



MY
PERFECT
VILLAIN

A FLUFFY FOX ANTHOLOGY

My Perfect Villain

A Villainous Anthology

Fluffy Fox Publishing



Fluffy Fox Publishing

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MUSIC OF MY DESIRE

Ashley Bríon

BLURB

Darius Giocoso doesn't care who the hit is for as long as whatever Godfather pays him is enough. He's on his latest contract when Alessandro Segreto decides to hide with his girlfriend in the Appalachian Mountains. Darius decides to kidnap the loud-mouthed, swanky woman, but he ends up making a mistake that he'll never forget—letting his desire rule.

Harmony Catrone is an intelligent, fiery woman who doesn't give a damn about what anyone has to say about her. After yet another boyfriend leaves her to taste the fruits of other trees, she's had enough with love until Darius comes waltzing into her uncle's bar. Now she finds herself kidnapped, letting her darker desires take over.

Darius and Harmony find themselves exploring new territory, and there's no resisting.

CONTENT WARNING

This story contains themes of sexual assault, dark sexual kinks, torture, sexual sadism, and murder.

DEDICATION

This is my first very major pepper rated story, so here goes! I thank all my lovely friends who I met on TikTok and inspired me to write this story.

To my wonderful in-person friends, is this spicy enough for you guys now?

CHAPTER 1

Darius

“Fuck.” Darius growled. He tapped his fingers on the side of his whiskey glass. He wasn’t surprised this seedy, little, shit bar didn’t have anything remotely passing as a delicacy. This cheap Jonnie Walker Blue would have to do. He gently swirled the amber liquid, the heady, sharp scent filling his nostrils. Taking a sip, he scrunched his nose and reluctantly swallowed.

Nasty shit.

Sitting in a booth near the bar, he remained in the shadows, out of sight from prying eyes. The smoky haze of cigars and cigarettes filled the air. He checked his Philippe watch hidden under his white button-down sleeve.

Where the fuck is he...

Darius was positioned so he could see the front door and get a full view of the bar. His sharp eyes hidden under tinted glasses were pointed at the door when he saw his assistant walk in.

“Where the fuck have you been, Eddie?” he growled. “You were supposed to be here before me.”

Eddie adjusted his leather jacket and smoothed over his thick black hair as he sat down. “Yeah, well, shit happens, sir.”

That last word bit on the end of his tongue was laced with sarcasm and malice.

“Don’t take that fucking tone with me, Eddie. Where’ve you been?”

Eddie signaled to the sexy blonde bartender to bring him a drink. “Lager, sweetheart.”

Eddie looked back at Darius. “We’ve been here a fucking week looking for this guy and I finally found the son of a bitch. He’s here alright. His girlfriend lives here, so he thought he could hide from us with her in fucking Bigfoot country. Stupid fuck.”

Darius felt the corner of his mouth rise into a small smirk. “Taking off to bumfuck nowhere in the middle of the mountains. And the term is Appalachia, Eddie. Get educated for once.”

The bartender breezed by their booth and sat the dark beer in front of Eddie. He took a big gulp and shook his head. “That’s your job. I don’t need education to find a fucking person.”

Darius rolled his eyes. Eddie certainly had a way with words. He took a sip from his glass. “So where is he?”

“Don’t know. But I know someone who does know.”

“And who is that?”

Eddie arched his head toward the bar. “His girl is coming in here soon to meet up with some friends. We talk to her, we can talk to him.”

Talk...sure. The word that no one else in the building would think twice was code for more nefarious deeds.

“You know my rules.” Darius muttered.

“Sure do, boss. Wouldn’t wanna talk her ear off. You know how personable I can be.”

Darius furrowed his brows. More code for beating the shit out of someone and torturing them until they talk. Women and children were off limits, and Eddie knew that. Even men in his line of work had morals. Most of them anyway.

Darius reached into his jeans pocket and pulled out his phone. He pressed a few buttons and Eddie’s phone let out an obnoxious ding.

“You did good work. I’ll take it from here.”

Eddie downed his beer and placed the empty glass with dregs of froth on the table. “See you back in Miami, boss.”

Darius sipped on his drink, making a disgusted face every time. “Maybe. I might head to New York, Paris, London, who knows. It’s time for a vacation.”

Eddie nodded. When Darius said he needed a vacation, that meant he needed time to clear his head and get ready for the next contract. He needed focus, precision. Taking contract after contract makes a man lose focus and becomes sloppy, and one thing Darius never was, was sloppy.

Eddie got up and walked out of the bar, leaving Darius to stare into the distance. He went over the details in his mind.

Alessandro Segreto. Tall, handsome, and too cocky in his own right. 6’1, built like a soccer player, dark green eyes and black hair. The Tagliatti family wanted him taken out nice and

quiet, a silent warning to never touch the Don's daughter again. Not much tugged at Darius' heartstrings, but harming a woman and taking her against her will? That was an offense worthy of death in his eyes. But this mission wasn't harming a woman, merely a quick and gentle snatch to pull Alessandro out of hiding.

His phone pinged, the light of the phone almost shining through his dark glasses. A text from Eddie.

Name's Harmony. Cute little broad. Long black hair, Mediterranean complexion. Nice set of tits. Only one in town who can look like that in this hell hole. Entering in 5.

Darius looked up and locked eyes with the door. Eddie was right—a woman with that description, there couldn't be more than one in this shit town. He waited. The doorbell chimed and his ears were pierced with the twinkling sound of laughter. A crowd of women walked in, and there she was. Darius felt the breath knock out of him. Eddie must have let out some details; he didn't mention how gorgeous she was. Her long silky thick black hair cascaded around her small waist. Her thick legs and ass were so full he felt his cock starting to grow.

Down boy...business before pleasure.

His eyes followed her curves up to her large breasts hidden under a small, slinky plum dress. Her belly wasn't quite washboard flat, but it was very close. Her skin was glistening from a tan left over from the summer sun. Looking his way, he only caught a glimpse of blue eyes and a soft face. The gaggle

of scantily clad women made their way to the bar and around the corner to a room offset from the main bar.

This was going to be a long night.

CHAPTER 2

Harmony

Harmony Catrone sat off in a room opposite the bar. Once again, her sister was late meeting her at Kelly's Inn for their once-a-month bitch fest. She scrolled through TikTok on her phone, not looking up until she heard the door twinkle. Her long, thick black hair was tied up in a tight bun and her thick, purple-rimmed glasses framed her face, the glare from the phone hiding the hurt in her blue eyes. She crossed her arms, eyeing the bar again. Callie came around the corner from the bar with another fuzzy navel in hand.

“Sofia late again?” She quipped.

Harmony let a small amount of air escape her lips. “Yeah. Again.”

“I'm sorry, Harm. You wanna get some food while you wait? I'll put in an order for those pickles you like.”

Harmony sighed. “I guess. Fuck waiting on her. I'm starving.”

Callie leaned down close to her. “Hey. There's this really hot guy I've never seen before over in the corner booth near the kitchen. Says he's just passing through on his way to visit his grandmother. Maybe you should...you know...” Callie wiggled her hips and flicked back her blonde hair.

“Callie!”

“What? Just a thought. C’mon, girl, you’re single, live a little. Plus, the guy looks *loaded*. Bet he’ll buy you a drink.”

With that Callie walked away and went back behind the bar.

Hot guy, huh?

The doorbell chimed and a man Harmony had never seen before walked past the doorway to the room and over in the direction of the kitchen. He had a well-oiled leather jacket and thick black hair, just like hers. Curiosity got the better of her and she got up to peek around the corner. He sat down at the booth Callie was talking about.

Holy fuck.

A man with board shoulders and dark tinted glasses was slouched in the booth holding a small glass of what looked like whiskey. The white button-down shirt was perfectly pressed against his chest and the jeans almost left nothing to the imagination. What gave her almost instant wetness between her thighs was the mound of slicked-back orange hair that reminded her of a greaser in the ‘50s. She was a sucker for thicker men with wild hair colors. He looked angry talking to the guy in the leather jacket, but she wasn’t sure. She watched as Callie made her way over there with a beer and sat it on the table. She tried to get Callie’s attention when she came back to the bar, but it was no use. The smoky haze was getting thicker, and she didn’t want to draw attention to herself. She silently walked back to her booth where the waiting orange deliciousness was calling her name. There was next to no one in the back room except for a few of the local couples. She

looked around, watching them. Some were cuddled up next to each other and others were having full on make-out sessions. It almost made her sick to her stomach watching them, a bout of jealousy rising in her throat. Thoughts of Gio started coming back to her, and she tried pushing them out of her mind. *Fucking asshole*, she thought. There was no way in hell the thought of Gio Velestra was going to upset her today. Not on *her* birthday. She looked again at the couples wishing she had a love like that. Why couldn't the man of her dreams just walk into the bar and sweep her off her feet? Especially a man like tall, dark, and ginger over there brooding in the corner. She couldn't help but think what it would be like to be in his arms and caressing her entire body, that stone look piercing through her making her nice and wet for his touch. *Stop it. Don't think about people like that.*

Why not, a husky voice whispered in the back of her mind. *He's certainly a meal I'd like to devour.* With her mind wandering and thinking about the ginger-stranger who sent her pussy into overdrive, she almost didn't hear the door chime again, but she certainly heard the obnoxious familiar laughter of Sofia and her friends. Harmony took a sip of her drink and watched her sister stumble back toward the room.

Look at her, she's a fucking mess.

The hyenas finally made it and Sofia almost fell into her seat at the booth.

“Harmony!” She squealed.

“You're late, Sofia.” Harmony growled.

“C’mon, sis, don’t be like that. I’m sorry but the girls wanted to come too. After all it’s our birthday!”

Sofia squeezed her into a hug, and Harmony rolled her eyes. She pushed her twin sister off her. “Yeah, well, would’ve been nice if you didn’t show up already shit faced.”

Sofia blinked at her, her expression almost emotionless. “But, Harm, what fun is a birthday if you don’t drink all day with the gals?”

Harmony sighed. “Look, Sof, I like drinking and partying as much as you, but you said this time it would be just you and me at our uncle’s bar for a good birthday night out.”

“Yeah...but...Angel and Tia really wanted to hang out to... day...*hiccup*...and Bella showed up...*hiccup*...”

Sofia could barely get her sentences out through her drunken hiccups. Angel and Tia piled in the booth, squishing Harmony almost out the seat. Their drunken laughter and screaming were already getting on her nerves. Callie came around the corner with her usual bottle of wine for the trio.

“So if Bella stopped by, where the hell is she at?”

Sofia hiccupped again. “She had to...*hiccup*...go home. She has a date with Gio.”

Harmony turned stone white through her tanned skin. The bile rose in the throat, and she thought the fuzzy navels were going to come retching out of her mouth.

“The fuck did you just say?” Harmony spat.

“She’s gonna go fuck Gio. Did...didn’t I just say that?”
Sofia giggled.

“Fuck you, Sofia. And your stupid fucking friends too.”

“Oh shit...oh! I forgot, I’m sorry, Harm.”

You didn’t forget, you heartless bitch. You wanted me to know. Thanks a fucking lot.

Harmony got up from the booth. “I’m going home. You guys have fun or whatever.”

“Harm, no, please stay.”

Sofia tried to stand up to stop Harmony from leaving, but instead she fell forward knocking the open bottle of red wine to splash onto the table and splatter Harmony’s matching plum dress.

Sofia stared at the red liquid flowing on the floor. “Fuck.”

Harmony saw red, and it wasn’t the wine. “What the *fuck*, Sofia! You’ve ruined my brand-new dress!”

“You can wear mine. Hold on.” Sofia went to take her dress off, but Harmony slapped her hands and pulled them down to her side.

“Will you stop that! Are you fucking crazy?! You can’t take your clothes off in the middle of the bar!”

“Oh, Harm...” Sofia started to let out the tears. “I ruined our matching birthday dresses...”

Jesus Cristo.

“C’mon.”

Harmony grabbed Sofia's arm to pull her along, but Sofia stumbled again, falling into Harmony. Her hand reached out to stop herself, but Sofia, in her drunken haze, overshot and slammed her hand down on Harmony's bun, pulling it halfway out of the bun holder.

"SOFIA!" she screamed. Harmony immediately reached up to her ruined hair, feeling the throbbing pain of hair almost being ripped from her skull and the bobby pins jutting into her head.

"I'm sorry...I'm sorry..." Sofia kept repeating. This time, Harmony forcefully grabbed Sofia and dragged her into the women's bathroom next to their booth. Once inside, she locked the door.

"Fucking dammit, Sofia." Harmony screamed, turning back to her sister. "Can't you get ahold of yourself for once? You come in here late, a drunken mess, ruining our birthday like you *always* do. You only ever think about yourself and what *you* want. It's never about anyone else."

"Harm...that's not fair..."

"It *is* fair. This is just the straw that broke the camel's back."

Harmony turned away from her sister who looked like she wanted to cry again. *Let her.* Carefully, she pulled the bobby pins out of her hair and unrolled the bun shaper. Her long, curly black hair cascaded around her just like her sister's. With a Tide Pen in her purse and some soap and water from the sink, she tried to rub out the stain. Sofia stood there wobbling. She looked like one of those wacky inflatable waving tube

men at the car dealership the way she was moving. With no desire for Sofia to rip out her hair again or take the time to put her bun back up, Harmony left her hair down. Harmony turned toward her sister. Her face looked like she wanted to hurl, but the only vomit that came out was her words.

“You’re just mad Gio cheated on you and I have a loving man like Alessandro who would never do that to me.”

As she spoke, Sofia’s heel got caught in the grout between two tiles, lost her footing, and stumbled into Harmony...again. This time, Sofia wacked her in the face and sent her glasses flying only to break on the hard tile surface.

“Oh....” Sofia muttered.

Harmony was so pissed at Sofia’s drunken ramblings that she kicked Sofia’s legs out from under her with her stiletto pumps, knocking her to the ground. Sofia started to cry and scream from the pain of hitting the cold tiles. She ignored her, reaching down for her now broken glasses.

“Fucking had *enough* of you, Sofia.” She gritted through her clenched jaw. The lenses were cracked, and the bridge of the nose busted in half. There was no fixing them. Luckily, Harmony dug inside of her purse and pulled out her spare set of contacts. Ignoring Sofia whining on the floor, she carefully placed the contacts on each eye with her manicured acrylic nails. She may not be the most beautiful woman in the world with her small fupa, professional hairstyle, and proper glasses, but she loved having her nails done. That was the one luxury

she afforded herself to look and feel beautiful other than some of her clothes.

Blinking, her blurred version went to sharp and in focus. Looking down, she realized Sofia had stopped her incessant whining. Sofia was passed out on the floor.

Ugh...

Reaching down, Harmony pulled her sister up and flung her so she could get an arm underneath her to support her back. Unlocking the door, she half-dragged Sofia out to the table where Tia and Angel were still laughing and carrying on with a new bottle of wine. Callie must have put it on the table while they were in the bathroom. The wine was gone from the floor and table, almost like it was never there. Harmony threw Sofia into the booth on top of Angel and Tia.

“Take her the fuck home. Let Alessandro deal with her ass.”

She turned on her heel and stomped out of the room. Without looking, she waved to Callie that she was leaving. She doubted she was able to see her through all the cigar and cigarette smoke. Throwing the door to the bar open, she took a deep breath of the warm night air. The smell of pine trees and hot asphalt was more comforting than the stale smoke. She tried to not let her tears escape her eyes as she walked to her car around the back of the building. As she reached for the door handle, she felt like something was wrong. The hair on the back of her neck stood up, and her gut told her to hurry and get in the car. Pulling the door open, she felt the sharp sting of something snake around her throat and a growing pressure

causing her to choke. Grabbing up at her throat, she felt the familiar feel of a man's arm. Another arm, clad in a white long sleeve, placed a rag around her mouth as she tried to scream. The only thing she could make out was there was a music note cufflink where the normal button would be.

It was just like in the movies. Slowly, everything went black.

CHAPTER 3

Darius

Darius' target walked right past him into the back room behind the bar. He had to sharpen up and not let his cock lead the way. He wanted nothing more than to throw her down on his custom silk sheets and fuck her until she came around his cock and he himself climax deep inside her. But that wasn't what this mission was for. This wasn't a one-night stand mission with yet another unknown broad—this was business. He could hear yelling in the back, then the slam of a bottle. The bartender was going back and forth from the room to the bar, and he could tell by her expression the party was upsetting her. Classic sign along with the yelling that soon they would be leaving. He gulped the last of his cheap whiskey and placed a \$100 bill on the table. Slinking out of the booth, he silently made his way outside. He walked around the side of the building away from the streetlights. In the shadows across the parking lot, he had a perfect view of the door. It wasn't long until the door burst open, and there she was, stomping with fury around the side of the building to her car. The fury in her body only aroused him more.

He slunk from the shadows and slithered around the cars, watching her every move. She stood at her car, fumbling for her keys. This was the moment to pounce. Without a sound, he crept up behind her and took the chloroform rag out of his pants pocket. Swift as ever, he snaked his arm around her

throat and pulled her toward him. She went to scream, but he had already moved in and placed the rag over her face. Instantly, she was limp in his arms. Scooping her up, his hands graced her ass as he pulled her up into his body. He felt his own body pulse and ache for her touch, and he had to remind himself of his own rules. He could not take this woman against her will, no matter how much he wanted inside of her.

He walked around the side of the car and opened the passenger door, placing her in the seat. He slammed the door shut and walked back around with her keys and climbed into the driver's seat. Starting up the used Genesis, they left as silently as he nabbed her. Driving along the road to his safe house, he quickly pulled out his phone and called Eddie.

“Eddie. Got her. Prepare her room.”

Eddie didn't even get a chance to say anything before Darius hung up.

The same smirk played across his lips. *Time to come out and play, Alessandro...*



Harmony

Where am I?

Through blurred vision, Harmony could just make out she was in a room on a bed. Her head was pounding and foggy.

What happened? How did I get in bed?

She tried to think back and remembered fighting with Sofia. There was the spilled wine, the stain on her dress, the fight in the bathroom, and the last thing she remembered was walking out to her car. So how did she get here?

Her vision started to clear. She realized she wasn't in her own room. It had a large canopy bed complete with black silk sheets. The set of windows and a sliding glass door led out to a large balcony with a comfy deck chair and a table with an umbrella. Narrowing her eyes, she could tell there was an alarm attached to both the door and the windows and a row of small red laser lights went across the glass. An ornate oak desk was in one corner of the room. The desk had a basket of fruit with apples, grapes, and oranges. On the other side of the room was a small baker's rack complete with tea and coffee cups and the largest variety of tea and coffee she had ever seen. Looking around the room she could tell she was in a mansion—the room was four times the size of her own apartment. A velvet, antique Victorian couch and chair were

off to the side of the room by the bed facing the door. An 80-inch TV was placed on the wall in front of her.

OK...well I'm in a mansion. But what the fuck am I doing in the mansion?

She got up out of the bed and walked over to the desk. Looking down, she realized she wasn't in her dress. Instead, she was clad in a soft silk nightgown that barely went down to her thighs and had a high lace slit up the side.

I didn't even wear this nightgown yet; I just bought it... Did I go home first?

While chowing down on an apple, the juice dripping down her chin, a soft knock came at the door. Before she could answer, the door opened. There in the doorway stood the man from the bar. She immediately felt the pressure grow inside her and the pulsating of her pussy was enough to make her drip between her legs. He stood there, watching her, leaning up against the doorway with one arm resting on the trim above him. He walked in, closing the door behind him. Yet again, his vibrant orange hair was slicked back, his white crisp silk shirt was perfectly tailored to his broad chest, and his purple dress pants she wished would show more than what it was offering. She caught herself staring at the zipper of his pants and turned her gaze away. She wanted to keep looking and give this man her famous temper that sent everyone else running and groveling at her feet. But for some reason, she also wanted to be on her knees in front of him, for more than one reason.

“I see you're awake, *mia curore*.”

Harmony felt her cheeks grow hot. Did he just call her his heart?

She wanted him badly, but she had to stay strong and find out why she was here and what he wanted with her.

“Where did you take me? What do you want with me?” She crossed her arms over her chest, the coolness of the room forcing her nipples to peak and push against the silk of her nightgown.

He gestured to the bed. “Sit, and I will tell you.”

Harmony walked over with apple still in hand to the bed and sat on the edge.

“Talk.”

Behind the white shaded glasses that hid his eyes, an orange eyebrow raised over the rim.

“I wouldn’t be the one making demands if I was you.”

He walked over and pulled out the chair by the desk, turning it around and straddling it. Harmony had to shift in her spot to prevent the wetness from escaping.

“I’m not one to beat around the bush. I don’t do the mysterious bullshit of playing games when it comes to business. You’re here because I need to find your boyfriend. I have you, he’ll come out, and I’ll kill him.”

Harmony stared at him. Was he *serious* right now? She couldn’t help but begin to laugh.

“And what boyfriend would that be? Look if you want Gio I’ll lead you right to him the bastard, slit his throat, tie him to a car or a brick and toss him in the sea. I don’t care whatever you do to him; he deserves it.”

She couldn’t see his expression behind the glasses, but she could tell she derailed whatever his plans were.

“Gio?” he said softly.

“Yes, Gio. I don’t know why you want him, but you can have him.”

All he did was smile.

“Where are my manners? I never introduced myself. My name is Darius.”

Harmony cocked her head. “Harmony.”

Darius swung his leg from around the chair and walked to the door. “Plans may have changed for you, *mia curore*. We’ll talk soon.”

Before he walked out, he peeked back around the door. “And I wouldn’t try to open any of the windows and doors. Your room is being monitored.”

Darius left, locking the door behind him.



Darius

Immediately, Darius stormed down the hall and up the extra set of stairs to his office. His polished oxford saddle shoes clacked against the dark-stained hardwood oak floors. Taking out his keys and opening the locked door to his office, he slammed it shut behind him. He walked over to his desk and pulled out his file. Photos of Harmony and Alessandro graced the pages, but something ate away at him. Why did she mention this Gio person and not Alessandro? Was that his nickname?

He picked up his phone and dialed Eddie.

“Yes, boss?”

“What the fuck did you do?”

“Drank, smoke, possibly fucked this broad I met last night, why? You need a girl?”

“No, you fucking idiot. I want to know why you gave me the wrong information.”

The phone went silent for a moment. *“I did my job.”*

“You’re slipping.”

“She matches the description and all the photos.”

Darius stared at them...hard.

“Wait a fucking minute...”

Darius picked up the photo of Harmony and Alessandro at a nearby small-town night club. He noticed there were no tattoos on her. The woman he had in his guest room had a small pawprint on her arm and he saw a glimpse of a thigh piece.

“Eddie.”

“*What?*”

“The woman in the photos doesn’t have any tattoos. This Harmony I have in my guest room has at least two of them.”

“...*Fuck.*”

“I’m calling Ramiro. We’re getting this settled *now.*”

Darius slammed his desk phone down and picked up his cell. He pressed two buttons, and the phone didn’t even ring.

“Yes, sir.”

“Alessandro Segreto. Find him. Eddie fucked up. Who’s the girl?”

The phone was silent for all of 5 seconds before Ramiro had the information he needed.

“Sorry, sir. His girl is Sofia Catrone. Family owns a couple of businesses in the area. Construction, bars.”

“Anyone named Harmony?”

Ramiro was silent again for a moment. “Sister. Harmony Catrone. Twin.”

Darius’ eyes went wide.

“Thank you, Ramiro. I’ll have your pay in a few minutes.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Darius hung up and ran his fingers through his hair. He knew he shouldn't have given Eddie another chance. He'd been slipping, and he dropped the ball yet again. In this line of business, mistakes like this couldn't happen. He'd be punished properly, and Ramiro would be his go-to for information from now on. Eddie was a liability, and liabilities are to be...settled.

This changed everything.

This wasn't Alessandro's girlfriend, but rather the girlfriend's sister. If his intelligence was correct, Alessandro wouldn't give a fuck about her unless Sofia demanded that he do something about it. He didn't know much about her to know if she would be upset if her sister went missing. He had to find out what happened last night and asking her seemed like the best bet. That smile curved again at the corner of his mouth. She was single. And he noticed earlier that she turned his cock harder than the night before. His morals be damned. He would have Harmony and make her like what he had to offer.

CHAPTER 4

Harmony

She couldn't believe he just left her there! And what was that about not escaping? And who the hell would want Gio dead anyway? *Well, that's a stupid question to ask. I do.* She already finished her apple and started getting to work on the grapes. She explored the room, seeing that many of her clothes were in the closet. She needed more answers than what he gave her, and she'd get them. Harmony walked over to her purse sitting on the desk and pulled out some cream, squeezing it on her palms and rubbing it on her body, especially her tattoos. She paid good money for them and always wanted them at their finest. She rubbed the cream over her shoulder, gently rubbing it over the pawprint tattoo. She then lifted her leg up onto the chair Darius had sat on and pulled up her nightgown slightly, fully exposing her thigh. A garter belt tattoo encircled her leg, red lace with a classic Sailor Moon locket in the center and charms hanging down from the garter. She smiled. Harmony was a sucker for anime, and Sailor Moon was one of her favorites growing up.

After applying the lotion, she pulled the nightgown back down and walked over to the bed. She could see a door slightly ajar off to the side of the bed. Peeking in, she found a large master bathroom complete with a separate shower and clawfoot tub. Towels were stacked on a built-in shelf. Soaps and lotions—brands she could never dream of owning—were

stacked in a cabinet next to the shower. The large walk-in shower featured a waterfall over jutting rocks and a showerhead that was built into the ceiling, covering the pebbled ground behind the glass wall. The huge clawfoot tub was marbled with Victorian-style fixings. Next to the tub was a variety of candles and bathbombs. Looking up, she saw another sliding glass door leading out to another balcony. On the balcony was a jacuzzi.

“I wasn’t sure what all you’d like, so I got a little of everything.”

Harmony jumped at the sound of the liquid voice that soothed and caressed like Neil Patrick Harris but had perfect Robert De Niro grit. She was so enthralled by the gorgeous bathroom that she hadn’t heard the lock click on the door and Darius come into the room. She quickly turned around and saw him leaning up against the bathroom doorway.

“I’m sorry...it’s just so gorgeous!”

He slowly stepped inside.

“If there’s anything you need, let me know and I’ll get you anything you want.”

Why the hell was this god of a man being so nice to her? Harmony stamped her foot down and crossed her arms.

“I need to know why *else* I’m here. You can’t tell me you kidnapped me just to pull Gio out of hiding. The man doesn’t hide, and you don’t need me.”

Darius looked away then looked back into her eyes. “It seems as though my assistant made a mistake. The man I’m after is Alessandro.”

Harmony couldn’t believe what she was hearing. She wasn’t surprised that disgusting fucker had gotten into some trouble. “My sister’s boyfriend?”

“Yes.”

Now she was angry. She was angry that Sofia ever got into a relationship with that creep in the first place. She warned her about fucking him, and now look. Once again Sofia and her stupidity got her into a mess.

Harmony huffed and threw her arms. “This is just fucking great.”

“I understand you’re upset...”

Harmony held up her hand and cut Darius off. “It’s not *you*. It’s this whole situation. My sister constantly fucks up her life *and* mine because she lacks enough cognitive development to do anything right.”

She wanted to let the hot tears flow down her face, but she was stronger than that. And she certainly wasn’t going to look vulnerable in front of him. Quickly wiping her eyes, she looked back up at him.

“What did he do that you want to kill him?”

“Simple. He harmed a Don’s daughter. Raped her.”

Suddenly, it clicked. He was a master *sicario*.

“Who do you work for?”

“No one.”

He was quick to answer.

“It was Paola Tagliatti, wasn’t it?”

Darius stood silent, watching her.

“Yes,” he finally admitted.

Harmony shook her head. “Fucking knew it.”

“Care to share?” He quipped.

Harmony looked away, tapping her foot. She didn’t know if she should be telling Darius all of this, but something in her Sicilian gut told her it was the right thing.

“I don’t know anything outside of what my sister mentioned. The son of a bitch mentioned to her a few times if she didn’t ‘act right’, he’d do to her like he did Paola. Funny enough, Paola is an old friend from college. We met in our freshman year. She called me the night he raped her.”

Darius stood listening to her story about how Paola begged her to come to Chicago to stay with her and help her tell her father. She was very close with Don Tagliatti, he even saw her as his adopted daughter.

“When Sofia got involved with him, I didn’t know it was the same person. Not until he mentioned Paola, and I called her up, asking her that *cazzo’s* name. She told me it was Alessandro, my sister’s new boyfriend. I tried to get her to leave him, telling her he was no good. She didn’t listen. She

doesn't know he's been cheating on her, and I see the bruises he leaves on her."

Darius lowered his eyes. "I'm sorry you got mixed up in this."

Harmony waved her hand. "It's done."

Harmony watched as he stood for a moment, then turned to walk away.

"Darius." She called.

He turned back around to face her.

"What if I help you find him?"



Darius

Did she just offer to help him? In all the years he'd been a hired hit man for the mafia around the world, not once had someone involved with the victim offer to help him. There was more to this woman than he knew, and he wanted to explore every bit of it.

“Do you really want to help? You don't understand the work I'm in.”

Harmony stepped closer to him, the little negligee leaving nothing to the imagination as to what was beneath it. He felt his cock grow and it ached against his Versace custom dress pants. He had to remain strong, no matter how much he wanted to unleash it and show her a good time. He sucked in his breath as she was only inches from him. He had to change the subject, fast.

“Who is this Gio you were talking about?”

She stopped in her tracks and looked away. “He's my ex. He decided that multiple women was more his style...and he's not poly.”

Darius felt his blood boiling. Who would ever harm this perfect deity? What sick, twisted, demented fuck would cheat on this delicate rose? Once the business with Alessandro was done, he wanted to take care of this Gio himself, with or without a contract. He could tell by the way she spoke and her

manners in the little time of knowing her that she was not only beautiful, but there was a soft and caring side. The way she spoke about Gio and Alessandro proved this rose had thorns.

“*Mia rosa.*” He whispered.

“What was that?”

“You.” He didn’t know what possessed him to do it, but he gently took her hand in his. It was creamy, the feel of cashmere. He clasped her hand in his. “You are a rose. It’s my job to read people. I can see you have a caring heart until someone hurts you, then you pull out the thorns.”

Harmony smiled. “That’s what my mother always says.”

Darius gently lifted her hand to his lips. “You’re still willing to help even after my mistake, *mia rosa?*”

Harmony smiled so wickedly, he wanted to take her right there on the bathroom floor.

“Absolutely.”

CHAPTER 5

Harmony

For some reason, agreeing to help Darius felt so right. Sofia had fucked with her life enough, and if this was the way to teach her sister a lesson to wise-up then so be it. She lay on the bed, caressing her hand against her chest. After their conversation in the bathroom, Darius told her to meet him later for dinner downstairs. When he left, he didn't lock the door and all the alarms mysteriously disappeared from the windows while she showered. She kept thinking about how he sounded, how good his touch felt. There was something about him she couldn't place. She only just met him, but he made her feel safe and loved. She never felt this way around any of her boyfriends, not even Gio. Sexually, she wanted him badly. She wanted him underneath her, moaning her name, begging to touch her, her pussy squeezing his cock and milking it dry until he couldn't come anymore.

She felt herself grow hot, pulsating, waiting for her treat. She sobered up out of her lustful thoughts when she thought, *Does he feel the same way about me?*

It wasn't fair to think he wanted her just as badly. Except it wasn't hard to see he had some sort of attraction to her the way he shifted and allowed his cock to try and play peek-a-boo under his pants.

She had to find out. Harmony Catrone was no damsel-in-distress. She didn't even care that he kidnapped her at this point, now knowing the full story. Everything started to click. She was a woman who took what she wanted when she wanted it, and Darius would be no different.



Darius

Darius walked around the dining room table, making sure everything was perfect. An Italian like himself...well...half Italian...he couldn't see her turning down a perfectly cooked meal of meatballs, pollo alla cacciatora, caprese pasta, and finish it out with freshly made tiramisu and cannolis by his Sicilian chef. After lighting the red taper candles, he grabbed the wine bottle that Stefano pulled out for him from the wine cellar off the table. Grabbing the corkscrew, he expertly twisted it into the cork and the familiar *pop* was music to his ears. He wafted in the smell from the open neck of the 1945 Brunello di Montalcino. Perfection. He thought about going up to knock on her door to tell her dinner was ready, but there was no need. He heard the clack of heels against the hardwood stairs. Darius looked up and watched as the vision in red took delicate steps down each stair. The heels were black and strappy, and the bodycon dress held her curves snug. Her little fupa at her stomach and thick thighs took his breath and gave him a raging hard-on in return. It glittered under the soft candlelight. The dress had a long slit up the side of her right leg, exposing her thigh. He could tell she wasn't wearing any panties or a bra for that matter. Her nipples poked at the thin fabric and her long hair cascaded down her back. He walked over to the other chair and pulled it out for her. She smiled and sat delicately as he pushed it in toward the table.

Harmony eyed up the spread. “Mmmm, pollo alla cacciatora. My favorite.”

Darius grabbed the wine bottle and poured the red liquid into her glass. “Really?” he said curiously. *I’ll have to thank Ramiro later for that information.*

She took the tongs and scooped some caprese pasta to start out with. He sat down on the other side of the small table. He was thankful he took out the 6 leaves earlier that made it from a table that could fit 15 to a more intimate setting. They eyed each other as they ate and sipped wine.

“Why did you decide to become a hit man?”

Darius was never taken by surprise, but her question caught him off guard and almost made him spit out his wine.

“Excuse me?”

“A *maestro sicario*. Why?”

She continued eating forkfuls of pasta, barely batting an eye like her question was polite conversation. He loved a woman who got right to the point.

Darius shrugged his shoulders. “Money. Prestige. And I just like whacking people.”

“Just people who deserve it or anyone?”

“I don’t normally let people into my business, *mia rosa*. But if you must know, it doesn’t matter to me. I ice anybody the money tells me to. Makes no difference who or why.”

Darius watched as her eyes flared and a small curl tease at her lips.

She was enjoying this.

They continued eating, making actual polite conversation. The bottle of wine quickly disappeared and by the time they hit the cannolis, tiramisu, and coffee, they were giggling and smiling.

“You mean to tell me you’re the one who put Luca Rosso in the meat freezer and set The Batello on fire with its own liquor?” Harmony spat through fits of giggles.

Darius laughed with her. “That’s right. Luca didn’t know what was comin’. The *capo* with Don Marcano said he was tired of Luca acting like a pig in his nightclub and skimming the till. So, I only treated him the way he acted and set The Batello on fire so they could claim insurance losses. Surprised the fucker stayed frozen after it burnt down. I was hoping he’d make some crispy bacon.”

They laughed heartily until Harmony went to reach for the wine bottle and tried pouring the empty bottle into her glass.

“Would you like another?” he asked.

She nodded in approval. Darius walked around to her side of the table and picked up her hand, placing it once again against his lips. “Be right back, *mia rosa*.”

She watched as he walked away to a door near the stairs and opened it, going down below.

Harmony stared at the room. Looking over toward the front door by the foyer, she saw a large living room. In the room there were comfortable leather couches and chairs. A large ceiling to floor bay of windows, bookcases lined with books of all genres from smutty to Shakespeare. By the window was a large grand piano. She smiled as she walked toward the piano.



Darius walked down the steps into the wine cellar. Looking through the catacomb of hundreds of bottles, he found the one he was looking for. He pulled out the bottle off the rack and blew off the dust. *The 1907 Shipwrecked Heidsieck will do.* Above him, he heard a strange sound. He'd left the door ajar and realized the sound he was hearing was melodic and soothing. It was the piano in the grand parlor. The tone tugged at his heart, making him feel calmer than he had been in many years. He felt himself giving in to the notes. Who was playing that beautiful music?

He gently walked back up the stairs with the wine in hand. Coming around the corner and walking the few steps to the door of the parlor, he peeked in and saw Harmony sitting on the bench at the keys. Listening more intently, he realized she was playing the Moonlight Sonata.

Darius wasn't sure but it felt like his jaw dropped. She was already everything he had ever dreamed of, and this was icing on the cake. A woman who adored classical music? He didn't want to ruin the moment, watching her play from a distance,

her body swaying to the resonating sound of hammers hitting strings.

He silently walked up to her beside the piano. “Beethoven. I’m impressed.”

Harmony looked up at him but continued to play. “You know it?”

Darius leaned against the piano. “Of course I do. Beethoven was a favorite growing up, although one of my favorite pieces is his Symphony number nine in D minor.”

Harmony stopped. “That was the one piece I could never master. Can you play it for me?”

Darius smiled. “Of course.”

They switched places and she stood behind him as he warmed up his fingers. He began to play. They both gave in to the music, closing their eyes and becoming drunk on the notes. She leaned in close, her body pressing against his back. Her arm snaked around his chest and she pushed her breasts into him. They both sharply inhaled. His fingers began to fumble as her mouth came close to his ear.

“Darius?” She whispered.

“Yes?” He barely choked out.

“I need to know something. I saw what happened in the bathroom. And I could tell the moment you looked at me walking down the stairs. Do you want me?”

He stopped, turning toward her. His arm quickly wrapped around her and pulled her in so forcefully her mouth was barely touching his. He realized he was still wearing his protective glasses so she couldn't see his eyes. She had no idea the heat that was burning inside, poisoning him.

“I've wanted you since the moment I saw you.”

That was all she needed to hear. Her mouth went down on his, her hands curling through his hair. She moaned against his lips and he felt his cock stand at immediate attention. This was it. She was about to be his.



Harmony

She got what she wanted. She didn't think it would take playing the piano to finally have his cock, but that didn't matter. She was tired of her pussy begging for relief, her swollen lips crying for an orgasm. His words were music to her ears, and that was her cue to make the move. Harmony was never one to play games and hard to get if she didn't have to. This man turned her on so badly she wasn't waiting for him to take her. His sweet talk and the well-tailored black suit, white shirt with the silken green tie, were enough to make her want to come right there on the stairs when she walked down. Thanks to the slit in her dress, she found herself easily able to straddle him. She felt his hands graze over her ass and grab hard. She moaned against his lips. Nothing else mattered right now. Not Alessandro, not Sofia—all that mattered was having him inside her.

She did this on purpose, and it was working beautifully. Her fingers curled in in his hair, pushing his mouth harder on hers. They both parted their lips at the same time and began to explore each other's mouths with their tongues. His scent, his taste, it enflamed her. He picked her up and swung her around to place her on the piano lid. She almost felt sorry for it, but he didn't seem to care that he almost broke the lid prop slamming her down onto the hard wood. His hands expertly worked his way down her neck and cupped her breasts. He pulled one out,

exposing it in all its glory. Darius's hot kisses left a trail of fire from her lips to her neck and down to her nipple where he began to lick and suck on it so gently that she wanted to arch her back and push his mouth on it harder. His tongue continued to dance and tease, perking up her nipple. She didn't even feel it when he pulled out the other one and began to tweak the nubbed flesh between his fingers. She writhed in his hands, unable to control the growing pressure and heat between her legs. He made his way down and spread her legs open. She was wet, pink, and ready. Both sets of lips begged him to take her. He grabbed her thighs, pulling her closer to his mouth. She almost screamed when his tongue delved into her pussy. He lapped at her juices, guttural moans escaping her throat. She felt herself grabbing his head and pushing him in deeper, and he responded by working his hands under her ass and pulling her into him even more. His tongue flicked inside her pink walls, playing with her pierced clit. One hand worked its way out and began to rub right where her piercing was while he continued to eat her out. She couldn't stand it anymore. She was so close to the verge of her own orgasm, but he stopped right when she was about to reach her peak.

She looked down and saw him looking up at her. Standing up, she could see how hard his cock was. She licked her lips, wanting to taste him like he tasted her. She had to hold back the animal inside her that wanted to rip those expensive dress pants open and let his cock spring forth in all its magnificence. Darius picked her up by her waist like she was nothing but a feather to him. He positioned her to wrap her legs around him

so he could walk them over to the large Victorian couch with gold inlays over by the bank of bay windows. He tossed her down onto the black velvet. He stood up, his hands reaching down to unbutton his pants.

“Wait.” Her voice was raspy, almost a whisper.

He stopped. She maneuvered herself up and reached for him. Her manicured nails slithered past the silk trim of the waist band, her thumb flicking his belt apart. If there was one thing she was an expert at, it was getting a man’s pants to the ground. She undid the buckle and popped the buttons, her hands sliding the black cloth down past his thighs until they dropped to the floor.

Well, hello there...

Turns out she wasn’t the only one expecting to get fucked tonight, since there it was staring back at her, a glorious, unsheathed sword hard and ready for action. Harmony had seen plenty of different cocks in her life, in more ways than one. But this one...it was the most beautiful thing she ever saw. It was long, hard, and perfectly thick. And would you look at that...the carpet matches the drapes. Gently, she wrapped her fingers around the shaft. Already it was pulsing beneath her hand, and she heard Darius moan a sigh of relief. She didn’t want this moment to end, so she slowly started stroking it, her mouth leaning in to suck on his head. Her tongue flicked over his skin, cradling it as her hand moved up and down his shaft. He reached to put his hand on the back of her head.

“Suck it.” His voice had changed from the soft and gritty undertones she was used to, to demanding and cold. The change stirred something inside her she didn’t understand. She felt him grip her hair and pull it downwards, so she had to raise her chin to face him. He was looking down at her.

“I want that mouth, *mia rosa*. Now.”

Yes, daddy!

He released his grip only slightly so she could reposition her head before she took his full shaft in her mouth. Her tongue going over every part she could possibly reach. She cupped his balls, her fingers dancing closely between them and his ass. The sound he made was primeval, instinctive. He wrapped his fingers in her hair, pushing her to help her. He tasted divine, like a heady mix of desire and bourbon-laced bodywash. Tears started to flow down her cheeks. Never in her life had she wanted a man so badly it caused her to cry. She wanted to please him, to have him come in her mouth so deep it would hit the back of her throat. He must have known what she wanted since he started to thrust his hips faster and faster until he cried out, holding her tight against him. Harmony responded by pulling him in as hard as she could, letting the salty liquid drip down her tongue into her throat. She felt a sense of euphoria feeling him squirt so hard it hit with such force at the back of her throat, and she gladly swallowed every, last drop.

Why does this feel so good? Please, Darius, give me more. Don't let this end...

Pulling his cock out of her mouth, she looked up to see him smiling.

“That won’t do, *mia rosa*. I’m not done with you yet.”

He was so quick that she was almost instantaneously on her back on the couch. She looked down to see nothing had changed, he was still rock hard. It almost looked like he was even harder than he was before he came. Taking off his jacket and unbuttoning his shirt, he revealed a broad chest with the beginnings of a small 6-pack. She reached up to run her fingers down his chest and followed the little orange trail down to his cock.

Harmony felt a shiver of anticipation go down her spine. She didn’t know what he was going to do to her, but he hoped he would bring her some relief and fast.

“What do you want from me, Darius?”

He leaned in close to her. “I thought that was obvious.” He leaned even closer until his lips grazed her left ear. “*You.*”

The moment he said it, she felt him enter her. The feeling of him filling inside her almost made her explode on the spot. Her mind swirled, the ecstasy too much for her to handle. Waves of pleasure washed over her as he pumped inside her. Something in her mind clicked. Decades of tampered-down feelings and pain and hurt came boiling up. He was the key to unlocking her true potential. Tears poured out of her eyes, letting the feeling take her where she needed to go. He watched her every move, realizing what was happening. For the first time, he reached up and took his glasses off his face,

never breaking his stride. Harmony stared back into deep black pools. Most women would be turned off by a man who had black eyes, but she found it sexy as hell.

No wonder he kept them hidden behind those glasses...

A new world opened to her. She saw lust, desire, and aching need... for her inside his eyes. She wrapped her arms around him, letting a guttural moan escape her lips as she reached her peak and the tears kept coming of pure pleasure.

“Darius...” she cried, her voice pained with an aching need. Their eyes were locked, and neither one of them were going to look away as they came together.

He thrust deep inside her, both of them coming and orgasming, their bodily fluids mixing together in peaceful harmony.

“Harmony...” he whispered as they climaxed together. She felt his body, slick with sweat, grow tense in her arms then limp as he spent his energy into her.

Harmony felt her soul leave her body. It almost pained her to feel him pull his cock out of her, but he only got up long enough to walk over to a large oak chest by a closet door and pull out a thick sherpa blanket. The couch was large enough to comfortably fit the both of them, so she slid over a little as he went to lie on the couch beside her, holding her close to his chest. Harmony wrapped one arm around him, lying her head on his heavily beating chest after quickly landing a soft kiss on his neck. Darius looked down and gently kissed her on the lips. She wanted more of his lips, but her body was too much

like Jell-O lying between him and the arched back of the couch. Both perfectly content, he pulled the blanket over the both of them and they sat drinking in each other's company, letting the moment take them. Soon, she drifted off to sleep.

CHAPTER 6

Darius

What the fuck was his life coming to? Within the last two days everything was turned upside down. He went from business and doing a typical hit to having a woman freely walk about his mansion sending his cock into spasms every time he looked at her like he was a horny teenager. For the first time, sex didn't feel like a biological need he had to release...it felt like home. He didn't know how to love them, to give them what they needed besides sexual satisfaction. Darius had always kept love and sex separate. Was it really supposed to be? He used them, fucked their brains out, then moved on to the next one, never getting attached because of his line of work. But this one...she *wanted* in. Since last night, he felt his heart *and* his cock aching to please her. He wanted to see her smile, to bring her into everything about his life. He'd already told her more than he probably should have, and she took it in, even giving suggestions on how to pull Alessandro out of hiding. It was like she was meant to be in this world, to be his. Everything was going so fast he could hardly contain it. The dinner, the ease of talking about his work, her willingness to help him find Alessandro and bring him down, the delightful and sublime sex...he was *enjoying* it. The worst part was, he didn't know if it was a good thing or a mistake. Villains weren't supposed to get a happy ending.

Today, Darius was going over his plans in his study when she waltzed in. No woman had ever been in his office, but there she was, clad in one of his button-down shirts and lace-topped panties with a messy bun standing in his doorway. His cock immediately raised the flagpole, saluting her. His imagination started to run with it, thinking about ripping open those buttons, exposing her naked breasts underneath, grabbing her and nailing her right there on his desk. He couldn't decide what was sexier...the red dress last night or this laid-back don't-give-a-fuck look. He had to control himself. Last night he was able to let himself go, to give his all to her. Today was business. If he spent all his time fucking her, he'd never get any work done. No work meant no money, which meant no treating her to the lifestyle she deserved. That thought sobered him up only slightly.

She strutted across the lush, carpeted floor, the only room in the house except his bedroom with carpet flooring. Harmony came around the desk and hoisted herself up, popping her ass right on the wood. She looked down at the papers in front of him. It was too late to hide them now. She thumbed through them, acting like he wasn't even there. *Cheeky cunt.*

Suddenly, she spoke. "That's your problem, you're doing this wrong."

Darius raised an eyebrow. "Excuse me?"

"Here..." she shuffled a few papers across the desk. "I've been around the bastard long enough to figure out his kind. If a woman is willing to open her legs to him, he's on it like a

cagna in heat.” She smiled that wicked smile that had Darius like putty in her hands. “I don’t really think he’s in love with my sister. They met in Miami when she was down there over the summer with Paola.”

Darius held up a hand and stopped her. “Your sister was in Miami with Paola?”

Harmony rolled her eyes. “Yes, pay attention Darius. *Papà* Tagliatti offered to have us go down there for the whole summer as a graduation gift since the three of us just got done with our master’s degrees. I stayed home, but they went, and she found him in a nightclub. The three of them have been inseparable ever since. When they had to go home, he followed. Paola told me the story of how he raped her the night before they left. She never told my sister about it; she was so scared and embarrassed. After she called me and told me, I begged her to tell *Papà* Tagliatti. Took her a week to get the courage to tell him. And here we are.”

Darius sat back in his chair and folded his arms. His purple sweatpants and white T-shirt showing her his every curve. He enjoyed being comfortable in his own office, and she looked just as comfortable in his shirt.

“Then tell me, *mia rosa*, how am I going about this ‘all wrong’? And why didn’t you go with them?”

Harmony looked away from him. “I needed a job. Wanted to make money to help pay for my parents’ house in foreclosure. They lost a lot of money by constantly bailing my sister out of her stupid decisions and sending us both to college. So, I asked

Papà Tagliatti if there was anything I could do. I've been his best *capo* ever since.”

Darius's eyes grew wide, and this time, he didn't have his glasses on to hide his expression from her.

“You...”

Harmony smiled. “Yes, me. I was the one who convinced him to put the hit out on Alessandro. I didn't know you'd accidentally kidnap me in the process.”

Everything started to fall into place. She was already mixed up in this world. That's why she was so willing to help him and wasn't afraid when he nabbed her. She knew who he was the entire time.

“I know that look.” Her voice cut through his thoughts. “I didn't know you were the one he hired that night in the bar. All he told me was he hired the best in the world to take care of the problem. I didn't figure it out until you told me you were looking for Alessandro.”

His heart jumped from his chest to his stomach, up to his throat and back again. The thought crossed his mind that she may have used this to spy on him, use him. The experience they shared last night was enough to prove that theory false.

She reached out and placed her hand under his chin. No one else would have even been able to walk into the office, let alone touch him. It was a testament to prove just how much he trusted her. “I want him *morta*, Darius. And I need your help.”

He grabbed her hand and moved it from under his chin to his lips, kissing the lusciously soft skin. Her golden rings set with diamonds and rubies glittered from the sunlight streaming in through the window. “Any other man would think you were using him with that admission, *mia rosa*.”

Harmony cast her eyes downward. “I’m sorry. I never wanted you to think that. I...I’m not...”

He saw her trying to keep the tears from escaping her eyes. He stood up, pulling her off the desk and into his arms. Every fiber of his being wanted to take whatever pain she was feeling away from her.

He didn’t know what to do except to just be there for her and let her feel whatever it was she was feeling.

“Let it out, *mia rosa*.”

“Everything’s happening so fast. One minute I’m back home keeping tabs on him and my sister. and the next I’m in your home having mind-blowing sex that I never thought I could feel.”

You and me both...

Darius gently lifted her chin up to face him. “Tell me.”

Harmony let out a rattled sigh. “All my life I’ve had horrible boyfriends, lovers, whatever. They only wanted one thing from me. I was seen as a trophy, a toy to play with. No one except my parents, *Papà* Tagliatti, and Paola respected me. I’m sorry to dump all this on you. I know we’ve only been together one night but...I feel like you respect me. You understand me.

Darius, you're nothing like all those other guys. I don't give a damn what you do, because I'm in that world that is my life now. This is gonna sound crazy but..." He could barely hear her when she whispered, "I want to live in our world with you."

Her admission was a smack in the face. All night lying with her in his arms he had thought about the same thing. It didn't matter that it had been one day, one night. There was a connection there he couldn't explain. Whatever that connection was, he wasn't going to break it. And he'd go to hell and back and do whatever it takes to keep her in his life as his permanent lover...and hopefully more.

The heat rose in his body, revealing itself in his dark eyes. As he looked into her blue pools, they ached for him to respond. He pressed his lips hard on hers, delving into her mouth. She melted in his arms, responding with her tongue and an urge that matched his own. He broke away from her, leaving her in a daze.

"You are *mine, mia rosa*. And *no one* will ever take you away from me." He growled.

She smiled, teasing him. "And what would you do for me?"

Darius returned the smile. He didn't know what possessed him to do it, but the sharp Bowie knife came sliding out of its holster and he held it in his hand. The wrapped leather and long stainless-steel blade felt like an extension of his own arm. He brandished it in front of her, the steel glittering from the sun. Her eyes glittered more than the knife itself. "Live for

you. Die for you. Burn down the world for you and take anything stood in my way.” He leaned down close to her ear and whispered, “I’ll kill for you, *mia rosa*, and present their heart on a platter if it pleased you.”

She moaned against him, his words engaging her soul. “And what would you do for me?” he asked.

She grabbed the knife from him, licking the blade. “Words aren’t enough to show you, Darius. You’ll find out soon enough.”

He let out a throaty growl, almost snarling.

I can’t wait to find out...

“But for now...we have business to take of.”



