Ferris! I can’t believe it’s you!’ Brax walked over to him, keeping that limp in his left leg, as Ferris’s gaze appeared to have turned to stone. He was in shock as Brax’s arms came around him, clutching themselves into a genuine hug. For the first time, he was manifesting any kind of human emotion, totally unaffected that there was another person in the room. A strange mixture of pain and happiness appeared on both of their faces, incredibly similar to the one I think I had when seeing my family.

I was the one that wanted to ask questions this time, though before I got to open my mouth and speak, Cole walked through the door ‘Mouse, don’t tell me you’re planning a surprise-’ but he too suddenly stopped in the doorway with eyes pointing straight at the guys **‘Brax!?! Ferris!?!’**

***What the fuck was going on here!?!***



***“Kings of Desire” is book 1 of The Pleasure Room series,  
and will be continued!***

*If you enjoyed this book, please leave a review on  
Amazon*



## *About The Author*

### *M.O. Absinthe*

Ascending author with a sweet tooth for alpha males, and a guilty pleasure of making your darkest fantasies come to life.

Follow me on:

-Instagram: @m.o.absinthe -for sneak peeks and events

-Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/absintheiswriting> - for extra steamy art scenes to go with my books

-Email : [absinthe.is.writing@gmail.com](mailto:absinthe.is.writing@gmail.com)

## ***Books by M.O. Absinthe***

### ***The Sin of You***

*A vampire dark romance that will make you shiver in unknown temptation*

The book is suitable for a mature audience.

I invite you to take a dangerous path where nothing is forbidden. Desire, lust, deceit, and betrayal revolve around an ancient prophecy that can build or break destinies. You're soon to find out if passion and love are enough to stand in the way of antique forces, or it will all be dust with the first ray of light.

“The room darkened with his presence as every step he made towards me took me closer to my downfall. He was death and life merged in a predator’s body. Strength and dominance oozed from his every pore. But it was something else too... Something more, that made a cold chill flash through my body. His beautiful absinthe eyes captured the depths of time, making him irresistible, undeniable, but also fatal. All of my instincts were telling me to leave as fast as I could, but there was something stronger that kept me frozen to the spot. An unspoken link from the dawn of time, brought me here, in this place, meant to fulfill my destiny. He is the living dead that people whispered about while looking, with fear, out the window... He is a vampire.”

### ***Il Capo's Seduction***

*An enemies-to-lovers passionate mafia romance.*

The book is suitable for a mature audience.

One dreadful night changes Angelo's and Elise's lives forever, sharing a dark secret that can never be revealed.

After her mother's tragic death, Elise finds herself trapped in the dangerous Italians' penthouse caught up in a wicked game of smothering lust and wild passion - mind versus feeling.

To escape she has to win his trust -yet she ends up losing her heart in the process.

“The water drops path while rolling over his inked body was becoming mystical. A sparkling road her famished hands craved to thoroughly follow, to feel his ripped muscle tense beneath them while sliding her fingers towards the wet towel. It felt like a sin, just to be looking at him. “

*Special thanks to my dear friend  
and book editor, Richard.*