Harmony

Harmony left his office with a plan in place. She felt like an entirely different person, the way she acted in there. And it felt *good*. She was finally letting her real self-shine thanks to Darius. He brought out something in her that had long been dormant and now she was blossoming. Padding back to her room, she grabbed her cell phone off the bed. It had been since before dinner yesterday that she had checked it, and of course she had a million missed calls and texts from Sofia.

I'm sorry, Harm...

I didn't mean to ruin our birthday. I just wanted to have a good time.

I don't understand why you're so upset. I didn't do anything wrong.

Please call me back?

Why aren't you answering me?

Will you call me? Alessandro wants to take us to dinner because he didn't get to celebrate our birthday.

Bingo. This was the “in” she needed, and she didn't even have to do any of the work.

She tapped her phone, and it began to ring.

“Harm...?”

“What do you want Sofia?” Her tone was laced with acid.

“Harm! Where have you been? I’ve been so worried about you!”

“Around. Running errands.”

“For 2 days?”

“Well, if you actually stopped by my apartment instead of asking *mamma* and *papa*, you would know.”

Harmony knew damn well her sister didn’t bother to come check on her after their fight at the bar. She probably nursed a hangover all day and then decided to call her today to play nice and act like nothing happened.

“Harm, please. Alessandro wants to take us out for our birthday. A real nice place.”

“And what *place* would that be?” Harmony scoffed. “We live in bumfuck Egypt in the middle of the mountains where Bigfoot and skinwalkers come out at night. Guys work for steel mill factories and the town looks like it’s still in 1975. Where could he possibly take us that’s *so* nice?”

“Altius in Pittsburgh.”

Harmony almost dropped her phone. “Altius? The place with the \$160 caviar?”

“Yeah! He said he’d treat the both of us.”

And just where the hell did he get the money? As far as Harmony knew, her last tab on him said his own family wasn’t paying his way after they found out what he did. No matter,

what *did* matter was getting Darius near him to do the job. This was his ticket in.

“Alright. But I’ll meet you there. It’s almost an hour drive from here and I have to do a few things before I go.”

“Okay. How about 8pm?”

“That’s fine.”

Harmony hung up the phone. This was going to be perfect.

CHAPTER 7

Harmony

Harmony was silent, the only sound was the roar of the restaurant and the clicking of her gold rings against her wine glass. She had picked out a slinky blue dress to match her eyes. She loved long dresses with the slit up the side, but this one barely covered her lower region. If she opened her legs everyone would get a show. A small slit went up both sides, stitched together with delicate black lace. The silken fabric rubbed against her large breasts with its custom built-in bra and chiffon straps.

She looked down at her phone. It was 8:10.

Why am I not surprised?

Taking another sip of liquid courage, she saw her phone light up. It was an unknown number texting her.

Late again?

She forgot she had given Darius her number before they left the mansion. She drove separately in her car so Alessandro wouldn't get suspicious. She knew Darius wasn't far behind and always had her in sight. She picked up her phone and started to type. *Yes. As always.*

She downed the rest of her glass and started to pour another from the bottle of Chateau Potelle. Eyeing up the menu, she was tempted to order the 2019 Spottswode. Her phone lit up again.

Get the wine. If that bastard doesn't pay, I will.

Harmony smiled. *Oh really? Is that a date? How gentlemanly.*

You're mine, mia rosa. Anything for you.

A chill went down her spine. Even reading those words was a sonata to her soul. *You're mine. I'm his.*

She called the waiter over to the table and asked for the bottle of Spottswode. He seemed eager and pleased to bring her the selection.

A noise near the door pierced her ears. It was the familiar sound of her sister's laugh. *It's showtime.*

Sofia walked over to their table smiling and laughing. "Harmony!"

"You're late, Sofia."

"I'm sorry, we got held up."

Standing behind her was the vile in her throat: Alessandro. He looked as sleazy as ever with his greasy black hair and dark green eyes. His slim body made him look like a twig. She could tell the tailored suit he was wearing had seen some better days, nothing like when Sofia first sent her a pic of him. He looked nervous, sweat beading down his brow. He looked considerably paler than the last time she saw him.

"Anything wrong, Alessandro?" She cooed. "You don't look well."

“I’m fine.” His voice was nails on a chalkboard. She couldn’t stand it when he spoke, all she wanted to do was vomit.

She put on her fake smile and hid her disgust. “Sit down. I ordered wine, hope you don’t mind. I was waiting for you to get here to order food.”

Sofia plopped down on her chair. “Ugh! I’m starving. I hope they have some good steak. Oooo, maybe I’ll get salmon!”

Sofia was lost in the menu, not paying any attention to her or Alessandro.

The rest of the night went without a hitch. Alessandro started to calm down and eased up after 4 glasses of wine. The three of them talked and laughed over steak tartare and their various meals of steak and salmon. They had just finished their fourth bottle of wine when coffee came around with a chocolate medley, crème brulee, and a strawberry pretzel for dessert. Sofia got Alessandro to reminisce about their time in Miami until she asked Harmony about her future plans.

“Summer’s almost over and we’re getting into fall Harm. What are you gonna do now that we’re out of school?”

Harmony shrugged her shoulders. “I’ve been offered a position at my summer job so I think I might stick with that until I find something in the field.”

Sofia giggled. “I don’t know why you decided to go into criminal justice and cyber security, Harm. It’s so...boring.”

Harmony took a sip of her coffee. “I find it fascinating. Maybe I’ll even go on to law school.”

“Well...you go right ahead, Harm. Leaves for fun for the rest of us.”

“I don’t consider an undeclared major with a mass of stupid courses just so you could sleep around *fun*.” Harmony muttered under her breath.

Sofia looked away from Alessandro to Harmony. “Did you say something, Harm?”

“Me?” Harmony put her hand on her chest and put her empty coffee cup back down on the saucer. “No, I didn’t say anything.”

Harmony placed her hand down next to her chair and moved her fingers to sign “L-E-A-V-E.”

She knew Darius would see it wherever he was.

“Well, um...thank you for dinner Alessandro. That was sweet of you.”

“Yeah...happy birthday.” He slurred. *Perfect*.

The waiter came by with the check and placed it on the table. Alessandro looked at it and the sickening color came back into his cheeks. Harmony smiled. She bet that the bill was over two grand, since she purposely ordered the five-hundred-dollar wine bottles.

“I’ll be right back, Sof. Gotta use the bathroom.”

Alessandro practically ran from his chair to the back of the restaurant.

Harmony smiled. She knew Darius had to have seen him go toward the bathroom, and now it was just a waiting game for his signal.

Ten minutes had passed before Sofia started to worry.

“What’s taking him so long?”

Almost immediately, her phone lit up. Sofia looked down and saw it was a text from Alessandro.

“Huh. He said something’s come up and for us to go on ahead.”

“Oh.” Harmony feigned. “Hope it’s nothing serious.”

“I don’t think it is. Harm, can you take me home?”

“Absolutely, sis.”

Harmony and Sofia got up and left the restaurant, walking out to her car. The entire ride home Sofia was chattering incessantly. Harmony wished the wine would kick in a little more and she would shut the fuck up. An hour later, she pulled up to Sofia’s door.

Sofia smiled and reached over to the driver’s side, hugging Harmony.

“And what’s that for?” Harmony quipped.

“For being a great sister.”

You have no idea...

Harmony turned back toward the road, trying to hide the softness in her face. “Thanks.”

Sofia got out of the car and looked back at Harmony. “Do you think he’s ok? He does this sometimes, but he’s never left me to catch a ride home.”

“I’m sure he’s fine. Probably an important work thing or something.”

“Ok. See you soon?” There was hope in her voice.

“Yeah.” Harmony said dryly. With that, she pulled off and made her way to start the half-hour drive back toward Darius’ mansion. If he was just here for a hit, she was curious how the hell he had a mansion in the middle of nowhere near the mountains. She’d have to ask about it later.

Rounding the corner up the long and winding macadam road, the mansion loomed in the distance. She pulled up to the gate, showing her badge to Tony the security guard to let her in.

“He’s already made his way to the cottage, Miss Catrone.”

Efficient much? Then again, she had purposely driven a bit slower on the way home and she had to go out of her way to drop Sofia off at her apartment. She drove up the road to the 7-car attached garage and pulled into the one open door. The whirring of the garage door was white-noise as she got out and made her way to the back of the house. Going through the large living room area from the foyer to the dining room, there was a massive sunporch leading out to an even larger patio.

The patio was complete with lounge chairs, plush cushions, an inground fire pit, built-in bar and grilling area, and a cabana. Her heels clacked against the brick and cement. A small stone path from the patio led to a shed the size of a small outhouse a few feet away. She squeaked open the wooden door and stepped inside. Locking the door behind her, a caged wall came down the floor began to move. Down, deep down she went, the elevator taking her a few feet underground. When it stopped, the cage lifted open revealing a clean, well-lit tunnel encased in cement. A few feet from her was a railing and a moving travelator. She stepped onto the belt and leaned against the railing, the travelator taking her down the tunnel faster than her feet could move. It wasn't long until she reached the end. A bank of large, sealed-off steel doors lined the walls. She walked to the right towards the closest door and knocked twice. She heard the wizzes and clanks of the automatic lock coming undone. Looking up, a camera was right above her. She waved, then the door swung open. Stepping inside, she couldn't help but smile. Darius stood behind Alessandro tied tightly to a Saint Andrews cross. He was putting on his leather gloves when she walked in. Alessandro's head was down, blood dripping from his mouth. He was stripped down to his boxers, and she could see bruises were already appearing on his ribs.

Harmony walked up to Darius and rubbed her hands over his chest. "Who said you could start the fun without me?"

"I'm sorry, *mia rosa*, I got a little excited." He purred. Darius grabbed her around her waist and nibbled on her neck, his

tongue soothing where his teeth had just been.

His name escaped her lips with a moan of pleasure.
“Darius.”

She didn't know why his touch and teases were turning her on so much, especially in front of Alessandro's broken and bleeding body. But it was hot, and she loved every minute of it.

“I'll take care of that pussy later, *mia rosa*; right now we have work to do.”

“What if we do both at the same time?”

She had no idea why she said that. The thought ripped through her mouth before she could stop herself from vocalizing it. She looked back at him, ready to apologize, but all she saw was a hunger. She couldn't tell if it was for her, for the thrill and power of having Alessandro in his grasp, or both. Either way, she felt something deep down inside her rise and whisper to her, *Take both*.

Suddenly, her mouth was on his, her tongue exploring his mouth. He moaned against her, battling with himself to stay on task but fuck her senseless. She broke away from him, and the look on his face told her the decision he had made.



Darius

What the hell was this woman doing? He went through careful planning and dealing with his men to grab Alessandro and bring him back to his bunker to have this moment. A job was to be done. But here she was, walking in and asking, no, demanding with her body and her mouth for him to fuck her and kill Alessandro at the same time. His body shuddered, his cock standing up at attention and so hard it hurt. The pain and pleasure of his large cock pressing against his pants was almost unbearable. He wanted to spring it from its confines and show it to her, let her play. If this is what love is really like, he'd take it. Harmony was weaving her way into his heart forever. If she wanted to play while working, so be it. After all, all work and no play made Darius a dull boy. He grabbed the back of her head, freeing her hair from the confines of her pins and hair ties that held up her curls. Her long locks cascaded down her back and she shook her head, the bouncing curls spraying over her shoulders. He kissed her back, grabbing her ass and slightly pulling her dress up over her hips.

“Let’s play, my little spitfire.”

Her eyes fluttered as she whispered, “Yes, sir, let’s play.”

Walking back over to Alessandro, he smacked his cheek with the back of his hand. His one eye was already starting to swell

shut from a punch to the face.

“Wake the fuck up.” He growled. “You’re going to watch this before I get rid of you, you rapist bastard.”

A small chair was off to the corner. Harmony had already grabbed it and dragged it over to be close enough she could touch him while he worked. Normally he’d quickly take out his victims and dispose of their bodies before anyone knew they were missing. This man...no...this man was in for a treat. He hurt the woman he loved, her sister, and her best friend. He was going to suffer as they had suffered.

He felt like a brick went into his chest with the realization. He *loved* her. He’d do anything to make her happy, to please her, burn his way through anything while walking through the fire to get to her. He didn’t care how much blood he had to spill as long as she was safe and happy....with him.

He looked back before he began, watching her. The heat was evident in her eyes. She was a strong woman who could manipulate people, hide her emotions, and make deals with the best of the *capos*, but she couldn’t hide her emotions from him. She loved him back.



Harmony

She knew he saw it, the love in her eyes. It was fast, it was sudden, but she knew she couldn't live without him. He was the Hades to her Persephone, her Joker to his Harley. They were fucked up, but the insanity of their lives fit together perfectly. Two people involved with the blood and underground of America, the politics of the Mafia. It was business. Together, they could bridge the gaps between the four families in Los Angeles, Miami, New York, and Chicago. They could build an empire of peace between them. The thought of business was taking over until she saw Darius pull out his bag of toys. He walked over to a small radio built into the wall. He flipped the switch and it began to play Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 5 in E minor, Op. 64. She licked her lips as he sliced through Alessandro's skin, small knicks that just barely bled. Alessandro watched them, spewing out curses in Italian. The curses turned to screams when Darius placed salt on the wounds. The screams ran down her spine, filling her with the justice her family deserved. She got up from the chair and gently placed her hand on Darius' back.

"Mia rosa, I'm trying to work." He cooed softly.

Harmony smiled. *"Please, mi amore, let me play too."*

He smiled back at her and bowed, his hand gesturing to the bag. She reached down and pulled out a small bat just big

enough for her. It was light, but mighty. Casually she walked up to Alessandro and swung, the bat crashing into his ribs. He strained against the ropes, trying to hold his chest from the agonizing pain.

“This is for Paola.” She took her stiletto heel and jabbed it into his cock. As she twisted it, he let out a curdling scream of agonizing pain.

“You will never harm my family again. Don Tagliatti sends his regards.”

Harmony walked away from him and motioned to Darius to let him take care of the rest. Sitting down on the chair, she watched him work. She felt the heat grow between her thighs, her pussy dripping wet. He was so hot and sexy when he worked. The determination in his black eyes, his skill and precision, it made her want to get on her knees and suck his cock while he cut into Alessandro. The only thing that stopped her was she didn't want Alessandro's blood dripping on her and possibly getting in her mouth.

Darius was in the process of ripping off Alessandro's fingernails when she opened her legs and pulled her panties off. The *Allegro con anima* was coming to an end as the *Andante cantabile con alcuna licenza* began. Her fingers stroked her clit, sending her into eyes almost rolling in the back of her head. Slowly she pushed one, then two fingers in and began pumping inside herself. She let out a loud moan which caught Darius and Alessandro's attention.

“Love, right now?”

“I’m sorry...it’s just...when you work it’s so hot, baby.”

Alessandro was panting, moaning from the pain that was being inflicted on him. Darius looked back at Alessandro then back to Harmony.

“Don’t die on me.”

Darius walked over to Harmony, grabbing her and pulling her to her knees. He unbuckled his belt, his pants falling to the floor. His cock bounced in front of her, thick, hard, and ready for the taking. She quickly took it into her mouth, sheathing it to the hilt. He let out a moan as his hand pushed against the back of her head. His cock was so deep in her mouth she was able to slip out her tongue from between it and her teeth to lick at his balls against her chin.

“Good girl.” He groaned. That only turned her on even more. She spread her legs wide, using one hand to push inside her wet and dripping pussy while the other wound around his back to steady herself as she bobbed back and forth, her mouth being filled and unfilled. He helped guide her, thrusting himself in and out of her mouth.

She could feel him tensing, almost on the verge of coming. He quickly pulled out then turned her, putting her on all fours, bending her over the chair.

Darius turned back to Alessandro. “Watch.”

Alessandro had no choice. He wasn’t able to shut his eyes. Harmony didn’t know why, but she was too busy wanting to orgasm from Darius’ cock to ask.

Darius leaned down next to Harmony's ear, pushing up her dress around her waist. He expertly slipped one hand into the top of her dress and pulled out one breast, then the other. He squeezed them and played with the nipples until they peaked. She moaned and tried to rub her ass against his cock, needing the friction to relieve her aching lower lips. He pressed it against her opening.

“Do you want this?”

“Yes, please, yes,” she whispered, her throat dry.

“I can't hear you, *mia rosa*. Do you want this cock deep in your little cunt?”

“Yes! Please, baby, yes, I need you.” She screamed.

“Your wish is my command, your majesty.”

He slammed himself into her, the pleasure and pressure so intense she thought she'd orgasm and pass out at the same time. He pumped hard inside her, the friction causing her to scream. She was never one to be very vocal, just some moaning, but *Dio*, this man had her crying and screaming his name. She couldn't take it anymore. She was on the verge, almost at the edge. She didn't want to come unless he did. He must have understood her because he pumped harder inside her, then slow, deep penetration as they moaned together, calling each other's name. The finale—Andante maestoso - Allegro vivace—started. She climaxed over his cock while he filled her up with his seed, all while the climax of the orchestral piece occurred. He pulled out of her, dripping with their juices, while the cream ran down her legs. He walked

over to a small door like the ones in the doctor's office when they ask for a piss sample. In the door were two wet cloths. Darius cleaned himself up, then walked over to her, rubbing down her thighs and ass. The cool, wet cloth felt good on her skin. She pulled down her dress and he pulled up his pants, putting himself back together. Darius gently kissed her on the lips.

“Do you feel better?”

Harmony smiled through her satisfied haze. “Yes, *mi amore*.”

“Good. Now let your *amore* work.”

Harmony sat on the chair, happy and content as she watched Darius walk back over to Alessandro. He had watched the entire thing, his eyes a mix of pain, shock, and fear.

“Wha...what...about...Sofia...”

She cocked her head. “Sofia? Oh, I'm sure I can come up with an easy enough explanation. After all, you just *love* to use women until you're done with them, right, Alessandro?”

He never got another word out. Darius' hand was around his neck, crushing his vocal chords and cutting off his air supply. Five minutes later, after slowly squeezing and adding a small amount of pressure each minute, the light finally died from Alessandro's eyes.

Harmony smiled wickedly. Justice had been served. She got up and walked over to Darius, slowly kissing him on the neck.

“Want me to help get rid of him?”

Darius turned back and smiled. “No. Eddie needs to redeem himself, and Marco and Vincenzo can handle it.”

He bent down and kissed her, long and hard.

“You understand you’re mine forever? I’d have to kill you if you leave.”

She looked back up at him and lifted her hand, running her fingers through his hair. The small light in the room caught it just right, making it look like a raging fire.

“I love you too much to leave you. Besides, you’re mine forever too. You see what happens when you hurt *Papà Tagliatti’s* family.”

Darius reached down to cup her breast and gently grab the back of her neck. “Get upstairs,” he groaned. “We’re not done yet.”

Harmony didn’t say a word after he released his grip. She picked up her panties and sashayed to the door, leaving him to speak with Eddie, Marco, and Vincenzo who were standing outside the door.

“He’s all yours, boys.”

Alessandro that is...because Darius is all mine.

After getting back up to the house, she grabbed her phone from her purse on the foyer table. She walked over to the living room and sat down on the same couch Darius had just fucked her on the day before. Pressing two buttons, the phone rang.

A man answered, his voice ragged and withered with age.
“Harmony! Mia figlia, I trust it’s done.”

“Si, Papà. It’s done.”

“That’s good. When will you be back to visit us? Paola misses you and I need my best capo by my side.”

“Soon, Papà. There’s been a change of plans.”

“Oh? Dimmi.”

“It’s a long story, but I fell in love.”

“Bring him to Chicago. I want to meet him.”

“The thing is you already know him.”

She could almost feel the old man smiling behind the phone.

“I never expected you and Darius together. He’s a good man in our line of work.”

“Papà, I have a proposition. Can we meet with you soon? I think I have an idea to bring peace to the four families.”

“Be here in two days. Love you, figlia.”

“Love you too.”

She hung up the phone and felt someone watching her. She turned around and saw Darius leaning against the doorjamb to the sun porch.

He looked amazing in his all-black suit, the only contrast being his purple tie. The man certainly loved his blacks, purples, and greens.

“Hides the blood better.”

It was almost as if he could read her thoughts.

Harmony scoffed. “I’m sure you have a great dry cleaner to take care of that.”

“I do. But right now, I need to take care of you.”

She smiled, licking her lips. She was his, and he was hers. She couldn’t wait to start their empire, together.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ashley Brion's ancestry hails from Paris, France, and Suffolk, England. Ashley has three degrees, two being master's degrees in English and Creative Writing. She specializes in all types of romance, mainly focusing on historical romance and dabbles in horror and dark fantasy. Ashley is an autistic author who is proud to be a member of the Rainbow mafia and a POC advocate. She enjoys spending time with friends and family, painting, gaming, attending reenactments with her Civil War regiments, reading books on historical events throughout the world, and loves having a glass of sake or red wine at night along with playing with her pets and TikToking with friends.

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SACRIFICE

S.J. Ransom

BLURB

Vincent

Did I do bad things to get the woman of my dreams?

Yes, I did.

Am I the bad guy in Aribella Tremaine's story?

Yes, yes, I am.

Do I regret what I've done?

Not a single drop of regret is given. She's mine and one way or another, she will realize it.

Aribella

My brother is a gambler, everyone knows this.

I didn't realize it would affect me the way it has.

Now this monster has me and I'm not sure if he will ever let me go.

Oddly enough, I think I am falling him.

But can I truly love the beast?

CONTENT WARNING

Please note, all content warnings are listed on my website.

<https://www.ransomsbookreviews.com/trigger-warnings>

GLOSSARY OF SPANISH TERMS

Mi reina- my queen

Mi pequeña reina- my little queen

Mariposa- butterfly

Pequeña mariposa- little butterfly

Mi pequeña reina, te amo más que a la vida misma- my little queen, I love you more than life itself

Mi reina está actuando como una bestia - my queen is acting like a beast

Si, mi bestia- Yes, my beast

Mi rey bestial- my beastly king

PREFACE

Vincent

Only the true gamblers are out past midnight. I chuckle as the high rollers keep dropping out of the Texas Hold'em tournament I started.

“Carlos, it seems you and I are the last two standing.” Taunting the young man is for sport. He's a card shark, and I'm here to bust him. I respect the fact that he's worked his way through the ranks to sit at this table with me, but I'm busting him all the same.

“Yes. Shall we do an all-in round to close out the night?” He sits there, fidgeting with two poker chips. He's wearing sunglasses, but the twitch of his upper lip gives him away.

The irritating thing about this is Carlos is an exceptional card player. If he hadn't taken my cousins and four others for twenty million, I'd extend him a job. As it is, he's on the kill list. I've held off until now. I try hard not to shed blood if I can help it. Therefore, I'm trying to get him into debt, so I have a hand up on him.

“Agreed. All in.” I push my chips in and watch as he does the same.

The dealer shuffles the deck and deals the cards out to us. She lays the community cards upward. I look at my two. “Turn your cards up.”

I see my two queens, plus a king and jack from Carlos. Not bad. I glance at the community cards and notice an eight, ten, and five. We both have the option of a straight. Waiting for the dealer to turn the fourth card, I notice the fidgeting is getting worse for Carlos. To be honest, I'm worried he may walk. If it comes down to that, the next step of my plan won't work.

A ten is dealt—which gives me two pair. He has no chance of winning. The dealer lays the river card down, sealing his fate. Carlos sits there, clearly realizing what this means for him.

“You must pay in full the notes on the table before you leave,” I demand as I stand up. Carlos gets up and the frantic look on his face is hilarious. Had he won, he would have won a little under twelve million. This would have paid off most of his debt and he would be walking away here unharmed.

“I'll need twenty-four hours to come up with that kind of money.”

The dealer leaves the two of us as my enforcers walk into the room.

“You knew the deal the moment you signed up for the tournament. Every player must pay up at the final table. The buy-in you used is deducted from the total amount due. Don't tell me you came here with no money...?”

As the cocky look in his eyes clears out, dread settles in them. “I'll have to go to the bank. I honestly didn't think I'd lose.”

The sunglasses on Carlos's nose slip from all the sweating he's doing. "Well, this is unfortunate. You hustled millions from the casinos around here. The last straw was when you tried to do it here—at my casino. It looks like you were trying to do another swindle here."

I walk around to where he's sitting and stand above him. "Give me one good reason not to kill you."

"Wh-what?" Oh, he didn't think I would get rough with him. Stupid on his part. "Look, I..." His head swivels around, trying to find the exits. There is no way out for him. "I was overconfident. It was a mistake. There's no need for all of this."

Sighing heavily, I pull my nine-millimeter gun out and point it at his head. "That's too bad because this ends tonight, Carlos." To prove my point, I cock the hammer on the gun, and he shakes.

"Wait. Wait!" he screams as my finger touches the trigger. His hands are up, and the wet sheen over his forehead makes him look deathly ill.

"This is your one chance, Carlos. It better be good."

He gulps, looking guilty. What the fuck? "My sister. I will trade my sister for my life."

The other casino owners said he would do it. He would give his sister's life in exchange for his own. Sick bastard. My anger boils over to the point where I don't stop my itching trigger finger. I shoot him in the forehead.

“I hate being wrong,” I growl into the silent room. Looking at my men, I wave my gun in a dismissive way. “Get rid of this piece of shit.”

CHAPTER ONE

Aribella

Five in the morning comes early around here. My brother must still be asleep. Yawning and stretching, I get out of bed and shiver as the cold wooden floor makes my toes icy. I reach for my hair tie and mess with it until I have a messy bun. Looking in the mirror, I notice the dark circles under my eyes. Working the graveyard shift at the diner four nights a week, going to college, and trying to take care of this farm is taking its toll.

“Carlos?” I call out as I stand in front of his door. “Big brother, you have an appointment at eight. We need to get the hay in for the cows.” Music blares in his room, and I bang on his door. “Come on, don’t make me come in. Your room is a mess.”

He’ll get up soon enough. I trudge down the stairs and wonder why it’s so cold here. The heat is on, I hear it running. Looking at the thermostat next to the kitchen entryway, I notice it’s ten degrees colder than what I set the heat on. “Ugh, another thing to fix.”

Irritated, I walk into the kitchen and start the coffee. It’s definitely going to be a two-pot day. Why my brother moved us to this farm, I will never know. It’s been one problem after another to fix. It’s been a year, and we have sunk every dime our father left us into this heap.

The sound of gravel crunching causes me to frown. Is Carlos just now getting home? Or maybe he is home. Ugh. I hope it isn't Brayden. He keeps trying to get my brother to partner with him in some kind of land deal. It would be a mistake. There are rumors about Brayden and how he killed his last business partner.

Siding with caution, I pick up the shotgun by the back door and check the chamber. *Loaded*. Exactly how I left it. After sneaking out the back door, I walk around the east side of the house and see four large black vehicles parked in a row.

"I don't know who you are, but you have five seconds before I shoot."

My nerves are going haywire. A door from the middle vehicle opens, and I aim the barrel toward that area. I'll either hit the person or make the windshield my new practice target. Heck, I've never shot a single thing in my life, but now's as good of a time as any.

I can only describe the man that steps out of the vehicle in one way. Gorgeous. Spiked black hair that's coiffed perfectly. Not a single errant strand. His nose is straight, and those white teeth are a stark contrast to his dark skin.

"Are you Aribella Tremaine?" He buttons his jacket as he takes a step closer to me.

"Why are you asking?" I snarl. The man standing before me is someone well-known around town, but I've never seen him this close before.

“As the man that owns this land, I’d like to know who is in my house.” He gives me a pearly white smirk and steps closer once more.

“Don’t move another muscle or I’ll shoot.” He has the audacity to laugh at me. “You are mistaken. I own this land, and you are trespassing.” Technically, I own half of it, but that’s semantics at this point.

“Ms. Tremaine, I’m—”

“I know who you are, Mr. Davide.” Wow, my manners are shining through today.

“Then you know if you kill me, everyone in the Cartel will look for you.”

He’s right. Vincent “The Beast” Davide is known as the highest-ranking Cartel member in America. I watch him step right up to the end of the twin barrels and, without blinking, stare at me.

“I’m listening.” I don’t tell him I’m still contemplating shooting him.

“Your brother, Carlos, owes quite a hefty sum of money to the Cartel and the casinos they own.”

As he moves, I jerk. “Don’t you dare move.”

He holds up his hands. “I’m reaching for a piece of paper in my coat.” He opens his coat and shows me the paper on the inside of the jacket. Nodding my head, he continues to take the paper out. “We can discuss this once you put the gun down, Aribella.”

“You and me only. There’s no reason for all these men.”

“I agree.” He turns to his men and gives them the slightest of head movements. If I hadn’t been looking at him, I wouldn’t have noticed. All the vehicles leave except the one he exited from.

“Alright. I showed my good faith. Now show me yours.”

Lowering the gun, I look at him with distrust. “No funny business.”

Once we are back in the house, I put the gun back and walk over to the table where Vincent is sitting.

“This is from Carlos,” he says and waits patiently as I unfold the letter. I notice Carlos’s scribbled lettering and read that he promised the land if he lost in a Texas Hold’em tournament. The wind in my sails vanishes.

“As you can see, your brother gave me the right to the land and house. As well as everything in it.” He takes the paper from me, and I sit still, unable to process what is happening.

“But, in the state of Texas, you must have the permission and written consent of both landowners.” It’s a last-ditch effort—the only rebuttal I have in my arsenal. I know that if Vincent wants the land, he will take it.

“There’s no going back on a deal with me. Your brother lost the tournament, and therefore, anything in or around this land is mine. You understand that I have the best lawyers in the land. Your fifty percent will simply transfer into fifty percent ownership with me. However, I have no...”

I slap him. I put the blame on the way he is smiling at me in a patronizing way. His reaction is swift, and I'm not expecting it. Vincent grabs my hands and forces them to the table. "You will vacate the premises immediately. Do not make this hard on yourself, Aribella."

What option do I have? I can barely afford to buy food, let alone get a lawyer to fight this. My one saving grace is that the deed to the land is in my safe deposit box at the bank. Maybe I can get my friend Janie at the courthouse to help. "Fine. I will get my clothing and be on my way."

"No, you'll take nothing. As of now, everything here is mine." His words are final. It's as if he isn't used to being told no.

"You can't do this." I hear the confidence leaving my voice. The world is sinking around me. This cannot be happening.

He chuckles and squeezes my wrists. "I already have."

CHAPTER TWO

Vincent

Spitfire. My God. Aribella is a force to be reckoned with, and I want more of it—of *her*. The world shifted the second I saw her coming around the house like a trained soldier. My heart is beating itself to death. Hell, I didn't even know I had a heart. However, this changes nothing.

Aribella pulls her arms from my grip. "If I can get some clothes, I'll be out of your way. Surely, you wouldn't throw a woman out on the streets without her clothing."

Studying her face, she's a sight to take in. Her messy bun cannot hide the fact she has a full head of luscious almond brown hair. Those pouty, red lips don't have a dusting of gloss on them. They are all her, and I bet they would look amazing around my dick. It's those piercing hazel eyes that get me, though. It's unfortunate this is how we must meet.

I have the advantage here. She doesn't understand that I own her too. It will only be a little while longer and she'll know. My cock will be deep within the depths of her cunt, and she'll be yelling out my name in ecstasy.

"No." I release her, and we stand up in unison. I'm well over six feet but this young, beautiful, fiery woman isn't short by any means. Her head comes up to my chin. Perfect height. I won't have to reach down too far to steal a kiss.

She walks past me, and I'm so shocked she's ignoring me, I almost let her get to the stairs before I react. "Don't you walk away from me," I growl out.

The animalistic urge to take her here and now, to show her who the fuck the alpha is, runs rampant through my veins. Somehow, I make the seven steps to the staircase and manhandle Aribella up against the wall.

"Unhand me." She seals her fate right here. Her head held high, shoulders back, and not a lick of fear in her eyes. Aribella is royal and regal, looking as she wages a war inside of me. She's going to be a handful. I can't wait.

"Oh, sweet, *mi reina*." I push her face up, forcing her neck to arch until I hear her yelp.

"I'm not your queen!" She tries to knee me in the groin, but I block her knee and laugh at her gumption. *Goddamn, she's going to be fun.*

"You know Spanish. This is wonderful."

"Oh, shut up. I want my cat and clothes." Fuck me. She turns her lower lip down in the cutest pout I've ever seen. If only she knew I'd give her the world, she'd learn to exploit that. Keeping a stern face to hide how much I want her; I squeeze her neck.

"I fucking said no. When I speak, it is final." Watching the way she processes what I'm saying is intriguing. She goes from pouting to in shock, and now she's raging mad. "Then I'm not going anywhere."

“*Mi reina*, you don’t have a choice. You can either walk out of here alive or I can tote you out in a body bag.” I wouldn’t kill her. No, she’s going to be my queen, dammit, but I must put fear into her. I believe it’s the only way I can get her to conform to what I want.

The fight leaves her as her stupid cat comes down the stairs. “Can I at least have my cat, then?”

As I’m about to talk, the cat stretches and runs his paw along my leg. Never thought I would be an animal man, but it seems I’m going to be. “Fine. You may have your stupid cat.”

She gasps. “Don’t call him stupid. He’s a sweet, sensitive boy.” She’s clearly not afraid of me, even though my hand is still wrapped around her throat, because she bends down and picks her *baby* up. I release her neck, not wanting to choke her. At least not yet.

The way she strokes his magnificent white fur makes me jealous. *Fuck me*. “Let’s go.”

“Fine.” She stomps out of the house with her cat, and I swear, said cat looks over its shoulder with the wickedest grin I’ve ever seen. I bet the damn thing is going to be just like his owner.

Feisty.



Aribella said nothing to me during the ride. Not a damn word. But she spoke to that cat and stroked his back like he was the king of the world. Soon enough, she’ll know exactly who I

am, what I will be demanding of her, and everything else. By the time I pull the car into the driveway, I'm seething over hearing how wonderful the fucking cat is.

“What's his name?”

This rewards me with a smile from her. Talking about the cat. Got it. “Espresso.” She giggles and kisses the top of his head. Dammit, I really am jealous, and I'm pretty sure what I'm about to do is going to make me the biggest bastard in the world.

I get out of the car, walk around the front, and open the passenger side door. She doesn't speak about the house or how I am being a gentleman right now. I wait until we get into the house, and I grab Espresso from her.

“Hey!” Aribella reaches back out for the animal, but I walk away to my head of security, who is waiting for me. “Give him back,” she demands, and the tremble in her voice kills me.

“Make sure we lock this animal up in the basement.” Mossimo doesn't say a word but nods in understanding.

“No. Give Espresso back. You can't do that.” She nearly trips over her own feet to get to my head of security, but I grab her around the waist and put my hand across her mouth.

“Pipe down, *mi reina*. If you do everything I demand of you, you will get to see your cat again.”

The feel of her hot tears scorches my hand as I grip her harder. “I mean it. Calm down or you'll be locked in the basement, too.”

Aribella goes soft against me, but I'm on high alert. "I'm going to let you go, and we are going to walk to the office. Do not run from me."

She nods her head, and I let her go. "Right this way."

When we get into the office, I lock the door behind her. "Sit down." I look at her, but she refuses to meet my eyes. Her shoulders shake and I know she's still crying, but at least she's not being bad. I hate that I have to punish her, but she has to know what's going on here.

"As you know, the house and land are mine to do with as I please. Your brother also entrusted *you* to me as well."

This makes her head pop up. "What do you mean?"

"Your brother stole over twenty million dollars from the neighboring casinos. I am the debt collector for the families that own them. He must pay the money or it's his life."

She gasps and pales. "Did..."

"He traded his life for yours. I allowed him to live, and you are now the payment for the debt." It's a lie. He's at the bottom of the Sabine River, floating with the fishes. Aribella doesn't need to know that.

Her eyes go wide, and that luscious mouth opens then closes multiple times. "You can't be serious."

CHAPTER THREE

Aribella

Vincent laughs and steeple his fingers together. “Dead serious.”

My mind races, not understanding what could go on here. “This is some sort of nightmare. I’m going to wake up at any moment now and this will all be over.”

The television screen behind Vincent comes on, and it’s my brother at some kind of poker table.

“Wait. Wait!”

“This is your one chance, Carlos. It better be good.”

“My sister. I will trade my sister for my life.”

The screen goes black, and Vincent sits there with a smug look on his face. “As you can see, Aribella, he did, in fact, trade your life for his.”

My tears have dried and I’m shaking. “You... You can’t possibly think this is alright? He was under duress. Surely you understand that.”

Black dots swim in my vision. It’s a sure sign of my blood pressure rising. “A deal is a deal, Aribella. You will stay here for the rest of your life. Get used to this now. I don’t want to argue or hear any more about it.”

“But...”

He slams his hand down on the table and stands up. “I can be a cold-hearted bastard to you, or you can do everything I say. What would you like?”

I shrink back into the chair, and for the first time, I let the fear wash over me. This isn’t a nightmare or a dream. God, what has Carlos done? “Can... Can I see Carlos?”

“No, you may not. He’s left the country and has no reason to talk to you.”

The words are harsh and stab at my heart. “What are you going to require of me?”

“Ah, you *are* seeing reason. Good girl. Stand up.”

I take a minute to get up because my knees are weak. My eyes have those black floaters in them, and my head is pounding.

“Strip.” It’s only a word, but it’s a dagger to my psyche. He’s going to do bad things.

Lip trembling, I finally look at him. My head swims and I sway on my feet. “I—” My world turns black, and the last thing I see is his angry face staring at me.



“All the records that could be found about her, Sir.” The voice is so far away. Who are they talking about, and where am I?

“She suffers from high blood pressure, anxiety, and cluster headaches.”

Oh, they’re talking about me. “Why did Aribella faint?”

“Her blood pressure was high enough for her to have lightheadedness. However, I think she suffers from vasovagal syncope. It can happen with triggers, and she was in a stressful situation, so her body reacted by fainting.”

Footsteps pace the floor and I look around to see that Vincent—oh God, he wasn't a dream—is pacing back and forth. *Don't panic!* Taking a deep breath, I try to calm down. “I've given her prescriptions to Ms. Terrington to pick up. Once she has them, she should be fine.”

“I don't take medicine.” Oh no. I didn't mean for that to come out loud.

“You do now.” Vincent is by my side instantly.

Pushing the covers off me, I step out of bed. Standing in front of him, I look up at his glowering stare. “I refuse to depend on medicine. I don't need it.”

“Miss, your blood pressure was in the extreme category when I was called. I understand there may...”

“You mean he kidnapped me and took my cat from me?” I smart off to the doctor. He works for this beast, so I don't see why I'm inclined to be nice to him. “The brute stole my home, and I'm locked here, being forced to take medicine.”

“Thank you doctor, you can go,” Vincent demands of the man.

As he looks down, he reaches out to me. I flinch backward and he growls. “Don't move.”

The office scene flashes in front of me. Taking a moment to calm myself, I lift my chin. “I’m not stripping.”

He chuckles. “Oh, but I already stripped you, *mi reina*. You are wearing one of my T-shirts.”

A blush creeps up my neck and into my chin. “Did you...”

Vincent pulls me into him. “No, I don’t touch unconscious women. When I get my hands on you, you will beg me to fuck you.”

Yanking my arm from his grip, I snarl at him. “You are disgusting.” He snatches my arm in a tighter grip.

“I may be disgusting, but your nipples are hard under my T-shirt, and your pupils are blown.”

“Let me go.” I’ve never been turned on before, but he’s... Oh God, am I one of those girls that likes it rough?

He chuckles. “*Mi reina*, do you like when I grab you?”

“No. I just told you to let me go.” Why am I being so bold with him? He could snap my neck at any moment.

His free hand moves up my stomach, and I tremble. “You know, I could force myself on you, but that’s not who I am.” That hand continues until he’s touching my left breast.

Closing my eyes, I block everything out. The way it feels. How my body throbs. Fear that this man may hurt me. Trembling, I feel the way he’s massaging me, playing with my nipple. “Please don’t.”

“Your words say no, but your breathing is shallow. You can’t stand still, and I can smell your need.”

I move back from him and the hand that was holding my arm grabs my neck. “I told you not to move.”

“And I asked you to let me go,” I whisper, trying to keep the fierceness in my voice. It doesn’t faze him.

My heart rate spikes as he squeezes me hard enough to cause me to gasp for air. “You’ll never be free, *mi pequeña reina*.”

CHAPTER FOUR

Vincent

Releasing her throat, I grasp her face in my hands. “If you do as I tell you, everything will go smoothly. You will have nothing to fear. Fight me, and although I won’t force myself on you, you will regret it.”

I walk away from her. If I don’t, I’ll end up fucking her. She’s not ready for that.

Aribella is like a damn drug to my system. The longer I’m around her, the more I want her. It’s driving me crazy, but I’m trying to do right by not forcing myself deep within her cunt.

Locking her bedroom door, I make my way to the office downstairs. Sitting here, I pull up every asset known to Carlos and Aribella. It’s wrong of me to wipe her name from existence. Hell, it’s against the law, but she will be mine now. I change her last name to Aribella Davide and make a fake marriage license. No one’s going to tell me no, but now the system says it’s official.

Afterwards, I transfer everything that I found into Aribella’s savings fund. If anything happens to me, she will receive it all. She may think I am a beast, but I did her a favor. Her brother traded her to me for a debt. Oh, I will do everything in my power to earn those twenty million dollars from her body, but she’s mine. It’s only fair that I give her the money.



“Ms. Terrington, did you get everything needed for the animal in the basement?” I ask my housekeeper.

“Yes, Mr. Davide. The cat is well taken care of and is being fed now. Ms. Tremaine’s medication is on the table with a glass of water.”

“Perfect. Can you make sure to make her favorite dishes?”

Ms. Terrington’s mouth curls into a smirk. “Of course, I can. You finally give me something worthy of my talents. If your father knew that you insisted on eating out every night, he would turn over in his grave.”

If the old bat wasn’t loyal to me, I’d have killed her years ago. Instead, I pay her an exuberant salary to stay, and she does everything I demand.

“Did you call the...”

“Son, I’ve been a housekeeper since before you were born. I know the duties. As far as the girl is concerned, I have someone coming to clothe her. Now, the hairdresser will be here in twenty minutes. After that, we have the manicurist coming to do her hands and toes. Once that is done, the waxer will be here. Then the stylist will come. Is there anything else?”

I’ve irked my housekeeper, and I find it hilarious because she’s usually easy going. “Thank you, Ms. Terrington.”

“You’re welcome. Now get out of my kitchen.”

As I am walking up the stairs, I notice the door to Aribella's room is ajar. What the fuck? Taking my cell phone from my pants pocket, I pull up the security system and I see Aribella walking toward the door that leads to the basement. Smart. Cunning. Hell, there's so many words I could use for her. Firing off a quick text to my head of security, I make my way toward the basement.

Me: Keep her out of the basement.

Mossimo: Yes Sir.

Me: Don't touch her.

Mossimo: Wouldn't dream of it.

When I get there, Mossimo is standing in front of the door, arms crossed over his chest and towering over Aribella. *Mi reina* is pointing her finger at him, demanding he move. I chuckle at the sight. Mossimo looks uncomfortable, and I realize that he may have a soft spot for women who cry.

“You move from this door, this instant. I want my cat.”

“No.” I reply for Mossimo. He isn't going to move, but it's my words that must sink in. “I believe I locked your door, *mi reina*.”

“And I know how to pick a lock, so sue me. Give Espresso to me. That's all I ask.” Her lower lip is trembling, and even though she's bravely trying to get her damn cat back, I see the fear.

“I see a lesson is in order.”

Mossimo's eyes shoot to his hairline for a moment, but he schools his features as I step up to her and pull her against my chest. "No, just my cat. I'll be good once I have him in my arms."

"Unfortunately, that's not going to happen. You are lucky he's alive." This earns a horrified gasp from Aribella. I'm lying my teeth off with her. The cat is being spoiled right now and has every damn toy known to the animal world.

CHAPTER FIVE

Aribella

Vincent practically drags me back to my room. I don't make it easy for him. By the fourth stair, he picks me up and slings me over his shoulder. "If you don't calm your ass down, I will give you a sedative."

I have no doubt that he would drug me. Then I would be vulnerable to whatever he might do to me. That cannot happen. "No, you won't. Just like a man to be all talk. Put me down."

He chuckles as he slams my bedroom door shut. I go flying in the air and bounce along the bed. Not wasting a moment, I scramble to get to the other side. I don't make it far.

Vincent grabs my ankle and pulls me to him. I lash out with my free leg, but all he does is swat it away like it's a fly. The hand that's holding my right foot squeezes until the pain is unbearable.

Startled, I stare at him as whimpering sounds of pain come out of my mouth. His eyes are wide and unfocused, nostrils flared, and he's snarling at me. He's in beast mode. I've never felt fear like this running so rampant through me, clogging my throat.

"I told you to behave. You didn't." He grits his teeth and yanks his belt out of the loops on his pants.

“Don’t!” I scream as the first hit lands on my left thigh. He doesn’t stop. No, his belt comes down faster with every swing. I’m grateful it isn’t the belt buckle that’s hitting me.

Hot, incessant tears flow down my face as he flips me on to my stomach. Vincent pulls down my panties, but he makes no move to spread my legs. “Please, don’t. I’m a virgin.” I’m too scared to move away from him—too afraid he might bring that belt down on my sensitive parts.

He grunts and makes a weird sound in his throat, but he pulls my hair and forces me to look at him. “You want to continue to disobey? It will be that little cunt that gets the next punishment.”

The sound of his zipper coming down causes me to sob. I never thought I’d be in this situation. Frozen in fear and hoping he doesn’t take me against my will. “Bring your hand back, *mi reina*.”

“I…”

“Now!” he bellows, and I twist a little to reach my hand backward.

“Goddamn, *mi reina*. You have me so worked up. It’s only going to take a second to come all over you.” He releases my hair and takes hold of my hand, forcing me to touch his hardness.

“Stroke it or I’ll shove it in your tight little asshole. I told you you’d beg me to fuck you before I slide deep into that pussy.”

Vincent wraps his hand around mine and moves us back and forth along his hardness. “Eyes on my cock. Don’t let them close.”

Using my free hand, I push myself off the bed to look back at him. I tremble, wondering why I’m not as disgusted by this as I should be. There’s a small part of me that wants to dig my fingers into him, but I squirm. True to his word, he doesn’t last long before jets of white goo hit my bottom.

Rubbing it into me as it spurts out, Vincent looks at me. I can feel that animalistic stare but before I can say anything, he growls at me. “This ass is mine, *mi reina*. Don’t forget that.”

Not waiting for me to move, he yanks me off the bed and pulls up my panties. I’m too confused to fight him. He’s going to take my virginity, eventually. Right now, I’m not ready to accept it or have it forcefully taken from me, so I’m going to be good.

“You’ll wear my cum on you while you get pampered. The hairdresser should be here any second.”

His clean hand caresses my face, and he tilts my chin upward, so I have to look at him. I wonder how my brother could trade his life for mine with this monster. “Come. Only I am allowed in your room. You’ll meet the team downstairs in the living room.”

I don’t know what to say, so I shrug. “Ok.”

Vincent takes my hand, and as we walk, I feel his sperm hardening on my butt. My thighs sting, but I say nothing. No,

I'm too busy trying to figure out how to rescue Espresso and leave here. I'm homeless, but I am sure I can get one of my friends from college to help me out.



The women have been with me for hours and I'm tired. They have cut my hair to my shoulders and lowlights are in it now. I liked my hair the way it was. Johanna, the manicurist, said everything would grow on me. I hate it. My nails have French tips and my toenails match. Makeup done and, to be honest, I feel like a hooker. I can't stand red lipstick. There's no reason for any of this.

I look in the mirror, I'm trying to find myself. All I see is what Vincent wants. Taking a deep breath in, I move to the rollaway closet and close my eyes. The stylist put all the dresses in there and I don't like them. They are fancy and I have no need for them. She's already coordinated the dresses with my bras and panties. If you can consider those strings of fabric panties.

“Where are my pants and blouses?”

“Mr. Davide told me to bring dresses only.” The woman seems awfully snooty.

“Well, I'm your client, right?”

The woman's perfectly arched brow rises, and she looks at me sternly. “You are, but Mr. Davide is the one that's paying the bill. You'll get what he wants you to have.” She looks at

me and gives me an evil grin. “Besides, all his whores get the same treatment.”

“Alright.”

That’s all I say. I could tell her I’m not a whore but what good will that do? She’s already made her mind up about me. Selecting a blue dress, I walk behind the makeshift curtain and put the dress on. It fits perfectly, and it’s beautiful, but this isn’t me.

“Where is she?” Vincent demands, and I sink into myself.

“She’s behind the curtain. She’s a wretched girl who doesn’t appreciate the dresses.”

I’m going to be in trouble, it seems. What a horrible woman! I step out from behind the curtain and look at Vincent. “Not that I don’t like dresses, this is—”

He’s livid. “This is not what we discussed.” He turns to the woman, and she trembles. “Get out.” He points at her, and she flees.

He comes to me and touches my hair. I try hard not to step back. “They’ve done more than I asked. I told them to cut your hair, not put dye in it. *Fuck*. You look beautiful, but this is not what I fucking told them.”

His words make me feel better. Maybe... maybe he didn’t want to change me?

CHAPTER SIX

Vincent

Fuck! I should have stayed here and made sure they did what I wanted. The way Aribella won't meet my eyes gives me all the answers I need. I know there is something about this that has to do with more than the dress and hair.

“*Mi reina*, look at me.” My voice comes out in a harsh whisper, and I watch as her lower lip trembles.

“You... you are going to make me a whore, aren't you?”

The air in my lungs leaves in a harsh exhale. “What?”

“The woman said that all of your whores get the same treatment.”

Goddamn. Aribella is far from a whore. She will never know the likes of what that life is about. “No. You are not a whore, and you won't be one either.”

The look of distrust is written in her eyes. It's clear as day that she will not believe me. Hell, I've treated her like property, and I plan to do more to her to make her scream my name. But to make her a whore? Never. She's mine dammit. *Mine!*

“My brother sold me to you, well bartered to you for his life. That makes me property.” Her shoulders slump and she glares at the mirror.

“Aribella, change out of the dress and into something better.”

“I can’t. All the dresses are the same. High slits with a cinched waist.”

Growling, I pull Aribella to my office. I’m so livid right now. At myself, mostly because I called the wrong crew in. Yes, the crew has helped every one of the high dollar escorts in my business to become successful, professional looking. It isn’t suitable for a queen.

“You will tell me everything the women said and then I’m going to have someone fix this.”



We are late for dinner, and I’m irritated, but Aribella is happier. I cannot change her hair, but the clothing was fixable. She sits next to me in yellow button-down blouse and silk trousers. I never thought I’d let anyone have their way, but it seems I’m doing a lot of things differently.

“When we are done, I will show you to the library. Anything in there is yours to enjoy.”

Her eyes light up. “Thank you.” It’s the first time I’ve heard a genuine thank you from her, and it makes little sparks of joy go off in my mind. Dammit, I’m falling fast and hard for her. I don’t think I’m going to hold off on fucking her. Even if I do want to hear her beg me.

“Also, um...” She blushes and gives me a giggle. Oh, I want to hear that more often. “I appreciate you not making me wear those dresses.”

I reach out for her hand and squeeze it. “You will wear dresses on occasion, but you should be comfortable here as this is your home.”

Aribella doesn't move to take her hand away from me, so I lace our fingers together. “Are you done eating?”

“Yes.” As I stand up, she comes with me without an argument or hesitation.

Opening the doors to the library, the gasp I receive is worth it. I've never used the area because I don't read much. It's a two-story area that houses every book that I could think of to get. There's nothing new in this library, but by the way Aribella is acting, it doesn't matter.

“Espresso is going to love this. There's even a wonderful window seat for him to look out and watch the birds.”

She's apparently forgotten that I'm holding her cat hostage. I should let her have this moment. To enjoy the library with her extremely playful cat. Hell, I even went down to check on the damn thing. He perched himself on the cat tower while enjoying a stuffed animal. He was swishing his tail as one of my guards stroked his fur.

Lucky bastard. Unfortunately, I cannot let her have this moment. She must understand this is a privilege, and her cat isn't free. I watch as she twirls around, gasping as she reads the spines of the books.

“Aribella, you aren't getting your cat, so he won't be enjoying this room with you.”

The light in her eyes and smile on her lips disappear. I have to be a bastard, don't I? It could have been easy to take her to get her pet and enjoy this room with him. Instead, I'm playing my part...simply because she must learn who's in charge here.

The way she's walking back toward the door of the library, I can tell she's hurt. I did that. Fuck, why do I care? I've always been a coldhearted son of a bitch, but I can't stand how she's looking at me.

“Where do you think you are going?”

Her pretty, sad eyes look over my face and she's on the verge of tears. “I think it would be wise if I went to bed. That way I...”

“I don't recall approving that.” Yeah, I cut her off. Aribella tempts me, even when she disobeys. Hell, especially when she disobeys me.

Before she can react, I plunge my hands through her hair and kiss those pouty lips. We mesh well, and when she's not fighting me, it's a beautiful ballet we dance.

Aribella's body relaxes as I plunder her mouth. There are tiny moans coming from her as she runs her hands up my stomach. As I deepen the kiss, she pushes away from me and bolts out the door. The laughter bubbles up inside of me, taking over. She's driving me insane.

“You'll break soon enough, *mi reina*,” I call out to her while I watch that curvy ass of hers climb the stairs.

I retire to my office; there is much to do. Sure, I could follow and eat that sweet pussy of hers, but she needs time alone. She needs to understand that while I may be a bastard to her, I'm a beast that can also be reasonable. *Fuck*. The emotions swirling inside of me want her to like me.

I would even settle for lust.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Aribella

Midnight. I've waited until I can't handle it anymore. I'm dressed in warm clothing, and while I don't have shoes, I'll figure it out. Escaping is the only thing important right now. Tiptoeing down the stairs, I make my way to the basement door. My heart is racing, and my palms are sweaty. *It doesn't matter.*

I make my way down the basement stairs, and I see all the cat toys and the bedding. What?

"You are not supposed to be here," the guard says from deep within the room. I gasp and take a step back. He's holding my Espresso.

"Please let me have my baby." I reach for him, but a hand grabs my shoulder, and I whip around. Vincent stands there, like an angry god waiting to smite me where I stand.

"This was a very bad decision on your part, *mi reina*." He looks down at me with disapproval. "Mossimo, take the cat out back and make sure to dispose of it properly."

"No!" I get loose from Vincent and run after the man named Mossimo. "Don't. Please."

Mossimo doesn't touch me even as I claw at him to let my sweet boy go. It doesn't deter him as Vincent grabs me by the waist and hauls me backwards. "*Mi reina*, calm down. You'll eventually learn that it's best just to do as I say."

The door opens and Espresso is looking at me, meowing right before it closes. A gunshot rings out into the air, and I scream. My legs give out and I fall to the ground.

Defeated.

“How could you?” I whisper.

“Get up,” Vincent demands of me, but I don’t. I can’t. My world is spiraling, and I want nothing to do with him.

“Oh, for fuck’s sake, it’s just an animal.” He rips me upward by my hair and drags me back up the stairs. “If you had behaved, you wouldn’t have lost your pet. Now stop fighting me.”

“Never, you beast.” I find my anger, and I lash out by kicking and screaming but it doesn’t do a bit of good—aside from making me feel better.

“I believe you are my pretty little beast after all. Look at you, drawing blood from my arm.” His voice is calm, collected. It scares me worse than anything he’s done so far. He’s just too calm.

“Let me go.” My demand falls upon deaf ears as he chuckles and flings me into his room. I’ve not been here, but I know it’s not mine. It smells of him, and I feel my body react.

“I told you I’d make you beg for my cock. It seems I’m going to have to give you a true lesson and take it.”

“What?” My eyes go wide with shock. Surely, he doesn’t mean he’s going to force himself on me...

“Don’t worry. You’ll enjoy everything I do. Unfortunately, I’m not patient enough to wait any longer. Now that you understand that if you act up again, you’ll be getting the same treatment Espresso just received.”

His words make me stop. Everything around me is crumbling down and my blood pressure is skyrocketing because the floaters are back. I sway, trying to get my bearings about me, but it’s not working. Vincent grabs my arm and sighs. “You’ve messed up your blood pressure again. Lie down, *mi reina*.”

I don’t fight him. I can’t. Not right at this moment. There’s too much fluttering about and I feel faint. Vincent strips my clothes off me and helps me lie back against the pillows. “There, deep breaths, Aribella. It’s going to be alright.”

Why is he being so kind to me now? He’s cruel and... and he killed Espresso. Vincent is confusing me more than I confuse myself. Whimpering, I close my eyes because it hurts to have the lights on.



“The cat?”

“He’s fine, Vincent.”

I must be dreaming. My cat is gone. Or is there another cat? Blinking my eyes open, I look around and see him and Mossimo at the door. Quickly, I close my eyes and pretend to be asleep. If they think I’m awake, they will make me talk. I don’t want to right now.

No, I need to figure out why I keep having these fainting spells and how I can get out of here. I have no doubt Vincent will kill me, eventually.

“Thank you, Mossimo. Tomorrow, we shall discuss it more.”

Vincent closes the door and turns back toward me. Alright, so my eyes are almost all the way closed. I think I’m more worried about what he might do to me if he thinks I’m asleep. Am I trying to catch him in a bad act? Or do I want him to touch me? I hate how uncertain I am, and Vincent is definitely a wild card.

“*Mi reina*, I know you are awake. Go ahead and open your eyes.” There’s humor in his tone and that’s a good thing. Right?

“How are you feeling?” I watch him walk over to me and sit down on my side. I’m on my left side, facing him. He reaches out and pushes my hair off my shoulder and leans down to kiss it.

“I’m fine.” That’s hardly the truth, but I’d rather not tell him I feel weak. That he confuses me, and I want to leave.

“Look me in the eyes, *mi reina*.” Instantly, my gaze falls upon him.

“If you promise to behave, I won’t hurt you. You know I want you. It’s obvious that I’m not going to kill you. If you behave, that is.”

“It’s unrealistic to believe I will behave.” I didn’t mean to say that out loud, but there’s not much I can do about it now.

He gives me a side smirk and shakes his head. “So, I should treat you like a beast then?”

I frown, wondering where he is going. “No. I’m not property and I’m not a pet.”

“Ah, but you are mine. I can do with you as I see fit. Don’t you see, I’ve given you comfort. I could make you stay in the basement, in a dingy, dark, and horrible place.”

I don’t like how this conversation is going. “I’d like to go to my room.” My words are barely audible, but I know he hears them.

Instead of letting me up, Vincent moves on top of me. He’s only in a pair of sweatpants. His sculpted chest looms over me, naked and hot. His skin sears mine as he claims my lips.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Vincent

Aribella's legs open for me without having to demand it. *Mi reina* wants me as badly as I want her. She's just fighting it. Acting like it's an imposition to be with me. Of course, I've done nothing to appease her fears. Hell, she thinks I've killed the most important thing she holds dear to her heart.

I can give her happiness now. Provide earth shattering orgasms and let her see how amazing we are together. Although, I shouldn't. Not without coming clean to her about her brother. Fuck it. Not tonight. Tonight, it's me and her.

Pushing my hips into hers, she moans, and I sweep my tongue around her mouth. She trembles under me as I move my hands from her hair and make my way down her body. Aribella's nipples are tight and hard. They are begging me to touch them.

"Oh!" I smile against her neck as I tweak her nipples, pulling on them until she's arching into my hands.

"Do you like that, *mi reina*?" Biting down on her pulse at her collarbone, I continue to thrust my hips against her. Only my sweatpants keep us from bonding our bodies together.

The war raging inside her brain plays out across her eyes and lips. She wants to hate me. To hate the feelings, I am invoking in her. But she can't deny the chemistry. Nor can she deny

what her little whimpers and back arches are saying. Her bottom lip trembles and her eyes are glossy with her need.

“Yes.” The word is drawn out in a pleased moan as I move one hand from her breast down to her soaking wet clit.

“*Mi reina*, you are drenched.” I growl into her skin as I kiss her left nipple, sucking it into my mouth to nibble on.

Soft, steady, and determined strokes around her wetness cause her to quiver. I will not put my fingers nor my cock in her pussy until I hear her beg for it. “Do you want more, Aribella?”

I apply pressure to her labia, and she mewls for me. Her legs clench around my body, as she attempts to get me closer. “*Mi reina está actuando como una bestia.*”

“No.” She whimpers and bucks her hips against my erection. “You’re the beast.”

Her words hold no conviction in them as her pussy soaks my hand. “Please.” She begs me. It’s a beautiful plea. One that untangles the chains on my restraint.

Releasing my hold on her right breast, I yank my sweatpants down and my cock bounces between us. Slapping it against her flesh, pre-cum seeps out as she continues to move her hips up and down.

“That’s *mi mariposa*. Get my dick all wet for your tiny cunt.”

Aribella’s cheeks blush but she doesn’t stop moving. No, my girl is eaten up with lust and I am the only one that can

appease it. “Eyes on me, *mi reina*.”

She complies, and I push into her inch by agonizing inch. “It...” If she talks, I know I will ruin it. No. I can’t let her overthink this or chance me running my mouth. Kissing her lips, I watch her watching me. Pulling back enough to where I can get a good grip on her hips, I enter her in one fast motion.

“Ooooh.” She gasps into my mouth, and I swallow her discomfort.

“Such a good girl taking my cock.” The praise slips off my tongue as I begin to pick up the pace.

Her hot, tight pussy clenches around my cock like a vice grip, but I plow through it. Picking up her legs, I bend her in half and pound into her. I’ve lost all control as she pulsates against my hard cock.

“Fuck, *mi reina*. Fuck.” I can’t even form a full sentence as I think about breeding her. Filling her up with my cum and seeing her belly grow.

“Too... too fast.” She trembles as she says the words, and I know I’m not being considerate. I can’t help it. She’s made me wild with need and desire. Fucking her harder, I hold her face so she can’t turn away from me.

“It’s alright, Aribella. Just hold on. I got you, *mi reina*.” I’m not sure that I do, but it seems to calm her down as I take from her sexy body. My desire ripples through me as her mouth opens and a whine comes out.

Reaching between us, I play with her clit, pinching it hard and tugging on it until her pussy is holding me in place. It was already a tight fit, but now she's clamping down on me so hard, I can't move. "Vin... Vincent!" She screams my name as her body releases, giving into pleasure.

Aribella squirts onto my stomach and I smirk in victory. She came for me. Now it's my turn to come for her. That tight cunt of hers is milking me, urging me to release inside of her. To breed her and lock her to me forever.

"*Mi reina!*" I growl into her ear as I thrust one last time, filling her up with my seed. Rope after agonizing rope comes out, releasing me from the pressure she has caused. I can't hold my weight any longer and collapse on her, shaking with the power behind my orgasm.

By the time I move my head, she's asleep. A soft smile on her lips and peaceful. Slowly, I pull out of her body and go to the restroom. After looking at her blood on my cock, I feel a sense of pride, Aribella is mine, whether she likes it or not.

Running the warm water, I put the washcloth in the stream and think about caring for her. I have to tell her the truth about her brother and the cat. Eh, her brother didn't deserve her.

Walking back into the bedroom, I watch my sweet *mariposa* and how she slumbers. Spreading her legs, I swipe the cloth along her thighs and pussy. A soft whimper leaves her, but she doesn't wake up. Mm, the things I could do to her while she's sleeping.

Shaking my head, I back away and put some clothes on. There's at least one thing I can make right for *mi reina*. Going downstairs, I see Mossimo holding Espresso. Hell, has my stone-cold killer's heart become attached?

“Mossimo, what are you doing?”

“Feeding Espresso.” He looks at me as if I am the dumbest person alive—like it should have been obvious what he was up to.

Laughing, I walk over to him and look at the cat. “I'm going to take him up to the bedroom. I've traumatized her enough.”

“Good choice, boss. Be careful though, he likes to bite.” Mossimo leaves me with a grin on his face. The fucker never smiled before.

Shit.

CHAPTER NINE

Aribella

Stretching, I groan and feel the ache in my body. That's not what I focus on. No, it's the tail in my face as my eyes open.

"Espresso!" I scream and pull my baby boy to me. "How?" Looking around the room, I see Vincent looking at me, amused.

"You didn't kill him." Holding Espresso to me, I kiss his tiny head and he meows at me. The purr he gives me is so wonderful. My heart feels lighter knowing he's not gone. *My baby is still here.* It's on repeat in my head as I think about how Vincent tricked me.

"No, I didn't. I needed you to get in line, Aribella. Fear is a wonderful tactic for that." He doesn't sound remorseful, and I guess he doesn't have to; considering I did fall in line *and* straight into his bed.

"What now?" Vincent comes over to me and sits down next to my legs. He places a hand on my hip and waits for me to look at him.

"Now, you and I have a life together. I know this isn't what you wanted, and I am one hundred percent sure you are going to test me for a long time. But I'm willing to work on that if you will behave."

A blush creeps along my cheek as a naughty thought crosses my mind. "Tell me, what did you just think about?"

Giggling, I hold onto Espresso, and he moves his head against mine, comforting me. “I... Um...” There’s no way I can ask for sex again, right?

“Tell me, *mi reina*.” His hand on my hip tightens, and I gasp.

“Are we going to do it again?”

This causes Vincent to throw his head back and laugh. “Yes. Many more times for a long time. Does my *pequeña mariposa* enjoy when I spread her legs and make her cream all over my dick?”

Wow, I didn’t think I’d like dirty talk, but the way his voice drops an octave and his eyes blaze, I can’t help but be turned on. I’m still scared of him and what he could do to me. Yet, he gave me Espresso. Can I trust him? My body screams at me to stop questioning and have fun with him.

“Yes,” I whisper, and he smirks at me.

“Good. I’m ecstatic to hear that. We have some business to take care of. Why don’t you get cleaned up and meet me in the kitchen?”

“Alright.” Vincent takes Espresso and I panic.

“Calm down, *mi reina*. I’m taking him downstairs and getting him set up in the kitchen. All his toys will be brought out of the basement. However, I must inform you, my right hand has become attached to him.”

This excites me. “Really?” I step out of bed, not realizing I’m still naked. Vincent groans and I look down. “Oh.” I grab for the blanket, but he stops me.

“Do not hide from me,” he warns me, and I stand there, embarrassed.

“I... I’ll try not to.” A nervous giggle escapes me, and Vincent kisses me.

“Mossimo will take good care of your baby. He didn’t want to give him to me to bring to you. I swear that bastard was smiling, and Aribella, he never smiles.”

I throw my arms around him. “This is good. It means he is happy and is changing.” Keeping my thoughts about Vincent one day changing to myself, I kiss him and push my tongue into his mouth tentatively.

“You are a distraction, *mi reina*. Go, you are too sore for me to fuck you right now. Go, before I forget myself.”

I rush to the bathroom and wonder if maybe, hopefully—alright, I’ll be honest—*wishfully* hoping I’m not being stupid by letting my guard down.



Breakfast is amazing. I didn’t know Vincent could cook, but now that I do, I want more. My skills are alright, but his are awesome.

“This is so yummy.” I gush on and on about his food, and he sits there, smiling. It seems to please him that I’m enjoying his food.

“We need to talk, *mi reina*.” He sits his coffee cup down and Mossimo snorts.

Before Vincent can talk, his phone goes off and Mossimo starts singing to Espresso. Wow, who would have thought that big man could be so soft for a cat?

“He’s such a sweet boy, isn’t he, Mossimo?” I stand up and go to the counter. Espresso comes to me and bumps his head into my hand. I chuckle as Mossimo cleans up the mess my cat made.

“He is. I’ve always wanted a cat.”

Wow. Big, tough mafia man is soft. Vincent stands up and kisses the top of my head. “Now, now, *mi reina*, we need to be distraction free.” He takes Espresso from me and hands him to Mossimo. “Let’s go to my office.”

As we set down, the door is locked, and I tremble. I don’t like how this is starting to feel. “What’s going on Vincent?”

“Your brother sacrificed you to me as a payment.” My gut drops as he says those words.

“Yes.” I understand that’s what I am. A trade. Property.

“He didn’t leave that room with his life, though. The minute he traded you for himself, I shot him. He’s dead, *mi reina*.”

My head whips upward and my mouth falls open. “What?”

Sweat breaks out along my neck, and I feel the pressure in my head. No, not now, dammit. I demand myself to focus. “How... how could you kill him?”

Vincent is sitting in front of me in the chair next to mine, and he’s holding my hands. I’m not sure I want to be touched, but I

say nothing. “*Mi reina*, he was going to die one way or another. The families in this world were going to demand his entire bloodline be wiped out. In a way, he did you a favor by giving me you.”

My heart hurts and I want to scream, but nothing comes out. Numbness starts to settle in as I blink at him. “So, I’m never leaving here?”

“You are free to go.” Vincent’s answer stuns me. I’m sure I misheard him, but he gets up, walks to the door, and unlocks it. “Just know, you are not safe out there and will need to change your name. I can do that for you if you truly wish to leave.”

CHAPTER TEN

Vincent

The words leave my mouth, and I want to immediately take them back. I should have told her to stay, that she is my everything. Instead, I sit here, watching her spiral down the hole that I never wanted her to dive into.

Aribella says nothing and gets up. Still, I make no move to keep her here. She will stay or she will go. It has to be her choice now. "I..." That soft whisper of hers is like a tidal wave of anguish hitting my body, drowning me.

Tears run down her face, and she looks ill. I can tell her blood pressure is rising. "You need to take your medicine."

Pulling out the bottles, I hand them to her, and she takes them. Yet, she stands there, not moving. "You killed him."

Fuck, I shouldn't have told her. Hell, it would have been easy to make up a story about how he died on a yacht. Sighing, I grab her shoulders. "Yes, I did, Aribella, and you are free to go if you wish. I'll have to tell the families you are out there, though. You won't be safe."

Now I'm resulting to blackmail, well, more like emotional warfare. I'm sick of myself, but it's what I must do. Aribella is mine and she won't be leaving without fear in her mind.

"I'd like to be alone for a bit." She trembles as she takes her first steps out of my office. I don't follow her. My home is wired so I can see every hall and room.

The library door opens, and I smile. Of course, she would go there. I can tell it will be her refuge, and for now, I won't barge in on it. Working will be a good distraction, but Mossimo comes into the office and sits down.

“What?”

He has the damn cat in his arms. I swear if it wouldn't hurt Aribella, I'd drown the cat. “You know, for someone who was happy in the kitchen, you look like someone died.”

“Fuck off.”

Mossimo laughs and shakes his head at me. “You told her, then.”

Banging my hand on the desk, I stand up and pace. “Yes. I had to. There was no choice in the matter. The fact I fucked her before telling her was wrong. I'm sure she feels betrayed not only by me, but by her brother as well. The bastard gave her to me. Like she was fucking property.”

“And yet, you love her.”

I still at his words and look at him. “No. She is someone...”

“Stop bullshitting yourself. You love her. I saw how you pulled every picture, written word, and social media interaction on not only Carlos but Aribella. Hell, you spent hours watching her at the college campus. You love her and you made sure to setup the trap where Carlos had no fucking way out but to give her to you.”

He's right, dammit. It was the only way to save her, but it also was to get what I wanted, Aribella in my home and life.

“You’re right, Mossimo.”

“Of course, I am. Now stop moping and go get your girl.” Laughing, he leaves my office and I stand there, looking out the window. Yeah, me being this whiny little bitch isn’t my style. Aribella will see reason. I know she will.



Mi reina is on the window seat, reading a book when I enter the library. I didn’t go to her immediately. No, I let myself calm down to a simmering boil of anxiety before I came in here. Otherwise, I would have thrown her to the floor and ravaged her, forcing her to see my way.

“Aribella.”

She jumps, and the book falls from her arms. “Oh.” Looking away from me, she curls into herself.

“Have you made a decision on whether or not you are staying here?”

“Where else would I go? The farm was the only place I had.” She glares at me as I step closer to her.

Now’s the time to tell her you’d have her the finest of homes built but, that’s not what I do. “This is true. It’s been demolished.”

Another lie that’s slipped my lips. What can I say? I want Aribella here. “Then I guess you know I have to stay. I can’t be homeless and most certainly can’t fight off the crime families on my own.”

Mi reina looks defeated, and it kills me. “I know you hate me. It’s going to be alright though. I promise to spend every day making things right between us.”

Aribella turns her head to look at me, and she wipes a tear from her cheek. “The problem is that I don’t hate you. Not even a little bit. I’m hurt that you killed my brother. Yet, I’m furious he traded me in his place. It doesn’t make any sense to me. Betrayal and lies. They keep adding up to one thing and that it’s me that’s getting played on both ends.”

Fuck. What do I say to that? How do I make it better? There’s absolutely nothing I can say that will sound good. I might as well be honest. “This is true. You’ll have to figure out on your own if you are going to trust me or not.”

“I know.” She turns back around, leaving me wanting to see her eyes. Even if they are sad and full of tears, she’s still the most beautiful person in the world to me.

Sitting on the opposite side of the seat, I place my hand on her leg. “It’s going to take time, and I’m willing to give it to you. I want you to know...I will always love you.”

Aribella sucks in a deep breath but doesn’t turn to me. Gently, I move my hand up her leg. “Look at me, *mi reina.*”

Slowly, she turns to me, and I see the confusion in her eyes. There’s hurt and uncertainty laced within her. I don’t blame her. Not at all.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Aribella

Vincent's hand creeps farther up my leg, past my knee. I cannot deny how much he turns me on. However, I don't feel like I can trust him. I don't know if I can trust myself either. I should be angry at him for taking my brother. For some reason, I feel at peace knowing that Carlos won't be causing any more trouble. How horrible of a person does that make me?

"I don't trust you, Vincent. Not for the reason you think, but because you've lied to me over and over."

Pulling my legs up to my chest, I wrap my arms around my knees. "My brother, for the longest time, was a good man. He turned to gambling and drugs to cope with our parents passing and having to raise me."

The library door opens and Mossimo comes into the room with Espresso. "He wanted to see you."

A laugh escapes my lips, and I smile. "Oh, my good boy knows when Mommy needs him."

"Boss, I'm going to take care of business." Mossimo leaves and my sweet Espresso curls around my feet, meowing at Vincent. It almost sounds like he's telling him off.

When the door closes, Vincent looks at me and shrugs. "Continue," he demands, and a small smile graces my lips. I should have insisted that he let me leave. However, I have no

doubt that Carlos got into hot water and put me in danger as well.

“I knew a few years ago he was going to get us killed, but I didn’t want to believe it. So, I went to college, and I’m almost done with my degree. He begged me to get far away from him, but our father made us promise to stick together.”

Taking a moment to gather my thoughts, I look at Vincent. “At least I know what happened to him, and frankly, it’s a relief to know he’s not being tortured. I don’t know if I can forgive you for killing him.”

Vincent’s face turns to stone right before my eyes. I tremble as he looks at me and growls. “I told you that you’re free to go.”

“That’s a lie too, Vincent. You think I don’t know that you will hunt me down?” A sarcastic laugh slips through my lips, and I roll my eyes.

“You are correct. I would hunt you down like the beast you think I am.”

He moves and Espresso meows. “Don’t think about taking my cat from me again.” My voice cracks, but I am standing my ground and I refuse to back down.

“It’s not like any of my men would kill him. Mossimo is wrapped around his little paw.”

I square my shoulders and put my head up high. “And you are wrapped around me. I’d be dead without a single thought if you didn’t want me.”

He says nothing as he grabs me by the arms and kisses me hard. His lips are unyielding, and that wicked tongue of his barges into my mouth. I whimper a protest, but it goes to deaf ears as he controls my mouth with his own.

One moment we are kissing, the next he is gone. He's huffing and glaring at me. "You need time to recover from our last love session. But heed my word, if you stay here, you are mine and I will not let you go."

Vincent storms out of the room, and I'm left there, aching in more ways than one.



The confusion and other crazy thoughts kept me rooted to the window as I watched the wind blow outside. On one hand, Vincent killed my brother and freed me from the burden of living in fear. On the other hand, I'm not free at all. No, he will hunt me down if I leave.

Do you want to leave? That's the question that keeps befuddling me. I should be running for the hills, trying to get as far as I can from this world. Instead, all I can see is the deranged look in Vincent's eyes. The love. Well, I think it's love. It could be possessiveness.

Making up my mind to stay, I know I must at least give him a chance. If I walk out right now, my life is in the hands of the unknown. Better the devil you know. Right?

Going to Vincent's office, I stop in my tracks. My hand is raised to knock on the door when I hear moaning.

“Fuck!” There’s only Vincent’s voice, but I hear the moaning. Closing my eyes for a moment, I steel myself and back away. I should have known.

Turning around, I flee. There’s no reason to stay here. Naive. That’s all I am is a naive girl thinking a man like Vincent could be faithful.

“Aribella!” Vincent yells out as I run up the stairs. In my rush to get away, I hadn’t heard him open his office door.

Rushing to my bedroom, if I can lock it, I can hide for a few minutes. I berate myself for not running out the front door. Again, my brain tells me to wait for the full story but how can he deny he wasn’t in the middle of pleasuring someone?

“Open this door, *mi reina*. I don’t want to have to knock it down.”

“Why don’t you go be with the woman you were downstairs banging?”

“What woman?” He bangs on the door and rattles the doorknob. “You have to the count of three to open this door, so help me, God.”

My heart is racing. So many freaking unknowns. I can’t handle much more. “One.”

I back away and fall onto my butt in the closet, hoping that he won’t really kick in the door.

“Two.” The frustration in his voice is clear, and I realize he’s going to punish me for this.

There is no three before I hear the wood splintering as he forces his way in. I'm not a weak girl but I feel like he has me by the throat. No, he has me by the heart, and I am not sure I want him to let go.

“You will learn not to make me chase you, *mariposa*.”

The door to the closet swings open, and he stands there looking like the devil. “Next time you want to assume something, don't. Barge in, ask questions, but don't run from me.”

“Don't touch me.” I scramble to the far corner of the closet, and he stops. “You... you were with someone in your office. I don't want you touching me.”

CHAPTER TWELVE

Vincent

“What the fuck do you mean I had someone in my office?” I am confused and angry that she would run from me. I hate having to chase her, especially if I’m the one that made her run.

“I heard you. You were...” Her words trail off as the blush creeps upon her cheeks.

“I was what, *mi reina*?”

“You were making those noises you made when you were deep within me.”

Laughter comes tumbling out of me. “And you think after having a taste of you, I’d turn to another woman?” Shaking my head, I prowl toward her. “No, *mi reina*. My dick is for you and you only. I see I’m going to have to teach you that.”

“Then...” I cut her off with my tongue in her mouth. It seems to be the only way to get her to shut up. I don’t mind it. Not at all.

Pushing my hands through her hair, I kiss her, claiming those pouty lips of hers. She drives me up a damn wall, but I enjoy the challenge. It’s refreshing.

“Are you calm now?” I ask her, looking her in the eyes, hoping she will let me explain and not fight me.

Aribella's breathing hard and blinking at me. I smirk at her. "Yes," she mumbles.

"Good. What you heard was me looking at my computer screen, watching you. Yes, I watch you. Sue me. I got horny and figured you were still too sore to handle anything with me. So, I took matters into my own hands and was masturbating."

"Oh." Her soft giggle of embarrassment reaches my ears and my dick, which just came, is already hard.

"See?" I pepper kisses around her forehead and hold her to me. "There was no reason for you to be jealous."

"I wasn't jealous. I was furious." I can't help but chuckle. *Mi reina* can't even admit she wants me and is jealous. She's adorable.

"Fair enough. Now, can we get out of this closet, or should I spread you on the floor and eat you out until you call out my name?"

Aribella gasps and looks down. "Well, it does look comfy, but maybe on the bed."

"*Mi pequeña mariposa* is cheeky, isn't she?"

I let her walk out of the closet ahead of me and as she gets to the bed, she looks back and up. "*Si, mi bestia.*"

That does it. Her speaking Spanish to me turns me wild. That southern accent of hers mixed with the Spanish lilt is enough to have me come in my pants. I don't—no—I *won't* be wasting anymore of my semen. From now on, it's in her or I don't come.

“Take off your clothes.”

Her eyes go wide, but she does as I demand. For once, I don't have to force her to do it. Or put pressure on her. She gives me a show too. Those hips of her shimmy as she undresses.

“Lie back and spread your legs, *mi reina*.”

Aribella gives me a beautiful smile as she climbs onto the bed and settles in the middle. Her legs, while they are spread, are not far enough apart. “Farther.”

Biting her lip, she looks at me with a twinkle in her eye. Oh, she must want to play. With a growl, I pounce onto the bed, pushing her legs far apart and over her head. She squeals as my tongue laps up her wet juice.

“Already so wet for me. Naughty girl.”

“I... Oh, don't stop Vincent. Please.”

It would be a horrible shame to not admit, I love hearing her beg for me. I pull back a little and the sexiest whining noise comes for her. “Does *mi reina*, want more?”

“Yes. Yes, please. Vin... Vincent please.”

Those soft, sexy lips of hers pout as I blow air on her hot pussy. She trembles as I lick her from her slit to her clit. Pushing two fingers into her hole, she clasps onto them and bucks her hips. “Greedy girl, aren't you?”

“Yes, put your dick in me.” She slaps a hand over her mouth, and I can't help a groan coming from me. Aribella has barely

reached the cusp of her dirty talk and she's already embarrassed. I'm going to marry this girl and corrupt her. It doesn't matter if she's a dirty little whore with me. That's how I want her. Begging for me to cum inside of her and putting my dick in her mouth at all hours of the day.

"You aren't too sore?" Even if my wants are derogatory, I still don't want her to hurt.

"No. It hurts more that you aren't in me." *Well, fuck.* That won't do. Stepping off the bed, I take my shirt off. Aribella's eyes never leave me as I strip off my pants, then my boxers.

My engorged dick stands out in front of me, and Aribella reaches for it. She strokes it softly, slowly and I want to demand that she pick up the pace. I don't. She'll learn what I like soon enough.

"Get on your knees and hands, *mi reina.*" With a look of uncertainty, she does it. I know we haven't done this position yet, but it's what I want and well, I always get what I want.

Getting behind her, I run a hand down her spine and into her hair, pushing her head down. "It's alright. Relax for me, Aribella."

This was the right thing to do. Her back was rigid, and she was already trembling. With my hand in her hair, I use my other hand to guide my dick into her. It's a tight fit, and I have to think of something else to keep myself from coming before I'm fully seated in her. Goddamn, it feels like she's tighter than the first time.

Inch by inch, I fill her. By the time I'm balls deep within her pussy, she's coming. Her walls constrict against me, milking me. "Fuck, *mi reina*, did you just come from me entering you?"

I turn her head so I can see her expressions. Her eyes are glassy, and her mouth is open in a wide grin. Yeah, my girl is going to be a dick addict. I can't wait for her to be bold enough to come demand I fuck her.

"Yes. I... Oh, more Vincent. More."

Her hips buck back against mine, and I swear I see stars. "*Mi reina está actuando como una bestia.*"

"Yes. Yes. For you. I'm a beast for you." Her words come out in a scream as her body accepts my rough thrusts. She's everything I've always wanted and to know she matches my desires excites me.

Lifting her up by her hair, I bring her flush against my chest. "Bring your arms up and over the back of my neck. Hold on to me."

Aribella moans and moves her arms like I've told her. Her beautiful breasts are pushed out, and I grab them, pulling her nipples. Each time I do, her pussy flutters against my dick. "You are going to marry me, Aribella. I'm going to pump so much cum into your womb that you are going to be giving me a baby in nine months."

She goes off again, and I bite down on her neck as I keep a laugh in. It's not a laughing matter, but the way she is turned

on makes me giddy. “Such a good little whore for me, giving me your orgasms.”

The words slip out of my mouth before I can think of what I’m saying. It doesn’t matter though, because she’s pushing back against me, humping my cock like it’s the only thing keeping her alive. “Fuck, *mi reina*, you keep doing that for me, and I’m going to come.”

“Yes, I want you to cum inside of me.” She has no idea what a sexy woman she is. Her words are still so timid. It’s something we will work on. Later. Right now, I need to give her what she’s begging for.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Aribella

Questions run through my mind as the orgasm flows through me. Why do I want to be with him so much? How can I be with him if he killed my brother? Every time he touches me, I lose my mind. Why? What does it make me, if I don't feel bad because my brother is dead, and I am with his killer?

“*Mi reina*, it's alright.” He kisses me, making me forget the questions. I tremble with need as his movements quicken.

Want runs rampantly through me with each stroke of his cock. “*Mi pequeña reina, te amo más que a la vida misma.*”

I want to tell him I love him too, but I'm scared. It feels right and wrong at the same time. “It's alright Aribella. I will love you enough for the both of us.”

How can I think he's a beast when he's being so sweet to me? I whimper as he kisses down my throat and thrusts one last time deep inside of me.

“I know,” I whisper.

Vincent's cum doesn't seem to stop as he holds onto me, crushing me to the bed. His cock still pulses inside of me, and I wiggle against him.

“*Mariposa*, are you still horny for me?”

“Yes, I don't understand why the need won't go away.” I blush as Vincent kisses my neck and rolls off my body, pulling

me into his arms.

“It’s alright, you’ll never stop feeling this way. Neither will I. Remember, *mi reina*, you are mine forever.”



Six months later

Running my hand along my stomach, I smile at the thought of Vincent’s baby growing deep within me. Only three more months and our bundle of joy will be in this world. The doctor told us we were having a little boy. I can’t wait to see him and hold my precious one.

First though, I must get through my last class of the semester and graduate. Thankfully, today’s the second to last day of classes and Mossimo is standing outside the door, waiting on me. The only way I could finish my courses was to bring him along. Vincent is a bit paranoid that even though his ring is on my finger, and I married him, it’s not enough to stop the families from wanting blood. So far, they have given Vincent their blessing. I think my beast is a worry wart.

“Final exams are going to be next week. I expect everyone’s final paper turned in before next Friday to receive grading on time.”

The professor dismisses us and when I walk out of the classroom, Vincent stands there instead of Mossimo. I walk straight into his arms and Espresso meows at me.

“Espresso missed you.” Vincent growls in my ear and I laugh.

“Oh, is that so?” I smirk at him and giggle as Espresso crawls into my arms and Vincent takes my book bag.

“Yes, and now let’s get home before I murder any of these punk ass kids for looking at you.”

Every time he comes, he can’t stand to see others looking at me. “Why do you come get me if you know this is going to upset you?”

With his arm around me, he pulls me in close to him. “*Mi reina*, do not taunt me or I’ll take you out of classes all together.”

“You need to calm down. This ring on my finger and this sweet baby boy in my belly tells you, I’m yours.”

He opens the car door for me, and Espresso jumps into the back. I still don’t know how Vincent trained him to do that. Sliding into the seat, Vincent helps me buckle my seatbelt.

“I’ll be calm once the baby is born and I don’t have to worry about you going to a school with a bunch of horny jackasses.”

Vincent starts the car, and I roll my eyes. “Let me guess, I’m not going to get to work, am I?”

“No need to work, *mi reina*.” I sigh but know that I’m not going to get anywhere with him. “Besides, this won’t be the only time I have your belly full with my child.”

The way he says that makes my pussy clench and I squirm in my seat.

“Oh, Aribella, you like that don’t you?”

I know there's no reason to lie to him. He will fuck me until I tell him I want him and his baby deep inside of me. "Yes. You know I love when you talk dirty to me."

"*Mi reina* is my little whore, isn't she?" He chuckles and runs his hand up my legging. Trembling, I look at where we are.

"Can we..." I gulp. "Can we pull over?"

The look on his face makes me hornier. "You want me to take you over the hood of the car again?"

"Oh, yes, please."

"Always so polite, even now, with your legs spread, the wetness soaking through your panties, and that sexy little gasping breathing you are doing, you are trying to be proper." He pulls the car over into one of the wooded areas around our home.

Turning the car off, Vincent unbuckles both our belts and pulls me over the console. It's not an easy feat considering how large I am, but he and I make it work. Sliding the seat back, he lowers and unzips his pants.

"Is this what you want, *mi reina*?"

"Not exactly. My leggings are still in the way."

Vincent laughs, reaching down and tearing the fabric in half. "Not an issue. Now get my cock into that pussy, so I can fuck my wife."

Running my mouth down his neck, I nibble on his collarbone and unbutton the top three buttons of his shirt. Kissing his exposed skin, I slide my body down on him and moan.

“You always fill me up to the brink.” I breathe out and move up and down. He’s barely three inches inside of me, and I’m ready to orgasm.

“And you are always ready to come the minute my dick breaches your slit.” He grabs my hair and yanks my face away from his body. The way he manhandles me makes my entire body tremble hard.

“I don’t deny that. You make me horny the second you wake up.” I don’t know how he does it and I don’t care. He knows how to treat my body and make me his everything in the swoop of a few words. Whimpering, I bounce on his cock, ready to show him the whore I am for him.

We make love until we both are screaming each other’s name. “Goddamn, *mi reina*. You drive me crazy.”

Giggling, I lean down and run my hands through his hair. “It’s insane how much we still want each other. I don’t think I want it any other way, Vincent.”

He holds me to him. “Me either, love.”

Kissing his cheek all the way to his ear, I whisper, “I love you, *mi rey bestia*.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

S.J. Ransom was born in Texas where she currently lives in a small town that is inspiration for her book worlds. She is obsessed with romance novels. She loves writing, reading, crocheting, and cooking unique foods. Follow S.J. in her journey of bringing out emotionally gritty and dark taboo romances to the world.

Want to have some fun and get to know S.J.? Join her Facebook group here:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/ransomsdarkromanceworld/?ref=share>

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HELL BITES

A.K. Graves & Quell T. Fox

BLURB

One nerdy vampire. One unhinged demon. Two people in desperate need of an escape...

Azizia

All she wants is to fit in, but life on earth is more difficult than she thought. When she finds the absolute love of her life while listening to a podcast, she knows nothing will stop her from getting him—not even breaking a few human laws to do it. Kidnapping, murder, tampering with the mail; the consequences don't matter as long as she gets her man.

Felix

The Nerd Word is a podcast about words. Normal words. Nice words. Fun words—definitely not dirty words. Until Felix an obsessed fan emails him. Something he finds alarming, but also alluring. And for some reason, he wants to please her—even if she seems like she's lost her marbles. His life is calm

and quiet, it's peaceful flying under the radar—until that psycho girl comes crashing into his inbox, and eventually into *him*. So what's a vampire to do? Give in and speak all the dirty words to her, even if doing so could get him killed.

CONTENT WARNINGS

Kidnapping

Murder

Descriptive Sex Scenes

Mention of SA, Abuse, Forced Marriage

CHAPTER ONE

Azizia

The bathroom is covered in blood.

And I mean *covered*.

There isn't an inch of floor that isn't red. The walls are painted in it too, and there's even splatter all over the ceiling. I didn't mean to hit an artery, but when they fight back so hard, it's difficult not to. I prefer a slower, more painful death, but when you get those arteries, it's lights out.

Such a damn shame.

She was so pretty, too. I'd love to have sat and watched her beg a little more...

Guess I'll have to be more careful with the next one.

I grab a towel from the rack over the toilet and drop it onto the floor in the doorway, hoping it'll stop the blood from seeping into the rest of the house. The less messy it is out here, the better. I need a place to stay for a while, and I'd rather not slip in blood, or worse... have my foot get stuck in it. Ugh, I hate when it's sticky and gooey, almost like glue.

I move to the kitchen and grab a soda from the fridge. I crack it open as I walk around the house, taking everything in. It's a cozy little place. The girl was young and doing well for herself, it seems. I should have thanked her for that before I killed her, but oh well.

I take the soda with me and sit on the small couch in the living room to take a break. I've been moving all day, and a nap would be nice.

Oh, a nap sounds so good.

I put the soda onto the glass table beside the couch, then lie down and close my eyes.



The stone floor beneath me is cool and hard—just the way I like it. Anything that's different from hell is good in my book. I'm tired of hot and sticky. Fire and lava are overrated. And the humidity? Don't even get me started on it. Even the thought makes me want to gag.

Nevermind what it does to my hair. The air up here is nice. Though there were some places that didn't smell too great.

I spread my arms wide, crossing my feet at the ankles and open my eyes to darkness.

I can't help but smile at how simple and lovely this all is.

I chose good. For once, I'm confident in the choice I made.

Running away was a good decision.

This basement is wonderful. I only wish it were mine and I could stay here forever.

I glance at the door that leads upstairs.

Maybe it could be mine forever?

The girl who was living here won't need it anymore considering they're rotting in the bathtub... I really should clean that up, but I'm tired. A good mauling like that really takes a lot out of me. Even though it feels good in the moment... all the blood and guts, the yelling and begging... this right here, the silence, peace, and stale air? There's just something comforting about it. Besides, this basement has the best acoustics I've ever heard, and I found it out accidentally. I'd been exploring the house, had my favorite podcast on, and made my way down here. The sound had me stopping and sucking in a breath. It was at that moment I knew this would be my favorite place up here on earth.

I spent a half hour finding the perfect placement for my phone so I could get the sound *just right*. I've gone through countless episodes of Crime Time on a Dime since. There's just something about the way Shelly talks about cases and how they could have been investigated better... and cheaper. She's so passionate and really gets into the gritty details.

I love hearing the details.

All of them.

Every last one.

I glance up at the ceiling, over to where the body is lying. Rigor Mortis has surely set in by now. I can't remember how long it'll take for maggots to start eating her. If I turn the heat up, it should happen quicker, but I hate the heat and the smell would get worse. I hate the smell of rotting flesh.

Originally, I hadn't planned on staying here long, but now that I've found this house, I may have changed my mind. This was supposed to be a quick pit stop. A place to rest. But it could be home.

“Well, that's a wrap, my freaky fans!” Shelly says from the phone. “Until next time...”

The eerie music plays and then it's silent for a few moments while the app moves onto the next episode.

I have to say, Azrael is amazing for setting me up with this phone. Techy stuff isn't my thing, never has been. Thankfully, he's not only good at figuring it all out, he's good at explaining it to me in a way I can understand. I swear, tech stuff is like gibberish. Boy, do I love that man. Not enough to stay in hell, but oh well. I can love him from up here, too. Plus, he said he'd visit me sometime.

Music starts to play from my phone, but it isn't Shelly's intro. I turn my head in the direction of my phone, wondering if she's changed it or if I'd finally listened to the last episode.

Damn, I hope I haven't.

The music that plays is a jazzy little guitar number, and doesn't sound like something fitting for true crime.

“Hello, Word Warriors...”

Oh? My ears perk up at the sound of that man's voice.

“Welcome to The Nerd Word, I'm Felix, your host.”

Host? He sounds like a voice porn star. Is that a thing? Like a naughty narrator? A sexy storyteller?

A smile splits my face as I roll onto my stomach and stare into the corner where my phone is, resting my chin on my fists.

“Today, we’re going to get right into it, and continue the same path we’ve been on. For those just joining us, I like to talk about words. Words I like, words I don’t like, words people say incorrectly, and words that are beautiful. The lists go on and on. Today, we will talk about the infamous *irregardless* along with *anyways*. Also on the list is carnation, epidemic, monstrosity, and our bonus word for the day is... specificity. Ah, what a fun one to say.”

He chuckles, and the sound vibrates through me, causing tingles everywhere.

Holy hell, this man’s voice...

My panties are soaked just listening to him. I wonder what he looks like? Does he live around here? Where can I find him?

“Let’s start off with *irregardless*. People, this one is simple. It’s not a word. Stop saying it. Stop using it. Hell, stop *thinking* about it. The word you’re looking for is *regardless*. *Re*, people, that’s it.”

I get to my feet and move to grab my phone to click on the details.

There is no photo, which is such a bummer, but there is an email listed for listeners to send in the bonus word suggestions.

“Bonus words? How about bonus *story*? This man is going to say some dirty words, whether he likes it or not.”

I open the note app on my phone and start to type. I think of every dirty thing I’d want this man to say to me and write it down, and when I’m done, I look it over and can’t help but grin.

Hi Felix, I’ve attached a wonderful narrative I’ve written, and would love for you to read it on the air. I have a feeling your listeners, me especially, will enjoy it. I only found your podcast about ten minutes ago, but I’m already obsessed.

Dear Zia,

I’ve been thinking about you... about us. I can’t get you off my mind. All I can picture is how your lips would feel around my cock, how tight you’d be around my fingers, the way you’d taste on my tongue. I dream of having you bent over my bed, playing with that perfect little pussy of yours while I stroke my fat dick and watch. You’d tell me to fuck your ass, but I’d tell you we should wait. You’d beg, and finally I’d give in because I’ll give you anything you want.

Until next time...

P.S. Think of me when you touch yourself. I'll do the same.

All my love, Daddy Felix.

Holy hell, I need a drink, a fan, and a bag of ice.

I copy the passage and put it into an email, then hit send.

Boy, am I grateful Rae showed me how to send emails.

Now, all I can do is wait.



My phone alerts me of a new email, and I check it right away. There are only two people who have my email—Rae and Felix. My heart flutters when I see it's from Felix. I didn't think he'd get back to me so quickly. That must mean he liked my story.

Hi Zia,

Thank you for your email and for being a new fan of The Nerd Word. I read your narrative, and truthfully, I am at a loss for words.

I'm sorry, but I can't read this out loud to fans... or to anyone, if I'm being honest.

It's too... risque. That isn't what my show is about.

I appreciate your interest, though, and I hope you will continue to listen.

-Felix

I huff out an annoyed sound as I stare at my phone screen.

Is this a joke?

I re-read it, thinking maybe I read the entire thing wrong.

I didn't. Still the same crap.

“Well, that's fucking disappointing. What a prude!”

I groan as I re-read the email *again*. I'm not taking no for an answer. I will get this man to speak dirty words to me. I *will*. I have to. I need to hear them. It's like a damn compulsion now. I've listened to every episode he has up, and it isn't enough. I need more. I need new things... directed right at me. I need his words to be *for* me.

Felix,

I was thrilled when I saw you responded, but I'll admit, I'm disappointed with what you had to say. What's wrong with what I wrote? If you'd like to change a few words to make it sound smarter, feel free. But make sure you leave cock in there. I really enjoy that word, and I think it would sound divine leaving your sensual lips. I guess I can see why you wouldn't want to read a story directly to me. Other listeners may get jealous. Maybe change it to *Dear Listeners* instead of *Dear Zia*? I'll know you're still talking to me, so I won't mind.

Love, Zia

I hit play on his podcast to start them all over again, and I'm thrilled when I get a response almost immediately.

Zia,

I mustn't have been clear in my last email. I apologize for that.

My issue isn't that it doesn't sound smart. It was well written. My issue lies with what is written. Especially cock. (It took me a whole minute just to type the word, never mind speaking it out loud)

I appreciate your interest, but if there are any words that aren't sexual in nature that you'd like me to speak about, I will certainly do that.

Hope you understand.

-Felix

So he really is a prude then. Sexy voice man can't even say the word cock out loud?

Well, I'm still not taking no for an answer.

Felix,

Fine. I'll make a deal with you.

Pick a fetish to talk about. Or maybe a kink of some sort. Just something a little sexy. I'll settle for that.

I'm not opposed to begging for it... *wink, wink*

Love, Zia

There. I offered a deal. I tried to compromise. He better accept.

He answers right away.

Zia,

I'll do my best.

-Felix

It's not what I was hoping for, but it'll have to do.

My stomach rumbles, and I figure it's time to find something to eat. I head upstairs as I scroll through his podcast, noting he posts only once a week.

Once a week? How the hell will I wait a whole week to hear him speak dirty words to me?

These damn humans and their moralist ways.

CHAPTER TWO

Felix

“*Anilingus...*” Scrolling through the page in my browser, I skim the definition and quickly decide against the first word on the list.

There is absolutely no way I can read about *orally stimulating your partner’s anus* and all the ways to do it on my podcast. Nope, that’s not happening.

So, I keep scrolling.

“Electrostimulation?” No, not with *stimulation* in there. “Maybe melolagnia. That’s kind of fun to say. *Melolagnia*. And it’s basically just next level love of music. I could do that.”

With a sigh, I scrub a hand over my face and spin my chair to ask Roger what he thinks.

“How do you feel about melolagnia? So far, it seems like my best option. It’s not too vulgar, it’s kind of fun to say, and the definition won’t give me a stroke when I read it on the air.”

Roger lifts his head and gives me the most judgemental look he can muster before he resumes licking the pilling off his argyle sweater. Which would be really fucking weird if he wasn’t a morbidly obese sphinx cat but he is, so it’s just really weird that I’m asking him about the new segment on my podcast.

Ugh.

With a groan, I turn back to my research for the next episode and scold myself all over again.

I can't believe I agreed to this.

Opening the podcast up to listener suggestions was a last ditch effort to keep it afloat.

Not that I'm in it for fame or notoriety. That's actually the last thing I want to happen, but when my followers took a nosedive into the low double digits, I had to do something.

Allowing listeners to send in words or excerpts for analysis was a good idea, I thought. One supported by the way ratings picked up again, and I felt a lot better about things.

Then I got that email.

Zia.

I shift around uncomfortably in my computer chair, refusing to go down that road again.

Because jerking off to an email exchange with a listener can't be viewed as normal or acceptable.

Even if it seemed like it was the desired reaction Zia wanted from me.

I kept my responses cool, calm, and collected. I stayed professional and respectful, but reading those words and wondering *why* someone would want to hear me say them so badly had my mind wandering.

Had my hand wandering too, right into the front of my jeans and wrapping around my cock.

I'm not necessarily a prude, but I am a purist when it comes to my show. Even though I refused to read what Zia wrote on the air, it didn't mean I didn't read it multiple times while envisioning everything she detailed.

A pretty girl on her knees, her lips wrapped around my dick while big tear-stained eyes stared up at me...

I shake the thought from my head and go back to my research.

Maybe it wasn't exactly what Zia had in mind, but I'm a male of my word, and one week later I was talking about nebulophilia on The Nerd Word.

Did I think discussing how someone can become aroused by fog or steam was going to cause a spike in my followers? Not at all, but it did, and when I decided on robot fetishes for the next week, it happened again.

And that's when the emails started *flooding* in.

I got dozens of emails from listeners—new and old—who wanted to hear more of *my* voice saying *those* words. Men and women alike sent dirty narratives, serious propositions, and a hell of a lot of photos of naked boobs and erect penises.

I couldn't believe the way my podcast started traveling up the charts, slowly but surely, because it's never been very popular. As actual reviews started popping up after two years

of never having one, I found myself excited to see what people had to say.

And I didn't feel so alone anymore.

Which was enough for my exiled ass to make *Crude Corner* a permanent part of my regular lineup.

"Melolagnia it is then," I say with a sigh as I slump back in my chair.

The literature lover in me wants to argue about having this segment at all because it takes away from the entire point of starting my podcast in the first place, but that lonely, isolated part of me that longs to be a part of a coven again... that part won, and it's gotten very comfortable with using my voice to *make panties wet and groins tight across the country*.

And that's a direct quote from a listener.

The alarm on my phone beeps just as the last page of research shoots out of my printer, reminding me that it's not only time to get ready to head to the studio, it's also time to eat.

I get up from my desk and make my way across the room to the fridge, pull open the buzzing appliance, then grab a bottle of coconut water.

The small fluorescent light above the sink hums and flickers as I pop the top and pour it into a mug. It finally burns out as I stick the white ceramic in the microwave and zap my dinner for forty-one seconds.

I *really* don't want to call my landlord for that.

I don't want to call him for anything, honestly, but that fixture looks like a fire hazard waiting to ignite, and I'd rather not be the one who goes up in flames.

Scratching my bare chest, I take my mug out and blow on the steaming liquid, then pop my hip against the counter and look around my so-called studio apartment.

It's not much.

There's a twin bed in the far corner, a single folding chair and card table against the wall by the door, and my desk sits across from that along the entire length of that side of the room. My three-drawer dresser stands immediately outside the only other door, my personal effects on top of it because there's no shelving or space in the tiny sardine can of a bathroom— just enough for the child-size sink and toilet, and a rod for the curtain that hides a shower head above a drain. The kitchenette consists of a beat-to-hell refrigerator, an electric cooktop I've never used, a sink that groans every time I turn it on, and a microwave that might just be one of the first models ever produced.

So yeah, my apartment isn't much, but it's in the basement of a borderline condemned pawn shop owned by a crazy old coot who has no idea what day it is most of the time. All of that means my place is dark, it's cold, it's cheap, and most importantly, I'm left alone.

Not that I want that.

The isolation is really starting to get to me but living up here, amongst the humans? Being left alone is a necessity I can't afford to skimp on.

“Right,” I say to myself with a firm nod as I take a sip of my coconut water.

Still a little too hot.

It's hard to replicate body temperature in a liquid that was never in a body, and using an ancient microwave to do it makes it even more difficult.

Tea kettles don't work—it gives the water a strange taste.

Warming it in a pan does the same thing, and leaving the cans room temperature doesn't achieve the same thing I need the vegan blood substitute to do.

Vegan blood.

What a joke.

It's not a terrible alternative, but it sure as hell isn't the same.

Coconut water doesn't last as long, and buying enough to keep myself fed and sane is damn expensive.

And let me tell you, it's not exactly easy to find a strictly overnight job with next-to-no social interaction that asks no questions—or for legal documents—and covers rent, utilities, my needs, and Roger's expenses.

My gaze shifts to my cat, who's now awkwardly sprawled on the bed trying in vain to lick his ass and tail.

“Maybe if you lost a few pounds, cleaning your butthole on my pillow wouldn’t be so difficult.” He stops and looks at me as I push off the counter and walk over to my dresser. “Sticking to your diet would help.” I throw back my dinner and set the mug next to my deodorant, opening the top drawer to grab a pair of socks. “Can’t complain too much, I guess. Not since you finally stopped fainting like a goat every time I put your leash on. You’re down a whopping six pounds now that you actually walk to work with me.”

Roger blinks at me slowly, stares a little longer, then resumes trying to get his ass clean.

“Exercise is good for both of us,” I basically say to myself since my *cat* doesn’t talk back, and I’ve apparently lost my goddamn mind based on the amount I talk to him, anyway.

Definitely time to head to work. I need some more human interaction before I start talking to the furniture.

“Hey, Felix,” Mandy says with a smile as Roger and I walk into Hellcat Studio—the tiny little public access radio station where I work.

And where I record *The Nerd Word*.

“Hey.” I give her a nod as I set my messenger bag on the floor of the sound room, then unhook Roger’s leash. “How was it today?”

She shrugs. “Uneventful. Quieter than usual. Lawrence had a family emergency, so he didn’t come in.”

“So no, Law’s War tonight?”

“Nope.” Mandy chuckles as she grabs her jacket. “Normal lineup otherwise, but I didn’t realize how much of a mess Lawrence made while he rehashed the great battles through history.”

This is where I could say something witty like, *war is pretty messy*, maybe a little smarter than that, but I could try for a little bit of conversation. I don’t though, because I’m still kind of hungry and the longer Mandy stays, the more she’ll look like a snack.

“See you tomorrow, Felix.”

I nod my goodbye as she heads for the door, and as soon as Mandy leaves, I lock up and start on my normal routine.

Technically, I’m just the janitor here at the studio, cleaning at night, doing light maintenance and upkeep to a building that’s been around since the sixties, but when the owner found out I was semi-handy when it came to the electronic side of things, he asked me to do more.

At first, I just made sure the classical music that plays from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. ran smoothly, but now I keep all the radio equipment in working order. Everything from the DJ mics and headphones to the soundboard and PA system.

I’m not incredibly knowledgeable or some tech guru, but I know enough to keep the station running at night, and it was exactly what I needed to bargain with in order to gain use of the studio for my own recording purposes.

My apartment had a lot of background noise and the wiring is shit, and since my computer and Wi-Fi is almost more than it can handle, there's no way I could have a bunch of recording equipment hooked up in there.

So I come to Hellcat around ten, fire up the classical so it plays all night, get to cleaning the studio top to bottom, and make sure nothing needs fixing, then I use the extra equipment to record my podcast.

It's not ideal, but it works. Plus I can bring Roger and earn a paycheck in the process.

And since I'm indefinitely stuck here in this boring, lonely, soul-crushing level of the universe with beings my kind typically eats for dinner, this is all I've got right now.

Not that I had much more back home. There are multiple reasons I was sent here to rot, but at least I don't have to hide because of them anymore.

No, now I just have to hide because the sun is scary, humans are food, and freaky looking vampires who are obsessed with words and the English language, comic books and anime, and old-timey true crime are just as weird up here as they are down there.

Regardless of where I am, alone is all I'll ever be.

CHAPTER THREE

Azizia

I'm mildly satisfied with the direction Felix is taking his podcast, but it could be better. I sense he's still struggling to go all the way, and I hate that for him.

I've been listening to him non-stop, to the point I've memorized every word he says in each episode. His favorite words are now my favorite words.

Because I've been watching so closely, I've seen the way The Nerd Word has sky-rocketed the charts, and the reviews are flooding in. I try not to be pissed about all these people, these *humans* fawning over him, begging him to say things to *them*. That is a no. Absolutely not. This whole thing was my idea. I wanted him to speak dirty things to me. If I knew how to use technology better, I'd hunt them all down, and cut their fingers off one by one so they could no longer type out messages to *my* Felix.

On the same note, if I were better with technology, I'd find him myself to see him face to face. See what he looks like because I still have no idea. Even though his podcast is moving up in the world, he's yet to upload a photo, and he's since started ignoring all of my emails I've sent to him, begging for a photo and personalized messages just to me.

I fall asleep each night, dreaming of him speaking dirty things to me, and sometimes it's so bad I can't get to sleep at

all. I find myself wandering around the house, going through this woman's things. This woman who is really starting to smell, by the way. I need to get rid of her body, but I'm not entirely sure how to at this point. I've waited too long, and all it's going to do is make more of a mess.

I try calling my brother for the hundredth time since I've been up here, and don't expect him to answer since he hasn't once since I've left. So when I hear his voice on the other end, I jolt upright.

"Azrael?"

"Zia, is that you?"

"Yes, it's me. I've been calling you for like two weeks!"

"I told you the phones don't always work to call each other."

Oh... yeah, I think he did mention that.

"Right... I may have forgotten about that."

"What do you need? I'm a little... busy."

"With what?"

"Just *something*."

He makes a grunting sound, then I hear another man's voice. Then my brother says something that sounds muffled and I can't figure it out.

I ignore whatever is going on down there, and whatever he's doing, because this is more important. "Okay, well, I need your help. Lots of help, Rae."

"With what? You haven't been gone that long."

“For one, there is a rotting dead body that I don’t know how to get rid of, and—”

“Zia, I asked you *not* to kill anyone.”

“I needed a place to stay!”

He groans. “Is there only one?”

“Yes, just one.”

“Don’t kill anyone else, Zia. I’m serious. If you get caught, we’re both fucked.”

“Okay!” “What else do you need?”

“I’m trying to figure out how to find someone...”

“Someone who? Why? You didn’t go up there to find people, you went up there to hide.”

Think, Zia. If you tell him the truth, he’ll get mad. He doesn’t want you killing people, so stalking people probably isn’t good either. So what the hell kind of excuse can I give him that’ll make him help me?

“I found a potential job.”

“You did?” He sounds skeptical.

“Yes, at a recording studio. And the guy told me to meet him there, but then I accidentally deleted the email and can’t find it. I don’t want to send him another message and look like an idiot, so I’m just trying to find out where he’s at so I can go there.”

“When is the interview?”

Interview? What is an interview?

I say the first thing I can think of.

“Two days?”

He sighs. “I’ll have someone up there to help you first thing in the morning. Make sure your phone is on and fully charged, so I can ping it to find your location.”

“Thanks, bro. You’re the best! Love you.”

I end the call as quickly as I can.



Someone shows up at the house just as the sun is up. I peek through the little hole on the door and see someone who is most definitely a demon. He looks way too angry to be human. He’s also really big and scary looking, and that’s usually what the male demons look like. Even though he looks weird through this little hole, I can tell he’s tall. Muscular too. There are lots of tattoos up and down his arms. He even has a few on the side of his face. His hair is dark and short. The most telling thing, though, is the upside down cross necklace he’s wearing. Yep, definitely a demon. I unlock the door and step aside, giving him a happy smile.

“You Azizia?” he grunts.

“That’s me,” I say, still smiling.

He pushes past me and stops in the middle of the living room to look around. He raises his nose into the air, sniffs deeply,

then lets out a satisfied groan that has me clenching the handle of the door.

Ew. Does he enjoy the scent of death? Even as demons, we don't like the smell of rotting flesh. It's pungent and overwhelming. And it gets stuck in your nose for way too long.

He moves toward the bathroom, clearly knowing exactly what he's doing.

He pulls the door of the bathroom open, and I expect some kind of reaction, but all he does is stand there, his large body taking up the whole doorway so I can't see how bad it is. After day three, I shut the door and haven't been back in there since. Thankfully, there's another bathroom in the big bedroom that has everything I need in it.

The guy closes the door, then turns toward me, but it's as if he sees right through me. He walks out the door, goes to a large truck, rummages around for something, then comes back with a roll of black trash bags, and a bucket full of cleaning supplies.

When he reaches me again, he looks down at me and says, "Go around back, make sure the hose is connected, water is turned on, and meet me at the bathroom window."

He doesn't wait for a response, just goes back to the bathroom and gets to work.

I close the house door, then hurry around the back to look for this hose thing he's talking about.

When I spot it, I know exactly what it is. Something about the green tube that's coiled into a circle that looks like a giant snake has a fuzzy memory triggering, reminding me what a hose is. It's already hooked up to a spout, so I turn it, then find the end of the hose and press the button. I grin when the water squirts out.

Fancy stuff these humans have up here.

I let go of the button and the water stops.

Like magic.

I step back and look at the house, trying to figure out which window is the bathroom. When I spot that guy's grumpy face in one, I jerk away, startled. I shake out of it and hurry toward him as he opens it.

"What's your name?" I ask.

"Kiza."

"You're friends with my brother?"

"No," he grunts.

"Then why are you helping me?"

"Money."

That makes sense...

He sticks his arm out the window, and it takes a moment for me to realize what he wants. I thrust the hose into his hand, then hurry back into the house.

I sit on the couch and watch as he works, but the door is mostly closed, so I only get glimpses now and then. I check

my phone, looking for an update on The Nerd Word, but get nothing. I don't want to sit here and listen to repeats while this guy is here, so instead, I just scroll through the episodes and recall Felix's smooth and smokey voice.

So far, I think my favorite was listening to him talk about nebulophilia, and only because he said the word "aroused" seven times during the episode, which really got me going.

Would be nice if he'd accepted one of my suggestions, like pegging or spanking. Those are much easier to cover than some of the things he's talked about. Words I've never even heard of before, though I do enjoy the educational aspect of his podcast too. Still, I'd prefer to hear him talk dirty to me, rather than learn about formicophilia—arousal to insects—which I think Kiza is dealing with in the bathroom right now, if the grunts echoing from in there are any indication...

Though, had Felix not talked about that, I'd not know what to call it now.

Again, I'd rather he tell me to get on my knees and choke on his cock than be taught new words, even if they are helpful.

Kiza spends quite a bit of time in the bathroom before he comes out, lugging something inside of the trash bag, which I assume is the body. He doesn't say anything as he passes me, just heads to the truck where he tosses the bag into the back, wipes his hands on his pants, then comes back inside.

He disappears into the bathroom again, and I figure I need to do something to keep myself busy, so I head into the kitchen and find something to eat.

Everything in the fridge is either empty or bad, so I grab another can of beans from the cabinet, pry it open with a knife, then start to eat. When I turn to rest against the counter, I find Kiza standing in the doorway, staring at me like I've turned purple.

“Do you have any idea how to survive up here?”

“Excuse me?”

He gestures toward me. “You opened that can like a fucking savage.”

I stare down at it, not understanding what he means. The can is perfectly fine.

He shakes his head, then comes into the kitchen and pulls open some drawers and finds some weird scissor looking thing but without the sharp part.

He holds his hand out, then widens his eyes and focuses on the can in my hands, so I give it to him. Even though I don't want to because I'm hungry and they are good.

He rests it on the counter, puts the scissor looking things on the can, then starts to turn the handle.

The top of the can slowly cuts away from the sides.

“Wow...” I say in awe, smiling up at Kiza.

“This is a can opener. Use it, before you slice off a fucking finger.” He drops it to the counter. “And don't let bodies sit for that long ever again, especially if you're going to be as messy

as that.” He points to the bathroom. He opens the fridge and shakes his head again. “And order some damn food.”

He storms out of the kitchen, and I hurry after him.

“How do I do that?”

“I’ll be done in five minutes, and I’ll let you know.”

He goes into the bathroom again, so I head back to the kitchen to eat my beans while I wait.



“So you’re telling me I can do all of this on my phone?” I ask with a smile.

“Yeah...”

Who would’ve thought?

“And the food will be here by six pm tonight?”

“And they won’t even bother you. They’ll leave it right on the front porch, and your phone will go off to let you know.”

“What about Felix?”

“Job interview, huh?” he says with a raised brow.

“That’s what I said.”

“Uh-huh.” He starts typing something out on his computer, that he’s used to show me a few things about living up here. A web page about The Nerd Word pops up, but I still don’t see a picture. “Here’s the address. Give me your phone.”

I narrow my eyes but hand over the phone. He takes a picture of an address.

“What is that going to do?”

“Now you have the address in your phone, saved in your photos. All you have to do is put it into the maps app, and it’ll give you direction. Luckily, it isn’t far. Do you know how to drive?”

“Uh, sure.”

He grits his teeth and looks up at the ceiling and shakes his head.

“Don’t drive her car, or any other car, for that matter. I’ll send you info of someone who can drive you, and will be discreet.”

“Why would I need someone to be discreet?” I ask, tilting my chin up.

“You may fool your brother into thinking you’re a little angel, but I know what you really are.”

“What’s that?” I ask, feeling slightly offended.

“A manipulative demon.” He closes his computer, then grabs it as he gets to his feet. “Whatever you do is going to fall on you and your brother, since he helped you get here. Just keep that in mind before you do something stupid.”

I frown at him. “I won’t do anything to get my brother into trouble.”

He looks at me as if he doesn’t believe me, then heads to the door, but stops and turns toward me before leaving. “I’ll send

you the info of someone who can drive you once I find someone capable.” He steps outside.

“Thank you!” I call after him, but he ignores me.

I hurry to lock the door, then press my back to the door as I look around.

Kiza let me know that my brother was able to edit some information up here, and it now looks like the woman who was just taken away in Kiza’s truck, sold her house for cash two weeks ago and fled the country.

I am now the proud owner of a two-bedroom, ranch style home.

The only thing it’s missing is a guest.

CHAPTER FOUR

Felix

Grinning to myself, I lean toward the mic to close out the episode. “And that, my friends, is a wrap for this week’s The Nerd Word. I’ll be diligently sifting through your requests for next time, so don’t hesitate to email me suggestions, and maybe if you’re all very good girls and boys, you might hear your word on Crude Corner. Until next time, word warriors...”

I switch off the mic, then remove my headphones, momentarily satisfied with those parting words.

I don’t know what the hell has gotten into me, but I was feeling myself a little bit tonight.

Scratch that, I know *exactly* what has gotten into me, and it’s not even a what but a *who*.

Zia’s last email was a little more aggressive than normal, a little more possessive if I’m being honest, and while that should have probably made me block her and start searching for virtual restraining orders, it didn’t.

No, the email put a smile on my face and an erection in my jeans because the idea of someone *wanting* me based on nothing but my voice? Well, it caters to that incredibly lonely side of living the way I do.

It is kind of creepy, though.

I've seen *Play Misty For Me*. I know how this could turn out.

That's still not enough for me to try to cut Zia off or anything. Her attention is a nice change of pace, but I'll keep it in the back of my mind. I don't really have to worry, anyway. I'm a fucking vampire, so if things come to a head I'd be able to handle myself, and I'm sure it would end poorly for Zia because of that alone.

Probably.

It's been so long since I've actually acted like my kind that I'm not sure I'd remember how if I needed to, but natural instincts would most likely take over and I'd be fine.

Not that I think it'll come to that.

She's been emailing me almost daily and sent her last one a few days ago, but I haven't heard from Zia since then. And the *desperate for attention and connection* side of me is butt hurt over it, which is exactly why I did what I did tonight.

Still smiling, I start to put away my equipment and check to make sure everything is saved on my laptop.

I *might* have finally chosen one of Zia's words for Crude Corner, and I *might* have used a slightly deeper tone while I discussed impact play and how it can be incorporated into many facets of sex, including degradation and praise kinks. And that's why I threw in the bit about good boys and girls. It felt right after an episode where I somewhat gave into the

overall interest the show has piqued, but it was mostly to get a rise out of Zia.

I want to see if she'll email me again after hearing her requests on air, and after I addressed the masses instead of just her. She seems to struggle with that based on the needier aspects of her emails.

Egging on a potential stalker isn't the best line of thinking, but I'm lonely and bored, and thanks to this new segment of my show, I'm horny as hell.

"You know you had someone trying to break in through the back door?"

I nearly jump out of my skin and spin in my chair at the voice coming from behind me. "Jesus fuck, Silas. You scared the shit out of me."

"If you didn't hear me, that means you've been living up here way too long," he says with a raised brow. "Your senses are taking a hit."

Giving him my back, I finish taking care of my mess from recording. "And where am I supposed to go? Back to Purgatory? That'll go over real well, considering I was all but banished from there."

"You weren't banished," Silas scoffs just before I hear the click of his lighter.

"Exiled, then."

"Hardly."

“*Sent away?*”

“Eh, kind of.”

“Well, what the hell do *you* call it when the ruler of Purgatory has had enough of the complaints about someone and boots them permanently to the surface?” I get to my feet with a grunt, annoyed as hell that we’re having this conversation again after years of it getting us nowhere. “I’m here against my will, because I didn’t have any other choice, and because no one down there wanted the freak around anymore.”

“You could have gone to Hell.”

Silas smirks as I whip around to face him, my irritation growing by the second, but I just huff instead of continuing the argument.

We’ve been through this before, so many times, and it does nothing but piss me off and make him laugh.

“Brought you something.”

My brow furrows as he tosses a smallish rectangular package wrapped in brown paper at me. One I carefully start to open before I let out a sigh. “Silas, you know I—”

“I know,” he says as he takes a hit off his cigarette. “Call me what you will, but it drives me nuts thinking about you living off that damn coconut milk.”

I turn the pouch of blood over in my hands with a small, genuine smile, the thing obviously packaged and frozen by Silas himself at home.

Call me what you will.

I've secretly called him my best friend, my brother, even though we don't share genetics, and I've done so ever since we were kids. Silas knows it too. He just won't acknowledge it because he's not into that sappy shit.

And frankly, neither am I. I'm just more prone to letting it slip than he is.

But after one hundred and ninety-eight years of this guy coming to my defense and trying to take care of me in some way—by choice—it's hard not to get a little up in my feels over things. Especially when I know how much Silas is risking to come up here every night so he can check on me. He could lose a *lot* more than just his job by leaving Purgatory so frequently, and doing that on top of the impromptu and unexplained visits to Hell? Yeah, Silas deserves those titles I give him in secret. Even if he is a huge dickhead most of the time.

“You gonna acknowledge what I said when I got here?”

I blink a few times as I look up at him. “What?”

“Fucking hell, Felix, where are you right now? You're not normally this hard to talk to when I stop by.” He takes a long drag of his smoke as I stare blankly at his face. *He needs to shave.* “The person trying to break in?”

“Right, yeah, sorry. I guess I skimmed over that. You saw someone?”

Silas rolls his eyes. “Since I’ve brought it up twice now, yes. When I was walking up to the building, I saw someone at the back entrance trying to break in.”

I frown. “Why would anyone want to break in here?”

“How the hell should I know?”

Good point. “What’d they look like?”

He shrugs one shoulder as he says, “On the shorter side, dressed in all black, and they had a crowbar.”

“That is not helpful at all. You don’t have any more details?”

Silas shakes his head as he puts his cigarette out on the heel of his boot.

“You couldn’t tell anything else about them?”

“Not really. I was coming up through the woods, so I was getting nailed with a lot of other scents, and I’m pretty sure they heard me.”

I glance at the clock, noting it’s close to when my shift ends, which also means both of us have a very small window to get out back and see if the would-be intruder left anything behind before sunrise. “Don’t really give a shit anymore, do you?”

“Nope.”

“Well, go see if you can find anything. Mandy will be here in a few minutes and not only does she *not* need to find you here, I have to finish getting everything taken care of before I leave. And you’re a distraction.”

Carefully, since it's starting to thaw, I slide the frozen pouch of blood into my messenger bag before shoving the rest of my shit in there. Then I pack up all of Roger's stuff, close up the room I was using, and head down the hall toward the tiny break room.

I hit the button to start the coffee brewing, and then coax my sleeping cat into his carrier—he refused to walk tonight and I was already running late—thankful I have it right now.

Arguing with my cat over what to do or how to move while I go look at the potential vandalism to the back door is not high on my list of things I'd like to do tonight.

Roger finally gives in the moment Mandy drags ass into the break room, settling into his carrier with an annoyed huff.

I exchange pleasantries with Mandy, she thanks me for the coffee, and a few minutes later I've clocked out for the day and am joining Silas in the back lot.

“Crowbar was kind of a stupid choice,” he grunts as I stop next to him.

My eyes follow his and land on the crowbar, bent awkwardly at the flat side so both ends now have a bit of hook. There are scratches along the edge of the doorframe, a few smaller dents, and there's a larger one on the bottom of the metal door itself. One that looks like someone very strong kicked it in frustration.

But the weirdest part of all of this?

The brick along the edge of the frame, where the door sits inside the wall, is *crumbling*.

It's falling apart like whoever was here was using the crowbar like a pick in order to chisel away at the brick and mortar that's been here since the sixties.

Before it was a recording studio, this place was a small local armory where a few soldiers and a tank stayed during the Vietnam war, but shortly after it ended, they relocated both and that's why it's built the way it is.

The door is purely an emergency exit so there's no handle on it, and it's set deeply into the wall so it can't be pried open. And there aren't any windows save a couple in the front and one on the side where the office is, so why this is where someone decided to break in is beyond me.

Just like the *why*.

Unless they wanted to steal all the radio and recording equipment, there's no other reason to be here. And most of it is so old that it wouldn't be worth anything anyway, so that reason is out too.

I slowly shake my head as I lift my gaze to look along the back wall, first to the right, then the left, then I take a few steps back and look up at the roof.

"What the hell are you doing?" Silas asks as he joins me.

"I don't smell anything."

He frowns. "Neither do I, now that you mention it."

“But someone was definitely here.”

“No shit.”

Rolling my eyes, I walk backward to get a better look as I say, “And they couldn’t be human if we can’t smell them. Which means—”

“Oh, come on. Don’t start that shit again.”

“You know I’m right about this. The only one who could or would bother masking their scent so a vampire can’t smell it is —”

“Davina is not *here*, Felix. She has no reason to be here.” Silas kicks at the crowbar, then starts looking for his smokes as he walks away. “There is *zero* reason for it. None.”

“You don’t know that. She could be here.” I stare at the roof a little longer before I jog after him. “Davina might be bored enough to travel up here. You never know.”

“I do.”

“You can’t.”

Silas stops abruptly and pins me with dark, angry eyes as he pokes a finger in my chest. “She wouldn’t dare. I made it clear to her that she needs to leave you alone. Davina did her damage and now it’s done.”

Always looking out for me.

But something was definitely at Hellcat, and it definitely didn’t have a scent. Which means it intentionally covered it up so we wouldn’t know what it was, and since there are few very

creatures who do that, I find it hard to believe it wasn't one of us.

I start after Silas again, the male turning abruptly to lumber off.

Although, breaking in through the back is kind of strange. And it doesn't really fit the MO of anyone I know from back home.

If Davina really was here and decided to come see me, she probably would have made some grand entrance through the front door or some shit, scaring me worse than Silas did for a number of reasons.

I look over my shoulder just before we get to the end of the sidewalk to take the right turn toward my place, and when I do, I swear I see movement up on the roof of the station.

Movement and a quick glimmer of something shiny.

It was brief and barely noticeable, but I did see something, and that just further proves that something otherworldly was trying to break in.

I keep staring even as I nearly trip over my own feet, but the longer I look, the less I see, and then I don't see anything out of the norm at all.

But I know in my gut there is something out there, and whatever it is, it *definitely sees me*.

CHAPTER FIVE

Azizia

It's him.

I know it's him.

Holy hell, he's sexy.

All dark hair and nerdy vibes.

I stare at him from the rooftop, so entranced by everything about him that I forget I'm supposed to be hiding from him. He looks up, and that triggers my memory, causing me to jerk back at the last second.

Shit. I think he saw me.

Of course, I want him to see me. I want him to *love* me, damn it, but I don't want to scare him. I can't have him running away and making this more difficult.

The crowbar clanks against the ground as I drop to it. I brought it with me just in case I'd need it, but so far it's only been in the way.

I peek my head out, but Felix isn't where he was. I look around and spot him walking away.

My head is so messed up from setting eyes on him that I've forgotten part of plan now too.

I hurry down the old ladder on the side of the building, then hop onto the dumpster. Once my feet are on the ground, I

hurry to the black car that's waiting on the street, thanks to Kiza.

I tap on the driver's window, then point in the direction Felix went.

Once the guy rolls it down, I say, "He's going that way, carrying a large plastic box thing. I'm going to follow him, so stay close. He doesn't look too strong, but you never know. You may have to help me."

"I don't think this is a good idea," the driver says.

His name is Draven. He's a demon like me, but he isn't very demon-like. He's smaller than most of the male demons and doesn't look as scary. Probably kicked out of hell because of it. I stand up straight and plant my hand on my hip.

"Kiza said you would help me with whatever driving needs I had."

"Yeah, *driving*, not kidnapping!"

"He's not a kid..."

He gapes at me, then this weird, choked sound comes out of his mouth.

"I can't get in trouble up here," he argues.

"Neither can I. So you better stay close." I step back, but then stop abruptly. "Oh, take this for me."

I drop the crowbar through the window and onto the Draven's lap. He groans, then hisses, but I can't stick around

to see why. I can't let Felix get too far away. This is my chance.

I hurry down the street and hear the car following behind me. Good. At least he's listening.

I check my back pocket for the handcuffs, making sure they're still there, and smile when I feel the circular outline in my pocket.

I've never snatched someone off the street before, but here goes nothing.

I move quickly but carefully, and when I catch sight of him, my heart skips a beat.

His ass is so nice.

I stare at it as he walks. It's slightly too big for his body, with the nicest jiggle I've ever seen on an ass. He's tall too, but he's walking slightly crooked and I can't tell if there's something wrong with his leg or that box he's carrying is just really heavy...

What the hell is in there?

I glance around at the quiet street. It's early, so there isn't anyone around, which is great. The sun hasn't even come up yet, which helps me stay hidden. Draven has the lights off on his car, so that helps him be less noticeable, too.

I hurry after Felix, hearing him talking quietly to himself—or to the box, I can't tell—which I would probably find strange if I didn't love his voice so much.

When I'm about fifteen feet from him, I know it's do or die. Now or never.

I run and lunge, jumping onto his back and wrapping my arms around his neck and my legs around his waist. Felix flails his arms, letting out a yelp. He swings his body around, trying to shake me off, but I only hold tighter.

“Stay still!” I shout at him.

“Get off me, you whacko!”

“Just hold still. This will be so much easier... if you... hold still!”

I manage to get him in a good headlock, just the way my brother showed me. Rae showed me all kinds of awesome defense techniques that he said I may need while up here. Apparently, it's a dangerous place, but I haven't noticed any danger.

Felix and I stumble to the side as he loses his balance. I tighten my grip around his throat, hoping to get him to calm the hell down, but it only makes him freak out more. He groans and growls, using his free hand to yank on my arms. I rear my foot back and kick at the box, because now that I'm on him, I feel the heaviness to it and it's making us tip over.

“Drop the box!” I shout at him, trying to kick it again but missing.

“No, not Roger!”

“You named your box Roger?” I screech.

Again, if this man weren't so damn delicious, and his voice weren't the best thing my ears have ever listened to, I'd worry about him being crazy, but... everyone has their faults. If he's crazy, I'll accept him for who he is. He's just too beautiful to do otherwise.

He tries to respond, but his body starts to slow and go limp. Still, he doesn't let go of the damn box. Then I remember the handcuffs in my pocket, and the fact Draven is supposed to be helping me.

I look over my shoulder. The car is stopped in the middle of the road, and he's staring at me with wide eyes and his mouth hanging open.

"Help me!" I scream at him.

He shakes out of it, then opens the door and runs over, standing there with his arms out to the sides like he doesn't know what to do.

"Take the box!"

"Not Roger!" Felix manages to say, though his voice is quiet and very raspy now.

"Stop resisting!"

"No, not my—"

Draven yanks the box from Felix's hand as his body goes completely limp. His legs give out and he drops. I straighten my feet in time that I catch myself, then grab the handcuffs, quickly get them on, and look up at Draven.

“Get him, I’ll carry that stupid box,” I growl.

Draven hands me the box, and I take it, but it instantly pulls me down and drops to the ground with a loud clap.

What the hell is in here, bricks?

I scope it out, noting there is a wire-type front, and when I look inside, I scream and jerk away from it.

Draven is looking at me with wide eyes, bent over Felix and about to lift him.

“It’s a fucking alien!” I shout at Draven. “A naked rat! And it’s... it’s fucking *obese!*”

The thing hisses at me, its claws coming out, then it swats at me.

I glare at it and hiss back, showing dominance.

But all it does is hiss at me again.

I grit my teeth and crawl, then tap the side of the box, hoping to scare it, but all it does is lunge at me again.

I look up to see Draven shaking his head, then proceeds to lift up Felix and run to the car. He opens the trunk, and is just about to drop Felix in when I shout, “No, you heathen! I want him in the back with me!”

Draven freezes, glares at me, then brings Felix to the back seat. I lift the box with two hands, and hurry over. If it were up to me, I’d leave it here, but Felix seems attached and I don’t want to upset him.

“This devil spawn can go into the trunk.” I drop the box in, then close the trunk. “I wonder if Lucifer knows he’s missing a child.”

I wipe my hands on my pants, then find Draven staring at me again.

“What?” I bark.

“You know that’s a cat, right?”

“That thing is not a cat.”

“Yeah, it is.”

“It’s not. It’s hairless, huge with bug eyes, and wearing this ugly sweater that looks pokier than a cactus. Animals don’t wear sweaters.”

Draven then glances at Felix and frowns. “Weirdos dress their animals in sweaters.”

I storm up to Draven, and point in his face. “Don’t you dare insult my Felix ever again!”

He stumbles back. “Right... well, you should get in so we can go. I’m late for my day job.”

I climb into the backseat and groan when I realize Draven didn’t buckle Felix in. Doesn’t he care about his well-being? I reach across Felix and can’t help but run my nose along his chest and inhale his scent as I do. I buckle him, then tug on it to make sure it’s locked properly. I don’t want him getting hurt. I sit close to him, wrap my arm around his waist, and rest my head against his chest as we make our way home.

Draven helps me get Felix and the alien into the house, then he leaves without a word. Not to me, anyway. He's shaking his head and muttering to himself all the way to his car.

"Bye! Thank you for your help!" I call after him with a grin as I stand on the porch and watch as he goes. He looks at me over his shoulder, shakes his head again, then gets into the car and leaves.

When I get back into the house, I notice Felix still isn't awake.

Did I go too far?

He should have woken up almost right away... shouldn't he have?

He's comfortable at least, laying in my bed that I plan to share with him for the rest of forever.

Leaving the handcuffs on is necessary. I don't want him to attack me before I get a chance to explain. I look him over, wondering if there is something I can do to wake him up.

I spot some kind of strap across his chest. As I follow it, I see it's attached to a bag. I didn't realize he was wearing one because I was too distracted by that damn alien in a box. I tug on the strap, but it doesn't come off. And I can't get it off because of the handcuffs. I want him to be comfortable, so I guess cutting it off is the best option.

I go in search of scissors, pressing my ear to the bathroom door to listen for the alien, and smile when I hear it's silent in there. The thing was making the strangest noises inside that

box, so I figured letting it loose in the bathroom would be okay. It's been quiet ever since.

I find scissors in the kitchen that I use to cut the strap on the bag, but when I pull it away, I see a large spot of blood on the bed. Panic floods me as I search Felix's body, pressing my hands everywhere I can to find a wound.

Oh no.

No, no, no.

Did I hurt him!?

As I touch everywhere I can along his sides and arms, I don't find anything that would cause that much blood. My hands are shaking as I look around, trying to figure out where the blood came from, when my eyes spot another spot beneath the bag that's now on the floor. I narrow my eyes, then open it to find a rectangle bag that still has some blood in it.

Why the hell would he have a blood bag?

I take the bag, then drop it into the tub in the en suite bathroom and go back to Felix. I look over his face, his gorgeous face with flawless skin and beautiful dark eyelashes. As I stare at his lips, wondering what it would be like to kiss him, I see the smallest hint of a tooth. Well, not just a tooth, but... I lean in, press my finger to his top lip and push it up, then gasp.

Fangs.

Is my Felix a vampire?

“Oh, you naughty boy,” I say out loud.

Then I swing my head back to the spot of blood.

The blood. The fangs. Working a night shift...

This man is so naughty! I knew it. I knew he had it in him. Why is he playing pretend with me? Acting like he's so shy. Vampire aren't shy!

But I knew there was something about him that wasn't adding up, especially after he finally gave in and used one of my suggestions on his show. He may not have spoken directly to me, but I know he was doing it for me. I just know it. My non-stop emails finally paid off, and now... now I have him here, in my home, and I can't wait for him to wake up. Because from this moment on, this home is ours, and we're going to be happy together for the rest of our lives.

I take his shoes off to help him get more comfortable, then I cover him with the blankets, not worried about the blood.

My Felix is a vampire, so it won't bother him.

And it doesn't bother me.

Oh, my... just the thought of him feeding from me has chills running up my spine.

I've never been fed from, but it's been a fantasy of mine for as long as I can remember.

Felix really is perfect.

And now he's all mine.

CHAPTER SIX

Felix

Fuck, my neck hurts.

I groan as I try to roll it; my neck has the worst crick I've ever felt and my shoulders are bunched up to my ears, and I can barely move them.

I can't really move anything now that I'm trying, and it feels like my arms are...

My eyes pop open as I recall what happened on my way home from work.

Silas took off toward the woods.

Roger was getting restless.

I couldn't wait until I could sink into bed, and was already planning which email to jerk off to today when—bam! Some little gremlin jumped on my back and proceeded to *choke me out*.

With a scowl, I try to wiggle my way to sitting, but it appears my hands are bound together. I look over my shoulder as I roll to my side and, sure enough, I have a shiny pair of bracelets.

Fucking handcuffs.

Whoever that woman was, the feral creature who grabbed me and somehow managed to kidnap me, she couldn't have acted alone because even if she put the sleeper to end all

sleepers on me, lugging my limp ass anywhere wouldn't have been easy.

I'm almost six three, and a buck ninety on a good day, and that's without feeding myself properly for the last few years. I'm scrawny compared to Silas, but even still, it didn't feel like the woman was very big and even so, I don't imagine she dragged me down the street on her own.

Not to mention that would have caused one hell of a scene, especially when the sun came up and I burst into flames.

Thankfully, *that* didn't happen, but as soon as I can get these cuffs off, Roger and I are—Roger!

I look around the darkened room, my eyes darting from corner to corner as panic sinks in.

I swear, if she did anything to my cat...

He's an innocent bystander in all this, a casualty of some screwed up circumstances, and if that grimy little gremlin hurt my cat, it won't matter that I haven't fed from another living thing in years. I will drain that woman dry and leave her body to rot.

Speaking of rot.

My brow furrows as I inhale deeply, trying to pick up any trace of my grumpy good boy as I scoot toward the edge of the bed, but I don't smell Roger.

I smell very subtle hints of a woman; a cheap perfume, various hygiene products that females typically lean toward, lots of fruits and flowers, but they aren't overpowering. And

underneath all of that, I faintly smell the remnants of congealed blood and rotting tissue.

Considering where I am and how I got here, that doesn't exactly bode well for me.

I think I've had quite enough of this entire thing—I'll be going now.

I swing my legs over and plant my feet on the ground, and go to stand. As soon as I take a couple steps, I'm jerked back toward the bed.

Which is the moment I realize I'm not only handcuffed, but I'm also shackled to the headboard.

If this isn't some awful and morbid déjà vu...

Attempting to keep a level head, I take a deep breath and try to think.

Unfortunately, I'm irritated as hell and starting to panic, so that's not going to work.

And it's why I start yelling while I tug on my chain.

“Hello! Hey! Is anyone there? Roger!” Not that he could do anything if he heard me, but not knowing if he's okay is only adding to my stress. “Hey!” I yank on the cuffs so hard they dig into my wrists. “Goddamnit, where are you, you psycho?”

With another hard pull, there's a crack, and I turn around to see the middle of the headboard splintering.

Yes.

I back up toward the mattress and take another breath before I run away from it, ignoring the way my shoulders scream over the position of my arms as the chain splits a little more of the wooden slab.

Repeating my previous action, I gear up to take a flying leap, but just when I'm about to launch myself across the room, the door opens and a stream of light splits the darkness.

"You're finally awake," the girl beams.

I stop dead in my tracks as that sweet voice floats through the void, trying desperately to make out the smallish figure standing in front of me. She's backlit though, and even my acute night vision can't see the face it belongs to.

"How long have you been up? I didn't hear you call out until now. I hope I didn't keep you waiting."

Frowning, I watch as the small shadow moves deeper into the room, nothing but a glimmer of something shining from where I imagine her eyes must be.

Which means this woman is the one who was trying to break into the studio because that strange reflective thing they're doing is exactly what I saw when I was leaving.

"You kept me waiting, though. A lot longer than I thought you would," she says as she stays just out of the dark where I could see her clearer. "I waited for you to wake up, waited for you to leave work." She pauses and her eyes twinkle as I catch a flash of white. "And I waited for you to use one of my words."

“Zia?” The realization is instant, one I think I knew deep down because it was obvious this was coming. “You’re Zia?”

Her eyes practically glow and I feel her excitement vibrating off of her. “Oh, the way you say my name, it’s better than I imagined it would be. Say it again.” Uhm... no? Because this is getting weirder than it already was. Which is why I simply shake my head at her. “Please, say it again.”

A lamp clicks on and I squint, my light sensitivity more intense than most of my kind, so much so I have to wear tinted glasses. But they’re gone, probably lost in the...

“Oh, here,” Zia says as she quickly comes toward me in a blur of color and movement. “At first I thought you were just a really hot nerdy guy, but once I realized you were a vampire, well, the tinted glasses made sense.”

She grabs the front of my shirt and yanks me down toward her before cramming my glasses on my face—thankfully without poking me in the eye.

“Thanks,” I say slowly while I blink repeatedly, trying to adjust my vision. Then what she said sinks in, and my stare snaps to hers. “Wait, what did you just say?”

“That you’re a really hot nerdy guy?”

“No. No, the thing about...” *Wow.*

Holy shit, Zia is pretty.

Her eyes are dark, dark like I fantasized they’d be, but they have that silvery reflective quality, giving them an unusual sparkle. It’s captivating really, the way that almost silver light

dances across the darkest brown I've ever seen. And with those full lips and a rather adorable button nose, her jet black hair falling in loose waves to her shoulders... she's more than pretty—Zia is beautiful.

While I'm glad I wasn't kidnapped by a bridge troll, finding myself attracted to Zia is dangerous.

And probably misplaced.

I've been alone for such a long time, deprived of any sort of relationship outside of my ancient landlord or at-work-only coworkers, of course I'd find the first female to show me any attention at all attractive.

Hell, her emails are probably to blame for even entertaining the idea that Zia is pretty.

I'd be attracted to anyone who goes into great detail over sucking my cock or letting me fuck them in the ass at this point.

I need to stop thinking about this, though.

It doesn't benefit anyone, because at the end of the day, she kidnapped me, and I don't need to add Stockholm's syndrome to the long list of shit that's wrong with me.

“Where's Roger?”

Zia tilts her head as one of her perfectly shaped eyebrows raise in confusion. “What?”

“Roger.” I nod as I take a step back, putting a little more space between us. “What did you do with him?”

“Who the hell is Roger?”

“He was with me when I left work, but he’s not here now, and I want to know what you did with him. He needs me.”

Zia’s entire demeanor changes and I swear she growls as lunges toward me. “He *needs* you? The guy you were with at that tiny building where you make your podcast? Is he this *Roger* person? Because if you’re with him in any—”

“My cat,” I say quickly before she explodes. “Roger is my cat. I was carrying him while I was walking home.”

She frowns. “The alien?”

“Alien?” *What the hell is she talking about?*

Zia nods as she visibly relaxes. “Roger is the alien. The ugly naked thing with the big eyes that hisses. He’s in the bathroom.”

I blink and ignore the fact she called my grumpy good boy ugly. “The bathroom?”

“Mhm.”

“Why is my cat in the bathroom?”

“He made it very clear that he doesn’t like me. Probably because I tried to show dominance by hissing at him.” She smiles a little as she turns and sits on the edge of the bed. “I wanted to leave him in the trunk, but Draven wouldn’t allow it because he had other things to do, and a hissing alien was not part of his plans for the day. He also thought you’d be mad.”

“I would,” I snap. “Did you hurt him? I swear to god, if you hurt my cat—”

“Calm down, Felix. I didn’t hurt your naked mole rat. I put him in the bathroom while I waited for you to wake up.” Zia looks up at me as I sigh in relief. “Why is he wearing a sweater? That’s freaking weird. And it’s super itchy. He’s probably going to get a rash.”

“He doesn’t have any fur.” I sway a little on my feet, my stomach rolling with hunger and forcing me to sit down next to her. *How long have I been here?* “He’s a sphinx. They... they get cold because they don’t have fur like...”

“Felix?”

I shake my head as my gut rumbles. “How did you know I’m a—”

“Your fangs.” I turn to her with a furrowed brow as she scoots closer. “The blood bag in your messenger bag burst. Scared the hell out of me. I thought I hurt you and when I was looking over your body to see if I had, I noticed your fangs. Are they always out like that?”

“Yes,” I grunt, closing my eyes against the way my head starts to pulse. “I’m not—I’m not feeling so hot.”

“Of course not, silly,” Zia says with a laugh. “Vampires are cold-blooded. You shouldn’t be feeling hot. Not yet, anyway.”

Unsure what exactly she means by that, I choose not to address it in favor of finding out the severity of the issue we’re both about to be facing. “How long have I been here?”

“Just a few hours.”

“Oh.” That’s a huge relief. If it had been longer, there is a pretty good chance I would have gone completely feral on her sooner than later, and whether she kidnapped me or not, we don’t need to go there. I’d prefer we don’t, anyway, but I need to get some coconut water or else I won’t be able to control that.

“What’s wrong?” Zia turns to face me completely just as my stomach screeches. “Felix? You don’t look so good.”

“I just told you I’m not feeling very well.”

“Did I hurt you? I did, didn’t I?” Suddenly, I’m shoved back onto the bed, my head bouncing off the mattress as my hands are smashed underneath me, and knees settle on either side of my waist. “I didn’t see any wounds, nothing that was obvious at least, but maybe I had you in the sleeper hold too long.”

Zia’s breath is hot on my neck as her dainty fingers turn my head, my eyes sliding closed while she pokes and prods under my chin and along my throat.

If I wasn’t so damn hungry, I’d be ridiculously turned on by this.

She’s straddling my waist, touching me all over, and now that she’s this close, I can smell Zia’s natural scent.

It’s spicy yet sweet, heady but light. It isn’t strong, but it’s overpowering at the same time, and I need to stop breathing it in or else hunger isn’t going to be the only thing I’m feeling.

And that can’t happen.

Zia kidnapped me.

She choked me out on the way home from work, after she had been stalking me for at least last night.

She's been mildly obsessed with me for a while, and I saw that obsession growing with each email she sent.

Zia is clearly unhinged and capable of doing quite a bit of damage despite her size, and that's without proof that the smell of death somewhere in this house was caused by her.

I need to keep reminding myself of all those things because fucking my captor, no matter how pretty she is, how dirty her mind can be, or how lonely I am, is a one-way ticket to six feet under.

Thankfully for me, my stomach growls loud enough for Zia to hear, and she immediately stops poking around my body. "Was that you?"

I nod the best I can. "I'm hungry."

"You need to feed?" She shivers slightly, but it was enough for me to feel in this position. "Is that it?"

"Yeah," I whisper as my body goes lax. "It's been too long since... since I had coconut water. I'm—I'm going to pass out."

And just before I do, I feel Zia jump off my body and the bed, then hear her rush toward the door as she says, "I don't know why the hell you're talking about coconuts, but I'm going to feed you. It's my job to take care of you now, Felix. And I'm going to take care of you forever."

Oh shit.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Azizia

I run to the kitchen for a knife, or scissors, or something else to cut myself with. I'd love nothing more than for Felix to sink those sexy fangs into my throat or the inside of my thigh, but he's too weak right now. If I hadn't already made him pass out once, I'd consider sitting on his face and asking him to tear my skin open with his teeth, but that's too risky right now.

This is the next best thing.

But as I run back to the bedroom with the knife, I stop in the doorway and look down at the sharp blade.

I'm fine with knives. Fine with blood. Hell, I'm fine with using knives on people to cause blood. But the thought of running this blade across my own skin...

My head spins and I reach a hand out to press against the wall so I don't fall. I shake out of it, but as I look at the blade again, the thought of it going across my skin has the dizziness coming back tenfold. It falls from my hand, dropping to the hardwood floor with a clatter.

I press my back to the wall and slide down, wrapping my arms around myself as I think.

What am I going to do?

Felix needs to eat. I need to feed him.

He's my responsibility now.

I want to take care of him, want to be the one to nurture him.

He needs blood.

And I'll get him blood, one way or another.

I get to my feet, then hurry out the front door, noting the sun is already high in the sky at this point.

And thank whatever dark gods there are in this universe, because there's someone running by the house right now. She's young, not too pretty, but small enough.

I can totally take her.

I run at her full speed and tackle her, managing to get her into the same hold that I got Felix in just a few hours ago. She fights, but it's easier to subdue her than it was Felix. Once she stops flopping around like a fish, I glance around to make sure no one saw that.

Probably should have thought about that before I did this.

Oops.

My heart is thundering in my chest and my mouth is dry, but I don't see a single person anywhere, so I quickly get up, grab the girl by her ankles, and drag her into my house.

I absolutely do not like the idea of Felix putting his lips on another person, but if it's life or death... I'll have to deal with it.

I glance at the knife on the floor as I drag the woman's body to the room, and all it does is make me sick.

I'll have to get over that fear, because even having this girl in the same room as my Felix is making me angry.

I hope he drinks so much of her blood that it sucks her dry and she's even uglier than she is now.

I try getting her onto the bed, but when it turns out too difficult, and the thought of her being in bed with Felix has me seeing red, I hurry to the dining room to get a chair and bring it back to the room, which I then sit her on, and tie her to. I gag her too because even though she's still not awake, once I slice her arm open, she probably will be.

With the knife in hand, I hold her arm over Felix's slightly opened mouth, and drag the blade across it with ease. I'm enraged that I couldn't have just done that to myself, and it makes me want to jab this knife right through the girl's eye.

She wakes up then, groaning. It takes only a moment for her to realize she's tied to a chair and tries yanking away from me. Her eyes widen when she sees herself bleeding, but I hold her still to allow more blood to drip into Felix's mouth.

She mumbles behind the gag and I'm grateful I thought of it. The last thing I want to do is listen to some puny human beg me to let them go. Sorry, not sorry, lady. Felix is more important than you.

She fights me harder, the chair beneath her rocking around. Is she going to break it?

Damn, she's fighting me harder than Felix did!

Maybe it's because he knew I was following him.

Maybe he knew I was going to take him.

And maybe... maybe he wanted me to.

Oh, the thought has me so happy. I can't wait for him to wake up so I can listen to that smooth voice of his again.

It doesn't take long. It's about a mouthful later and his eyes are opening, but then they widen and he shoots upwards, spitting the blood out all over the place. He wipes his mouth as best he can, coughing and choking like I've poisoned him.

"No! I can't drink this stuff! It's... It's..." he groans, then lays back against the pillows.

"What's wrong with it? Is she sick or something?" I dart my gaze from him to the girl who is still trying to get out of the bindings.

He shakes his head. "No, no, she's healthy, I just... she's alive, Zia, and that, it's... I could... Jesus."

"What? What do you mean, Felix?"

His eyes close, and then it's like he's sleeping again. What the hell is wrong with him?

The girl is fighting like crazy, making so much noise it's driving me insane.

I whirl toward her and press the tip of the knife to her throat. "Shut the fuck up!"

Her eyes widen, and even though she's still shaking, she stops trying to escape. Her chest is heaving and she's making

weird breathing noises, but at least I can think a little clearly now. I start to pace as I work through my thoughts.

I need to feed Felix.

He doesn't want her blood.

He can't have mine because I'm too scared to cut myself.

I look down at my arm, wondering if I could bite into my own skin. I try it, sinking my teeth into the flesh of my forearm, but let out a whine when it starts to hurt.

Yeah, okay, that's not going to happen.

Think, Zia. Think! You're a freaking demon. How are you not able to think of what to do here?

But then it hits me, and I turn to the girl with a smirk. I hurry toward her, pressing the knife to her throat again.

"You need to die."

Her eyes widen even further, and then I push the knife into her throat. It goes in with ease, and a shiver runs up my spine as the satisfaction of her warm blood pouring over my hand, and the life leaving her eyes.

I love a good slow killing, but Felix is depending on me, so I have to make it quick.

It doesn't take long for her body to slump over. Which is when I realize all this blood is going to waste. I hurry to the kitchen again, slipping on the now blood covered floor, but thankfully don't fall. I grab a coffee mug, then hurry back and wait for it to fill.

Then I stare at it.

Is he really going to know she was dead when I got this?

Or does it need to sit for a while?

How long does it need to sit for?

I place it on the end table, then stare at the girl and the mess I made.

Shit, I wasn't supposed to kill anyone else.



It takes a while, but I'm finally able to coax Felix awake, though just barely. His eyes blink open a few times, but he's weak.

"Drink, drink!" I say quickly, holding the mug in front of his face. He stares at it for a long moment, then blinks some more until his eyes focus.

"Wha..." he mutters.

"I did this for you," I say, stepping to the side. "Since you didn't like her alive. I killed her even though I'm not supposed to kill anyone so you can feed."

His brow furrows, and he turns his head toward the girl. They widen, his mouth opens and I hurry to pour the dead girl's blood into his mouth, but he sputters on it and spits it out. Then he lets out some kind of whining sound and shakes his head.

Then his body goes limp again.

This is turning out to be way more trouble than it's worth. He's been here a few hours now and has barely spoken any words to me. In fact, he's being rather ungrateful, now that I think about it. Look at this damn mess!

With a sigh, I put the mug on the end table, then work on untying the girl, and I drag her into the bathroom and drop her in the tub. Then I hunt down my phone and call Kiza, who thankfully shows up twenty minutes later.

He stands in the doorway of the bedroom, taking in the scene.

"I'm not even going to ask," he grunts.

I smile coyly, then point to the bathroom.

He shakes his head as he steps inside and makes his way to the bathroom. He stops when he reaches me, glancing down at the end table that is now covered in ten different coffee mugs, all filled with blood.

I didn't want to waste it, so I sucked it off the floor with a turkey baster and put it in the cups for Felix.

The moment Kiza leaves, Felix will get to eat. Because at this point, I'm convinced the issue is his weakened state. Once I can get the blood into him, he'll be better and he'll wake up. Then he'll thank me for all I've done because this has been so much work.

Maybe I can convince him to tell me how much of a good girl I've been. Yes, that would be really nice. That would make all this worth it.

While I waited for Kiza, I even fed his *cat*. Though I don't believe it's a cat at all, but an alien that he's somehow disguising as a cat. The thing is pure evil with his wrinkly skin and big bug eyes. And that sweater. Ugh...

I threw some smelly pieces of ham at it, and all it did was hiss at me, the damn thing.

When Kiza is done cleaning up the mess, he comes over to me and points a thick finger in my face.

"No more," he grunts. I use my finger to draw an *ex* over my heart.

"Promise," I say, but quickly cross the fingers on my other hand and put them behind my back. Because if my Felix needs to eat, I'll do whatever I can to feed him.

I just may have to find another way to clean up the mess when I do.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Felix

I smell blood again.

Blood and death, stronger and fresher than last time.

And that's concerning as hell.

Especially since I'm so damn hungry.

My stomach rumbles at the thought, and I know I'm closer to losing the hold I currently have on my behavior. Once I get over the hump of passing out right and left, that's when it gets bad.

I can tell I'm there.

Teetering right on the edge, a new level of energy starting to wiggle inside just before it rushes to the surface. I can feel it, I'm right on the cusp. As my eyes slowly open, I know the only reason I'm not frothing at the mouth is because of the death I smell.

Blood without a life-source isn't appealing, and it can make vampires pretty sick if they ingest it.

It's like food poisoning for us.

I look around the room, searching for any sign of Zia or the woman she brought in before, only to come up empty, and I sigh in relief.

That was too close.

Too close for so many reasons, and even though I absolutely *cannot* feed from living, breathing humans, I sort of appreciate the gesture.

Which is fucked up, I'm sure.

But Zia was just trying to help me. She didn't know any better. How could she?

It's kind of amazing that she knew what I am so quickly, and how to make sure I didn't die, but there's no way she could know what feeding from a human would do.

What sort of consequences it would bring.

Or... could she?

It's obvious Zia isn't a human or vampire. There's her scent, for one. I definitely know it from somewhere, but I can't quite place it. The reflectiveness in her eyes, that's not a characteristic of either species and since she's not a cat, she has to be something else. Then you throw in the fact that she immediately knew what I was and how to feed me, the bare minimum basics of my kind, and that could mean...

No.

No, it isn't possible, is it? That Zia is working for Davina and that's why she kidnapped me? And why she was trying to force-feed me fresh blood?

I shake my head with a frown.

The look on Zia's face, there was a level of genuineness there that can't be faked. She isn't working for that she-devil,

and she's not a vampire, so it wouldn't benefit Zia to help Davina out anyway. Not to mention, I have no idea what purpose kidnapping me would serve for Davina. Exiling me here was as far as she was willing to barter for, and she made that clear. The bitch screamed it at me while she implanted that thing.

All of which confirms nothing but the fact that Zia is some crazed fan of The Word Nerd, and she took me because of it.

Leaving me with far more questions than answers.

With a groan, I roll to my side and push myself up to somewhat sitting, my entire body aching with hunger.

I'm not sure coconut water is going to cut it, but I'm stuck here and probably will be for a while. Since I won't have a choice, I'm going to have to ask Zia to get me some unless she wants me to do one of two things I won't be very proud of. Because dying of starvation isn't really the way I'd like to go out, and feeding from whatever the hell Zia is until I drain her dry—while most likely trying to fuck her—isn't a good idea.

Probably.

Who knows at this point?

I shrug to myself as I swing my feet over the edge of the bed, lifting my hands to my face to rub my eyes before pushing my fingers through my disheveled hair.

Which is the exact moment I realize I'm no longer cuffed and shackled to the bed.

I bring my hands back in front of me, turning them over to look at my palms before noticing the slowly healing marks around my wrists. I rub them gingerly, knowing damn well they should have healed by now but haven't because I haven't eaten in god knows how long.

My stomach growls again and just when I go to stand, a voice from behind me makes me jump sky high.

"I'm surprised your stomach didn't wake you up sooner."

I go ass over elbow right off the edge of the mattress as I turn to face Zia, no fucking clue how I didn't know she was *laying in bed with me* until she spoke.

Scrambling backward, I try to get my bearings again, blinking rapidly as I take a deep breath. "Where the hell did you come from?"

Zia smiles wide in the low light of the room, her full lips curled up at the corners while her dark eyes sparkle. "I've been here the whole time."

"Okay..." I watch her stretch her arms above her head, then sit up, and scoot forward until she's sitting where I was a moment ago. "You've been lying next to me for..."

"A while," Zia says with a tilt of her head. "Ever since you rejected the dinner I brought you."

For some reason, that makes me flinch, but I ignore it as I get to my feet. "I wasn't rejecting her, Zia. I just... I'm, well, Silas calls me a *vegan*."

"A vegan?"

I nod.

“What does that mean?”

“I...” I’ve never had to explain this before. Silas knows why I can’t feed the way we’re supposed to, it’s why he brings me the blood bags I never drink because Davina’s device won’t detect the processed shit and I still get nervous, but I’ve never had to break it down for anyone. Mainly because no one fucking knows. “I don’t drink blood.”

Zia blinks at me before she bursts into laughter, but when I don’t join her, her perfectly shaped eyebrows shoot up to her hairline. “You’re serious?”

I nod again as I cautiously walk over and sit with ample space between us. I’m lightheaded still, but I’m not going to pass out. “Very.”

“I thought that was how vampires survived.”

“It is.”

“But you don’t drink blood?” Zia asks as she scoots a little closer.

“I can’t.”

She frowns. “I saw your fangs, though. I can see them right now.” She points at them, almost so close she’s touching them.

God help us both if she touches them.

Barely fighting the urge to roll my lips over my teeth, I sigh. “I can *physically* feed. I didn’t mean it like that.”

“I don’t understand,” Zia says as she scoots even closer. “How do you survive if you can’t drink blood? *Why* can’t you drink blood?”

“I drink coconut water by the gallon. It has qualities that are similar and it’s enough to keep me going. I—”

“You didn’t like what I brought you, did you?”

I blink at her as I discreetly put space between us again. “That’s not what I said.”

Zia shakes her head. “You didn’t like her, and now you’re telling me this just so I don’t chain you to the bed again.”

“That’s not it at all, Zia. I appreciate what you did for me, it was very thoughtful but—”

Before I can finish, she hops up off the bed and rushes toward the dresser. Zia grabs a mug from the top then spins toward me, quickly putting herself directly next to me on the bed again, our thighs touching and everything.

“Here.” She shoves the pea green-colored ceramic toward my chest. “If you don’t have a problem with what I brought you, drink this. It’s from *her*.”

I pull my stare away from her brown eyes and look down at the thick, dark liquid-like substance she’s offering me.

And immediately wretch at the coagulated and gnarly blood.

“I knew it!” Zia exclaims as she yanks the mug away and launches it across the room. It crashes against the wall in a mess of goopy blood and ceramic shards, creating the most

morbid Rorschach test there ever was. *I bet human psychiatrists would have a field day with that.* “You don’t like what I brought you and—”

“Zia, stop,” I demand.

To my surprise, she does.

Zia stops dead in her tracks, stops moving completely, save for the rapid pumping of her chest, and she almost looks as though she’s waiting for me to give her a *command*.

So, I do.

“Come sit down.” She does as I say, albeit slowly, and sinks onto the mattress next to me. I lower my voice as I turn to face her, Zia’s pulse erratic enough for me to hear. “I appreciate what you did for me.”

She meets my eyes but doesn’t speak.

“I appreciate that you wanted to make sure I had something to eat while I was here, but I don’t feed like other vampires because I can’t.” Not that I’m going to tell her why yet. Don’t need to reveal everything to my *captor* right away just because I’m ridiculously attracted to her. “I can’t feed from humans directly and even if I did feed from them, I couldn’t do it from a mug like that because the blood would make me sick. It has to come from a direct source.”

Zia nods slowly. “You weren’t rejecting what I brought you.”

“Right.”

“You just don’t drink blood.”

“Correct,” I say as I watch her try to make sense of my vague and bullshit explanation. I have to tread lightly with her, I can tell, but I’m compelled to give her something in the way of a reason. *Because I’m more fucked up than I thought.*

“And you definitely can’t have the blood from that dead lady because it’ll make you sick?”

“Right. I can’t have the dead lady’s bloo... did you say *dead* lady?”

Zia nods. “I couldn’t let her live, Felix! Not after she saw me trying to feed you. You had to eat, so I did what I needed to.”

“Oh, my god.” Now *my* pulse is pounding while my breathing picks up. “Oh my god, Zia, you *killed* her?”

“It’s really not a big deal, okay?”

Oh no.

Oh no.

That is so fucking bad. So bad for a million reasons but the top two on that list are now *because Davina will find me in a house with a dead body and then I’ll be toast and that probably means Zia killed whoever owned this house and there could be two dead bodies.*

We are so fucked.

And yeah, I guess we’re a *we* now because not only did she kidnap me, Zia accidentally made me an accessory to murder.

“Felix?”

“We have to get out of here,” I say as I get to my feet and start to pace. “We have to leave, Zia. I can’t be here, not at a crime scene. We have to go. Where’s Roger? We have to pack.”

I frantically dart around the room, my head pounding as my hunger takes a back seat to my panic. I go toward the closet and rummage through it, looking for what? I don’t know, but when I find a suitcase, I yank it out and toss it on the bed next to Zia.

“Felix, what are you going to do with that? We can’t leave here. You have to stay..”

I shake my head and throw a bunch of random shit into the dark blue suitcase. “You don’t understand. This isn’t good. I can’t be here, not if you’ve been killing people here. I—”

“Felix.” Zia says my name firmly, but I barely hear her because I’m seconds from a full-blown panic attack. “Felix.” She’s saying it louder, but I grab the alarm clock from the bedside table and toss it in. “Felix!”

Suddenly, I’m falling, my body cutting through the air backward until I land on the floor with a hard thud. Spots dance across my vision again before the weight on my body registers, and Zia’s pretty face becomes clearer in my line of sight.

“Am I going to have to keep knocking you out? I can tie you up again. Maybe lock you in the bathroom too?”

She plants her elbow on my chest before propping her chin in her hand, and I swallow hard as I look up at her. “No.”

“Good,” Zia says with a smile. “I like you better when you’re awake and talking to me.”

Licking my suddenly dry lips, I take a slow deep breath so I can inhale her scent, but that is a huge mistake.

I feel my pupils dilate, and my fangs start to throb.

“You don’t have to worry about the bodies, Felix,” she says as she relaxes against me. “I took care of them already.”

Goddamn, she smells good.

Good enough to eat.

My eyes drop to the steady pulse in Zia’s neck, watching intently as it bangs out a rhythm so close I can taste it.

“I won’t be able to do that again though, not the way I did before. So I have to try really hard to be good. To be a nice d—Uh, a nice girl.”

I absently nod as Zia keeps talking about dead people and cleanup, my stare locked on her throat, my hands moving by themselves up her thighs. Thighs that are straddling me tightly again, while the rest of her lithe little body is pressed close to mine.

“Felix, are you listening to me?”

“No,” I grunt as she wiggles a bit, my cock stiffening behind my fly in response to the movement. In response to *her*.

Her brows slam down over her eyes as her heart rate quickens, clearly pissed that I've been ignoring her words. "That's rude."

She goes to sit up, but I snatch her wrists and pull them to her thighs, holding them tightly so she's off balance when she tries to move. And the little surprised whimper that escapes her, the way Zia tries to get free, it makes me even harder.

"Rude?" I grin as her surprised expression snaps to mine. I lift my hips as I push hers down, making sure she can feel my cock against her core. "Isn't that the pot calling the kettle black? All things considered, of course."

"Felix?" Zia whispers in confusion, even though there's a touch of heat in her words. "What are you doing?"

Lifting my head, I bring my mouth close to her throat, my lips ghosting over her jugular before I lick it in one slow drag of my tongue. "I'm hungry, Zia."

She shudders when I do it again and just as I'm about to tug her down and take a bite, the goddamn doorbell rings and breaks the spell.

Zia's head swivels toward the bedroom door as she pops up off my chest, my hands releasing her immediately as I let out a frustrated sigh.

"I didn't order anything," she says with a scowl. "Maybe Kiza forgot something?"

Then I'm watching her climb off my body and hurry toward the door, the crazy little female warning me *not to go*

anywhere while she's gone before my captor disappears into the hall.

Go anywhere?

I chuckle at the thought.

It's not like I can fight her off in my weakened state, and I haven't exactly been trying very hard to get out of here, but now that I've smelt her blood?

Not only will I *not* be going anywhere while she's gone, I'm not sure I'll be *able* to leave Zia without having at least a taste of her. And once I have a taste, I will definitely be eating my fill.

CHAPTER NINE

Azizia

Felix stays in the doorway of the bedroom, lurking in the shadows like a... well, like a vampire.

His eyes are on me as I move to the door, wondering who the hell could be here.

I hesitate as I reach the door, worried that it may be the cops or a demon coming to capture me.

Rae said he took care of everything with the house, but maybe he didn't. Maybe someone is here looking for the woman who owned this house before me. The one I killed.

I glance over my shoulder at the bathroom, and imagine that weird looking alien thing, and a shiver runs up my spine.

I take a breath, grab the handle, and open the door.

There's no one there.

What the... I stick my head out and look both ways.

No one.

Not a single person.

I step onto the porch, my foot snagging on something, and I trip, but thankfully catch myself and don't go flying face first into the dirt and look like a fool in front of Felix. I can't make myself look stupid in front of him. I need him to love me. To like me as much as I like him.

So far, it seems I'm failing at that, considering everything I do is just... wrong.

When I right myself, I look down and spot a small brown box.

I pick it up and see the address is for this house, but the name Karen Brown definitely isn't me...

Must have been the woman I killed. Sucks she ordered this and never got it. Just means she won't miss it though.

I walk back into the house and lock the door.

"Well?" Felix calls as I walk back to the bedroom, shaking the box. It's not too heavy, and doesn't sound like anything breakable. Hopefully, it's something that I can enjoy since she won't.

"Just a delivery," I say with a shrug of my shoulder, then hop on the bed and tear open the box.

Felix moves over to watch me, and I'm not sure how he's even standing. He passed out multiple times from being so hungry. He still hasn't eaten, yet here he is.

Here he is.

I really hope my brother doesn't find out about him. I'll be in so much trouble.

Inside the brown box is another box. I pull it out. On it is a picture of... well, I'm not sure what it is.

A choked sound leaves Felix, and he takes a step back.

"You ordered that thing?"

I frown and hold it up. “What is it?”

His eyes widen, then his mouth opens and closes. “Someone sent you that?”

“No, it’s not mine.”

“Then why did you open it?”

“Because I live here now...”

He shakes his head, running a hand down his face. “It is a federal offense to open someone else’s mail, don’t you know that?”

“I have no idea what a federal offense is, so no...”

“How long have you been up here?”

I narrow my eyes at him, wondering how he knows I’m not from here. I didn’t tell him. Can he sense it? He may be able to, but I can’t be sure. Still, I want him to trust me, and I guess that means I should trust him.

“Twelve days. Are you going to tell me what this thing is?” I thrust the box at him and he shakes his head.

“I... I can’t.”

“What do you mean, you can’t? Why not?”

“Because it’s a... you use that with...”

His eyes flick to the box, then to me, and something in his eyes changes. They somehow grow darker, and his face loses every ounce of worry that was just there.

“It’s a sex toy,” he says breathlessly, sounding almost pained.

I look back at the box, noting the curved shape, purple color, and little hole toward the top. “This is not a sex toy.”

“Oh yes, it is.”

“No way. I’ve seen plenty of them when—” I pause, realizing I was carelessly going to give information that no one should know about. “I’ve just seen plenty of them, and this isn’t one.”

“It’s a new model,” he says, sitting on the bed in front of my feet and taking the box before pointing to the star-shaped sticker. “It says so right there.”

He peels the plastic off it, then opens the box and pulls it out. He presses a button, and a soft, airy vibration sounds. His eyes meet mine again.

“Let me show you,” he whispers.

“What?” I grab the blankets on either side of me, my body tensing.

“I want to show you how it works.”

I shake my head, but why? Why am I telling him no? Isn’t this what I want? This is why I have him here at all, isn’t it? To make him mine, to make him love me and want me the same way I want him. Every woman knows the way to do that is with their body, so if I let him do this...

No. No, Zia, you know that’s not how it works.

He proved that to you. He showed you that sometimes, no matter what you do, it'll never be enough.

But as I look up into Felix's eyes, taking in his lips, dark green eyes, sharp jaw, and the way he's staring at me like he's going to devour me, I find myself nodding my head, my body relaxing.

He smirks, moving the box to the other side of the bed as he turns the vibration off.

"Take your pants off."

I get up and do as he says, losing my pants and not feeling an ounce of shame for it either.

I've been dreaming about this man touching me for weeks.

And now... holy shit, now it's actually happening.

"Back on the bed," he says, his tone taking on a slightly harsh quality. Demanding, almost, and hell do I like it.

I get back on the bed where I was, but cover my private area with my hands, suddenly feeling shy.

Felix gives one shake of his head. "Spread them."

He slides a little closer, running his hand up my calf and stopping at my knee. He applies a bit of pressure and I spread my legs, but don't move my hands. He pushes on my leg a little harder, causing me to bend it, so he can move even closer to me.

"Lay back," he says.

I run my tongue along my suddenly dry lips and rest my head against the headboard.

I notice now how hard my heart is pounding. I'm nervous. Why the hell am I so nervous about this? And why is he acting so different? How did he go from this panicked mess to this... calm and collected vampire?

He brings the long end of the toy to his lips and parts them, darting out his tongue to lick it. Then he wraps his lips around it, getting it wet. His eyes are on me the entire time. And when he pulls it out and brings it to my mouth, I don't hesitate to open for him and do exactly as he just did.

He grabs my wrists with one of his hands and slides them to my thigh, pressing down and holding them in place, then pulls the toy from my mouth and brings it between my legs. I bite my lip as it slides into me with ease.

It doesn't feel wrong like other things that have been in there. I find I actually like it because it's him. Felix makes me feel different. Safe and comfortable. I just know once he starts moving it, it's going to feel so good. It always does. Even if you don't want it to, it feels good anyway.

My breath is coming in short pants as he maneuvers the toy around, and my body jerks when he nestles that little hole right over my clit.

I hold my breath in anticipation, wondering what the hell is going to happen.

I've never used a vibrating toy before. I can't imagine it being much better than—*holy shit!*

The toy vibrates inside me, and my entire body tenses, my head falling back to the headboard with a thud. I blink my eyes open when I realize they're closed and find Felix looking down at the toy inside me like a sex-hungry animal. The look in his eye is purely primal, the color swirling from a dark green to an almost washed out shade, a pale green so light his blown out pupils look like bottomless voids.

“You ready?” he asks in this husky rasp.

“For what?” I say, my words coming out as a whimper more than anything else.

He chuckles, the sound going right through me.

Then... and then, I swear my soul—if I even have one—leaves my damn body when that little hole starts to suck on my clit like the tiniest, gentlest, but sexiest vacuum ever.

“Holy shit... fuck... oh my—Felix, fuck!”

My ass lifts from the bed, my stomach tightens, and I swear I'm going to orgasm any second... Quickest orgasm ever!

But then the doorbell rings again.

I open my mouth to tell Felix to ignore it, because this is the best thing I've ever felt in my entire life and it's been like five damn seconds, but he snaps out of whatever sex trance he's in, yanks the toy from my pussy, and throws it into the bathroom. It bounces loudly off something, then thuds against something else.

“Why did you do that? I was so close!”

His eyes are frantic as he gets off the bed, looking me up and down, like he wants to say something but doesn't know what.

I growl, slamming my hands onto the bed, and the doorbell rings again.

I storm toward the door, not even bothering to put pants on. Whoever dares to interrupt *that* can be graced with the beauty of my vagina.

“Zia, open the door!”

I halt when I hear the voice.

My brother's voice.

My eyes widen, and I glance at Felix, who is frowning. I race toward him as Azrael pounds on the door.

I grab Felix by the shirt and drag him after me, running to one corner of the room, then back to the bathroom, only to realize there isn't a lock.

“What are—”

I slap my hand over his mouth.

“Be quiet! Don't you know who that is?”

He mumbles something, but I can't make it out. I tug him out of the room, grasping his shirt harder and keeping my hand over his mouth.

“Zia, I will break this damn door down!”

I spot the bathroom, get a flash of the alien, which makes me cringe, but I hurry to it, fling the door open, and shove Felix in.

“Don’t say a word!” I hiss at him, then lock the door from the inside and close it. At least Rae won’t be able to get in there now.

I reach the front door, then realize I don’t have any pants on.

Shit!

“Zia, I swear to—”

“I’m just putting pants on!” I call out, then run to the bedroom, grab my pants, and shove them on. As I hurry back to the door, I realize they’re backwards. Oh well.

I run a hand through my hair and unlock the door, then pull it open. I grin wide.

“Hey, bro.” I lean against the door frame. “What’s with the surprise visit?”

His jaw is clenched, brow furrowed. “Don’t give me that shit, Zia.”

He barges past me, and as I stare out at the sky, the sun starting to set, I realize I’m so fucked.

CHAPTER TEN

Felix

I have a funny feeling I'm going to die tonight.

Okay, maybe not for real, but things are getting interesting as hell, and not in a good way.

Except maybe seeing Zia's pussy.

That was pretty fucking good.

So responsive, her pretty pussy already wet before I even...

I shake the thought from my head as I start pacing again.

I can't think about that right now.

Throwing caution to the wind that way, it's one of the reasons I'm convinced that I'm nearing the end of my life.

I'm so goddamn hungry that my more primal instincts are getting harder to keep under control. And if I don't eat something soon, I'm liable to do far worse than using a sex toy on the woman who kidnapped me.

Then eventually I'll hit the point of no return. I'll end up permanently feral and either go on a killing spree that will result in Davina finding me before she kills me, or I'll just wither up and die.

And both of those options really suck.

No pun intended.

I groan at that stupid thought and look at Roger, relieved he's perfectly fine and sound asleep.

Which is miraculous because whoever it is that just showed up at this house is *loud*.

“Hey, bro. What's with the surprise visit?”

My ears perk up at that, and I lean toward the door, trying to eavesdrop the best I can.

And I do it while I ignore the second wave of relief that hits me in as many minutes because that dude is Zia's brother.

Probably.

Hopefully.

Either way, I'm ignoring the feeling because *why* would I be jealous of my relatively unhinged abductor having a man in her life?

I immediately scowl at that.

If Zia had a man in her life, she shouldn't have let me use that toy on her. I mean, by human morals anyway, and I'm not really into sharing, not after what happened with Davina and... oh my *god*, why am I even thinking about this!

Firmly patting my cheeks, I resume listening at the door.

“Don't give me that shit, Zia.”

“What shit? I don't know what you're talking about. Everything is—”

“Kiza told me about the second body.” The male voice grunts as the front door closes.

Well, now I know my senses are somewhat on target. I figured there were two bodies in this house at some point, so the validation is nice.

“I, uh, it won’t happen again. I promise. I swear even. No more bodies,” Zia says in a relatively sincere tone.

“There weren’t supposed to be *any*, Azizia. *None*. You came up here to hide, not draw so much fucking attention to yourself that I have to come up and check on you to make sure you’re sticking to your word.”

Up here? He said it too, so I’m not wrong in assuming Zia is from down below in some way.

This is Idaho, so I guess it’s up from somewhere, but neither of them has accents that would indicate they’re from any of the southern states.

Then again, I’m pretty convinced Zia isn’t human, so there’s no telling what *up* is in reference to.

“I know, but I needed a place to stay, and this house was kind of perfect,” Zia says. “I can’t exactly live in a box or something. Besides, you took care of all that already. What’s done is done, so let’s just move on. You want some beans?”

The male voice sighs in frustration as I hear heavy footsteps moving throughout the house. “Okay, Zia. Yeah, I get that. I wasn’t thrilled you killed someone to get shelter, but I can understand it, and we handled it so things were legit. It’s the second body that I’m struggling with. And I really hope you have more food to eat here than just beans.”

Assuming he's referring to the woman Zia tried to feed to me, this guy doesn't know about me. That I'm here, that I'm a vampire, and if he really is her brother, Zia knows he'll be pissed about that too. Why else would she drag me around the house before she hid me in here?

"She was too close to the house. Snooping around and looking in the windows. I was trying not to blow my cover!"

Yeah, he has no idea, and Zia is lying to keep it that way.

Which probably means he'd scold her for one count of kidnapping on top of the two counts of murder. I wonder how he'd feel about opening someone else's mail.

"There are other ways of dealing with that, Zia. You didn't need to kill her just because she was curious." This guy sounds exasperated. And definitely like a brother, a big brother at that, because the tone he keeps using is similar to the way Silas talks to me at times.

That whole *I'm annoyed but I care about you even when you make stupid decisions*, tone.

I'm definitely familiar with that.

My stomach growls as I keep listening, the hunger pangs getting worse with each passing second. And that noisy shit was enough to wake up my sleeping cat.

Roger lets out one of his god awful meows, one that sounds more like he's been trapped inside a dryer set to tumble for four hours, before he throws himself off the toilet with a deafening thud.

“What was that?” The male voice hisses as the footsteps stop.

“Nothing. What are you talking about? I didn’t hear anything,” Zia, not so tactfully, says.

I look around the bathroom for Roger, ready to break my back in my weakened state by picking him up so he doesn’t make any more noise, but I don’t see him. How the hell don’t I see him? *He’s huge.*

My eyes dart around the toilet, looking under it, next to, and when my cat is nowhere to be seen, I start to panic.

“Roger,” I whisper as I turn away from the door. “Roger, where are you?”

I’m worried if I move I’ll make too much noise, and Zia and her guest will hear me, but my cat was only getting started with that screech he let out, so I need to find him quickly.

Which shouldn’t be hard. We’re in a goddamn bathroom.

I search the sink, knowing damn well Roger didn’t jump up there because he hasn’t been that high up since he was a kitten, but where the hell did he go?

Checking to make sure Zia has her maybe-brother occupied, I turn away completely, take one step, then all hell breaks loose.

Roger screams as I step on his tail, then he moves faster than he has in years, darting between my legs only to trip my panicked ass. I go down to the tile floor in slow motion, my arms flailing as I try to find something to hang on to, ripping

the towel rack off the wall as I thump against the vanity before landing on my back.

“What the fuck was that, Zia?” The heavy footsteps quickly approach the bathroom, accompanied by Zia’s lighter ones.

“Nothing, Rae! There’s no one in the bathroom!”

Real smooth, Zia.

Rolling onto my stomach, I army crawl past my cat, who’s licking his tail and looking at me like I’m a complete asshole, then quietly push open the shower curtain.

The knob on the door turns a few times, my panic skyrocketing when I hear the male—*Rae*—shout, “This better not be another human, Azizia. I swear to god—”

“It’s not!” she blurts. “There isn’t another human in there!”

She’s not wrong.

But I don’t exactly need this guy finding *me* in here, either. I’m not strong enough to fight right now, and for some reason, I want to keep Zia from getting into more trouble. As fucked up as that may be.

I pull myself up on the edge of the tub as carefully as I can before climbing into it, closing the curtain just as Rae throws himself against the locked door and breaks it open.

“Whoever’s in here, better get the—what the fuck is *that*?!”

“My... it’s my cat.”

I roll my eyes as I press my back flat against the bottom of the tub.

There's no way she's going to be able to convince that guy Roger is hers. He doesn't typically like many people, and she's been referring to him as an alien, so I doubt this is going to play out well.

"Your cat?" Rae asks skeptically. "You have a *cat*?"

"Yep." Zia's shadow moves in front of the shower curtain and I'm not sure what she's doing until I see her bend down, then struggle to stand. "Isn't he... just... the cutest?"

She grunts multiple times as Roger gives off his warning growl, the insane woman picking my cat up and *kissing the side of his head*.

"Why, of all damn things, would you get a cat? Especially one that looks like *that*."

"I was lone—ah, shit! I was lonely, Rae."

"I don't think he likes you."

Roger hisses and starts wiggling in her arms like crazy as Zia says, "We're still... getting to know each other... he's going to—hey!" She drops him on the floor with a plop as my cat swipes at her. "That wasn't very nice, asshole!"

"I'm not sure you need to get to know each other at all if he's going to try clawing your eyes out every time you're within range."

"It's fine. Roger will love me eventually." Zia moves closer to the bathtub, and I'm not sure that's a good idea.

Her brother doesn't seem to believe in boundaries, and if he's worried about her having someone else held captive—which she does—in this house, I wouldn't put it past him to start searching. This bathroom being location number one on the list, considering he's already in it.

“You yelled at me for the second body and if you don't have anything else to yell at me for, I was just about to take a shower when you—”

She reaches behind the vinyl, turns on the water and pulls the little stopper thing so the shower comes on when her brother grunts, “He's looking for you.”

Zia's hand freezes on the faucet, the water like ice as it starts pelting me. “He... he is?”

Rae's shadow comes into view, closer to her, before he reaches out a hand and pats her shoulder. “That's really why I'm here. The second body, it flagged him.”

“Kiza wouldn't have told him, would he?”

“No,” Rae says. “Neither him nor Draven would have said anything, but *he* somehow noticed, and I think it means he has spies up here.”

Zia's entire body language changes as she pulls her hand away and wraps her arms around herself. “And you think they found me?”

“It's possible he has a good idea where you are. If you want to stay under the radar, I'd suggest you stop killing people and

consider changing locations, otherwise your husband is going to leave Hell just to drag you back down there himself.”

Everything else that's said is lost on me as I stare up at the ceiling.

Zia is a demon.

Which means her brother is too.

And that makes so much goddamn sense. The way I couldn't quite place her scent, her freakishly strong little body, the lack of hesitation when it came to killing people.

The woman who kidnapped me is actually a demon who escaped Hell, and it sounds like she's on the run just like me.

From her *husband*.

I immediately scowl over that, pissed off for multiple reasons, and ready to light into Zia for them all.

After her brother leaves because I *still* don't want to get her in trouble.

Like a fucking idiot.

The two of them talk in quieter, soothing tones, and reassuring words from her brother are spoken, and after a few moments, they leave the bathroom.

I don't get out, though.

As stupid as it is, I just get to my feet and stand under the freezing spray of water, and wait for Zia to give me the all clear before I turn it off or exit the tub.

And even though I'm thinking of about a million things to say to her when she gets back, only one of them comes out of my mouth when she does.

“Felix?” Zia whips open the curtain with wide eyes, her gaze moving over my face and sopping wet body for a beat. “Felix, are you—”

“You're fucking *married*?” Because *that* is apparently the most pressing matter right now.

Fucking idiot.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Azizia

I almost died when my brother tore through the bathroom door, and I don't just mean because I was scared of him finding out I'd kidnapped someone and was holding them hostage; but because if he found out I'd kidnapped someone and was holding them hostage, he'd kill me himself.

It's a good thing Roger can't talk because that hairless alien certainly would have ratted me out, and without a second thought too. The damn thing couldn't even play nice for two seconds to help me out. I thought cats were supposed to be nice? Why else would people have them for pets? That damn thing is a menace! And where the hell am I going to keep him now? My brute of a brother tore the bathroom door right off the hinges, so that fat beast is just going to roam free in my house? What if he tries to suffocate me while I sleep? All he'd need to do is plop his fat ass on my face and I'd be a goner.

Once Rai is finally gone, I feel like I can breathe, which lasts for all of three seconds until I remember Felix is in the bathroom... but not just in the bathroom, in the shower! And soaked, too.

I hurry to him to offer him help, but when I get to him, I find him furious.

“You're fucking married?” he barks at me.

Of all things that my brother said to remember, he had to remember that?

My eyes widen, and I step back. I didn't think he had it in him to talk in such a firm and demanding voice, but it seems when he's passionate about something, he finds it no problem. My head ping-pongs back and forth with how much I like his tone, to why he cares that I'm married, to the fact I think he's actually angry.

Why, of all things, is he angry about this?

He didn't get this upset over me kidnapping him.

Not about trying to get him to drink human blood.

Not about killing someone.

Not about keeping his cat hostage.

He did get a little upset about me opening up someone else's mail, but then he used that toy on me and he seemed to like it, and forgot the fact that he was partaking in said federal offense by using the stolen mail...

Men are such strange beings.

"Uhm... yes?"

Felix growls, then tugs the curtain open the rest of the way so hard that the plastic hangers snap, the bar that was holding it falls off and crashes to the floor. I jump back as he slips in the tub, but catches himself on the wall and doesn't fall. He gets out, straightens himself, then pins me with a glare. He walks toward the door, but stops right beside me, looking

down at me and says through clenched teeth, “It smells like death in here.” Then he keeps going.

I’ve made him angry.

Why did I make him angry?

No, not why. But how? I didn’t do it on purpose—hell, I didn’t even do anything but save Felix. I don’t want him angry with me. I want him to love me!

“Felix, wait!” I shout, spinning around to follow after him. I find him on his hands and knees in the kitchen, looking under the table. “What are you doing?”

“Looking for my cat so we can leave.”

“Leave? What? Why? I thought we were... you know. Uh...” I look back at the bedroom. “Doing stuff.”

Because I really want that stuff to continue. Damn my brother for interrupting!

“I need to go. I can’t say here. I’m not thinking straight. I need to eat.”

“I can feed you!” I say, taking a few steps into the kitchen.

He gets to his feet and runs a hand through his wet hair. “No, I told you. I can’t drink human bl—”

“I’m not human,” I shout, though I didn’t mean to say it so loud. I clear my throat. “I’m not human, so you can feed from me... right?”

He blinks a few times, then looks me up and down. He shakes his head. “I can’t.” Then he pushes past me.

“Why not?” I call after him. “If you’re hungry, I have blood. Lots of it, inside my body. You can have all—okay, maybe not *all* of it, but you can have whatever I don’t need to stay alive.”

He turns to look at me, brow furrowed and a frown on his lips. I have no idea what he’s thinking, and I hate that I can’t figure it out.

“You’re married,” he says sternly.

What the hell does that have to do with him eating?

“Why does that matter?”

“You don’t understand! I’m *starving*. I already lost control in there,” he points to the bedroom, “with you and that soul sucking toy. There is no doubt in my mind I’ll lose control again, and I can’t let that happen, because you are *married*.”

“But—”

“No buts!” He throws his arms up, then spins around. “Roger, where the hell are you?” he calls, then steps into the bedroom, getting on his hands and knees again to look under the bed for his alien. Hopefully, he stays good and hidden, because Felix will not leave without finding that damn cat. So, maybe that’s a good thing...

I could tell him I saw him head toward the basement, but I’m not going to do that.

I step into the bedroom. “I don’t want to be married,” I say, hoping that’ll help things.

“And I don’t want my cat to be missing, but here we are.”

He gets up and pops his head into the bathroom.

“He’s not missing. He’s just... hiding.”

Felix glares as he turns to face me. “Well, you actually *are* married, so—”

“You don’t understand!” I shout at him, repeating the words he said to me only a short time ago. “He’s not a good person. He’s... evil. And I know that’s crazy because he’s a demon, and most demons are, but he’s like *really* evil. I... I didn’t agree to the marriage. He just took me, and forced me to marry him, and that’s... that’s why I’m here because I’m trying to get away from him, but living up here is so hard. There are so many things and rules and laws and I don’t know what to do but I can’t go back. I can’t let him find me.”

I’m panting by the time I’m done, wondering where the hell all of that came from. I hadn’t meant to let loose all of that information. I’m not usually so emotional when it comes to this stuff, but I guess the thought of Xadrian finding me and taking me back has me crazy.

Felix stares at me for a long time. So long I think maybe he’s turned into a statue somehow.

Can vampires do that?

Finally he speaks. And when he does, his words come out so softly, I barely hear them.

“He forced you?”

How is it this man has so many inflections and tones in just one voice? It’s like magic.

“Yeah, but I mean, it’s not a big deal. It happens all the time in hell.” I shrug, then look down at my feet, for some reason unable to meet his eyes.

His feet come into view, and when I look up, I see him standing right in front of me.

“Don’t do that,” he whispers.

“Do what?”

“Justify something bad happening to you because you’re embarrassed about it.”

“I’m not embarrassed, I’m just...” I look away when I can’t find the words to describe how I’m feeling.

Maybe I am embarrassed?

He makes a strange, almost choked sound, and I look back at him, noting he’s even paler than normal. His eyes are closed, and even his lips are starting to turn a weird shade of white.

I place my hand on his arm, and he opens his eyes. “Felix, you need to eat,” I say gently. “Just let me feed you. Even if it’s only this once.”

He swallows, then sighs. When he nods, I blow out a breath of relief.

“Just this once,” he says.

I nod, then pull him toward the bed. I sit down, ignoring the box the toy was in that’s bringing back memories of him using it on me because that’s not what I need to be thinking about right now.

He sits beside me, and we both settle in to face one another a little better.

“What do you need me to do?”

“Just try not to move, and...” He swallows hard again. “And try not to make any noise.”

Well, that’s a weird request, but okay.

“Don’t move, don’t make a sound. Got it.” I nod. “I can do that.”

He leans in, but I press my hand to his chest. “Wait, you’re not going to kill me, right?”

He smirks, then shakes his head. “No, I won’t kill you.”

“Okay, because I really meant it when I said you can *only* have what I don’t need. I don’t want to die over this.”

“I promise you will not die.”

“Is it going to hurt?” I drop my hand from his chest.

“For a second, but then...” His jaw clenches and he looks away. “Just focus on not making any sounds. It’ll make it much easier on me if you’re quiet.”

“You won’t even know I’m here,” I say as cheerily as I can, but then realize how stupid that is because, obviously, he’ll know I’m here... he’s drinking my damn blood.

I pull my hair away from my neck and tug it around to the other shoulder, then move a little closer to him and turn so he has a better angle.

Felix slides his hand along my neck, stroking my jaw with his thumb as he settles it on the opposite side of where he's going to bite.

He leans in, and I hold my breath as I feel his along my neck, the warmth causing goosebumps.

I hear his deep inhale, hear what sounds like a small growl, and I brace for the pain.

“Just once,” he whispers so quietly. I don't think I was meant to hear it. And then there's the sharp pinch. The pain lasts all of a second before it turns into something so much better than I ever could have imagined.

I thought staying still was going to be easy.

I thought keeping quiet was going to be a walk in the park.

Turns out, both of those things are so far from the truth, it's almost laughable. The pleasure seeps into my neck, then travels through my body, settling low in my belly.

I reach for him, gripping his shirt and gritting my teeth as he sucks on my neck, pulling the blood from my vein.

Don't make a sound. Don't move.

Keep quiet. Act invisible.

I tell myself these things over and over but it does nothing to stop the whimper from leaving me when he moans. Before I know what's happening, he's on top of me, his erection pressed against my aching pussy, his hand wound so tightly in my hair forcing me to stay still as he continues to feed.

I'm wildly turned on, but also terrified.

I grind my hips against him, and he groans again.

Gods, this feels so good, but...

What if he doesn't stop?

CHAPTER TWELVE

Felix

My hips roll as my jaw tightens, a low growl rumbling from my chest while I draw more of Zia's blood into my mouth.

I have never tasted anything like the rich, decadent liquid coursing through her veins, and the way it instantly takes effect is intoxicating.

And when another small whimper vibrates against my lips, it's almost like I snap.

My free hand slides down Zia's body until I'm gripping her thigh, sliding it out from underneath me before lifting it high on my hip. And fuck, widening her legs to cradle my hips, nothing but our jeans separating my cock from being buried inside her hot little pussy, it's almost maddening.

I need to be inside her.

I thrust against Zia as I use my knee to push her legs open further, my hand on her neck sliding up into her hair, gripping it tightly to tilt her head, exposing more of her pretty throat. I grunt as her nails dig into my pecs, my other hand flying to the hem of her shirt before slipping underneath to cup her breast.

With a moan, I knead that perfect handful, squeezing as my cock throbs against her, then I pinch her nipple, twisting it between my fingers until Zia gasps, and I immediately stop.

Fuck.

“Fuck,” I groan the second I release her vein. *Jesus, that was close.* Licking my lips, I press my forehead to her collarbone and pull my hand from under the cotton material. “Fuck... Zia, I’m sorry.”

“Felix?” She reaches for me as I roll off of her, her tone a mix of lingering lust and confusion. “Felix, why did you stop?”

“I’m full,” I lie.

I feel her blood working through my system, almost tingling as it rushes through me, an unusual heat radiating down my throat before it moves like lightning within my body. But I need more. I *want* more. It’s been so long since I’ve fed that way. I’m sure that’s a small factor but I have never tasted anything like Zia’s blood and the boost I’m already experiencing because of it will easily become addicting. Because it’s *her*. The delicious life force coursing through her, it tastes like Zia—fiery, feisty, sweet and spicy. It *feels* like Zia, and it’s giving me one hell of a pick me up.

And one taste was all it took to know I will never have my fill of her, but that feeding was going in one direction and one direction only, so I had to stop it.

“You’re full?”

I drape my forearm over my eyes as I nod. Zia’s stare is something I can physically feel, and I don’t really want to see. “I’m full, and you asked me not to kill you.”

Which is also a veiled lie, because I wouldn't have killed her unless you can die by orgasm, then I would have fucked her to death. So, lying to the only other creature living up here who could possibly understand me is my only option.

Unfortunately, for as naïve as Zia has come across at times, she can apparently smell my bullshit.

“That was only a few minutes, Felix. How are you full after that when you've barely been conscious because you've been so hungry?”

“Guess your blood is more filling than coconut water.”

“How is that possible? It's all liquid.”

It's cute how she's trying to get me on a technicality, even more so when I think about how Zia probably doesn't know *how* to get me on a technicality. But I can't tell her the truth, so I keep lying. And trying to keep my cool because I'm growing stronger by the second thanks to her *liquid*.

“Are you suddenly a pro at how vampires feed?” I'm holding on by a thread—my patience and my sanity. She's testing me and I'm not in the right headspace to deal with it.

“I don't need to be a pro to know you're lying about something.”

“I'm not lying.”

“Yes, you are, and I don't like it.”

“Okay!” I snap, quickly getting to my feet, my patience worn because I'm not good at lying like this. “I'm still hungry,

Zia, but if I kept feeding from you, I would have done something I'd regret."

"Something you'd regret," Zia says with a subtle flinch.

My heart drops when her face falls, when this beautiful female quickly looks away. I'm not sure if vulnerability is something she's unfamiliar with or just something she refuses to show, but it's there and I hate that I'm adding to it by making her think it's her I'd regret.

"I didn't mean you, Zia." She scoffs and refuses to look at me, so I step right in front of her, then gently take her chin between my thumb and forefinger, tilting her head so she's looking at me. "You've already had so much taken from you. You had decisions forced on you without your say, and if I kept feeding, I would have been another male to do that to you."

Zia searches my eyes, her pretty dark ones almost shimmering. "So you don't regret feeding from me?"

I shake my head and smooth my thumb over her lower lip. "No."

"And you only stopped because you didn't want to fuck me without making sure I wanted you to?"

Sucking in a sharp breath because I like hearing her say that more than I should, I nod and take my hand away from her face. "Something like that."

"Felix," Zia says with a sigh. "Ever since I heard your voice, all I've wanted is for you to fuck me. I thought you knew

that.”

“I...” *This conversation is not helping keep my erection under control.* “I guess I do, but it’s not quite the same. I didn’t want consent to be implied just because you sent me very detailed emails prior to kidnapping me.”

“Well, consider this me giving you consent to fuck me.” Zia’s smile is warm as she shifts a little, embarrassed again by what she’s saying as she almost whispers the rest. “You have my consent for anything you want because no one else has ever asked for it before.”

And *that* breaks my fucking heart.

Just because Zia is a demon who doesn’t bat an eye at murder, kidnapping, or opening other people’s mail doesn’t mean she doesn’t get a say in what happens to her. Which has a plan quickly taking shape in my mind.

“Your brother said that asshole knows where you are, right? Said the second body was enough to get his attention?”

Zia nods as she watches me start to pace.

“Then we need to get out of here.”

“We do?”

“Yes.”

“Both of us?” she asks eagerly.

“All three of us.” I move to grab the suitcase I had out the other day, then toss it on the bed. “Do you have anything you need to bring?”

Zia gets to her feet and starts looking around the room. “No. Nothing other than my phone, I guess.” Then she spins in a slow circle and points toward the attached bathroom. “And that sex toy. We should definitely bring that.”

With a groan because *fuck*, I flip the suitcase closed and make my way into the hall. “Grab it. I need to find Roger, then we’re leaving. Did your first victim have a car?”

I start searching for my cat again, clicking my tongue and calling Roger while I crawl on hands and knees with a semi in my jeans.

The reaction I have to this female is insane and very alarming, but the more time that passes—all of three days—the less of a shit I give. Stockholm syndrome or not, I want Zia, and I need to keep her safe because of it.

“Found the keys!” she chirps as she hurries into the living room. “And I think there’s a vehicle in the garage.”

I spot Roger hiding under the sofa, and instead of trying to pull him out, I hop up and lift it, tipping it against the wall.

“Good. Do you know how to drive?” Zia blinks at me and holds out the key ring with a rabbit’s foot attached. “We’ll figure that out together then.”

“Together?”

“Together.” I hoist my cat over one shoulder, holding him in place with one hand before I walk over and cup her cheek with the other. “We are a *we* now, Zia. It happened when you made me an accessory to tampering with the mail and murder.”

Dipping my chin, I bring my lips close to hers, hesitating for the briefest of seconds before I give this adorably unhinged female a slow kiss. “And that’s why I need to get you out of here.”

I hop the curb with a loud thud followed by the scraping of metal as I turn right toward the studio, narrowly missing the streetlight when I do. Zia giggles from the passenger seat as she’s tossed around the inside of the tiny little car, some kind of Cooper or something, painted bright yellow with a black stripe down the side.

It’s absolutely hideous and I barely fit inside, but it was our only option to get to Hellcat fast enough to beat the imaginary clock I’ve conjured up.

Roger yowls from the back as I straighten out, jerking the steering wheel back and forth a couple times before I’m back on track. I’ve never driven anything like this in my one hundred and ninety-eight years of life, and I don’t really want to ever again.

If my knuckles get any whiter, they’ll be completely transparent.

“Turn here!” Zia blurts as she points her arm across my face.

Whipping the wheel left, I blast into a trash can and drive through the corner of someone’s lawn before focusing my eyes on the road. “Are you sure? I don’t see it.”

“Uhm...” She scrolls through her phone before nodding.
“Turn right... here!”

With another hard jerk of the circle of death that’s supposed to steer this hunk of junk, I accidentally floor it and send us flying down the first street I’ve recognized this entire time.

“There, see.”

“I see,” I grunt. Driving this clown car from that house to the studio was the single worst trip of my life, including when I took the portal from purgatory to the surface all those years ago, and I’m pretty high strung.

More than normal, anyway.

But getting here quickly was important.

Zia’s brother didn’t exactly give her a timeline or date to be expecting her *husband* to show up, but knowing he most likely knows where she is, we needed to leave. And when I told her what my plan was, Zia got on board very quickly.

“I’m so excited to watch you record!” She squeals as I swerve into the parking lot before whipping the car into a spot.
“I bet you look so sexy doing it.”

I roll my eyes as I figure out putting it in park, then throw open my door and carefully unfold myself from the seat before walking around to let Zia out. “I doubt it.”

But it doesn’t matter what I think.

This crazy little female was getting anxious the more we talked about my plan, and coming here to record was my way

of trying to take her mind off that.

So, we're going to be here while I get the next—and possibly final—episode of The Word Nerd squared away, then we're going to go to my apartment for the day before leaving as soon as the sun sets.

I wasn't really sure where we were going to go after that since we're both supernatural beings running from our homes, but I remembered this place Silas used to talk about, a camp or a commune of sorts in Alaska. I'm pretty sure he said there was someone there who could help *people* like us get somewhere even safer. I have no idea if any of that is true, but now seems like a good time to find out.

“Such a gentleman,” Zia says with a smile as I close her door behind her. Then she grabs a healthy handful of my ass before I grab her hand and turn toward the back of the studio. “And so nice to look at.”

I chuckle as we stop at the door. “That was very forward, *Azizia*.”

She visibly shudders as I growl her full name, then grins when I can't help but kiss her. “You didn't like it?”

“I liked it too much, but I'm not sure we have time for this right now.”

“*Fine*,” Zia pouts.

And I smirk. I have no idea how we even got here, but I'm very taken with my abductor, and I'm not mad about it.

After going in alone to send Mandy off without her knowing I have company tonight, I take Zia into the room I record in and get her situated before starting my regular routine.

If I'm going to be here, I might as well do some work.

Once everything I've neglected the last few nights is cleaned and running smoothly, I head to the break room to prep the coffee, and see if I have any coconut water here. It's not that I necessarily need it right now, but I'm not sure if Zia will let me feed from her again, and once we're on the run together, who knows what I'll be able to find to keep myself from eating every living thing we come across.

"Bingo," I say as I pull one sad bottle out of the fridge before pouring the contents into a mug and zapping it.

The first sip has me pulling a face, but I knock it back like a shot, barely forcing it down even though I know it's good for me.

I guess Zia has completely ruined my taste buds with her absolutely delicious blood.

A grin tugs at my lips as I think about that, about how she tastes, and how that rich liquid made me feel. I bet a proper feeding would have me fucking zinging. I'd be like goddamn Superman with the right amount. And I think I need to show Zia just how special she is because of it.

Completely insane, but special as fuck anyway.

I grab her a bottle of water and a granola bar from the community cupboard—I have no idea what demons need to

survive but if she needs food, she's got to be running on empty—then damn near saunter my way back to the room.

Tonight's episode is going to be different.

I think, since I have a special guest, I should make Crude Corner the focus, so she gets the most out of watching me.

“Brought these for you.” Setting the snack in front of her as I walk by, my grin grows. “You ready?”

Zia nods eagerly as I sit next to her and grab my headphones, the gorgeous little demon turning to face me with a brilliant smile. “I'm so ready.”

“Good evening, word warriors,” I croon after pressing record. “I have a special treat for you tonight. One *so many* of you have written in requesting.”

My special guest tilts her head in question as I stretch the mic stand so I can face her as well. *She's going to love this.*

“Tonight's episode is all about Crude Corner.”

Zia's eyes flare, and she licks her lips, but she stays silent.

“And our focus is going to be on how exhibitionism and voyeurism can go hand in hand.” *If I can make it through this fucking episode.* “For those who may not be familiar, an exhibitionist is one who enjoys being watched while exposed or engaged in a sexual act.” *Nope, I'm not going to make it.*

Not when I hear Zia's pulse pickup and I see her squeezing her thighs together.

Fuck it, right?

She kidnapped me because she wanted me. Zia wanted me without even knowing anything about who I am. She had no idea how I looked. She just wanted me, and even though it was beyond unorthodox in terms of a *meet cute*, I want her too.

So, I maintain eye contact with her as I lean back in my chair, pulling the microphone toward my mouth before slowly moving to my fly. I pop the button and unzip while I keep talking.

“In other words, an exhibitionist would like showing off their cock.” Zia sucks in a sharp breath as I pull mine out, already erect and leaking precum. I give it a firm stroke from tip to base, squeezing tightly as I add, “Especially while masturbating with an attentive audience.”

I groan into the mic as Zia scoots closer. Her stare is laser focused on the way my hand moves up and down my dick, stroking at a steady pace. “And a voyeur is one who derives sexual gratification from watching others engage in sexual acts—the one who watches the exhibitionist jerk off until he comes.”

With a grunt, I slide my hand back down my cock before cupping my balls and giving them a small tug. “When a voyeur meets an exhibitionist, it’s a match made in heaven, the perfect storm of sexual tension, unless *both* parties happen to be interested in *both* fetishes.”

One arch of my brow has Zia getting to her feet, and as I point to her jeans, I growl at how fast she drops them and sits back down.

“Looking at a pretty, wet pussy,” I say as she widens her thighs to show me exactly that. “A pair of perky, round tits.” Zia pulls her shirt off and slips the cups of her bra down under hers, my cock twitching in my hand. “That can drive one participant crazy, even more so when she dips her fingers in that tight little channel before circling her clit.”

Good god, Zia is fucking beautiful, damn near perfect as she follows my instructions without being asked. A perfect partner indeed as she fingers her pussy and rubs her clit exactly like I said, completely exposed and open for me.

“Such a good fucking girl,” I moan into the microphone while stroking my cock faster. “Those perfect breasts gently bouncing as her chest heaves, as she plays with her pussy faster, pinching her tight little nipples hard while she watches her partner pump his cock, all as she inches closer to climax.”

Zia gasps as her body jerks, following everything I’m saying to a T, and when I see her cunt start to drip, I know it’s game over for me.

I get to my feet and bring the mic with me, my cock now in Zia’s face, and before I can get any words out, she leans forward and fucking licks me root to tip with her goddamn *forked tongue*. And if that’s one of the ways demons are able to change their appearance, fuck, I really want to know what else Zia can do.

Fucking gone.

“When an exhibitionist and voyeur get together,” I pant, staring down at her as my spine begins to tingle. “It doesn’t

always end in sex, but when it does, it's fucking divine."

I cup her cheek with my hand, gently pulling her to her feet as I do, and I give her a quick kiss before spinning her toward the mixing board.

Letting my jeans drop to my ankles, I kick Zia's legs open as she plants her hands on the desk in front of her. "But don't forget, word warriors, consent is key in any and all sexual acts." She looks back at me over her shoulder, her eyes glassy, pupils blown the fuck out, and when she gives me a firm nod while mouthing *yes*, I can't help but groan. "And once you get that clear, unmistakable green light—" I line my cock up at her entrance—"that's when you'll reach divinity."

I slam into Zia on the last syllable but still briefly, because holy shit, I have *never* felt anything like this before.

The level of heat, how fucking wet she is, Zia's pussy is absolutely divine, and when it spasms around me, I know it's going to pull my possible soul right from my body,

"Fuck," I hiss as I grab her hips, pulling mine back before slamming in again. "Fuck yes, with the right partner, the perfect partner, sex can be existential."

"Felix..." Zia tries to whisper, but it comes out in the sexiest moan I've ever heard, and I thrust harder because of it. "Fuck, Felix."

Keeping one hand on her hip, the other slides up her side and around to her breast, squeezing it tightly before I twist her nipple. Zia whimpers and pushes her ass against my hips,

bouncing on my cock in this position just as hard as I'm slamming into her.

This is so goddamn good.

So good I know I won't be able to control myself. And I don't really want to.

I let go of her tit and run my hand up her back before burying my fingers in her hair, leaning forward as I pull Zia back against me, exposing her slender neck.

My hand on her hip moves to her pussy and I start circling her clit, the podcast forgotten while I growl in her ear. "Consent, Azizia."

"Yes. Yes, Felix, please."

I pinch her clit as my fangs sink into her flesh, Zia's pussy immediately clamping down on my cock. I pound into her harder, faster, deeper than before, bottoming out on each thrust. And as I pull on her vein, tugging to the rhythm of my hips, Zia screams my fucking name as her cunt gushes all over me, and I explode so deep into her body she will never get me out of her system.

"Goddamnit," I groan as I lift my mouth and twitch out the last of my orgasm. "Zia... holy shit, baby."

"Mmhmm," is the only response I get, and I can't help but smile.

She sounds satisfied and instantly sleepy, and that has pride swelling in my chest.

“Did we just record that?”

She giggles as I lick the side of her neck and nip at her ear. “We did. And I’m not going to air it, but you better believe we’re listening to it later. Preferably when I have you completely naked in my bed while I’m balls deep inside of you.”

“You... you want to do this again?”

I turn Zia around to face me after I pull out, both of us a mess, but I need her to know this isn’t a one off or circumstantial. Not really. “I want to do this again, in multiple ways, and I figure since we’re basically running away together, you might be okay with that.”

She nods and hits me with a huge smile, pushing up on her tiptoes to kiss me. “I am.”

“Good. I was really hoping—oh shit!” I look at the clock and realize Mandy is going to be back in less than twenty minutes, the entire night already almost gone. “We have to get dressed.”

Rushing around the room, Zia and I fix our clothes, clean up, and try to make sure there aren’t any fluids anywhere. We can’t really get rid of the smell of sex on such short notice, but once Zia is outside waiting on the roof, I can only hope it gets ignored since I look to be alone.

“Hey, Felix,” Mandy says with a smile just as I notice a spot of cum on my jeans. “Did you have a good night?”

“Yep. It was great. I have to split, coffee is going, I’ll see you later.” And then I’m all but running out the back door,

scrubbing at my crotch like a lunatic.

“Zia,” I whisper-shout. “Zia, baby, let’s go.”

I back up and look at the roof, searching for the silver gleam that was there the night she kidnapped me. “Zia?”

Pausing, I search the roof, looking for any sign that she’s up there and hopefully waiting to pounce, but I don’t see anything at all.

I close my eyes and focus on her scent, breathing deep while running my tongue over my fangs. Her taste is just like her scent, but stronger and the more of it I have in me, the easier it is for me to find.

Except I don’t have enough.

“Where the hell have you been?”

I jump at the sound of Silas’s voice, but I keep looking for the female I’m quickly realizing I don’t want to be without. “I was kidnapped.”

“Yeah, okay.” His lighter cracks behind me and I smell his non-filter cigarette, so I move toward the left side of the building. “Why haven’t I seen you in three days?”

“Because I was kidnapped.”

“Stop screwing around, Felix. I was worried Davina showed up or something. There’s a lot of shit going on down below lately, and I... what the fuck are you looking for?”

I roll my eyes as I walk along the back of the studio toward the right side, my heart starting to beat a little faster when I

still don't find any sign of Zia. "Looking for my kidnapper."

Silas grabs the back of my shirt just as I step up on the bottom rung of the ladder. "There isn't anyone up there."

"How do you know? You just got here."

"I was just up there, Felix, and I was alone."

Fuck.

Zia wouldn't have taken off, not without me. I barely got her out the back door because she didn't want to let me out of her sight and now... "Goddamnit, I should have listened to her."

"Who?" Silas asks as he follows me toward the car. "What the hell is going on? And since when can you drive?"

"I can't." Wrenching the driver side door open, I check the mini backseat trunk thingy and find Roger sawing logs—Zia brought him out with her so I know she's been here at least.

"So why do you have a car?"

I walk around the Cooper in a slow circle, looking for anything that might help me figure out what happened to Zia and just when I'm about to go back inside, I stop short of the passenger door when something shiny catches my eye.

Handcuffs.

The handcuffs Zia used on me, and decided to grab last minute before we left, are on the ground, and they're *partially melted*.

"Son of a bitch," I growl as I bend down and snatch them up. "Fucking bastard."

I rush around to the driver's side and get behind the wheel, starting the clown car up because it's close to sunrise and if I don't want to die before I figure out what happened, I need to get to my apartment.

“Felix!” Silas grabs onto the side mirror as I start to back up.
“What the—”

“Get in.”

He blinks at me before shaking his head. “You just said you can't—”

“I fucking know! But if you want to know what the hell is going on, get in this goddamn car and buckle the fuck up!”

Silas scowls but gets in. “Where are we going?”

“My place.”

“Why?”

The tires squeal and spin as I tear out of the parking lot, ignoring his question while I fly down the road. “Do you see a phone over there?”

“You know I'm going to be in some deep shit if I'm not back by sun up, right?”

I slam on the brakes, gripping the steering wheel tightly as I slowly turn. “In or out, Silas. I never ask anything of you, try to keep things quiet so I don't make trouble, but I am about to cause one hell of a shit storm, so I need to know if you're in or out right now.”

He stares at me for a few seconds, his pale-colored eyes shifting between mine. Then he nods firmly and starts looking around the floor. “I’m in. Just don’t get us killed.”

It’s not us I’m worried about.

I should have listened to Zia.

I didn’t think anything would happen in such a short amount of time, but it did, and it’s all my fault.

“Found your phone.”

I glance at Silas as I take off down the road again. “Look through the contacts for Rae.”

“Got it.” He hands me the phone. “It’s calling.”

After two rings, the same voice I heard from outside the bathtub answers. “Where are you?”

“Is this Rae?” I know it is, but I need to be sure.

“Who the fuck is this? Where’s my sister?”

“My name is Felix. Your sister kidnapped me a few nights ago. I heard everything you two were talking about and I wanted to help her. We planned on leaving for Velariom tomorrow night and—”

A low growl rumbles down the line. “I don’t give a shit about any of this. I want to know where Azizia is.”

“She’s gone and—”

“What!” he barks. “I swear to god if you laid one—”

“Shut up and listen!” I swerve just in time to miss another trash can. “Xadrian took her from me, and I need your help to get her back.”

I can feel Silas staring at me, his curiosity and confusion practically palpable since I’ve never acted this way over anyone before, but I’m not about to entertain any of that right now.

No, I’m way too focused on figuring out a plan to get Zia back and I don’t give a shit if it’s Stockholm syndrome or not, that unhinged little vixen is mine now.

Zia is *mine* and anyone who takes from me is going to find out what lengths this freak of a vampire will go to in order to keep what belongs to him.

Xadrian better be ready because he has *no* idea what the definition of Hell truly is, and I’m about to bring it right to his front door.



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A. K. Graves is a grumpy motherfucker from Michigan who likes surrealism, masked musicians, books that make her say WTF, and maybe five people. She's been married to the wonderful Mr. Graves for fifteen years and is grateful—and shocked—he's still willing to put up with her shit. She is also mama to three amazing Graves girls, and she is so proud of the beautiful, creative and intelligent monsters they're becoming. A. K. loves writing, it makes her black heart soar, and as long as she can keep coming up with ways to combine her love of romance and true crime, she'll be happy doing it forever. For more about A. K. Graves and her work, check out www.akgraveswrites.com

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THE HEADMASTER

Sonja Flowers

BLURB

Olivia Jacobson is attacked by her ex-boyfriend and left for dead. After months of rehabilitation, Olivia is left with anxiety and fear that is out of control. Her therapist suggests some time at the secluded Eden Hall Academy, a mental institution for high school students. On her first day, she encounters the Renegades, a group of four basketball boys who are much more than boys. The tattooed, muscular, handsome Dalton, Rucker, Julian, and Anthony all want a piece of Olivia, and she is not sure which one to give it too. Dalton may be the biggest villain, but he doesn't even compare to the likes of Headmaster Deter. He has his eye on Olivia the moment she comes into contact with him. Who will save her from the Headmaster?



Content Warnings

Readers there is drug use, language, references to pedophiles, and physical assault, this is a bully romance and it is dark.



Dedicated to my mom, who has always believed in me and supported my writing from day one. Love you Mom.



PROLOGUE

Olivia

Bang! My head reverberated with the hit from Kevin. I winced at the pain and felt a warmth flood my face as my nose began to bleed. “Kevin, please stop,” I begged, as he hit me again.

We had been going out for several years, and suddenly he just changed. His Dad had taken off a few months ago, we were going into our Junior year at North High. Nestled in the outskirts of the Twin Cities in Minnesota, you would find the small town of Harmond, Wisconsin. Our town only had about four thousand people, and the entire school from kindergarten through twelfth grade was held in the same building. No separation for an elementary school, middle school or high school, all the little brats were on one wing, while the middle school was basically in the middle and the other wing held the high school classes. With only about 60 of us graduating next year, it was a small class. Not like some of the schools in the cities, where they had hundreds of graduates.

After his Dad left, Kevin became different. He was withdrawn and mad at the world. He took it out on me, mostly. Screaming in my face when I asked him a question he didn't like. Pinching me on the leg as we sat in class, leaving a bruise because I dared to talk to someone else. All of these images over the past few months come flooding to my mind, as Kevin jumps out of his car and comes over to the passenger side.

Yanking open the door, I don't even recognize the boy who is standing before me. "Kevin, it's me, Olivia," I cry out as he grabs me by my long brown hair and pulls me from the car, tossing me on the ground.

"You shouldn't have done that," he says, pacing back and forth. I can see his boots moving around me, in front of me. But I have not looked up at him as I lay on my belly on the hard ground. My nose continues to bleed, and it drips down onto the sand and dirt. "You shouldn't have done that," he screams, pounding the dirt with his boot. I flinch and try to move away from him crawling on my belly across the dirt. I need to get away from him.

My head is yanked back, and I am staring up into Kevin's eyes. His pupils are narrow, and his eyes look sharply at me. "Where are you going?" he asks before slamming my head into the dirt.

"Please, Kevin," I cry out as he slams me into the dirt again. More blood covers the dirt where I lay. I try to curl up into a ball, and he kicks me hard in my ribs as I hear a popping sound and an enormous amount of pain. I can barely breathe. I try to suck in a breath, but the pain is unbearable. Kevin kicks me in my leg and I try to move away. He continues to kick me and then jumps on me, punching me in the chest and abdomen. Again, I try to wiggle away, but the effort takes my breath away. He is now straddling my chest, he punches me in the eye and cheek. I feel my head being violently jerked from one side to another as he punches me. "Kevin, please," I beg, as he

continues to punch me. I can barely see through the blood that is coating my face, dripping into my eyes.

Kevin gets up off me for a moment and paces around me. “You know this is for your own good,” he says and paces closer to my body. I try to curl away from his footsteps. “We will be together again. You won’t be able to leave me now.” Kevin laughs and slaps his knee like he just made a joke. “Olivia I’m doing this because I love you and we will be together forever now,” he says and slams his foot down on my head.

Finally, darkness succumbs me and I welcome the darkness where there is no pain. My last thought is why would he do this? You don’t hurt those you love.

CHAPTER 1

Olivia

Two years later

I bounce my leg as I sit in the chair in the therapist's office. Dr. Horne sits in his chair across from me with his leg crossed over his other knee and balancing a notebook against his leg.

Dr. Horne is at least 50 years old with graying dark hair, a mustache, and a goatee he likes to rub as he asks me questions. This is the fifth therapist I have seen since Kevin tried to kill me and then killed himself. Since the incident, as my mother likes to call it, I have suffered from crippling anxiety. Everyone thinks they have a magical cure. But no one can undo what Kevin did to me out in the woods. No one can know what it was like when I finally woke up after being unconscious for who knows how long, and found Kevin's body lying next to me. Broken ribs that took months to heal, and I had to drag myself to the car, and it took hours to open the door and then get my cell phone to call for help. I passed out so many times trying to get into the car, where my purse and cell phone were.

I lay on the ground after I called for help for what seemed like hours before I was jolted awake by the sirens from the police cars and ambulance. My arm was broken in several places, along with my leg. Apparently, Kevin had stomped on not only my head but my arm and leg as well, breaking both. I

spent months in rehabilitation learning to walk again and feed myself after the traumatic brain injury I suffered from the punches and the stomping of my head.

Kevin's mom came to the hospital to say how sorry she was for what her son had done to me. She came in while I was sitting in a wheelchair near the window in my hospital room. My leg and arm were both in casts, while my head and ribs were wrapped up. She knelt next to the wheelchair and cried with her head resting on my leg. I felt a pang of sympathy for her, as she had lost her son. Then she said, "Olivia, I'm so sorry I should have gotten him some help." So she knew he was violent and a danger to others, and she did nothing. I just stared out the window, not talking.

Finally, after I didn't answer her at all she got up, kissed me on the forehead, and left my room. A single tear rolled down my cheek that I swiped away.

I look at Dr. Horne as he talks to me. He mostly talks while I sit and observe. I haven't felt much like talking since it happened. Sitting here listening to Dr. Horne drone on, he tells me to think of a time when I should have seen a red flag with Kevin.



What the fuck is going on? I wanted to scream at Kevin. He begged me to get on my knees and give him a proper apology.

I felt my face flush with anger and humiliation as I looked at Kevin, who was still gripping me. "What do you mean, Kevin?"

Why should I apologize to you?”

He looked down at me, his eyes dark with anger. “You know exactly what you did, Olivia. You embarrassed me in front of our friends. You made me look like a fool.”

I felt a surge of defiance rise up in me. “I didn’t do anything wrong, Kevin. You were the one who was acting like an asshole. You were flirting with that other girl right in front of me!”

Kevin’s grip on me tightened, and I winced in pain. “That’s not the point, Olivia. You disrespected me. And now you need to make it right.”

I shook my head, tears of anger and frustration welling up in my eyes. “I’m not going to apologize to you, Kevin. I didn’t do anything wrong.”

He glared at me for a long moment, then suddenly released me and stepped back. “Fine,” he said through gritted teeth. “If that’s how you want it, then we’re done.”

I watched in shock as he turned and walked away, leaving me standing there alone and confused. I knew that our relationship was over, but I couldn’t help feeling relieved that I had stood up for myself.

A few months after the incident where he broke up with me, Kevin picked me up from school. He said he wanted to apologize to me for breaking up and that he felt he should come and see me to apologize in person.

Kevin pulled up as I was walking home from school, his music blaring as he slammed on the brakes next to me on the sidewalk trying to scare me. I jumped as he got out of his car and ran around gripping my arm. “Olivia please, I need to talk to you,” Kevin said gripping my arm tightly.

“No Kevin, you said we were done so that’s that,” I said trying to pull my arm away. I dropped my book I had been carrying onto the sidewalk. “Please just let me go, you’re hurting me.”

“Just come with me, I want to apologize to you, and you’re not letting me,” Kevin said looking into my eyes.

I stared back at him and sighed. He wasn’t going to let up, I knew that look he gave me, a look of determination etched upon his face. “Fine,” I said and Kevin released his grip upon my arm. I bent over to pick up my book and came over to the car. Getting in on the passenger side, Kevin took off down the street.

As the car sped down the familiar streets, the tension between us was palpable. Kevin’s apology hung in the air, and I couldn’t help but wonder what he was truly sorry for. Was it the way he ended things, or was it something deeper? I glanced out the window, watching the cityscape blur by, lost in my own thoughts. Memories of our relationship flashed through my mind, both the good and the bad. It had been a whirlwind romance, filled with passion and laughter, but it had also been marked by arguments and jealousy.

Finally, Kevin pulled into a secluded park, a place we used to frequent during our happier days. The memories flooded back, overwhelming me with a mix of nostalgia and pain. I took a deep breath, mentally preparing myself for whatever Kevin had to say. We stepped out of the car, the silence between us deafening. Kevin cleared his throat, his gaze fixed on the ground. “Olivia, I know I messed up. I should have never ended things the way I did. It was immature and unfair to you.”

His words hung in the air, and a part of me wanted to believe him, to give him a chance at redemption. But another part of me couldn't forget the hurt he had caused. “Kevin, apologies don't erase the pain. Breaking up with me was one thing, but the way you treated me just now... it's not okay.”

He looked up, regret etched on his face. “I know, and I'm truly sorry for that too. I let my emotions get the best of me. I've been struggling with my own demons, and I took it out on you. I never meant to hurt you, Olivia.”

I studied his face, searching for sincerity. There was a vulnerability in his eyes that I hadn't seen before, and it made me pause. Maybe, just maybe, there was a chance for us to heal from this if he was willing to put in the work.

“I appreciate your apology, Kevin,” I said softly. “But it's going to take more than words to rebuild the trust that was broken. If you're serious about making amends, we'll need to take things slow and work through our issues together.”

Kevin nodded, his expression filled with determination. “I understand, Olivia. I’m willing to do whatever it takes to make things right. I don’t want to lose you.”

As we stood there, facing each other, I couldn’t help but feel a glimmer of hope. Perhaps this was the turning point we needed, a chance to rebuild what was broken. I couldn’t help but wonder if he really was remorseful and things would change between us.



As I think back on that moment with Kevin, I realize that there were so many red flags that I should have seen. The way he always wanted me to apologize for things that weren’t my fault, the way he would get angry and violent when he didn’t get his way, the way he would manipulate me into feeling guilty for things that weren’t my fault.

But I didn’t see it. Love blinded me, or maybe just naivety. I wanted to believe that he was a good person deep down, that he just had some issues that he needed to work through. But I was wrong. And now I’m paying the price.

Dr. Horne’s voice brings me back to the present. “Olivia, are you okay?” he inquires, concern etched on his face.

I take a deep breath and nod. “Yeah, I’m okay. I was just thinking.”

He nods, jotting something down in his notebook. “What were you thinking about?”

I hesitate for a moment, but then decide to be honest. “I was thinking about Kevin. About all the red flags I should have seen.”

Dr. Horne nods again. “It’s important to recognize those red flags, Olivia. That’s the first step in moving forward and healing.”

I know he’s right, but it’s hard to face the truth sometimes. It’s hard to admit that I was so blind to what was happening. But I know that if I want to heal, I have to confront those red flags head-on. And maybe, just maybe, I can start to move on from the trauma that Kevin inflicted on me.

“I think I have something that might help you to get past all of this anxiety,” Dr. Horne said. “A friend of mine runs a school for boys and girls dealing with mental blocks, anxiety, or other mental disorders. I think you could benefit from attending it. They have a program where you take college classes at the same time.”

“Really well, I don’t know,” I said, looking at him.

Dr. Horne leaned forward in his chair. “It’s worth considering, Olivia. They have a great track record of helping young people overcome their mental health challenges and achieve their goals. And the fact that you can take college classes at the same time is a huge bonus.”

I chewed on my bottom lip, considering his suggestion. It sounded too good to be true, but I was desperate for any kind of help. Maybe this school could be the answer I’ve been searching for.

“Okay,” I said finally. “I’ll look into it.”

Dr. Horne smiled. “That’s great, Olivia. I really think it could be a game-changer for you. It’s called Eden Hall Academy.”

We talked a bit more about the school and what it entailed, and I left the session feeling both hopeful and apprehensive. The idea of going back to school was both exciting and terrifying, but I knew that I needed to do something to break free from the cycle of anxiety and fear that had been consuming me since the incident with Kevin.

CHAPTER 2

Olivia

After talking to my mom for endless hours about the mental institute school we decided maybe it would be best if I went there for a year. Get some college courses and work on myself. The decision to enroll in a mental health institute school was not an easy one, but I knew deep down that it was the right step for my own well-being. My mom had always been my rock. Supporting me through thick and thin, and her endless hours of conversation and guidance, had helped me see the potential benefits of such a program.

Together, we researched various institutions that offered college courses. As well as specialized programs to help individuals, like me work through their mental health challenges. We wanted a place that would provide a safe and supportive environment. With professionals who could guide me toward personal growth and healing.

After careful consideration, we found a reputable institute that seemed to fit our requirements, the same one that Dr. Horne had suggested. It offered a comprehensive curriculum, including therapy sessions, group activities, and academic courses that could help me continue my education while focusing on my mental well-being.

The thought of leaving my familiar surroundings and embarking on this new chapter both excited and scared me. It

meant leaving behind friends and family, but I knew that this was a crucial investment in my future. It was an opportunity for me to prioritize myself and commit to the journey of self-discovery and healing.

As the day of departure drew near, mixed emotions swirled within me. I was nervous about what awaited me at the institute, but also hopeful that this experience would bring about positive changes in my life. My mom assured me that she would be there to support me every step of the way, and her unwavering belief in my strength gave me the confidence I needed to take this leap of faith.

I sat on the bed, surrounded by a whirlwind of emotions. My room, once a sanctuary, now felt suffocating with uncertainty. Knowing that this conversation with my mom would be difficult, yet necessary. Taking a deep breath, I called my mother into the room.

My mom entered with a concerned expression, her eyes filled with love and worry. She sat down next to me, taking my hand gently. “Sweetheart, I know this decision has been weighing heavily on your mind. I want you to know that I’m here for you, no matter what you choose.”

Tears welled up in my eyes as I tried to compose myself. “Mom, I’ve been thinking a lot about what we discussed, and I believe that going to the mental institute school might be the best thing for me right now. I need a fresh start, and I want to focus on my mental well-being while continuing my education.”

My mom nodded, her voice filled with empathy. “I understand, Olivia. It takes immense strength to recognize when we need help and have the courage to seek it. I’m so proud of you for acknowledging that.”

My voice trembled as I shared my fears. “But leaving everything behind scares me, Mom. What if I don’t fit in or what if it doesn’t help? What if I’m just running away from my problems?”

Mom squeezed my hand reassuringly. “Those are valid concerns, sweetheart, but remember, taking this step doesn’t mean you’re running away. It means you’re facing your challenges head-on, with the support and resources you need. You’re not alone in this journey; we’ll be right beside you every step of the way.”

Tears started flowing freely now, a mix of fear and relief. “I’m going to miss you so much, Mom. Leaving home, leaving my friends, it feels so overwhelming.”

She pulled me into a warm embrace, holding her tightly. “I know, my love. It won’t be easy, but sometimes the greatest growth comes from stepping out of our comfort zones. We’ll visit you, and we’ll be there for you, cheering you on.”

I sniffled, my voice shaky. “I’m scared that people will judge me, Mom. What if they see me differently when they find out I’m going to a mental institute school?”

Mom looked into my eyes, her voice filled with conviction. “Olivia, you are so much more than your struggles. Going to this school doesn’t define you; it’s just a part of your journey.

The people who truly matter will understand and support you unconditionally. And anyone who judges you based on this doesn't deserve a place in your life.”

The room filled with a profound silence as I absorbed my mom's words of wisdom. A sense of courage began to replace the fear that had consumed me moments ago. I knew deep down that I had made the right decision, and I had my mom's unwavering support.

Wiping away my tears, I looked at my mom with newfound determination. “Thank you, Mom. I'm scared, but I also feel ready for this. I know it won't be easy, but I believe that this journey will help me become the person I want to be.”

Mom smiled, pride shining in her eyes. “You're strong, Olivia, stronger than you realize. Remember, this is just one chapter in your life, and it's going to be a transformative one. I'm here, always, cheering you on and loving you unconditionally.”

With a mixture of sadness and hope, Mom and I held each other tightly, cherishing the love and support that would carry us through this challenging yet necessary journey.

Looking around the room one more time, I grabbed my suitcases and headed downstairs.



As the car glided along the winding road, I pressed my face against the window, my eyes widening in awe. The familiar knot of excitement and nerves twisted in my stomach as the

sprawling estate of Eden Hall Academy came into view, emerging through a veil of lush greenery. The sun cast a warm golden glow upon the grand entrance, illuminating the towering stone arches and intricate carvings that adorned the façade.

As we slowly approached the main entrance, my heart skipped a beat. My palms grew clammy, and I couldn't help but fidget with the hem of my skirt. This was it—the moment I had been waiting for. The moment marked the beginning of a new chapter in my life.

The car came to a stop, and I took a deep breath, trying to steady my racing heart. My eyes darted around, taking in the breathtaking surroundings. Eden Hall Academy was a sight to behold. The estate sprawled out before me, a tapestry of vibrant colors and exquisite architecture. The perfectly manicured lawns stretched out in all directions, like a lush green carpet leading the way to the main building.

I drew my gaze to the main building, a majestic structure that stood tall and proud, a testament to the academy's rich history. The blend of Gothic and Victorian elements painted a picture of elegance and charm. The grand bell tower reached towards the sky, seemingly reaching for the dreams and aspirations of the students who had come before me.

Stepping out of the car, I felt a sense of awe wash over me. The air was filled with a gentle breeze, carrying with it the scent of fresh grass and blooming flowers. I looked up at the towering oak trees that lined the perimeter of the property,

their branches spreading like protective arms, creating a sanctuary within these hallowed grounds.

The entrance courtyard beckoned me forward, its grandeur impossible to ignore. A magnificent fountain stood at its center, water cascading down over intricate sculptures of mythical creatures. The melodic sound of the water mingled with the sweet songs of birds, creating a symphony of tranquility and beauty.

As I walked towards the main entrance, my footsteps echoed against the polished marble flooring. The stained-glass windows bathed the hallway in a kaleidoscope of colors, casting vibrant patterns on the walls and floor. The soft glow of the chandeliers above illuminated the way forward, creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere.

Each step I took brought me closer to the heart of Eden Hall Academy. The hallways whispered with the stories of generations past, the walls seemingly alive with the laughter and dreams of those who had walked these same paths. The portraits of esteemed alumni watched over me, their gaze both stern and inspiring, reminding me of the legacy that I was now a part of.

With every passing moment, my excitement grew. Eden Hall Academy was not just a school—it was a sanctuary, a place where I could grow, learn, and discover who I truly was. The weight of the world seemed to lift off my shoulders as I stood in the grand entrance hall, my eyes tracing the intricate details of the architecture.

At that moment, a surge of hope and determination coursed through my veins. I knew that within these walls, I would find the support and tools to overcome my struggles and carve a new path forward. This was my chance to embrace the challenges and opportunities that lay ahead, to immerse myself in the beauty and history of Eden Hall Academy.

With my heart full of anticipation, I took a deep breath, ready to embark on this new chapter of my life. The journey within these hallowed halls was about to begin, and I was determined to make the most of every moment. Eden Hall Academy was my sanctuary, my haven of growth and transformation, and I was ready to embrace it with open arms.

CHAPTER 3

Olivia

A lady dressed in all purple greeted us at the desk in the main office of Eden Hall Academy. As I walked into the main office of Eden Hall Academy, my eyes were immediately drawn to a lady dressed in an elegant ensemble of vibrant purple. Her outfit exuded an air of confidence and sophistication, perfectly reflecting the aura of the prestigious institution.

Her regal presence seemed to command attention as she greeted us with a warm smile, her eyes sparkling with kindness. Her neatly styled hair, cascading down her shoulders in gentle waves, added to her polished appearance. Every detail, from her perfectly manicured nails to the way she carried herself with grace, spoke volumes about her dedication to maintaining the high standards of Eden Hall Academy.

As she extended a hand in welcome, I noticed the delicate silver bracelet adorning her wrist, shimmering with purple gemstones that matched her attire. The intricate design seemed to mirror the attention to detail that permeated the academy itself.

Her voice, soft yet confident, filled the room as she introduced herself. “Welcome to Eden Hall Academy,” she said, her words laced with genuine warmth. “I am Mrs.

Harrington, the head of administration. How may I assist you today?”

Mrs. Harrington’s professionalism and poise were evident in her every movement and word. She efficiently guided us through the necessary paperwork, ensuring that we had all the information we needed to begin our journey at Eden Hall Academy. Her wealth of knowledge about the school’s programs, extracurricular activities, and the supportive community within its walls left me feeling reassured and excited about the opportunities that lay ahead.

As we concluded our meeting, Mrs. Harrington offered us a personalized tour of the campus, eager to showcase the beauty and rich history of Eden Hall Academy. Her passion for the institution was evident in the way she spoke about its esteemed alumni, the academic excellence it fostered, and the nurturing environment that encouraged personal growth.

Throughout the tour, Mrs. Harrington’s love for the academy shone through in her every word and gesture. As we walked through the halls, she pointed out significant landmarks, sharing anecdotes and stories that brought the history of Eden Hall Academy to life. Her enthusiasm was infectious, igniting a sense of belonging and excitement within me.

In her role as head of administration, Mrs. Harrington effortlessly balanced professionalism with genuine care for the students and their families. Her dedication to creating a welcoming and supportive environment was evident in the way she interacted with everyone we encountered during the

tour. It was clear that Mrs. Harrington, dressed in her signature purple, was not just a figurehead, but an integral part of the Eden Hall Academy community.

Leaving her office, I couldn't help but feel a sense of gratitude for Mrs. Harrington's warm welcome and her commitment to ensuring our smooth transition into the academy. Her presence had set the tone for what I knew would be an exceptional journey at Eden Hall Academy—a place where the pursuit of knowledge and personal growth were cherished, and where the staff went above and beyond to create a nurturing and inclusive community.

“Okay, well, I am ready,” I said to my mom as she stood with tears in her eyes.

“All right baby, you know you can come home anytime you want,” she said, hugging me tightly.

“I know mom, but I think this will be good,” I said.

Before I started to cry, I went back into Mrs. Harrington's office.

“Yes, dear,” she said warmly as I came into the office.

“I am ready to head to my dorm now,” I said confidently.

“All right, let me call one of the girls to escort you,” Mrs. Harrington said, picking up the phone and dialing a number. “Yes, if you would send Georgia I would appreciate it. Please have a seat Miss Jacobson.” she said, turning to me and hanging up the phone.

I sat down and smiled at Mrs. Harrington, who smiled back warmly. “Georgia will be right here in a moment, and she can take you to your dorm and help you get settled,” Mrs. Harrington said as she sat down at her desk facing her computer.

Someone knocked on the office door and Mrs. Harrington called them in. It was Georgia, a friendly and outgoing girl with a bright smile. She greeted me warmly and introduced herself.

“Hi, I’m Georgia Bentley. I’ll be your roommate and orientation buddy. Mrs. Harrington told me you needed some help settling in,” she said cheerfully.

I nodded gratefully, feeling a bit of relief wash over me. Having someone familiar to guide me through the daunting process of starting at a new school was exactly what I needed at that moment. Georgia seemed genuinely kind, and her presence instantly put me at ease.

Mrs. Harrington handed Georgia a set of keys and some paperwork, explaining the necessary details about my dorm room and the university’s rules and regulations. Georgia listened attentively, nodding occasionally and jotting down notes.

Once Mrs. Harrington finished, Georgia turned to me with a reassuring smile. “Alright, let’s go get you settled in. Don’t worry, I’ll make sure you feel right at home.”

We left Mrs. Harrington’s office and walked through the bustling campus. Georgia chatted amiably, asking me about

my interests and sharing her own experiences. Her friendly demeanor and genuine interest in getting to know me made me feel comfortable opening up to her.

As we reached the dormitory building, Georgia handed me my keys and pointed out the common areas, the laundry room, and the cafeteria. She explained the dormitory's layout and mentioned some of the activities and events that would be happening during orientation week.

Once we arrived at my dorm room, Georgia helped me unpack my belongings and made sure everything was in order. She shared tips and tricks for organizing my space and made suggestions for personalizing it to make it feel more like home.

I couldn't help but feel grateful for Georgia's kindness and support. Starting a new school was a major transition, and having someone to lean on during this overwhelming time meant the world to me. "Let's head down to the cafeteria for something to eat," Georgia said.

As we sat down at a table in the cafeteria, Georgia's expression turned serious. Sensing the change in her demeanor, I asked her what was on her mind.

"Hey, I wanted to talk to you about something important," Georgia began, her voice filled with concern. "I know you're just starting out here, and I want you to be prepared for something that unfortunately happens at this school."

My curiosity piqued, I leaned in closer, giving her my full attention. Georgia took a deep breath before continuing.

“There are a few bullies in this school, and they tend to make life difficult for some students,” she explained, her eyes scanning the room as if making sure no one was eavesdropping. “I won’t lie to you, it’s not a pleasant situation, but I want you to know that you don’t have to face it alone.”

I nodded, grateful for her honesty and support. “Can you tell me more about these bullies? How can I recognize them?”

Georgia sighed, her gaze fixed on the table. “Well, they usually travel in a group, making themselves known by their unkind words and actions. They target students who they perceive as vulnerable or different from them. It’s important to remember that it’s not your fault if they target you, and you don’t have to tolerate their behavior.”

Her words resonated with me, and I felt a mix of apprehension and determination. “What should I do if I encounter them?”

Georgia’s eyes met mine, filled with determination. “First and foremost, stay strong and confident in yourself. Bullies often feed off of others’ fear or insecurity. If you show them that you won’t be easily intimidated, it might discourage them.”

She paused, gathering her thoughts. “If you find yourself in a situation where they’re being aggressive or confrontational, don’t engage with them. You shouldn’t have to face them alone, and there are people here who genuinely care about your well-being.”

I nodded, grateful for Georgia's guidance. "Thank you for telling me all of this. It's good to be aware and prepared, even though it's disheartening to know that such behavior exists."

Georgia's expression softened, and she placed a reassuring hand on mine. "Absolutely, it's important to know what you might encounter. But remember, this school is filled with wonderful people too. Focus on forming positive connections, finding your support system, and pursuing your passions. Don't let the bullies overshadow the opportunities and growth that await you here. They call themselves the Renegades, and they all play for the basketball team."

I looked around the cafeteria and in strolled four of the most gorgeous guys I had ever seen, all of them tall and muscular, with arms inked with tattoos. My heart skipped a beat, but I knew immediately by the demeanor of them that this was the Renegades. The four of them looked more like Greek Gods, why call them Renegades? I hope I wouldn't find out. The one in the front of the group with his dark blond hair looked at me and his eyes narrowed, assessing me. I felt like I was being undressed with his eyes. "That's them, and their leader, Dalton Greyson," Georgia said, following my line of vision directly to the four Gods in the doorway.

I looked sharply at Georgia, Dalton Greyson, the Dalton Greyson was here at this school for kids with mental issues. I barely recognized him, since the last time I saw him.

CHAPTER 4

Dalton Greyson

Damn, who is that fine-ass girl? I look over at the blond sitting at the table with goodie-two-shoes Georgia Bentley. When I first came to Eden Hall Academy, I thought she was cute in a fuckable sort of way. But her goodie-two-shoes self wouldn't even come to a single party the Renegades and I threw. My three friends, Rocker Ashton, Anthony Carnell, and Julian Carter. I locked eyes with her, who was she? My dick twitched just looking at her. I glanced at Rocker, and he was staring at her too. I felt a pang of jealousy as I looked over at Anthony who was staring, and Julian as well. Running a hand through my dark blond hair, I stared at her again, walking into the cafeteria. Yeah, she would be mine.

We sat at our usual table and within a few moments, girls flocked to our table. Rocker sat brooding like he usually did, staring at the girl still, he sat with his dark brown hair falling over his eyes. He had a dark demeanor since the day I met him. The only time he ever seemed to be happy in a way was playing basketball. Anthony stared at her too, his dark green eyes looking over at my beautiful Goddess made my blood boil, of all of us, Anthony was the most charming, he was only here at Eden Hall because he had anxiety, the rest of us were fucked up. Julian, with his jet-black hair pulled into a ponytail at his neck, had tried to kill his stepfather, but his mother had stopped him. Instead of letting him go to jail, she sent him to

Eden Hall to learn to be a productive member of society. But no one who came out of Eden Hall was ever a productive member of society. My family had been involved with Eden Hall for centuries, in fact my great-great-great-grandfather had started it, and built the main campus building that housed the classrooms still. Rumors had it that Granddaddy liked to do psychological experiments on the girls and boys that were sent to Eden Hall. When it started out it was just an institution for students who were mentally ill. But now it was touted as a fresh start for kids with mental illness who could take some college courses along with the high school classes.

“What’s up, man?” I asked Rocker as he sat with his head down, staring at my beautiful Goddess.

“Nothing. Who’s the new girl?” he asked, looking up at me. I shrugged, but I was going to find out.

Rocker was the worst of us, he had gone crazy and cut off his own father’s dick when he caught him fucking his girlfriend. I mean, they were able to sew it back on, and since Rocker’s father didn’t want anyone to know he was fucking an underage girl, Rocker was sent here. With a love of basketball, Rocker was the center of our basketball team. The Eden Hall Rangers, don’t get me wrong, I love basketball too, but Rocker could play for hours without stopping. He is obsessed with it, and it seems to be the only thing that keeps him from actually hurting someone. I believe he was fucked up before the incident with his douchebag father, but no one ever wanted to look at it. Rocker’s father is a high-powered attorney in Minneapolis, and his first chance to send Rocker away to a

boarding school like Eden Hall he did, I mean he had to get his penis whacked off first, but he had been wanting to get rid of Rucker for years.

Then of course there is me, Dalton Greyson, son of Carlton Greyson, a world-class asshole. Carlton Greyson is one of the biggest drug dealers in the state of Minnesota, throughout the entire Midwest. But he does it legally, by selling pharmaceuticals. Drugs that psychologists can prescribe to “cure” people, as he likes to think. It does nothing but mask their symptoms and make people feel like zombies. At Greyson Pharmaceuticals, they think my father is a God.

Kiki Walton, a leggy blonde with severe daddy issues, came over and tried to sit on my lap. I wasn't having it today, sure I had let her suck my dick a few times, and I fucked her. But she wasn't anything more than just a free ride and a warm place to put my dick. I didn't care about her, and when she whined in my ear, I pushed her off me and got up to walk over to the new girl.

“Dalton, want me to come over tonight and suck your dick again? I really liked it,” she purred into my ear.

“No, I don't think so. I'm not interested,” I said, pushing her away as I got up.

“Dalton Greyson, you will regret you did that,” she cried out as I pushed her out of my way, she was trying to run her fingers over my chest.

Yeah, yeah, like I'm worried about Kiki, that psycho bitch did nothing for me. I waved my hand at Kiki like I didn't give

a shit, which I didn't. My Goddess was only 10 feet away, twirling a strand of her blond curls in her fingertips. Oh, I couldn't wait to have her on her knees worshipping my cock as I fisted those blond curls in my hand.

“And you are?” I said as I slid into the seat across from my beautiful Goddess.

She looked at Georgia and then back at me with a scared look on her face. Oh great, Georgia had already filled her in a bit about the Renegades. Well now that explains the frightened stare, she didn't say a word, just sat trembling in front of me. Oh, yeah, this was going to be fun, breaking her, making her scream my name. Soon those pretty pink lips would open and breathlessly scream Dalton as I fucked her so hard she begged me to stop.

“I'm Olivia,” she stammered.

Olivia, a vision of a young blond girl and I running through a field, came into my mind. I had a best friend when I was a small boy named Olivia, until she moved away after her mom married some rich guy. I never heard from her again. But this couldn't be her, could it?

“Olivia what?” I asked, staring into her green eyes. Did my Olivia have green eyes, I couldn't remember.

“Olivia Jacobson,” she replied timidly, then looked down at the table.

No not my Olivia, she was Olivia Radcliffe. I pushed the thought of her out of my head, as I stared at my new Goddess.

“It’s lovely to meet you, my Goddess,” I said with a smile as she looked up at me.

I reached out and touched her chin lightly., “I think we will have fun getting to know each other.” I said with another smile. She trembled beneath my touch, my fingertips grazing over his soft skin. Oh, how great it was going to feel as I held her soft body in my arms. But first, I was going to have some fun, I enjoyed the thrill of the chase. And the fact that she was nervous around me made it that much more fun for me. I was a sick bastard like that.

“I’m Dalton Greyson,” I cocked an eyebrow at her as she looked into my dark brown eyes and I felt a stirring in my soul, I knew she would be mine, I just needed to make sure she was only mine, as Anthony, Roker, and Julian sat down next to me across from my Goddess. She would know soon that I wasn’t some cute little boy next door, I was a villain, and I would be her favorite villain.

CHAPTER 5

Olivia

I couldn't believe it, Dalton Greyson, the Dalton Greyson. He was sitting at a table not 10 feet away from me. When we were younger in kindergarten and first grade, he was my best friend. We had lived on the same block, even though his father owned a multi-million dollar company Greyson Pharmaceuticals, my grandmother had left my mother her mansion that we lived in, until the tax payments, upkeep, and repairs made it impossible to live there anymore. My mother met my step-father, Clark Jacobson, and we moved away from Minneapolis and to an area right near Milwaukee. A few years after moving, Clark adopted me as his daughter, my own father, Jeremy Radcliffe, had died when I was only one year old. I don't even remember anything about him. Then it was just Mom and I living in the mansion by ourselves. Despite her determination to continue living there, it just wasn't possible on a waitress's salary. It was too much house and the repairs became too much for my mom to continue. When she met my step-father, Clark, she was at a desperate point in our lives. With barely any money, we were looking for somewhere else to go. Clark whisked us away from Minneapolis and the only friends I had and moved to Milwaukee. I never saw Dalton again.

I barely recognized him, his dark blond hair was cut short in a preppy way, but his dark brown eyes now that stared at me

from only 10 feet away were piercing my very soul. I couldn't believe it.

My heart beat faster as I looked at him, he was so different from when we were little. Back then he was a cute, kind little boy, now years of heartache it seemed turned him into a demon. He looked like the devil might be intimidated by him. Now I saw why Georgia said they were bullies, look at them, all four of them. Muscles bulged out beneath their polo shirts, covered in ink from tattoos. Black lines zig-zagging across their biceps. Made me wonder what it would feel like to trace those lines as we laid in bed together. Get those thoughts out of your head, Olivia. He probably doesn't even notice you, maybe he is staring at Georgia. I glanced over at her, a tight pink sweater covered up her standard white polo shirt that everyone wore, both boys and girls. The buttons on her polo shirt were unbuttoned, and the tight pink sweater stretched across her perky breasts. She had a cute little button nose, and high cheekbones, long blond hair and blue eyes. Typical Midwestern look for a white girl, thin and perky. While I on the other hand had the blond hair, but it was curly and never seemed to cooperate, dark green eyes, and a round face. I was thin enough and had perky breasts since I was going to be 18 soon, most girls have perky breasts at my age. But my hips were a bit wider and I had more of an ass than most girls my age, which always made me feel self-conscious.

A perky brunette stepped up and tried to sit on his lap. But he pushed her away after she whispered into his ear. Now he was walking over this way. Damn, he was tall now, when we

were 7 when I last saw him we were the same height. But now he was a good foot taller than my 5-foot-four inches. As he walked up to the table, the brunette cried out in anger at him, “Dalton Greyson, you will regret that!” He held up a hand and waved bye to her, ignoring her.

He took the seat directly across from me and stared at me.

“And you are?” he asked with a smile.

I trembled looking at him, I felt so self-conscious then, here was Dalton, my Dalton sitting before me. Would he even remember me? Probably not, he probably had hundreds of girls around him. I had loved him since we were 7.

Now here he was sitting across from me, and I could barely speak.

“I’m Olivia,” I stammered out, barely able to control the tremble in my voice.

“Olivia what?” he asked, staring at me with a smile.

“Olivia Jacobson,” I answered and then looked down at the table. Oh my God, I think I might pass out if I keep looking at him.

“It’s lovely to meet you, my Goddess,” Dalton said with a smile.

He reached out and gently cupped my chin, “I think we will have fun getting to know each other.” Dalton said with another smile. I trembled beneath his touch, I was physically shaking. What is wrong with me? How am I not jumping across the table and kissing him?

“I’m Dalton Greyson,” he cocked an eyebrow at me as I looked into his dark brown eyes and I felt a stirring in my soul. Then his three friends came and sat on either side of him, staring at me too.

Now was the time to tremble and shake like a leaf. These four guys were intimidating as hell. They were all staring at me like I was the new dessert on the buffet table.

Georgia pulled my arm, yanking me to my feet. “Olivia, we have to get going, nice to see you guys,” she said nodding to them as she dragged me from the cafeteria.

As we left the cafeteria and were in the hallway heading back to our dorm, Georgia hissed in my ear, “those are the Renegades, stay away from them, they are nothing but bad news.”

I couldn’t help but wonder what made Dalton come here, and what was up with his friends.

CHAPTER 6

Rocker Ashton

After Georgia Bentley whisked away Olivia, we walked back to the house set off of the dorms on campus. Dalton's old man even though he was a psycho asshole who liked to perform psychological experiments on girls and boys at Eden Hall gave us a nice little setup of living in his house rather than the dormitories. Which was a huge plus because we liked to party, smoke and drink as much as we wanted. This was a nice little perk while we lived on the compound, as we liked to call it. A huge fence went around the entire property, all 20 acres of woods, campus buildings, and housing for the students and staff surrounded Eden Hall.

"Damn, that girl is fine," Anthony said, and immediately Dalton slapped him in the back of the head.

"She's mine," Dalton growled.

"Okay, man," Anthony said, rubbing at his head.

I had never seen Dalton get like this over a girl. This couldn't go well. Dalton already had anger issues and liked to go around beating the hell out of some students... Mostly the boys, but once he had lost control when a girl laughed at him while she was sucking his dick and he smacked her so hard I thought her teeth were going to come out. But of course nothing happened to Dalton as the son of the famous Carlton Greyson of Greyson Pharmaceuticals. No one messed with

Dalton, that's just how it was at Eden Hall. Everyone knew who his family is and respected that from a distance. But if you angered Dalton, you would be in for it.

Most of the time, we passed girls around at parties for any of us to fuck. There was always a ready and willing pussy for us anytime we wanted it. Eden Hall didn't have a shortage of willing pussy, but most of the chicks here were crazy as fuck. Kiki had been trying to get Dalton to call her his girlfriend for months, but he wasn't biting. He had fucked her enough, both her pussy and her mouth. But still, he didn't claim her as his girl, I thought she was cute enough, and I had fucked her a few times. She wasn't bad, but not the best either. She and her little crew of crazy bitches came to all the parties and would fuck us anytime we wanted. So there was that plus of having her around. But I was getting tired of the same old pussy, it was getting boring. I needed a new girl to chase and conquer. Like Dalton, I love the thrill of the chase, breaking her and making her mine. But with Dalton already claiming her, I knew I should stay away. But I was drawn to this girl, something about her.

I hadn't felt anything for a girl in a long time, since my freshman year, Sarah Stokes my baby girl had been my dream girl. But when I caught her fucking my father, I cut off his dick and ended up here at Eden Hall. Sarah had been my first, and I hadn't felt anything for any girl since. I think I threw up a wall, and I didn't want to let anyone in to hurt me again.

But this girl Olivia was different. I could sense it. And I wanted her as soon as I saw her. Dalton wasn't going to share,

or would he?

“So, what are we doing tonight?” I asked Dalton, as he usually ran things.

“Well, I don’t know about you guys, but later tonight I am going to visit my Goddess,” he said with a wicked grin.

“How, the dorms are off-limits after 9 p.m.” I asked with a cocked eyebrow.

“With these,” he said, pulling a keychain with keys out of his pocket. Looks like he was holding the master set of keys that unlocked every building on campus, including the dormitories for both the boys and the girls.

“How did you get those?” Julian asked, looking at the keys.

“Headmaster owed me a favor,” Dalton said with a grin. I could only imagine what favor Headmaster Deter could owe Dalton. The man was the definition of sleaze balls. He was short, fat, and greasy, always looking for a way to get girls in his office to do God knows what to them. But lots of the pretty girls would go to his office for special therapy for their conditions.

Dalton’s father didn’t give a shit what Deter did to any of the students on the campus, so long as it wasn’t his boy being punished for anything. We were all safe from Deter’s wrath as we were with Dalton, but outside the Renegades, the other students were all fair game for Deter’s sick and twisted therapy sessions. Rumors had it, most of his therapy involved sexual degradation

“Before your late-night rendezvous, what are we doing?” Anthony asked.

“Throwing a party, of course,” Dalton said, raising his eyebrows.

CHAPTER 7

Olivia

Georgia and I walked back to the dorms, it was my first day and already I had the shock of a lifetime seeing Dalton. I also had caught the eye of all the Renegades. According to Georgia they were nothing but bad news and to avoid them at all costs. But I felt a pull toward Dalton and I wanted to see him.

As Georgia and I settled in for the night, we were going to watch a movie a knock was heard on our room door. Georgia went to answer it, as I contemplated how to see Dalton again soon. Maybe we would have some classes together, I hoped.

“What do you want?” Georgia said in the doorway, a small boy with dark brown hair stood in the doorway.

“I...I...I...,” he stuttered.

“Spit it out, Charles, you what,” Georgia said, her voice tinged with annoyance.

“I...am..am...am..bringing...you...a...a...a...message,” he stuttered as Georgia stared at him.

“Okay, what is it?” Georgia asked with her hand on her hip.

“From...the...the...the...Rene...Renegades. They....wa...wa..want...you...to...come...to...a...party...to...tonight,” he said looking down at the ground.

“We are watching a movie tonight and relaxing before school tomorrow, I don’t think so. Go tell the Renegades that,”

Georgia said slamming the door.

“What was that?” I asked looking at Georgia.

“Oh the Renegades want us to come to a party at their house, and sent their latest little errand boy to deliver the message,” Georgia said, plopping down on the bed.

“So we aren’t going?” I asked. “Don’t you think that’s not a wise decision, maybe they won’t bully me if I do what they say,” I said looking at her.

“Yeah stay away from them, is your best choice,” Georgia said as she picked up the remote and turned on the movie.

My heart beat a hundred miles a minute as I wondered how I could get Georgia to agree. Or maybe I could just sneak out after a bit, but I didn’t even know where their house was.

Wandering around the campus at night alone didn’t seem the best idea, but considering there was a tall fence surrounding the entire property, I doubted anyone could get in.

Before long, Georgia fell asleep and the soft glow of the television illuminated her face. I coughed a few times, and she didn’t stir, this was my chance. I slipped on a light jacket and quietly walked out of the door and into the hallway. I breathed a sigh of relief when I got into the hallway, and she still hadn’t stirred.

Walking outside the dorm, I could hear laughter and people talking behind the dorms. That had to be the house, I walked down the pathway from the dorms toward the noise.

As I walked, I had an overwhelming feeling of someone watching me. The path was covered on both sides by trees, and was only open by the dorms and in the main part of the campus. Eden Hall was very secluded outside a small town in Wisconsin. No one would even know it was there if you passed it on the dirt road. Despite being surrounded by a fence, there were also woods everywhere around it, and concealed all the buildings from being seen from the road. The entrance was gated, and you would miss it if you blinked as you were driving. We passed it as my mom dropped me off.

“What you doing out here little rabbit?” I heard a deep voice say as one of the Renegades stepped out from the woods on the path.

He stopped on the path blocking my way, my heart beat faster as I realized I was all alone with this boy and no one would hear me if I screamed.

“I was invited to the party,” I stammered, my voice clearly cracking with fear.

“Oh right, Olivia isn’t it,” he crooned my name.

“Yes, and you are?” I asked.

“I’m Anthony, but you can call me turtle, get it the turtle and the rabbit. I will always catch you,” he said taking a step closer to me. A grin on his face.

“Well turtle would you mind showing me where the party is, I would hate to be late,” I said trying to sound confident. Even

though my heart was hammering inside my chest so hard, I was sure he could hear it.

“Sure thing rabbit,” he said with a grin and grabbed my hand dragging me along the path.

I felt so small and frail compared to his height and large body, his hand covered mine and I knew if I tried to run he was right, he would catch me. Wondering what he was here for, we came out of the woods into a small clearing that was lit up by lights surrounding a large two-story house.

“You live here?” I asked, impressed with the nice house and that four 18-year-olds lived in the house. I assumed they were all 18. Dalton was for sure, his birthday was a month before mine. I was going to be turning 18 in two weeks, so that meant he had just turned 18 within the last 2 weeks.

“Yeah, nice perk of being friends with the great Carlton Greyson’s son, Dalton,” he shrugged.

Music was playing loudly from the backyard of the house and students were gathered all around the front porch of the house and inside as well as in the backyard.

“Come on, I’ll show you around,” Anthony said, putting his hand on the small of my back, sending shivers up my spine as we walked into the house.

“Hey where’s Dalton?” Anthony asked one of the other Renegades who sat with his feet propped up on a coffee table as he played a video game, a blond girl was sitting next to his on the couch, kissing his chest, his shirt was unbuttoned, and

she had one finger twirling over his nipple as she kissed his chest. He seemed oblivious to her advances as he continued to play the video game.

“Try out back,” the Renegade said.

“Come on, that’s Julian, he’s an ass sometimes,” Anthony said, leading me through the kitchen and out onto a small deck at the back of the house. There was another larger deck that surrounded an in-ground pool. Students, both boys and girls, were lounging around the pool and I immediately saw Dalton on a lounge chair with that brunette from earlier sitting on his lap.

I wanted to rush over there and yank her off of him, but I remained silent next to Anthony.

Dalton waved and pushed the brunette off of him as we made our way over to him.

“Welcome, my beautiful Goddess,” Dalton said, throwing his arms out.

“Thanks,” I said, and Anthony nudged me over into a chair by Dalton and sat down next to me.

“Do you want something to drink?” Anthony asked, looking at me. God, he was so handsome now that I could see him in the light. I wasn’t sure which of the Renegades was the better-looking of the four. But Anthony definitely was near the top.

“No, I’m okay,” I said with a smile, feeling very nervous, sitting between Anthony and Dalton.

“So you got my invitation?” Dalton said, glancing over at Charles, who had come by talking to a boy sitting on the edge of the pool.

“Yes, thank you,” I said politely.

“Kiki, you can leave now,” Dalton said, looking over his shoulder at Kiki, who stood staring at me like she would kill me if I even dared touch him.

She stomped off towards the house and went inside, shoving past a girl carrying a cup of something red, it splashed everywhere on the deck.

“Anthony, go get Kiki to clean that shit up,” Dalton barked at Anthony.

“Yeah, all right,” Anthony said. He seemed to be the one who did the dirty work, I thought as Anthony walked into the house looking for Kiki.

“Sorry about that. Some of these girls here are just a little over the top,” Dalton said with a smile. “I’m glad you came, gives us a chance to get to know each other.”

“Yes,” I stammered. All my self-confidence was gone now as I realized that maybe coming here was a mistake.

“How about we go for a little walk?” Dalton asked.

“Um, I’m not sure, it’s kind of dark out,” I whispered, looking at him. I had been afraid of the dark ever since Kevin beat me almost to death and then took his own life. The walk down the path had been lighted, but now that we were behind the house and the campus dorms and other buildings were

farther away, it was nothing but darkness between us and the forest that surrounded Eden Hall.

Standing up, Dalton grabbed my hand and pulled me close to him, “You don’t need to be afraid of the dark, there are much worse things than the darkness,” he whispered against my ear, as a shiver went up my spine.

CHAPTER 8

Dalton

She fit perfectly in my arms as I pulled her close. My dick twitched being next to her. I could smell her vanilla shampoo. Damn, this girl had me wanting her so bad, and she hadn't even done anything yet. Just being near her was driving me wild. I wanted to claim her right here, take her in front of all these people, throw her over the top rail of the deck, and fuck her raw. But I loved the thrill of the chase. I loved to catch my prey. There was something so satisfying about chasing a girl and finally catching her, making her mine, claiming her as mine. I hadn't felt this thrill in a long time. Now it was finally happening, and I wanted to savor each moment.

Devour her every breath with all that I had inside me. I led her off the deck and toward the woods. She trembled beneath my touch, but willingly came. Maybe I hoped she would run, and I could catch her. Maybe she would get scared and beg me to take her home.

Or maybe she would tremble beneath me as I claimed her mouth as mine tonight.

I touched the small of her back as she walked beside me. Trying to put her at ease, she trembled beneath my touch. My cock was getting harder just imagining chasing her through the woods and catching her like a psycho in a horror movie. But I

had no intention of killing he. No, my Goddess would be worshiped. That's what she deserved, to be worshiped.

“So tell me about yourself, Olivia,” I inquired, wanting to know more about my beautiful Goddess. “What do you like to do for fun?”

“Um, let's see, I like to knit, I make fun animals and things that I knit,” she said timidly

“Well that sounds nice,” I said, adjusting my jeans, they had become a bit cramped in the crotch now that my cock was hard as a piece of steel.

“What do you do?” she asked, and her breath caught in her throat. I knew she was scared now, as this was the darkest part of campus. Sometimes I would come here to just be in the darkness. Sit and think about things, just be in the darkness.

“Don't worry, I won't hurt you. You're not afraid of the dark, are you?” I said, pulling her close. I crushed my mouth down upon hers, and she responded by arching her body into mine.

Deepening the kiss, I pressed my fingertips into her ass as I brought her closer. She moaned against my mouth and I almost lost it. Control Dalton, control, you want to claim her at the right time, it will be worth it.

As our lips parted, I whispered against her ear in a growl, “Sometimes there are much more dangerous things lurking in the darkness, run.”

At the sound of me whispering against her ear, it registered that I told her to run. She took off toward the dorms and I

whooped loudly, chasing her. “You won’t get far, my Goddess, you will be mine,” I cried out as I chased her across the grass lawn toward the dorms.

CHAPTER 9

Olivia

Oh my God, did he just say run? I take off toward the dorms. Running for my life. He cried out, “You won’t get far, my Goddess, you will be mine.” What the fuck? I thought as I ran toward the dorms. Maybe I could reach the safety of the dorms before he caught me. I wasn’t sure what he was going to do if or when he caught me.

Georgia was right, I should have stayed away from the Renegades. But, as usual, I was stubborn and thought I was right. As I found the path back to the dorms, I heard a voice stop me in my tracks.

“What are you doing out of the dorm, young lady?” a gruff, deep voice asked, as a short, fat, man stepped out of the shadows along the path.

“Uh, uh, sir,” I stammered looking at him. He stepped towards me and roughly gripped my arm. I was shocked, who was this guy?

“Time for you to get back to your room,” he said.

Dalton stopped as Headmaster Deter had me by the arm. I looked at him helplessly.

“Headmaster Deter, Olivia was with me, we were having a party, and I was about to escort her back to her dorm,” Dalton said with a sense of authority that this Headmaster Deter was beneath him.

Headmaster Deter released my arm and I stepped closer to Dalton. “Be sure she is back in the dorms immediately,” Deter said before heading back into the woods. What the hell was he doing out in the woods at night? Dalton was the lesser of these two evils by far.

“Come on, let me get you back before you’re in trouble,” Dalton said sweetly in a sarcastic way.

I wasn’t sure what to say, I walked alongside him, and he opened the door to the dorm building with a key he pulled out of his pocket. He leaned against the door frame, and pulled me close, whispering against my ear, “This isn’t over, you will be mine.”

CHAPTER 10

Julian

Damn, was that Olivia? My dick hardened, but I kept playing the video game. What was she doing with Anthony? Dalton had already claimed her. Bastard. We all wanted her. Some blond bimbo whose name I couldn't remember but was in Kiki's crew sat next to me, rubbing my chest and whispering in my ear that she wanted me to fuck her.

I got up and wandered outside to the backyard. Standing on the deck, I watched the interaction between Olivia and Dalton. After a few minutes the two of them took off into the backyard farther away from the light and taking her into the darkness. Dalton was a sick bastard, he loved the dark, and had a thing for somnophilia. He enjoyed having sex with a girl while she was asleep. Dalton loved the thrill of seeing her wake up scared.

Anthony came toward the house and sat down by me. "Hey Julian, what's up?" he asked.

"So, what's up with them?" I asked, motioning a thumb toward the darkness where Dalton and Olivia had gone.

He shrugged, "I guess she must like him. She went off into the dark with him. But really the scariest thing in the dark is Dalton, not the actual darkness," Anthony chuckled.

"Right," I said, walking back into the house. I went out the front door to smoke a joint. Since it was during the week, I

was trying to cut back on my smoking. But after seeing Olivia with Dalton, I needed something to take the edge off.

Heading down the path toward the dorms, I stepped into the woods, to smoke. I heard a rustling in the woods and saw Headmaster Deter step out of the woods with a young man. What the fuck, he liked the boys too. I knew he was screwing around with the girls, but this was a new one. The boy had a strange look on his face, but scampered down the path, and Headmaster Deter stopped in the woods to relieve himself. Nasty motherfucker, I thought as I stood there listening to him take a piss in the woods, oblivious that anyone was near him. Old pervert, messing around with the students.

Dalton's father obviously didn't care who he put in charge of this school. I heard feet pounding down the path as I saw Olivia come running down the path. Headmaster Deter stepped out in front of her and grabbed her arm. Dalton was right behind her.

"What are you doing out of the dorm, young lady?" Deter asked.

"Uh, uh, sir," Olivia stammered looking at him.

"Time for you to get back to your room," Deter said.

Dalton stopped as Headmaster Deter had Olivia by the arm, she looked at Dalton helplessly.

"Headmaster Deter, Olivia was with me, we were having a party, and I was about to escort her back to her dorm," Dalton

said with a sense of authority that this Headmaster Deter was beneath him.

Headmaster Deter released her arm and Olivia stepped closer to Dalton. “Be sure she is back in the dorms immediately,” Deter said before heading back into the woods.

“Come on, let me get you back before you’re in trouble,” Dalton said sweetly in a sarcastic way.

I stayed in the woods until Dalton and Olivia walked up to the dorms. Then I headed over to Headmaster Deter’s house. Let’s see what this old pervert is up to now. I crept through the woods, to his house which was set on the other side of the campus toward the back. The two-story house, set in the woods, had a large front yard. The house has a wraparound porch with two large windows in the front. Deter never bothered to close his curtains, so I could see him walk into his living room and sit in his lazy boy chair. He turned on a porno on the television and sat there masturbating for several minutes as I watched from the woods. On display for everyone and not caring. I almost chuckled to myself, as he watched two men going at it on the screen right in front of himself. He really was a pervert, what I thought were men were actually boys when I looked closer. Well, one was a man and one was a boy. Jesus, the guy had kiddy porn in his house, right on the campus.

We needed to get rid of this guy. I thought as I walked back through the woods, smoking my blunt. I would mention it to the guys about seeing Deter doing that and coming out of the

woods with that boy. Of course, I won't mention the part about seeing Dalton chasing Olivia.

CHAPTER 11

Olivia

The Headmaster called me into his office. “Olivia, please have a seat,” he motioned to the chair in front of his desk. He came around the desk and sat directly in front of me, his clearly hard erection right at my eye level as he sat upon the desk. He didn’t even try to hide it.

I felt my face flush with shock and discomfort. I couldn’t believe what I was seeing. How could he be so brazen and inappropriate? I tried to avert my gaze, but it was impossible not to notice the way his pants were straining against his arousal.

“Is everything okay, sir?” I managed to stammer out, hoping to break the uncomfortable silence that had settled over the room.

The headmaster didn’t seem to notice my discomfort or if he did, he didn’t care. Instead, he walked back and sat behind his desk, leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms, his eyes fixed on me with a disturbing intensity.

“I’m afraid we have a bit of a problem, Olivia,” he said, his voice low and menacing. “It seems that you’ve been causing quite a stir among the boys in your class. They can’t seem to concentrate on their studies because of you.”

I felt a surge of anger and disbelief rise up in me. How dare he accuse me of being a distraction? I had always been a good

student, and I had never done anything to encourage unwanted attention from my classmates.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” I said, my voice shaking with emotion. “I haven’t done anything wrong.”

The headmaster’s expression darkened, and he leaned forward, his erection still clearly visible.

“You’re lying,” he said, his voice cold and menacing. “I know what you’re doing, and I won’t tolerate it. If you don’t start behaving yourself, I’ll have no choice but to take disciplinary action.”

I felt sick to my stomach as I realized what he was implying. Was he really suggesting that I was somehow responsible for the inappropriate behavior of my male classmates? And was he really using his position of authority to intimidate and harass me?

As I sat there, frozen with fear and disgust, I knew that I had to get out of there as soon as possible. But how could I escape the clutches of a man who held all the power in the situation?

I took a deep breath and tried to remain calm. I knew that I had to be smart and strategic if I wanted to get out of this situation unscathed.

“Sir, I assure you that I have not done anything to provoke or encourage inappropriate behavior from my classmates,” I said firmly, trying to maintain eye contact despite the uncomfortable situation.

The headmaster raised an eyebrow, but he didn't say anything. I took that as a sign to continue.

“If there is a problem with the boys in my class, then perhaps it's something that you need to address with them directly,” I said, trying to sound confident and assertive.

The headmaster chuckled, and I felt a shiver run down my spine.

“You're a clever girl, Olivia,” he said, his voice dripping with condescension. “But you're not as clever as you think you are. I know what's going on here, and I won't let you get away with it.”

I swallowed hard, trying to ignore the sick feeling in the pit of my stomach. I had to keep my wits about me if I wanted to get out of this situation alive.

“Sir, I don't know what you're talking about,” I said, my voice shaking slightly. “But I can assure you that I have not done anything wrong. I am a good student, and I always try to behave in a respectful and appropriate manner.”

The Headmaster stared at me for a long moment, his eyes cold and calculating. I could feel his gaze weighing me down, like a heavy burden that I couldn't escape.

Finally, he spoke.

“Very well, Olivia,” he said, his voice low and menacing. “But I'll be keeping a close eye on you from now on. And if you step out of line even once, I won't hesitate to take disciplinary action.”

I nodded, my heart pounding in my chest. I knew that I had dodged a bullet, but I also knew that I couldn't let my guard down. The headmaster was clearly a dangerous and unpredictable man, and I had to be careful if I wanted to stay safe.

As I left the headmaster's office, I couldn't shake the feeling of unease that settled over me like a dark cloud. I knew that I had to be careful around him, but I also knew that I couldn't let him intimidate me.

I made a point of keeping my distance from the Headmaster. I avoided him whenever possible and tried to stay out of his line of sight. But despite my best efforts, I couldn't shake the feeling that he was watching me, waiting for me to slip up.



Later, as I was leaving school, I felt a hand on my shoulder. I turned around to see the headmaster standing behind me, a cold smile on his face.

“Going somewhere, Olivia?” he asked, his voice low and menacing.

I tried to pull away, but his grip was tight, and I couldn't escape.

“Let go of me,” I said, my voice shaking with fear.

The headmaster chuckled, and I felt a surge of anger rise up in me.

“Let go of me, damn it!” I shouted, struggling to break free.

But the headmaster only tightened his grip, his fingers digging into my skin.

“You think you’re so clever, don’t you?” he said, his voice dripping with contempt. “But you’re just a little girl, and you’re no match for me.”

I glared at him with all the strength I could muster, but I knew that I was no match for his power and authority.

Suddenly, I felt a hand on my other shoulder, and I turned to see Dalton standing behind me. He had come to my rescue, and I felt a surge of gratitude and relief wash over me.

“Let her go, sir,” Dalton said, his voice firm and resolute.

The headmaster glared at us for a long moment, his eyes flickering with anger and frustration. But finally, he released me and stepped back.

“Fine,” he said, his voice cold and bitter. “But remember this, Olivia. You may have won this battle, but the war is far from over.”

With that, he turned and walked away, leaving me and Dalton standing there, I felt shaken, but comforted by Dalton.

Dalton walked me back to the dorm and asked me what was going on. “Headmaster Deter, threatened to punish me, after our encounter last night in the woods he feels I should be punished and that I am a distraction to the boys in class,” I stammered out finally. Tears streamed down my face and Dalton wrapped his arms around me. It felt good to be in his arms. He tipped my face up toward him and kissed me hard.

His mouth crushing into mine. I leaned into him, wrapping my arms around his shoulders as he pressed harder against me. Feeling his hard dick pressed against my thigh, I moved my body closer and thrust my pelvis forward into his dick. Letting him know I could feel it. He moaned and pulled me closer, gripping my ass.

As he pulled away from our kiss, he smiled, “Don’t you worry that pretty little head, Goddess, I will take care of Deter.”

I smiled shyly, wondering what he was going to do. But since his family pretty much owned the school and ran things, Dalton had his own way of doing things, I was starting to see.

Just then Georgia stopped in front of us. “Hey Dalton, your boys are looking for you, they told me to come and tell you.” She smiled at him. Then looking at me. “Come on, want to grab some dinner?”

“Yeah, thanks, I’ll see you later,” I said pulling away from Dalton. He grinned at me, then lust filled his eyes again.

“I will see you later,” he said gruffly, and walked off toward his house.

CHAPTER 12

Dalton

God-damn, Georgia had to come up just then. I was about to drag Olivia into the woods for a little more fun. Now my hard dick was making it difficult to walk. The girl tasted and smelled so good. I couldn't wait to spread those legs and taste even more of her. When I kissed her, I thought about young Olivia again. The feeling of her lips on mine felt familiar. Dismissing the thought, I stalked off towards my house, annoyed at the interruption. But if the boys sent Georgia to find me, it must be something important.

Slamming open the door and letting it swing closed behind me with a bang. I saw Julian, Anthony, and Rocker sitting on the couch playing video games. As I came into the living room, they paused the game and turned to look at me.

“Hey man, we need to talk,” Julian said.

“Okay what's up?” I asked, wondering what could be so important.

“All right so last night I got bored with whatever blond bimbo was from Kiki's crew and I went to go smoke in the woods. And guess who I see coming out of the woods?” Julian asked, with his eyebrows raised.

“Who?” I asked him.

“Deter,” Julian said with emphasis. I kept my face stoic as he continued. “Yeah, so I see Deter come out of the woods with a

boy, and this boy runs off toward the dorms. He's a huge pervert, I knew he was into the girls and doing things with them. His experimental science psychological crap, but boys too. So then I go and follow him back to his house. Get this, the old pervert is watching kiddy porn, some old man fucking a boy."

"So, what do you want to do about it?" I asked.

"Well, I heard today from some chick that Deter has his eye on Olivia," Anthony said.

"I heard that too," Rocker said.

"Okay, well today, before I came here, Deter had her by the arm and was telling her he was going to punish her. We need to do something, we need to get rid of him," I said looking at my three best friends. I couldn't leave this up to my fucked up father to handle. He had put Deter in charge. Now I had to do something, I couldn't risk having Deter fuck with my Goddess.

"I say we chop off his dick and throw his ass in the river," Rocker said.

"Why do you always go to cutting off someone's dick?" Julian asked, turning toward Rocker.

Rocker shrugged, "any of you assholes have a better idea?"

"I have a plan, but it doesn't involve cutting off his dick," I said with a smile.

Later in the evening, after everyone was asleep, I wandered over to the dorms. The entire campus was quiet, in the middle of the night, and that's when I did my best thinking.

Pulling the key for the dorms out of my pocket, I quietly opened the door and gently closed it behind myself. Walking down the halls, I stepped lightly and made my way to Olivia's dorm room with Georgia. I already knew what dorm she was in. Mrs. Harrington in the office loves me and gives me any information I want on anything I need. Paying her monthly for information, she loves the money to support her gambling problem and is happy to provide me with anything I need.

Using another key, I quietly opened her door, after listening to the soft breathing inside. Looking over, Georgia was sound asleep and so was Olivia on the other side of the room. She was wearing a tank top that was slightly pulled up, as she slept, and her skin was slightly exposed. I felt my heart skip a beat but quickly regained composure, and my dick hardened just looking at her lying on the bed. Taking out the envelope from my pocket, I placed it on her bedside table and quickly left the room without waking either of them. I took one last glance at Olivia before closing the door, feeling a pang of regret that I couldn't drag her from the room down to the woods right now. But we had other things we needed to do.

Heading back to the house, I formulated the plan. So Deter was a pervert and needed to be eliminated from Eden Hall. We couldn't have someone like that on the staff. I may be a villain, but messing with a kid is above and beyond anything, I would ever do. Disgusting bastard.

“Okay, here is the plan,” I said as I entered the house and gathered the guys. Roker, Julian, and Anthony stared at me intently.

“Let’s leave a note on Deter’s door, asking him to meet a girl up in the woods, I will check with Kiki on one of the girl’s names that Deter messes with and use her name,” I said.

“Then we wait for him and dispose of him in the river, weigh down his body with rocks, and leave him at the bottom of the river for the fish to eat,” I said, smiling. Deter had been a psycho since my father hired him. Despite my warnings, my father wouldn’t get rid of him. Now we had no choice.

“Sounds good,” Julian nodded.

“I’m in, I hate that bastard,” Anthony said.

“Yes, I hate that bastard too,” Roker said in agreement with the rest of us.

“All right, let’s get ready to do this,” I said with a smile.

CHAPTER 13

Rocker

I was all for the plan of killing that bastard, Deter. But I did think cutting his dick off was a must, but the other guys said no, so I guess I'll leave it alone. Deter had been messing with the girls on campus ever since I came to Eden Hall. And Dalton's asshole father did nothing about it. But now that he was messing with Olivia, I knew we had to do something. Even though she was Dalton's girl and would be her girl, I didn't want anyone messing with any of our girls.

We got ready to take care of Deter, I could hear Dalton on the phone with Kiki finding out a girl's name while Julian and I grabbed a few weapons to take care of Deter. Armed with a few knives, a hammer, and a screwdriver, we shoved everything into a bag.

Dressed in all black, we headed out into the woods to wait for Deter, the slimeball.

CHAPTER 14

Olivia

I heard the door click shut in our room, the room was illuminated by a nightlight and cast a soft yellow glow around. I rolled over and looked at the bedside table, there was something white on there. Grabbing my cell phone, I used the light to illuminate the item. It was an envelope with my name scrawled on it. Snatching it off the table, I ripped it open, wondering who left this for me.

A red rose petal and a note fell out of the envelope. I picked up the note and read it.

I'm watching you. You will be mine. My beautiful Goddess.

My heart skipped a beat, as I dropped the letter on the bed. Dalton wrote this and was in my room while we were sleeping. I grabbed my shoes from the side of my bed and slipped my feet into them. Grabbing a light long sleeve shirt, I put it on and slowly walked to the door. Quietly, I opened it and shut it behind myself so as not to wake Georgia.

Slipping out of the dorms, I headed towards Dalton's house. I felt a thrill of excitement building in my core, before I fucked him I was going to tell him we knew each other since we were kids. Walking down the path, I heard some voices coming, and I jumped into the woods, scared it was Deter again. Dalton, Rocker, Julian, and Anthony were coming down the path. I stayed hidden in the woods, as they walked down the other

path toward's Deter's house. They were all carrying some kind of packs with stuff in it.

Even though I know I shouldn't, I started to slowly creep down the path behind them out of view. As I got closer to seeing Deter's house, through the darkness it looked creepy, you could see inside his windows and the fat bastard was sitting on a lazy boy chair watching porn. He really is a disgusting prick, Dalton walked up to the door and slid an envelope under the door. Knocking, he took off running toward the woods, with Julian, Anthony, and Rocker. I stayed in place, watching as Deter opened the door and picking up the note smiled a sinister grin, like the devil himself.

Deter closed the door for a moment, and then opened it again, heading off in the direction where the Renegades had just taken off. I followed behind Deter, careful not to make any noise, he didn't seem to notice as he happily walked through the woods with a flashlight. The moonlight lit my path and I could see the flashlight bobbing up and down ahead as the fat bastard walked.

The flashlight went off, and I heard a scream. Then a gagging sound before silence. I crept forward a bit more, being very careful not to make any noise, and I could see the Renegades had killed Deter. He lay on the ground in a small clearing by the river, the Renegades all standing around him. I could only see Dalton's face. He was smiling and then said, "That will teach you motherfucker, mess with my Goddess and you won't live to see another day."

My heart began to beat faster, fear overtook my body as I ran through the woods back to the dorm. I felt like the devil himself was chasing me.

ABOUT AUTHOR

Hello dear reader my name is Sonja Flowers. I write romance novels, and I love to write steamy, as well as bully romance. You will find some of my dark mafia romance, as well as my newest Kindle Vella The Real Family a humorous serial story about a hillbilly redneck family and the reality television show that they appear upon. I hope you enjoyed the first in the series, The Headmaster. The Dorm will be coming out in the Fall of 2023.

The Real Family

The year in the life of The Real Family. Let me introduce you to the Cunningham Family, a group of redneck hillbillies living in the backwoods of Kentucky. Follow their life over the next year, the ups and downs of their relationships with each other, neighbors, and the general public.

https://www.amazon.com/The-Real-Family/dp/B0CBP122H8/ref=sr_1_2?keywords=sonja+flowers+kindle+vella&qid=1690845596&sr=8-2

The Daughter

Lucia Galantes father dies and she must fight her brother Giovanni for control of the family. Will her list for her fathers henchman Federico be a distraction to her success of the family. Follow this mafia boss romance.

https://www.amazon.com/The-Daughter-Galante-Family-Mafia/dp/B0C39G1TT4/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=sonja+flowers+kindle+vella&qid=1690845596&sr=8-1

The Gangster's Wife

Mirella Delucos husband Joey "The Tuna" is locked up in prison and now Mirella is left to manage the family mafia business. After her young son Joey is kidnapped by the Anderro family Mirella must bring together all the family to get her son out of harm's way. The loyal family members of the Deluco Family will come together and assist with not only the kidnapping but also the running of the family. Her husband's unexpected death will leave Mirella to become the new family boss.

https://www.amazon.com/Gangsters-Wife-Book-Mafia-Wives/dp/B09YG8CJHK/ref=sr_1_5?keywords=sonja+flowers+kindle+vella&qid=1690845596&sr=8-5

PROVOKING A PANTHER

Antonella Sinner

BLURB

In this world of shadows and secrets, fiery determination entwines with sparks of desire.

Since awakening as an omega, the lowest rank among my kind, I've vowed to prove my worth in this world skeptical of my abilities simply because of my status. I yearn for acceptance into the feline army, the valiant defenders against the malicious Gladsheim hunters who hunger for our kind's demise. Fate barges through our doorstep in the heart of war, and the Gladsheim hunters deliver a devastating blow.

Born as the runt of the litter, I carry within me an unyielding will and an insatiable desire to surpass all expectations. The elation coursing through my veins is indescribable when news arrives—I have been granted entry into the feline army. At last, an opportunity to silence the doubters and thrust their muddled faces into the truth. However, fate unveils its twist as I discover my battle instructor—the enigmatic panther alpha, Zara Nightshade, who has no desire to be entangled with me. In her eyes, I am feeble, unworthy of the fight, destined for a

life in the omega nests, confined to breeding for the sake of our lineage.

Now, I tread a treacherous path, burdened with the weight of proving my mettle amidst battle. It falls upon me to challenge Zara's dismissive beliefs, to shatter the constraints she has placed upon me. In this struggle for acceptance, I yearn not only to secure my place but to alter Zara's perception of my abilities. Little did I know that the flames of passion, like an inferno, bind our fates together. As Zara's touch reaches out, a glimmer of hope emerges—an ethereal chance for my icy heart to thaw, forever altering the course of our destinies.

CONTENT WARNINGS

Provoking a Panther is intended for mature audiences as it weaves an enthralling romance with a daring twist—the villain claims the heart of the protagonist. This enemies-to-lovers story is fueled by heated tension and sizzling encounters that ignite the pages. However, it is essential to note that this story delves into morally gray territory, where love is entangled with darker elements.

Within these pages, you will encounter scattered instances of dark themes, including mentions of murder and threats of violence. For those into kink, some breath play is featured, as well as those spicy dominating attitudes from the love interest I know many of us crave.

CHAPTER ONE

Beneath Moonlit Shadows

Evangeline

The last slivers of sunlight peeked over the horizon, casting dancing shadows within the evergreen jungle brimming with life. My snow leopard shuddered within my mind, becoming antsy, and causing me to pace within the four walls of the expansive palace. After the general called the initiation of an infiltration of enemy lines, I eagerly seized the opportunity, bracing myself for action. My excitement quickly waned as I was summoned to the desolate palace just before our forces commenced their maneuver.

The untamed part of me longed for a run, to feel the snow-kissed wind brushing against my pelt, to expel energy as I mindlessly slaughtered, succumbing to a frenzy. For weeks now, I'd been denied the privilege of a hunt. Everyone held me in their lowest regard, just because I was born the runt of a litter and never awakened with power coursing through my veins. I strived to prove them wrong, to show them I was more than what I appeared.

Coming to a stop in front of a broad window, the group of felines with heavy gaits beckoned my attention just beyond. The world teetered on the brink of war. The call to arms echoed throughout the land, summoning warriors to take up arms and face the encroaching darkness. Like a wild tempest, the billowing storm within me yearned to join the fray, to unleash my primal instincts upon the enemy.

I could sense them, almost taste the soil they kicked up, pick up snippets of conversation carried by the wind. I terribly wished to join them into the heart of war, but the one person who could grant my participation faced me with her enigmatic glare.

“I assume you’re aware of why I summoned you here.” The panther’s voice enraptured me. I turned to face her, determined to hold my ground, to continue in defiance of whatever she’ll throw at me, hoping to keep me from the battlefield.

Clad in a form-fitting bodysuit, it melded to her lithe physique, accentuating her graceful movements as she came to a halt on the other end of the room. Her attire reflected her commanding aura and emphasized her fierce nature.

Zara Nightshade, a name whispered like a forbidden secret, was the war Manehunter—officers skilled in the art of ambush—in charge of the night’s warfare. She was also the same feline that had become the bane of my existence. She believed I belonged in the safety of the heat nests, where the vulnerable sought solace and protection from the impending storm. The moment I was recruited to join the ranks, entering as a Whiskerling, she sought to make it her mission to undermine me. To remind me of the omega blood rushing through my veins, bidding me to her command as she was an alpha. The only alpha I’ll ever defy.

She stood at the base of the hall, the epitome of commanding authority and hidden desires, surveying me with an aura of displeasure. I gaped at her, almost enthralled as the twilight

sky cast shadows upon her figure. Her locks fell in luscious waves down her back, a few of the intricately woven braids adorned with silver ornaments. The mesmerizing interplay of light and shadow against her dark tresses highlighted her captivating beauty. As I faced her, lifting my chin even as my instincts shouted at me to curl into myself, frustration blossomed in my chest like a storm.

The tension in the atmosphere crackled between us like the rumble of an impending avalanche as I took a step toward her. Nostrils flaring, Zara clenched her jaw and peered at me through her lashes as I approached. The air around her crackled with restrained power, which drew me in with enigmatic charm.

“Zara, I’ve done more than enough to prove myself in training. I’m ready to go out there and face this battle with the rest of you.” I spoke with determination lacing my tone, and I wouldn’t allow her unrelenting gaze to pull me into submission. Defiance ran hot through my veins. “You can’t keep me confined to the heat nests simply because of my cursed rank.”

“Know your place, *omega*.” She closed the distance between us, making me swallow thickly as the warmth of her seeped into the front of my shirt. Her intoxicating scent, fresh rainfall with a hint of petrichor, filled my senses and clouded my mind, causing me to take a step back from her. The panther seized the opportunity, pleased with the dent in my spirit. “You have no right to call me by my name. In public or in enclosed spaces, you’ll refer to me as your Sergeant, lead Manehunter.

Unless you wish for me to take you outside and set you in your place, I suggest you follow my orders. Are we in understanding?”

Goddess, every instinct within me was telling me to test her limits, to defy this alpha. Not for the sake of joining the battle, but to see if she could crack.

The clash of our wills resonated in the stillness of the twilight, desires intermingling like a dance on the edge of passion and surrender.

“I won’t be confined to a life of submission,” I gritted.

“I commend your enthusiasm, snow princess.” She chuckled, a sound that vibrated through me like a muse. “But the heat nests are where you belong, away from the dangers of the battlefield. I’ve been more than lenient allowing you into the courtyard to train beside betas.” Zara’s piercing gaze bore into me, her expression unmoved by my pleas. “Now is the time to face reality. Your status as omega speaks volumes about your capabilities.”

“I will prove you wrong in this decision, *Sergeant*.” My lip twitched from the growing irritation and angry tears brimmed in my eyes. “I’m more than my rank, more than a submissive little omega begging for an alpha’s rut.” A growl vibrated from her chest as the words left my lips, and for just a moment, I was witness to the beast lurking within the shadows she expelled. Her eyes flicked to golden, like fiery embers, exuding a magnetic allure. “I’m useful to the army and I refuse to be trampled on by you.”

Zara took my chin into her grip, forcing me to crane my neck to meet her looming stature and gaze into her serpent-green eyes that bore into me. My hand reached out to rip her off of me, but she seized my wrist effortlessly, unleashing a wave of energy that stilled me to my core as she tugged me forward so I'm pressed flush to her chest.

The breath rushed out of me, and all I could hone my senses on was the consuming presence of this alpha. The intensity—the weight of her gaze pinned me, and I couldn't fight the rush of titillation through my veins at the sensation of having her touch upon my skin. It's so much more than a connection between an alpha and an omega; it's more than duty. This transcended those boundaries. There was a darkness concealed within her, one I craved to taste and become consumed by. As much as I'd grown to despise this panther, it was undeniable she ignited a passion within me, stirring my emotions.

“If you desperately wish to safeguard the kingdom, do it from within the veil.” Her tone dropped an octave, and I was enamored by the silkiness of her sultry voice. It was laced with an edge that held power, bidding me to obey. “We'll need protection from within.”

“You leave me with no choice but to submit to your command, alpha.” My gaze narrowed, and instead of the chuckle I expected from her, Zara purred. Her hand shifted from the death grip on my chin to gently caress my jaw down to the collar of my jugular. I shuddered, my lids fluttering shut as I became consumed by that singular sound she emitted.

“Do as you’re told, Evangeline,” she whispered. “If I find you in the field,” she leaned in close, her lips grazing the shell of my ear as a warm blush painted my skin, “I won’t hesitate to kill you.”



The night air hung heavy with both tension and resignation. My mother’s hand resting on my knee kept me in place, preventing me from pacing. Upon hearing the general’s plan, the witches got to work securing the omegas into an enchanted building they conjured around our heat nests.

“Evie, you must relax,” my mother whispered to me, giving my knee a squeeze. “You’ll fall into a heat stroke at this rate.”

I wiped the bead of sweat from my forehead frustratingly. The nests were suffocating me in heat, my body not used to the climate of the jungle. Snow leopards like me were built for dense weather—snowfall and frost, not this heated, sunny oasis bullshit. My growing vexation didn’t help, and my animal craved to set foot on a blanket of snow, rub my pelt into the cushion of the delicious icy blanket.

“I know, Mom,” I grumbled. “You don’t have to tell me twice.”

“Just let her be, Mother,” my sister said on the other side of our enclosed space. “You’ll only make her worse.”

“I shouldn’t be here,” I grumbled. “Why must I be subjected to her ignorance? I have to suffer because she believes I’m not worthy of the field? That’s bullshit. I have every right to be out

there, fighting for our freedom, our right to prowl whichever mountain we please.”

“Evie, my love, listen to me.” My mother shifted to kneel in front of me, taking hold of my chin gently so I didn’t avert my gaze as I usually would in these situations. “Your battle lies here within the nests for tonight, not out there.” Her serene voice was laced with both love and caution, gentle eyes softening. “We are all omegas, and our purpose in this world is to cater to the needs of our alphas, to ensure their strength, our kind’s wellbeing.”

My jaw clenched at the repulsive idea. I would not fall subject to these chains brought by our blood. I refused to. We could be so much more than needy little omegas unable to function without an alpha’s bidding. If they’d allow it, we could fight, we could battle, we too could protect. I knew it in me that I didn’t need protection from an alpha. My spirit was just as strong, if not fiercer, than the common alpha’s.

“You’re wrong, Mother.” I frowned, my gaze narrowing. “I have so much more to offer and contribute than what’s between my legs, more than our biology. I will not allow myself to fall subject to these standards.” I placed my hand on my heart. “I have a frost fire within me. I can feel it surrounding my heart, and I will unleash it on this world. Protecting our kind, the nests, is my calling, and I’ll make it my duty. With or without your support, I’ll rise above these expectations, plow through these repulsive limitations placed on me.”

Amara, my older sister, pushed herself off the wall to crouch before my mother. “Let her follow her dreams. It’s not good for her to suppress them, Mother.” Facing me, Amara winked in my direction, and some of the tension within me eased at the sight of her support. My sister, since the beginning, had always backed me up, and I knew I could place my full trust in her, knowing she’d never let me down.

“Evie’s always been special. She’s our blizzard, and it’s best to let her storm, or she’ll toss the avalanche in our direction on the mountain.” She smirked, causing me to crack a smile.

“Thanks, Mara.” I took her into an embrace, causing her to erupt into giggles. My heart warmed at her words, filled with love from the faith in my dreams my older sister held. No one could match her unwavering support, and I’d forever be grateful to have her in my life.

Mother chuckled, running a hand down her face. “I relent.” She tossed her hands up. “My little girls took after their father.” Tears welled in her eyes as she turned to me. “Especially you, my frost dreamer.”

“I miss him too.” My resolve dropped, and I reached out for my mother’s hand.

Father had been killed not too many solstices ago. I’d been a young cub when he was captured by hunters. They sought out our family to exterminate us. Father was strong-willed and never gave us up. He endured horrendous torture before succumbing to the blade. At least that was all our brother told us when he grew into his paws and joined the feline ranks as a

beta. He was out there fighting tonight, and I should be alongside him. I owe him my gratitude. If it weren't for him, I wouldn't have been allowed to set foot in the courtyard.

As the moon reached its zenith, the tranquility of the heat nests was shattered by the chilling echoes of approaching danger. The sound of a cheetah's desperate call piercing the scorching air reached the sanctuary, chilling me. Shadows cast by the glowing silver light shuddered in the distance. Whispers broke throughout the nest, followed by an eruption of chaos as it reigned supreme.

A shiver ran down my spine, not solely from the heat trembling my suffering body, but from the foreboding presence that crept closer with every passing moment. I could sense it, an evil force barreling through the jungle. My snow leopard bristled, and I allowed the frosty rage from within to take over even as my mother shouted in my direction to stay with the group. The fight within me held sway over all my senses; my muscles tensed and coiled with the bidding to battle—to protect the helpless.

As I broke through the veil concealing the sanctuary, surrounded by my warrior brethren, horror struck every nerve within me. Hunters, clad in armor adorned with the sinister symbols of the Gladsheim, emerged from the jungle's edge. They moved with unsettling grace, eyes that held a malevolent fire. Their weapons gleamed with their imbued power, leaving a sinister wake behind their step. It was a mark of damnation, a reminder that their blades were fueled by an unholy source.

Before this night, I'd never been witness to their force as they surrounded every opening, every escape from the nests.

They never should've been able to locate, let alone breach, the outer veil surrounding the territory. How did they get in? Who led them to find us? What treacherous—My questions were answered in an instant at the sight of an emerging witch. Her bright light of magic exploded toward the nests, blinding and knocking me back against the veiled wall of the building. Could it be? A traitor amongst us? I didn't have time to snarl or howl a warning as her light magic reached my skin and took root.

It sizzled as soon as it contacted me, binding around my throat like a noose to bid me into silence. The illusion was much stronger than an alpha's command. My blood boiled at the attack, fueling my leopard enough to break free.

The few of our forces lingering within the underbrush surrounding the omega nests were greatly outnumbered by the hunters. The clash of steel against flesh echoed through the air, accompanied by the anguished roars and cries of the dying warriors.

As I stood on the precipice of this harrowing spectacle, a mix of terror and resolve coursed through my veins. The warrior spirit within me burned brighter than ever, yearning to be unleashed. I felt the power of my feline essence surging, intertwining with the flames of my determination.

With an inward breath, I launched myself into the fray, my claws extended and my eyes blazed with a fierce

determination. The strength and ferocity of the snow leopard within me rushed forward. Predatory instincts merged with my own as a blanket of snowflakes waked my trembling transformation. The hunters would know, even within this darkest hour, there were those who refused to bow down, who refused to let the light within be extinguished.

My muscles tensed beneath my sleek, spotted coat as I leaped into action. I landed with a silent grace; my padded paws found firm purchase on the moist ground. The hunters, momentarily caught off guard by my sudden appearance, turned their attention toward me with sneering smirks. But they underestimated the power that surged through my veins, the primal instincts of a predator fueled by determination.

With lightning-fast reflexes, I lunged toward the nearest adversary, my teeth bared in a fearsome snarl. The snow leopard's predatory prowess flowed through me, sharpening my senses and honing my focus. My claws extended, glinting like shards of ice in the pale light as I swiped at my foe with calculated ferocity.

The air filled with the clash of steel against flesh as I evaded their strikes, my lithe form twisted and turned with an uncanny agility. I moved like a wisp of smoke, my body a blur of feline elegance. Each movement was calculated, each attack precise, as I danced with lethal grace.

Despite my valiant efforts, the tide of battle turned against me. Overwhelmed by sheer numbers and the relentless aggression of the hunters, I found myself in a precarious

position. Their blades slashed through the air with merciless precision, narrowly missing me as I leaped and twisted to evade their lethal strikes.

But as I fought, a sinking feeling settled in the pit of my stomach. Through the chaos and flurry of battle, I caught glimpses of the sanctuary's defenses crumbling before the hunters' relentless assault. The once impenetrable barriers shattered like fragile glass, allowing the darkness to seep into the heart of our haven.

I watched in horror as my brethren, their animal forms torn asunder, fell beneath the onslaught. The air was heavy with the scent of fear, mingled together in a bitter symphony. The once tranquil surroundings now bore witness to a macabre scene, a tapestry of violence and despair.

The unfamiliar witch, who I once thought was the light wielder betrothed to the jaguar, unveiled herself to be an ancient witch from a forbidden coven with the Gladsheim. A harbinger of darkness and light, her presence an ethereal slurry of darkness, stood at the forefront of this invasion. Carried over the wind, a chilling incantation that fueled the hunters' frenzy. Dark tendrils of magic snaked through the air, penetrating the veil in an instant.

My heart pounded with a mixture of dread and despair as I witnessed the hunters breach the sanctuary's once-thought-impenetrable boundaries. Like a flood, they poured through the weakened defenses, their sinister intent etched upon their

faces. Their eyes burned with a twisted pleasure, relishing in the destruction they wrought upon our sacred grounds.

Shifters, the majestic beings that had sought solace and safety within these sacred grounds, were now met with a massacre. Their cries of pain and fear echoed through the sanctuary, intermingling with the grotesque laughter of the hunters. It was a nightmare brought to life, a cruel twist of fate that threatened to extinguish the spark of hope within me.

“Evangeline!” A gut-wrenching cry tore through the chaos, piercing the air with a haunting lament. My blood froze, pinching my nerves as I turned to see my sister, her fur matted with blood, being ensnared by the grip of dark magic. Panic seized me, and I surged forward, desperate to free her from their clutches.

The hunters, guided by the witch’s twisted magic, had opened a portal, a gateway to the unknown. They dragged my sister, her form limp and lifeless, toward the swirling vortex that beckoned with its ominous allure.

Time slowed to a crawl as I sprinted toward the portal; my paws dug into the dirt with desperate urgency. But as I reached its threshold—my outstretched claws inches away from my sister’s fading silhouette—the portal snapped shut, severing our connection. A strangled cry tore from my throat, a scream of anguish and frustration that echoed through the desolate landscape.

My mother, her eyes brimmed with worry, rushed to my side, and her warm fur brushed against mine in a comforting

embrace. We shifted, and my fingers sank into wet soil as angry tears of frustration streaked my face. She murmured words of solace, a soothing melody amidst the cacophony of my anger. But beneath her consoling touch, an ember of wrathful determination flickered to life within me.

At that moment, my path was set and nothing would deter me from it, for the love I held for my sister shone brighter than any star in the night sky. I would plow through every hunter within the vicinity, tear apart every treacherous witch obstructing my path. I would find my sister, no matter the cost.



The flickering flames of a campfire danced in the night, casting shadows on the weary faces of the surrounding broken families. Since the breach, my mother and I trekked up the mountain with the gaping hole in our hearts my sister's abduction created. My brother, Jasper, had made his way back to us when the war between night and day drew its conclusion, and our spirits were eased upon seeing he'd survived the battle. The kingdom had won the war, but at a devastating cost, as we lost a number of omegas during the attack.

Gazing into the mesmerizing dance of the fire, memories flashed in my mind, intertwining with the flickering glow. Since we awakened as omegas, I had cried to my sister, claiming I believed in my soul I should've been an alpha, a beta at the least. But like the nurturing spirit she was, she saw the spark in me—the frosty passion that could put out a fire.

I remember her telling me omegas, the gentle souls among the feline kind, held a vital role within our streaks. We were the pillars of compassion, the keepers of peace, and the guardians of harmony. Though we lacked the dominant traits of alphas and betas, our presence was no less significant. Within our feline kingdom, omegas served as the calming force amidst the storms of pride and aggression. We possessed the ability to diffuse tension, to soothe frayed nerves, and to mend the bonds strained by conflict.

I'd longed to break from the custom, but with the absence of my sister, I'd fallen into a depression. In times of turmoil, the absence of her calming influence was felt, leaving our leap—our family—vulnerable to the discord that threatened to tear us apart. Her unique qualities were a testament to the fact that strength did not solely lie in physical prowess or dominance. It resided within the gentle heart of those who held the power to heal, to bridge divides, and to forge unbreakable bonds. Her absence was palpable.

It was my sister who had illuminated the path strewn with frost-covered obstacles, reminding me that the frost could also yield beauty and resilience. With her gentle words and steadfast belief in my dreams, she had nurtured my longing to challenge the norms that held us captive within the icy grasp of tradition. My brother, Jasper, had joined her in that conviction. He had used his influence to convince the feline army to grant me the opportunity to train as a warrior, to prove myself worthy of my aspirations.

Now, Jasper, with his long blond hair reflecting the light of fire, stood ahead of us, gazing blankly into the shuddering jungle. I sat among the broken with my mother huddled by my side, my eyes fixed on the mesmerizing dance of fire. The crackling embers mirrored the turmoil within my heart. It'd been days since my sister's capture, and the snow across my family's pelt had long since melted during the wait.

As the half-moon rose, a figure approached from the darkness where the edge of the jungle met the mountain's snowy terrain. The panther, sleek and powerful, her ebony fur glistening under the pale moonlight, commanded the space with an air of regal authority. Her entrancing fiery eyes held a depth that pierced through my very soul, as if she held the weight of countless secrets within.

Her shift took over, eliciting shudders from me as I witnessed the mesmerizing spectacle of shadow and mist gliding around her body. Struck with awe at the sight of her bare body, a thrum of arousal hit me at the sight of her dusky complexion. It was easy to become absorbed by the thought of mounting her, what it would feel like to have her warm flesh upon mine. Her silky sultry voice at my ear, those long thin fingers at my hips.

Heat enveloped my body. My core trembled. I didn't need to look down to realize my thighs chafed from arousal.

Could just the sight of this alpha get a rise from me?

With a shuddered breath, I quickly suppressed the emotions stirred within me in light of the situation. Tonight was not an

evening to fall under the clutches of lust.

As Zara wrapped a dark cloak around herself, she was greeted with an incline of my brother's head, and she murmured so lowly, not even my keen senses could pick up the ushered words. His spine stiffened, and without looking at us—his family—he allowed his shift to take over and rushed up the snowy terrain. Left in shock, my mother took a step toward him, to chase after him, but I grasped her arm, my gaze pinned to a stoic Zara.

My heart leapt with dread, and I took cautious steps toward her with breath hitched.

Our eyes locked as I drew closer, and a spark ignited between us in that moment. I felt inexplicably drawn to Zara, my instincts telling me our connection would have converged for a greater purpose.

In that moment, we were just two souls navigating the treacherous path of passion in a world still healing from the wounds of war.

Then the unthinkable left the feline's lips.

“I'm sorry. We found your sister...” Zara's voice was filled with solemn regret as she delivered the devastating news. “But she didn't survive. My deepest sympathies.”

Her stoic expression never faltered, but I noticed she wouldn't meet our eyes as my mother's sobs filled the atmosphere. Zara gazed into the night, her moonlit face becoming a blur as tears filled my vision.

My world shattered, the pain reverberating through every fiber of my being. A surge, like the might of an avalanche, swelled within my heart. Devastation mingled with unwavering determination. I would avenge my sister's death and find solace in the arms of darkness that entwined within this treacherous world.

CHAPTER TWO

Burning Desires

Zara

Stalking along the outskirts of the field, I remained hidden within the shadows as I observed the training exercises of the soldiers. My keen senses surveyed the scene, regarding their every move and gesture as they parried attacks.

In a field full of felines emitting endorphins and pheromones, my sights were entirely honed in on a single shifter that lured me in like a moth to a flame. The snow leopard with porcelain skin, reminiscent of freshly fallen snow and silver hair tied into a braid. She stood out in the crowd against her sun-kissed comrades. Her figure, clad in flowy attire, was sleek with sweat, her scent carried over by the gusts of wind.

She was the crisp snowflake I wished to taste on my tongue.

But I wouldn't give in. Not now. Not ever.

She didn't belong here. Not when I didn't know the wild beasts within my own men. Definitely not near an omega. I didn't care how much spirit she had. They would break her in two, and I'd be left to pick up the pieces of her.

As a growl rippled through me, a thrum of possession gripped my entity.

Fucking hell. Curse the lure of an omega—of *this* omega.

I'd visited the heat nests often...too often. And yet the only omega pussy I desired to rut belonged to the snow leopard I'd set my eyes on. I lusted after her sopping pussy on my tongue, savoring her, pinning her squirming hips as I took from her.

She was a sight to behold, one that stirred the primal instincts within me.

Surveying her slender figure, I sank into the shadows, and worry creased between my brows as I noted the heat she expelled. My ability, the gift bestowed upon my panther by the goddess of the hunt, wafted over the emotions she emitted. With it, I sensed the trepidation in her soul. She thirsted for revenge and blew off the steam in her training.

If she didn't grab ahold of herself, she'd collapse.

She was already panting heavily. At this rate, her leopard would give out on her.

"Dismissed," I barked at the troops in their minds. Stepping down from my perch, I landed with a thud as I emerged from the shadows, moving toward the crowd with a deliberate approach.

The soldiers dispersed quickly, appearing gleeful their training had come to an end. Their surprised chuffs rang out as they parted from my path, my narrowed gaze looming in the direction of the snow leopard. Her sleek figure remained enamored with her training, and a tendril of irritability struck me. Was the omega deliberately ignoring my command?

My obsidian paws sank into soft soil, and my maw hung low, nearly touching the ground. Evangeline moved with fierce determination and simmering anger. But as I drew closer, under my looming shadow, I noticed she fought through her exhaustion. It took everything within me not to pounce on her and challenge the unspoken fury ravaging through her. The sleek muscles rippled beneath her silky fur, and I found myself captivated by her grace.

“*Evangeline,*” I called out, my voice a thundering growl directed toward her. “*When I give out orders,*” she turned to face me, “*I expect all warriors to obey.*” As her gaze met mine, I could sense she instinctively felt drawn to submit, but fought against the urge as she struggled to maintain eye contact.

“*I’m not finished,*” she grumbled, and I could hear her swallow spit. Those piercing blue eyes, like frozen pools of ice, held a storm within them, and I knew she had more fight within her. She was determined to let out her vexation, even if it cost her sanity.

We simply could not have it. I wouldn’t be the one to carry her limp body up the dreaded snow-capped mountain. I’d dump her on a pile of snow for her family to collect. Her brother, the warrior that managed to talk our general into allowing her into our brethren, would be the one to care for her. I would not make myself responsible for the omega, nor would I make her my problem.

My gaze narrowed, and as I puffed out my chest, expanding my size, she cowered.

“I’m telling you, snow princess. You’re done here,” I said, sneering.

Evangeline shook her pelt, and her transformation took root within her, bathing the atmosphere in a soft blanket of melted snowflakes. The mesmerizing cascade danced around her form, engulfing her in a moment of mystic beauty. As the flurry subsided, her snowy complexion replaced her leopard.

Her bare figure stood in front of me, and it took every fiber of my being not to draw forward and inhale her scent. Saliva pooled in my mouth as I soaked in her appearance. My claws dug into the dirt, itching to reach out and knead her flesh. To sink my teeth into her curves and savor her as mine.

Much to my surprise, she pivoted on her heels, reaching for her discarded white tee to put it on and reined all her attention into the punching bag in front of her, continuing a relentless assault. My frustration boiled over and mingled with the lust that coursed through me.

As I allowed my panther to pull back, misty shadows mingled with melted snow, my hand shot forward to capture the omega by the back of her neck. I closed the distance between us and latched on to her, pulling her flush against my heated flesh.

A squeal left Evangeline’s lips, and desire pulsed within me, flaring my nostrils to take in the omega at my mercy.

The intensity of lust mingled in the atmosphere, and with the flush staining her cheeks, I knew my rough actions ignited something within this leopard. A realization struck me as she molded herself to my stone figure. Her sweat-soaked silver hair stuck to her forehead, her breathing jagged and labored. It wasn't just lust that boiled her blood. The damn leopard was nearing a heat stroke.

“You insolent fool,” I growled.

With no room left for her to take a breath, I seized the back of her throat and shoved her forward, forcing her to bow her back as I tugged her toward the dense jungle. A dark cloud flooded my mind, and I became ruthless in my actions. Her frantic steps struggled to keep up with my broad strides, but I had no intention of slowing down. One more second and she truly would have succumbed to exhaustion.



“Sergeant!” Evangeline exclaimed, digging her nails into my wrist in an attempt to make me release her. Not even in her dreams would I release her. “What the hell? Let me go.”

“Quiet,” I grumbled, tugging her through the moist foliage of the jungle. I tugged her along a path, beelining straight for the impressive mountain in the distance.

Cool air filled the damp atmosphere as we approached our destination, followed by the sound of rushing water. It invigorated me as goosebumps popped across my bare skin. As we approached the clearing, the ethereal sight of a frozen

oasis appeared. The rushing waterfall was fed by the melted snow of the mountain, creating crisp waters. With another step forward, I shoved the woman toward the stream, and she splashed into the crystalline water. Evangeline hissed and yelped, fighting against me as I held her under the roaring currents which enveloped her in a chilly embrace.

Pushing her head above the water, her eyes widened and lips parted with a gasp as she came back up for air, but I seized her throat and pushed her into the cold abyss. I held her down there for a moment, relishing the way her back arched above the surface of the water. The way I felt her thumping pulse at my fingertips as I squeezed the base of her neck tighter. Her nipples hardened to a sharp peak, and I savored the sight of them through the transparent fabric. Craving to take one into my mouth, my lips tugged into a sneer.

It was invigorating. Watching her struggle satisfied the predator within me. It awakened my primal instincts, summoned the need to take. To claim. To *rut*.

Goddesses, how long had it been since I released that dominating side of me? Had the trembling flesh of a pussy at my mercy?

A harsh purr left my lips, the sound seductive as I pulled Evangeline from the grip of the currents and hoisted her onto my lap. Her flushed face met my stoic gaze, her widened eyes full of fright and confusion, mixed with the undertones of arousal and want. The heavy draws of her breaths brushed her breasts against mine as she panted for air. I savored the feeling

of her cold flesh meeting my warmth, and my hand trailed over the softness of her thigh, toward the slit between her legs. A breathy moan left the omega's parted lips, and I squeezed the base of her throat. She thrust her chest forward. The peaks of her nipples scraped my breasts and a thrum of arousal gripped me.

I had her exactly where I wanted her. The needy, disobedient omega was at my mercy. Leaning in close, my lips nearly grazed hers, and she fucking preened. If I allowed myself to sink into the allure of her arousal, I'd give in and deliver what she wanted. But not today, not ever.

Even now, I sensed the turmoil within her. My darkness mingling with hers would ruin her. An omega doesn't belong on the field, and I wouldn't allow her to become consumed by the bloodshed that had marred my soul.

As the intense weight of my gaze settled on Evangeline, I watched as her pupils blew, the icy blue of her irises formed a ring around it. If she were any other omega, I'd feed what she desired to her parched tongue. I would force Evangeline to consume the darkness that tainted my soul, and I'd relish under the corruption I brought upon her.

But that's not what I desired from her.

"What you did out there, snow princess, was reckless. You could've killed yourself if I hadn't stepped in," I admonished, voice filled with palpable authority as she shuddered under the intensity.

"I wasn't aware you cared," she tittered dryly.

Squeezing the base of her throat, I drew her closer. Her breath hitched as our noses nearly touched, and I angled my head to survey her. Evangeline was a stark contrast with her luminous, flushed complexion. Her trembling thighs wrapped tightly around my middle. I inhaled deeply and drew in the sultry scent of her arousal, her addictive soft vanilla and white musk. It reminded me how powerful the lure of an omega was. Just how *distracting* one could become on the field.

“It only solidified my thoughts of you.” My lip curled, revealing my fangs. Her gaze flickered to them, and I could feel her swallow nervously. “You don’t belong here, among warriors.”

“I have every right to—” she began, but my growl cut her off.

“*Silence*,” I commanded, bidding her into silence with the power laced into my tone.

Evangeline shifted on my lap, and I became aware of the heated flesh between her thighs as her scent spiked. Through my lingering ability, I sensed the emotions stirred deep within her. It was a forbidden desire that sparked between us, one I’d ignored as it defied all laws. Her hips jerked and her thighs squeezed me tighter to suppress the quivering of her pussy. She was aroused and preened at my commanding authority.

“You’re nothing more than an omega. Under my will, you bend.” I took her chin when she sneered, pinching her cheeks as I forced her to look at me, to understand I meant every word I uttered. “At the weight of my command, you *break*.”

“Let me the fuck go.” She bit out each syllable, and I chuckled.

I released her hip, and she wriggled off my lap, shoving away from me, and stumbled back into the crisp stream. A blush stained her pale cheeks when she realized the promiscuous position I held her in. With her blown pupils, she gaped at my breasts, her gaze traveling down to the top of my pussy.

“I suggest you head to the mountain, Evangeline, before I decide your punishment in this instant.” I licked my lips, watching as the realization struck her. “Would you prefer it now?” I waded my way toward her, drawing up into my full height to loom over her figure. “I’ll take you over my knee, strike your ass until welts form. Until that pretty omega pussy of yours drips for attention. Is that what you’d like?” I snickered dryly. “It’s all you’d ever desire, isn’t it? More the reason I should drop you. Shove you into the nests where you belong. For another alpha to rut you as you please.”

“No.” She raised her chin and met my gaze, allowing me to view the frosty determination hardening her expression. “You’re mistaken, Sergeant.” She crossed her arms, pushing her breasts to a swell. “I will prove to you—to all of you, I’m more than this forsaken rank. I belong exactly where I wish to be.”

“Leave.” I scoffed, my gaze narrowing.

Without another word, Evangeline made her way out of the crisp waters. As the heat of her lure diminished with every

step she took, the coolness of the water finally struck me. My teeth clattered as I cursed and made my way to dry soil, allowing the darkness of my shift to overtake my shuddering body.

CHAPTER THREE

In the Clutches of Darkness

Evangeline

Stepping onto the warm soil of the jungle, I shook my pelt to ruffle the lingering snowflakes that had seeped in. They kept me cool throughout the night in the humid jungle and yet had me longing for the cool breeze of the mountaintops sifting over my figure. The night was buzzing with the sound of crickets and the heavy footfalls of felines ahead. Moonlight illuminated the path, and as I waded my way through the deeper underbrush, flickering torches came into view.

The fires cast a glow upon the many gathered faces ahead, causing my heart to race with a mix of anticipation and nervousness. I released a groan, sounding more like a growl as it drew the attention of a few others. Their forms shifted and prowled beneath the glow of the torches. As their gazes settled on my stark figure approaching, I was greeted with growls and hisses of displeasure.

A group of feline warriors, who had never hidden their skepticism of me and my abilities, stood together. Their glowing eyes brimmed with superiority. Their words, laced with disdain, reached my ears like venomous arrows. “Look who’s here,” one sneered. “It’s the snowflake Whiskerling with her astral parlor tricks.”

Laughter erupted among them, a chorus of derision that pierced my heart. They mocked my gifts, calling me names

that stung like impaling icicles. “Ghost girl,” they jeered, their taunts growing louder.

I shook my pelt, choosing to ignore them. Then I felt a brush against my body.

“Hey, snowball, mind if I have you as a treat when I beat this thing?” one of them purred, belittling me using my status amongst the ranks and using it like a sharp weapon.

My jaw clenched, and a surge of anger coursed through me. Without a moment’s hesitation, I lunged forward, my jaws snapping dangerously close to the beta’s face. Surprise flashed across his eyes as he stumbled backward, his confidence shattered in an instant. The air crackled with tension, my growl echoing through the field, a clear message that I refused to be treated with disrespect.

As an omega snow leopard shifter, I had always felt the weight of my inferior status amongst my kind, let alone my leap. It clung to me like a persistent shadow, a constant reminder of my perceived limitations among my comrades. But joining the feline army offered a glimmer of hope, a chance to rise above my blood status and earn the respect I craved.

Rumors whispered through the ranks, carrying the weight of Zara’s search for a new Lead Pounceguard. A position left vacant since General Eesha had slain the corrupted feline after his darkness reached her huntress mate. It’s the reason I’d thrown myself into grueling training, the very thing that nearly cost me my life as I pushed my body and mind to their limits.

Then Zara happened.

My body shuddered at the remembrance of the encounter, the way I reacted to her touch. Her scent. Her command. I'd wanted to taste her, to have her consume me, and feed me the darkness I'd sensed lingering within her. The very thing that tainted her soul and allowed her to walk into battle and leave unscathed.

Even as she held me beneath the water, my lungs aching for a breath, my core trembled with arousal. Her actions had turned me on beyond measure. It was fucked. Absolutely fucked. But I couldn't help my reactions.

Regardless, it pushed me to prove myself in this world. To prove myself to her.

The trials that awaited me were said to be the most arduous in feline history, but I was determined to prove my worthiness to Zara.



Finally, the night of reckoning arrived, beckoning me to leap from the mountains. The air crackled with electricity as the groups of anxious felines gathered at the edge of the arena. Set up especially for this night, the witches, master enchantresses renowned for their magical prowess, had crafted the treacherous arena to push us to our limits. Every step I took was laden with anticipation and caution, for danger lurked behind every shadowy corner.

The maze had a life all its own. Twisting vines and towering trees formed a labyrinthine path that seemed to shift and change as I gaped into its depths with intrigue. As the wind whistled, it carried the whispers of incantations imbued into soil, vines and anything it could latch onto in the shadow-filled abyss. It hinted at the power that resided within these hallowed grounds.

As I found myself amongst the crowd, felines pushing into me, my gaze swept over them. I searched for any hint of hesitation within them, a glimpse of the challenges that lay ahead. Settling my stark figure into the shadows, murmurs cut through the crowd, drawing my attention.

Appearing from the underbrush, a formidable figure with rippling muscles and an air of confidence stepped forward to join the fray. His piercing, silver gaze swept through the crowd as he kept his maw low, lips parted to scent the air. His sleek figure, draped in a coat of lustrous, creamy fur adorned with intricate patterns, created camouflage in the dappled light of the jungle. Nearing the front of the fray, gazing into the abyssal maze, I could sense the power within him. Beta blood coursed through his veins.

I knew then he would be my fiercest competition. But I refused to let doubt cloud my mind. I had trained relentlessly, honing my agility and cultivating the fierce determination that burned within me.

“Today, we stand on the precipice of a trial that will test your mettle, your resolve, and your unwavering loyalty.” Zara’s

voice rung clear across the clearing, her tone firm and authoritative. “The time has come for the trials to begin.”

At her words, as if they were a beckoning command, the heart of the jungle roared to life. The labyrinthine maze unfolded before me like a mystical wonderland, hidden within the depths of the jungle. The air was heavy with the scent of damp earth and foliage. Magical sigils, shimmering in hues of gold, were etched into the bark of the trees, infusing the maze with the very essence of the witches’ power. Runes glowed faintly, pulsating with arcane energy, guiding the way; weaving a tapestry of enchantment throughout the atmosphere.

I strained to catch a glimpse of Zara through the sea of shifting forms. And then, our gazes locked, a connection forged in that singular moment. Her composed facade flickered, her usually impenetrable mask slipping for an instant. Within the depths of her flawless dusky features, I saw a flutter of emotion—surprise, then simmering resolve. But in an instant, she regained her composure, crushing any semblance of vulnerability. Her expression melted into a stoic facade devoid of any readable emotion. Almost as if she’d trained all her life to wipe all perceivable emotion from her face, something only a battle ridden feline would possess.

“Among you, there is one who will prove themselves worthy of the position of Lead Pounceguard,” Zara continued, her velvety voice steady, but her eyes filled with unspoken emotions flickering within her entrancing irises. “They will become my right hand, my trusted ally in the battles that lie ahead. They will be the embodiment of our feline prowess,

striking fear into the hearts of our enemies with their speed and precision.”

As the sergeant’s words resonated within the arena, murmurs of anticipation swept through the crowd. I couldn’t help but feel a surge of determination coursing through my veins. Although the battle against the hunters of the Gladsheim had been won, the shadows still concealed rogue dangers; biding their time for the opportune moment to launch an attack. As the sergeant, Zara understood the imperative to maintain her strength, necessitating the search for a worthy successor to fill the void in the Lead Pounceguard position.

This was my chance to prove myself, to earn the respect and admiration not just of Zara Nightshade, but of all who doubted my worth. I held my head high, ready to face whatever challenges lay ahead.

Zara stepped back, and the air crackled with tension. I glanced one last time at her, only to find her glare, which pierced through me like a thousand shards of ice. A shudder ran through me as the weight of her intense gaze bore down on me. It came as no surprise she was displeased to see me here, ready to challenge for a position she believed I wasn’t capable of. Her displeasure was palpable as she beheld me. The weight of her doubt hung in the air, fueling my determination to prove myself despite her skepticism.

“May the trials commence. Prove your worth, my warriors, and may the fates guide us to the one who will fill the void in

our guard's ranks," Zara concluded, her lean figure engulfed by misty shadows of her transformation.



As the anticipation in the air grew palpable, a hushed silence settled over the jungle. The faint rustling of leaves held its breath, waiting for the moment to unfold. And then, from the depths of the wilderness, came a distant, ethereal sound, carried by the wind itself.

The soft beating of magical drums reverberated through the air, their rhythm steady and alluring. Haunting flutes emitted melodies that echoed with the secrets of forgotten realms. Their poignant tunes carried the weight of untold stories. The feline warriors surged forward with a purposeful stride; their paws thundering against the ground like synchronized heartbeats. My heart pounded with a mix of excitement and apprehension, knowing this journey would test every fiber of my being.

With a steady breath, I stepped into the arena, my paws sinking into the wet soil beneath me. The silence that followed was chilling, but I pressed forward. Thorn-covered brambles reached out like grasping claws, their barbs tearing at my fur and flesh. Ignoring the stinging pain, my determination fueled every step.

Through it all, I could feel Zara's presence like a whisper in the wind. I knew then the panther alpha was observing the contestants within the lingering shadows which shuddered beneath her presence.

Honing my attention back to the objective, I followed the sergeant's lead and sank into the shadows. As if sensing the magic coursing out of me, the lively jungle wrapped me in a slur of vines, shielding me with shuddering leaves. Within the protection of the jungle, I drew upon the depths of my inner power, embracing the gift bestowed upon me by the goddess who granted my feline. Closing my eyes, I floated within my thoughts carrying me out in a gentle current, and let my consciousness expand beyond the confines of my physical form. My body shuddered as it took root.

It took a moment for my vision to clear, and I soon became a spectral presence in the realm of felines—an untethered being. With a single thought, a silent bidding command, my astral projected form soared above the dense foliage. The presence of magic tickled me as I effortlessly twisted through the trees. Hovering above the tapestry of the labyrinth, I observed the intricate pathways, marveled at the obstacles faced ahead. From this elevated perspective, my heightened senses perceived and scanned the environment, seeking the most favorable routes to take.

The very essence of the jungle whispered to me, as if revealing the secrets woven into bark, into every lashing vine and sharp thorn. I could sense the intentions of the witches who had set up these trials; their enchantments pulsed through the foliage, guiding my ethereal form.

But while my astral form possessed a heightened perception of the labyrinth as I glided with ethereal grace, I remained conscious of the vulnerability of my physical body. Even if the

forest understood the disadvantage of that, protecting me with enchantments, I had to remain alert and prepared to sink back into my consciousness and ready for an attack.

If I wanted to make use of my ability as effectively as possible, I'd have to make this quick. Using my sleek and lithe figure to my advantage, I bypassed obstacles that would've hindered my physical form. Exploring the complex maze, I glided above the other felines, earning a series of hisses as my ghostly form brought a gust of wind that alerted them of my presence. I took note to bypass treacherous traps laid out and to cunningly avoid dead ends.

My senses heightened to the maximum my ability would allow; letting me scent faint signatures of magic that lurked within the energies imbued into the foliage. They alerted me of deadly dangers, ones that would suck my life essence. My astral projection acted as a scout, providing me with valuable information and empowering me to make swift decisions.

The trials within the enchanted maze demanded not only physical prowess, but also a keen intellect and an unwavering focus. With my ability, I possessed an advantage that set me apart from my fellow competitors. I used this gift not only to navigate the labyrinth but also to strategize, staying one step ahead of the challenges that awaited me.

Drawing a conclusion, I waded my way back to my physical form, following the illuminated trail my projection left behind before latching onto a tether to reality. As I sank back into my

body, my eyes shot wide open and I drew a deep breath. Sweat broke across my forehead, followed by a deep whine.

Goddesses, I miss the crisp embrace of snowy weather to cool my heated body. Already, the high temperatures of the jungle have taken a toll on me.

With the newfound knowledge, I barreled through the intricate maze and straight to the objective. The towering waterfalls fed by the melted snow of the mountains, right where Zara had taken me before I fell into the clutches of a heat stroke. Of course she'd make it the objective. The panther alpha must've sensed I wouldn't back down from the challenge, so she knew I'd need to refresh my senses before I collapsed once more to the heat.

The ground beneath me trembled, and before I could react, massive stone pillars burst through the earth, creating a treacherous obstacle course. I leaped and dodged, using my agility to navigate the shifting platforms. Each misstep could send me plummeting into the abyss below, but I refused to let fear consume me.

The jungle seemed to possess a malevolent intelligence, challenging me at every turn. As I ventured deeper into the labyrinth, the paths became increasingly obscured, each turn leading me further into the unknown. It was then that I encountered a treacherous obstacle—a pool of quicksand seemed to materialize out of thin air. With each step, the sand clung to my fur, threatening to pull me down into its murky

depths. I fought against its grasp, shaking my body vigorously to free myself from its suffocating hold.

As I caught my breath, movement in the corner of my eye drew my attention. Sinister figures slithered through the shadows, their dark forms undulating with an eerie grace. Venomous fangs glistened in the dim light, poised to strike with lethal precision. The air crackled with danger, a silent warning of the peril that awaited me.

Retracting my steps, I knew continuing along this particular path would lead to nothing but further danger. The obstacles that lay in wait were far too perilous for me to face head-on. It was clear I needed to tap into more than just my feline senses if I wished to navigate this maze unscathed.

A sense of determination welled within me; a reminder of the gift bestowed upon me by our sacred deity. It was a power that resided within, waiting to be unleashed.

The air grew heavy with the scent of fear and pain, intermingling with the earthy aroma of the jungle. I could hear faint shouts and cries of desperation, their voices a chorus of turmoil that reverberated through the twisting corridors. Each exclamation carried with it a tinge of agony, a testament to the obstacles they encountered. The jungle itself seemed to shudder in response, its ancient trees quivering as if in sympathy for the defeated.

Vines wrapped around the trunks of trees clung to bark, then trembled to life. They moved like snakes, twisting with a mind of their own brought forth by an enchantment, and beckoned

to test their mettle. With a breath to fuel my determination, I took cautious steps through them, thanking the deities above that I'd avoided the vipers in the obstacle beside this one.

As I emerged into the center of the maze, my heart eased as I encountered the brisk, cooling breeze carried over. The witches must've set up a teleportation spell as I felt the remnant of magic brush my face. Over the years, I'd heard stories my kind whispered about what lay within the shimmering cracks of stone behind the falls. I'd read about a hidden chamber, a secret ethereal sanctuary guarded by powerful enchantments.

Before me, a breathtaking sight unfolded—a majestic waterfall nestled amidst snow-capped mountains. As the waters descended, they transformed into a translucent veil of liquid diamonds, each droplet reflecting the brilliance of the sun. Approaching the edge of the waterfall, the cool droplets kissed my fur, teasing me with their icy touch. They beckoned me to enter their embrace, to surrender to the allure of transformation. Yielding to their call, I allowed myself to enter.

The rush of water was refreshing against my heated body, and I relished in the cooling sensations. I had to fight off the surge of emotions it evoked within me. The cool temperature of the water forced me to shift to my human form, bidding me to bask in the sensations even as my entire body trembled. I glanced toward the rocks lining the edge of the pool. There, as if placed with intention, lay a set of attire—garments that seemed to have been left for this very moment. With gratitude

for the unseen hands that had prepared this gift, I swiftly changed into the clothing. The fabric molded to my form, providing comfort and freedom of movement.

I was easily brought back to the alpha. Her hand wrapped around my throat, my thighs chafing. A breathy moan parted my lips and my core clenched at the memory.

Even as she belittled me, the sheer power she held over me was unlike anything I'd ever experienced. It awakened my body to her touch, wishing she would command me to her bidding and allow my body to bask in pleasure. I would writhe beneath her touch, crumble into the nothingness she sees within me.

"I should've figured you'd cheat your way through the maze." A voice startled me from the vision, and I gasped.

Pulling my hand from between my thighs, my brows furrowed as I took a step back, squinting through the darkness. A powerful figure emerged, stepping into the light, and I quickly recognized him as the beta that brought murmurs from the crowd.

He seemed to have no reaction to the subtle arousal lingering in the atmosphere. Was he mated?

He smirked as he surveyed me, his teeth bared in a primal display of dominance. I shuddered in his presence, but not in fear or submission. Never the latter. A fiery sense of determination cut through the frost, bidding me to square my stance.

His gaze held a certain arrogance, a confidence that stemmed from his belief in my supposed inferiority as an omega. I refused to let his taunts distract me.

A reverberating growl within the shadows pulled my death glare from his figure. The sound belonged to a displeased alpha, and I was reminded we were being spectated by her, by the panther alpha, Zara.

Ignoring her blazing presence, I lunged forward in a swift motion, engaging the beta in an unforgiving dance of combat. My snow leopard surged with primal instincts, but I refused to shift, choosing to wait for the advantageous opportunity to overpower his leopard with my own. Yet, as we clashed, his movements became fluid and overwhelming.

Our growls and roars echoed off the stone walls of the chamber, trembling the atmosphere. My curled fists and swift feet became extensions of my ferocious will, cutting through the air with precision. It was a dance of aggression. Years of training had honed my skills as I'd worked to mold myself into a formidable fighter. Every blow was infused with pent-up frustration of being undermined and underestimated by my fellow feline comrades.

Now, he was among those few. Who did this feline think he was to step into the field and challenge for the position? I'd only seen him a handful of times on the field. He was arrogant enough to believe he didn't require the extensive training. That his blood status would be enough to earn him what he desired.

This was my moment to prove myself—to prove them all wrong. What ran through my blood wasn't what mattered or determined where I belonged in this world. It was my will, my drive to rightfully earn what I desired.

Aiming for the tender and vulnerable spots on his body, my fist shot forward, targeting his ribs and abdomen. Each connection sounded with a loud smack, a cathartic expression of my determination as I released heavy breaths. The beta was built sturdy, with sinewy muscle as every hit reverberated through my knuckles and shot up my arm.

Exhilaration coursed through my veins as he backed up. But I was on him in an instant.

A powerful blow landed squarely on his jaw, snapping his head to the side. The crack of bone followed by the spitting of blood echoed throughout the chamber, a victorious symphony of success. In that fleeting moment, I relished in the feeling of vindication.

My body was fueled by the feeling, and it felt like icy pin prickles across my skin. I launched a powerful roundhouse kick toward his thigh, aiming to disrupt his balance, and it brought him to his knees. The impact of his body hitting the ground rumbled in the chamber, and a satisfied smirk decorated my face.

I fucking got him.

But fate was a fickle mistress, and victory slipped through my grasp like a shadow in the night.

As the dust settled, my opponent rose, wiping the blood from his lips, and a deranged chuckle emitted from him, disturbing me. His glowing, silver eyes settled on me, his leopard glaring back at my stark figure.

“Impressive,” he taunted, his words dripping with condescension. “I was expecting less of a fight from you. Do you honestly believe you can challenge me? I can overpower you with a command. Sure, I may not be an alpha, but I have more than enough power to subdue you.”

“Fuck you and your beliefs,” I retorted, spitting on the ground. “I’d like to see you try.”

As he straightened, rolling out the tension from his massive shoulders, an aura of raw energy swirled around him. The space between us darkened, the force leaking into the atmosphere. The air grew heavy to breathe in as a weighty presence settled on my chest.

My heart pounded with a mix of fear and anticipation. The beta male shifted into a state between human and beast, a manifestation of our strongest form—our primal essence.

The sinewy strength of his limbs became more pronounced, his body seemingly sculpted from the very essence of predators. A metamorphosis took hold of his face, features sharpening and becoming angular. The razor-sharp claws that jutted from his cuticles glinted in the dim light, a formidable arsenal capable of rending flesh and crushing bone.

His scent spiked with a distinctive musky aroma. A blend of the earthy notes of a clouded leopard and the powerful

undertones of something more. It was a testament to the deep well of power that lay within him, a palpable presence that set him apart. His eyes surveyed my reaction with an intensity that sent a shiver down my spine.

I knew then that I was facing a force far beyond my own.

He was not just a mere clouded leopard shifter; he was a hybrid, a being who shared the blood of a panther.

“Little omega,” he hissed, his voice dripping with arrogance. “You have strength within you.” With two steps, he closed the distance between us, seizing my throat with a vice-like grip, his claws digging into my flesh. “But it pales in comparison to the power I possess.”

Panic surged through my veins as I struggled against his relentless hold; the threat of asphyxiation tightening like a suffocating grip around me. He lifted me off the ground and my feet kicked beneath me in protest. My eyes bugged out as my vision blurred. I couldn't take in a breath to compose myself and think of a way out of this predicament.

A hybrid was a rarity in our world. They're a convergence of bloodlines which brought forth exceptional power. This beta was a clash of it, a force to be reckoned with, and I was terribly outmatched as he was a testament to this truth.

Desperately attempting to free myself from his powerful grasp, I fought with every ounce of strength within me. My heart pounded as I struggled to find an opening. With swift reflexes, I reached for his arm, attempting to use leverage against him. I twisted his wrist and tried to bend his elbow,

hoping to weaken his grip. But he resisted, his strength overpowering my attempts.

Time seemed to slow down as I fought against the suffocating hold. I knew I needed a decisive move, a final gambit. I kicked and twisted, attempting to break free from his clutches. My fingers clawed at his forearm, leaving shallow trails of crimson upon his rippling flesh, but it was futile; his hold remained steadfast, his strength overwhelming.

My lungs burned for air, my vision flickering at the edges as darkness threatened to consume me. Panic surged through my veins, mingling with the taste of defeat. I refused to let this be the end, to succumb to the brutal force of his power.

In that critical instant, when my very life hung in the balance, salvation arrived in an unexpected form.

An authoritative voice pierced through the atmosphere, cutting through the air like a blade.

“Enough, beta,” Zara’s voice resonated with a commanding force, an alpha’s presence that brooked no resistance. “Release her.” Her words carried the weight of centuries of dominance, echoing through the chamber with an undeniable authority.

As if caught in a spell, the beta male froze; his grip on my throat loosened. His eyes flickered with a mixture of frustration and submission, the power of Zara’s alpha command breaking the suffocating hold he had on me.

Gasping for precious air, I crumbled to my knees, trembling with the remnants of fear and adrenaline. Zara’s presence

enveloped the atmosphere with palpable energy. I looked up as I remained hunched over on my knees, my gaze connecting with her steely, serpent-green irises.

The disappointment etched across her features was palpable, the anger simmering beneath the surface. It was a look that cut through me, stirring a mix of guilt and frustration within my chest.

In a voice filled with a restrained fury, Zara announced his victory. Her words hung heavy in the air, mingling with the bitterness of my defeat. I slammed my clenched fist against the unforgiving ground; the impact reverberating through my body like a bitter frostbite of anger. The searing cold shot up my arm, numbing my senses with its icy grip, offering a temporary respite from the tumultuous storm within.

I fought with all my might; every fiber of my being stretched to its limit. Yet, in the end, it was the beta feline who emerged triumphant. The taste of defeat was bitter on my tongue, and my heart sank.

Amidst my despair, my brother appeared at my side, a beacon of solace.

He knelt beside me, concern etched upon his face, and gently helped me up. Wrapping a cloak around my weary frame, he whispered an apology, his voice heavy with regret. I averted my gaze, my anger simmering within me as I noticed his bruised eye swelled shut from the treacherous trail we had traversed.

Despite my anger, deep down, I cherished my brother and appreciated his unwavering support. I knew I was fortunate to have him by my side. He was the last connection to our sister, a companion in this journey of loss and resilience.

Recklessly entering the trials, I had disobeyed Sargeant Zara's orders. Now, the consequences of my actions loomed before me, threatening to strip away everything I had worked for.

Fear swirled in my mind like a tempest, casting shadows upon the ember of connection I felt with Zara. Though our encounter the other day had stirred a forbidden longing within me, it was entangled with the trepidation of what might come next—the possibility of expulsion from the feline army.

The conflicting emotions tore at my heart. I yearned for the passion and connection I had shared with Zara, yet I couldn't shake the sense of impending doom that clung to our liaison. It was a forbidden fruit I had tasted, an intoxicating brew of emotions that left me both exhilarated and terrified.

As I pondered the uncertain future that awaited me, I couldn't help but wonder if the flame of passion would be enough to withstand the storms that loomed ahead. She firmly believed, as an omega, I didn't belong in the ranks. That conviction tainted what little sliver of hope was left within me.

The weight of it all settled upon my shoulders, threatening to crush my spirit. But amidst the desolation, a flicker of determination ignited within me. I refused to let this defeat

define me. I would rise from this setback, even if it meant starting from the bottom.

CHAPTER FOUR

Between Fire and Passion

Evangeline

Nightmares, cruel mistresses of the night, weaved dark tapestries of torment within the depths of slumber. They resurrected buried pain, dragging us back to our darkest moments, like vengeful ghosts.

Curse the bloody god that instilled them in our fragile forms.

Within the dream, I struggled to project my spiritual form toward the looming danger, but an enchantment held me captive. My spiritual and physical selves bound together, rendering me powerless. Omega shifters' agonized screams echoed through the night, a tragic symphony that pierced my soul and left it shredded.

Amidst the chaos, visions of my sister, Amara, emerged with an ethereal glow—a beacon of life against the cruel embrace of death. She was my soul's essence, my confidante in this merciless world. Yet, she was torn from me, her image fading into death's embrace.

In that fleeting moment, a bitter realization struck—I was left with mere echoes of her presence, haunted memories of what once was. This vision, a cruel mirage of hope and loss, forever etched upon my shattered soul.



With a gasp, I awoke, drenched in a cold sweat; the nightmare's icy grip lingered even in reality. The lines between dream and waking world blurred, merging into a surreal tapestry of uncertainty. Darkness dissipated, yet fear and anguish still echoed through my being.

Desperation clung like a second skin as I sought truth amidst twisted illusions. Shadows danced in my home, urging me to clear my head with a walk. With my mother asleep, I descended from the mountain heights to find solace in the jungle canopies. Few ventured here, and the territory underwent renewal like a phoenix rising from ashes—a sanctuary for my troubled spirit.

Each step down the treacherous terrain was a careful dance. My paws found rhythm, echoing my resolute heartbeat. The air softened, as if nature sensed my yearning. Relief sighed from my lips as I left the desolation behind, moving toward the blossoming hope below.

Before my eyes, the landscape transformed. Green sprouts emerged, defying cracked earth—a symbol of resilience that refused to be extinguished. Approaching the canopies, the symphony of reconstruction greeted me. Hammers struck nails, harmonizing with nature's melodies. Canopies once broken, now revived, adorned with fresh leaves, breathing new life into war-worn structures.

Stepping into this evolving sanctuary, calm washed over me like a soothing breeze. Pine mingled with earthy scents,

invigorating my senses and igniting purpose. Along the perimeter, I paced, protecting and reflecting.

Lost in turmoil, I wandered, grief's weight still clinging. The world mirrored my internal tempest as nature itself embraced chaos. Each step became liberation, a rejection of despair's grip.

"You're making me dizzy with the crossfire of your thoughts, snow princess." Zara's voice from within the shadows startled me, and I pivoted on my heels to locate her. Her tall, lithe figure emerged, making me swallow thickly. "Reign them in before I'm forced to do it for you." Heat coursed through me at the sight of the enigmatic panther, then a thrum of apprehension. "With permission, of course," she chuckled.

"Would you stop calling me that?" I grumbled, rolling my eyes. Then I straightened, nibbling my lip, and said, "Sergeant."

Zara regarded me silently, a smirk curling those cruel lips.

"If you're here to expel me, I'm not leaving." I crossed my arms defensively. "Here is where I belong. Protecting the nests, the canopies, this is my duty." I stand firm. "Don't take this from me."

Zara's intense gaze unsettled me, as if she could see into the depths of my emotions. She approached, her rich, dusky brown complexion radiating a warmth that resonated with the earth. Her soft footsteps contrasted with the turmoil within me.

“I’m not here to remove you, Evangeline.” Her words eased me, but a sense of unease lingered. “But I am here to talk about your reckless actions entering the trails. You risked yourself and others...explain yourself.”

Her words weighed heavily upon me, fueling the fire within my heart. Stepping forward, I met her stance, taking in her commanding aura and intoxicating scent.

“Every shifter, including omegas, has a right to prove themselves.” I gritted my teeth.

“We are warriors, snow princess, and we strategize every move,” Zara muttered with resolve. “Acting on impulse only leads to suffering.”

The embers of passion flickered, igniting a fire that burned brightly.

“I’ve fought, bled, and trained relentlessly to prove my worth,” I snarled. “You won’t trample upon my purpose.”

Zara’s patience wore thin, and her frustration smoldered in the air. She closed in, seizing the base of my jaw and pulling me against her body.

“You disregard my orders again and again.” Her cruel chuckle escaped those plush lips, igniting a fiery thread of awareness. “Must I remind you of the power I hold over you, Evangeline?”

“I won’t be confined to the shadows.”

Zara’s hum merged with a purr, entwining with my essence. She led me to the secluded shade of bowing trees, pivoting me

and pressing me against their bark. Squirming under her grip, I sensed her reveling in the power she held over me.

“This darkness will consume you,” she murmured, tracing my cheeks. My lids closed, the flesh between my thighs trembling with anticipation. “I’ll reel, watching you writhe beneath its weight. Begging for my mercy.”

Her words sent a shiver through me, realizing we were no longer on the same subject.

“You wouldn’t understand my pain, what fuels my purpose,” I whispered, clenching my eyes as emotions rippled through me.

“I can feel it, Evangeline.”

“What?” I met her gaze.

“Your turmoil was a beacon.” Her demeanor softens, and I draw in every word she utters. “I followed the static of your thoughts, your teetering emotions.”

“Is that what your gift is?” I asked.

“Yes,” she answered.

“Can you shut these feelings off for me, then?” I scoffed dryly.

“I can interpret them.” She gave me a lopsided smile. “You need it.” At that, she had my full attention. “The weight of past regrets can become a heavy burden. I’ve shown no remorse to those I’ve slaughtered, but it comes with a heavy price. The echo of their emotions. The anguish felt by their families.”

Her voice was tinged with a haunting tone. It revealed something I'd never witnessed within her—the slivers of compassion as she dropped her facade for a moment.

“I had to shut off a side of myself, to bury the empathy that threatened to consume me,” Zara continued. “You must find a balance—a way to channel your fierce spirit without sacrificing your sanity.”

“I can't shut myself off like you can,” I grumbled, my voice laced with a tinge of resentment. “You're cruel and heartless, blind to the blizzard that rages within me.”

“Then you must embrace the darkness lingering around you.” A wicked smile curled upon Zara's lips. Her breathy whisper brushed against the softness of mine, tantalizing me with the taste of the darkness she spoke of. “Step into the shadows with me, Evangeline,” she urged, her voice carrying the weight of frosty command.

The allure was undeniable, and for a fleeting moment, I found myself frozen, almost preening at the touch of her words. The shadows beckoned, promising liberation from the confines of my snowflake existence.

“You'll devour me, won't you?” I whispered, my voice barely audible, as if lost amidst the gusts of a winter wind.

Zara's irises glowed with an ethereal light, the very atmosphere around her shifting with an intensity that mirrored the storm within me. A wave of emotions crashed over me, clinging to my skin before sinking deep within my core. Fear,

like a blizzard's bitter chill. Petrification, akin to being trapped in ice. Desire, a scorching flame amidst the frost.

My turmoil was a battle to preserve the fire within me, defying the icy limitations. Zara's offer to step into the shadows beckoned, a seductive invitation to embrace power. To allow the blizzard to consume and transform me.

Yet, surrender meant losing myself, letting the blizzard devour my essence.

I stood on the precipice, torn between the fiery allure and the resilient frost within.

"Only if you ask," she replied, her head tilting ever so slightly. Closing the distance between us, she embraced the swirling currents of our forbidden desires. The darkness within her resonated with the blizzard within me, their collision promising a tempestuous union.

I was taken aback as Zara drew me forward, hand at my hip, the other sinking into my hair, and she kissed me. The cloud of emotion she summoned over me recoiled, leaving a single thread behind. It curled around my entity, demanding to be felt. Desire. Lust. Want. The need to have her.

Zara handled me with a gentle caress, a fragile touch that held the weight of a lifetime of longing. In that single moment, the world around us ceased to exist. There was only Zara and me, intertwined in a dance of vulnerability and forbidden passion.

My pussy clenched and throbbed beneath the attention. Her tongue, commanding and demanding, pushed past the seam of my lips. She ensnared me, filling me with the taste of her, leaving me desiring for more.

At that moment, I understood what she meant. It was her darkness she wished to see me writhe beneath. And I would. I'd crumble beneath its weight, relishing the feeling as it consumed me—she consumed me. Because I would have her. She'd taken the choice from me, out of my hands, and would put me out of this misery.

I'd only ever been with an alpha after I awakened as an omega. Before then I used to mingle with betas. Once the omega blood settled, all I ever craved was an alpha. Even then, the one alpha I'd entertained wasn't able to quell that craving. She couldn't handle the frost within me, for she feared its bite.

Is Zara prepared for it?

As I thrust my hips forward, aiming to challenge her authority within the ensnare of passion, she shoved back just as hard. A growl reverberated in her throat, rumbling from deep within her chest. It coiled around me, and I shuddered with arousal.

Seemed like she was capable of handling it.

Tapping my outer thighs, she gestured for me to spread. The heat between my thighs responded, pulsating my clit. Zara fit herself between the apex of my legs, shoving a thigh forward. A greedy little whine left my lips, and I ground down on her, pulling from the kiss to gasp a breath.

This was so wrong. But fuck, I craved it.

As she trailed kisses over my jaw, my muscles clenched, thumping beneath my cheekbone. The overwhelming feeling to close my eyes and relish in the sensations gripped me, but I wanted to be present, watching her every move.

“Do you lure all your omegas into the depths of your shadows?” I whispered, struggling to contain a gasp as her fingers slipped beneath the fabric of my shirt, tracing a tantalizing path over the underside of my breast.

“Only the ones who beg.” Her tone carried a hint of smoky desire as her fingers danced along my heated flesh. My nipples pulled taut beneath the intoxicating attention. Shivers traveled down my spine; her words tempted me to surrender to the forbidden allure.

“I won’t give in to you,” I choked out, my voice strangled with a mix of desire and defiance.

Zara’s mouth moved to the delicate spot of my neck, softly trailing her lips over my flesh, and I shuddered under the attention.

“No, you won’t.” Her words dripped with a potent combination of dominance and a sinister edge.

I quivered.

“You’ll be writhing.”

The air around us crackled with the electric charge of an impending blizzard, as if the frost itself conspired to keep us apart. But the allure of her temptation melted the icy barriers

encasing my heart, and I could no longer resist the magnetic pull drawing us together. In that frozen moment, time stood still, the world encapsulated in a wintry hush.

It was as if the warmth of her touch ignited a blazing inferno amidst the snow-covered landscape of our forbidden desires. In that stolen embrace, I willingly succumbed to the frostbite, knowing the transient beauty of our connection would forever be etched in the icy tapestry of my memories.

As the flames of desire engulfed me, I surrendered to the darkness that pulsed within Zara. Her fingers cupped my breast, brushing her thumb over the peak of my nipple and pulling it taut in a pinch. She distracted me, or rather fed me the sensations coursing through my body at her touch as her tongue stroked mine in slow, tenacious swirls. It teased what she wished to do to the bud as she rolled my nipple between her fingers. With a panted whine, I preened.

I became intoxicated by the raw power that emanated from her. As she kissed me, her greedy fingers tugged off the fleecy material of my shirt from my figure, exposing my flesh to the heated climate. Off came my shorts as she peeled them from my skin, discarding them in the foliage. I moved to do the same to her, wishing to see her bared to me, but her hand took possession of my wrist, seizing it and pinning it to the bark.

Before I could react, Zara dipped her free hand over my panties, pressing her forehead to mine to gaze into my eyes, savoring my reaction. My lips parted, and so did my thighs.

As she felt my arousal that left a wet spot on the material, I sank into the darkness she fed into me. “You were anticipating this, omega, weren’t you?” She smirked, already knowing my answer.

It was in Zara’s presence that I could explore the untamed and primal aspects of my nature; embracing the submissive whispers that resided at the core of my being.

The tearing sound of my underwear reached my ears, and she pulled away to bring a nipple into her mouth. Her tongue curled around it, her teeth grazed in a teasing bite. The prickle shot down to meet the ache pulsating between my legs, and with her free hand, she grabbed my thigh to spread me. Cool air met my heated flesh, caressing my pussy.

Zara gazed at me through hooded lids as she dropped to her knees. She locked me in, bidding me to remain present. Amidst the tangled passion, doubts crept in. Was I merely a pawn in Zara’s game, fulfilling her desires, or did she truly see beyond the confines of my omega status? With her hands at my waist, she trailed kisses down to my navel, her destination mere inches from her lips. The answer eluded me, clouded by the heat of our entangled desires.

The rough texture of Zara’s tongue grated over the flesh of my pussy, splaying my folds with her fingers. She swiped that tenacious muscle over the bud of my clit. Heat rippled from my core as my hips rolled to meet her pressure. She hooked around my clit and my breath faltered, parted lips spilling whispered gasps.

My eyes were about to flutter shut when a squeeze of her hand at my thigh drew me to peer at her between my thighs.

Great heavens, the alpha was on her knees...for me.

Through her hooded lids there was a silent command, and as darkness swirled around her, the teetering presence of submission lingered, threatening to consume me at her command.

Zara leaned in; her shoulders forced me to part my legs further, and she nestled herself in. As she curled her tongue to slurp my pussy, the tip of her nose pressed to my clit, and she shook her head.

I groaned as her tongue eased into my channel, then switched to a relentless onslaught, flicking in and out of my channel. My hands sank into her hair, not to hold her in place, but to ground myself to reality as my mind fluttered to the clouds. A shudder rippled across my skin, pleasurable sensations curled around my waist and lashed my nerve endings.

My entire body felt as though it were set aflame, and the panther relishing the taste of my pussy ignited the embers within me. Our eyes met, and through the hypnotizing contact, she blew over my clit and reveled in the way I crumbled. She produced an addictive sound, a mix between a purr and a possessive rumble. It wrapped around my entity, curling around my waist, and sank into my belly to lash at my tender spots.

The commanding power her dominance held over me pinned me down, bidding me to become victim to her onslaught of pleasure. The scent of her, that addictive aroma I could taste on my tongue, nearly sent me over the edge. I crumbled in her grip, and I wished to bring her to that precipice as she had me. To the brink of insanity. But all my attention honed in on the sensations she brought upon my body, my reactions not belonging to me anymore as they were under her control—her command.

All the blood rushed to my throbbing pussy, my pulsating clit stimulated by the rumble of her throat. And yet, it wasn't enough to bring me closer to the edge I wished to toss myself from.

Zara nibbled at my clit with delicate teeth, teasing me. She pulled away, replacing her mouth with the warmth of her hand. My body writhed, my pelvis kicked forward to scrape the heel of her palm, only for her to pull away. A throaty whine left me, and she chuckled at the sound. Peering down at her, she seemed to relish in my suffering. In bringing me so damn close to the edge only to reel me back in. The tension in my belly became almost painful.

Sensing my frustration, Zara kicked my left leg over her shoulder, then I felt the cold graze of her fingers skimming my soaked folds. Anticipation bit my nerves, and as my hips rolled, I sank down onto those digits. They gyrated inside the warmth of my pussy, and the suction of her mouth found my engorged clit. A satisfied moan left my lips as she curled into the ridge in my channel, sinking her fingers to the hilt.

Warmth collected in my abdomen, my contracting muscles spasming. From my curled toes began an uncontrollable trembling. As I struggled to suppress my moans, my channel bathed her in my arousal. The orgasm unraveled, traveling up my spine to envelop my limbs in warmth. Flashes of white filled my vision as my back arched off the support of the tree, leaving Zara to hold me upright.

The panther showed me mercy as she pulled the ecstasy of her mouth from my pussy, allowing me to ride out the high on her curling fingers buried deep inside me.

“That’s a good girl.”

My body savored the aftershocks of the orgasm. And at her words, I was nearly brought to another. The sound of her curling fingers vibrating inside me, the obscene squelching, filled the atmosphere. My nerves fired up all at once.

“Zara, please,” I whined. “What if someone sees?”

“They know better than to interfere, snow.” She chuckled. “But we both know the filthy omega loves to be watched. Do you wish to be rutted?”

Fuck.

Too much.

Too little.

Not enough.

The sensations crowded in my mind.

“Yes, alpha.” I gasped, surprised at the admission.

“There’s my submissive.” She smirked.

Slowly and tentatively, she pulled out her fingers, only to shove them back in, spilling a whine from me. “You’ll come when I tell you to. Beg when it pleases my ears. The moment I feel this pussy clench, I’ll know you’re close. Disobey my commands and I’ll punish you. Sweet omega, don’t forget I can seize control of your emotions.”

I knew then the extent of her power. Dare I test it? Biting my lip, I let out a soft whimper and nodded in silent acknowledgment.

As Zara rose, her figure loomed over me, casting a shadow that engulfed my frame. With a commanding presence, she hoisted me into her grip, her touch firm and unyielding. My heart raced, both with anticipation and a flicker of fear. The intensity in her eyes matched the darkness that cloaked her, an enigmatic aura that sent shivers down my spine.

“What are you doing?” I managed to stammer out.

“Hold tight, Evangeline,” she commanded, her voice resonating with an undeniable authority.

With a calculated grace, she settled herself on a fallen tree stump, its surface adorned with soft foliage. As I found myself perched on her lap, the contrast of her commanding presence and the delicate embrace of nature beneath us intensified the swirling emotions within me.

“I’m going to fuck you now.” She gripped my cheeks between her fingers, commanding my attention, and I felt the

weight of her dominance pressed against my very core. “And you’re going to resist the urge to orgasm.”

Zara’s words echoed in my ears; a sinister promise veiled in darkness. The predatory gleam in her eyes danced with shadows, igniting a dangerous desire within me.

As she leaned closer, her cruel lips curled into a smile that sent shivers down my spine. She took the advantage of my parted lips to silence me with her tongue, a foreboding hint of the storm to come.

CHAPTER FIVE

A Dance of Shadows and Frost

Zara

Heat flushed her cheeks, painting them pink against her porcelain skin. This omega on my lap was a sight to behold—mine to corrupt. Leaning forward, I wrapped my lips around the pulse thudding at her throat, sucking on it.

Evangeline moaned, a sound so sexy my pussy ached to graze her own, melding our arousals. Thrusting her hips forward, the little leopard ground on me, tossing her head back as her clit scraped the material of my cargo shorts that clung to my thigh.

“That’s it,” I eased.

She’d been hesitant, a whiff of fear latching onto her as her turmoil came to a brink. What she was afraid of, I wasn’t entirely sure, but I knew it was of me. I could be gentle when need be, but when it came to this omega, it took everything within me not to rut her. Seeing her fighting her instincts to give in, to submit to me, surged a forbidden longing within me. It ignited my spirit as I wished to crush hers with my dark, scorching flames, with my commanding presence alone.

Latching on to her hand, I guided her slim fingers on to the waistline of my underwear. Her fingertips traced the outside of my thighs as she pulled the material off me. Her icy blue eyes filled with lust, lips parted as her gaze roamed over my bare torso, mesmerized by the sinewy muscle that rippled beneath

my taut skin. As they finally found the triangle between my thighs, her breath hitched with a delicate gasp.

Her fingers instinctively reached out to trace the fine lines of my stomach. The leopard drank in the sight of me. I broke her trance, sliding my hand to the back of her neck and pulling her into a sloppy kiss. It was all clashing teeth and swiping tongues, a throaty moan building from the back of her throat.

Thrumming my ability over her consciousness, I felt her lust mix with a hint of trepidation. And yet, an undeniable attraction bloomed between us like a rare orchid in a forgotten corner of the forest.

Evangeline's heart pounded like a captive bird cradled within the cavity of her chest as I guided her onto my lap, spreading her thighs as I nestled our pussies together. At the contact of our heated flesh, a groan rippled through my chest, and her swirling tongue stilled in my mouth.

Fuck, she feels like liquid lust.

My arms encircled Evangeline's waist. With a firm, yet gentle touch, I pulled her closer to fit her into the contours between our thighs as if we were two halves of a whole.

Evangeline pulled away, shuddering at the sensations as she ground her pussy down against me.

The sugary, addictive scent of her arousal filled my senses, making me lick my lips to savor the remnants of it. Her scent of soft vanilla and white musk wrapped around me like a silken cloak. It awakened an unquenchable hunger, drawing

me closer to Evangeline, and ignited a fierce flame of devotion.

Her folds glided over my own, and as I guided her hips into a rhythm, she squeezed down on my thigh with her legs, her fingernails digging into my hips for purchase. As Evangeline's head tossed back, moans painting the atmosphere, I relished in watching her barriers crumble.

“Zara,” she gasped.

The darkness which tainted my soul stirred, and the urge to pulse a thread of power over her overcame me. But I fought against it. I had to be patient.

Leaning forward, I took a nipple into my mouth, softly nibbling at the tender flesh of her areola before suctioning the peak. At the sight of her writhing, her gorgeous blond hair spilling over her shoulder, I allowed a single thread of my ability free to intertwine with her essence. It grazed her, which allowed me to feel the sensations coursing through her and understand the shadows of her thoughts.

She was resisting me.

Resisting that urge to submit, the primal instinct clawing at her.

A low grumbled moan vibrated through her, coming from deep within her throat. I trailed my fingers up her waist, over the curve of her spine, and watched as goosebumps popped on her flesh. So fucking responsive. My hand sank into her hair, and as I licked at her nipple, I admired her sharp jaw tilting

back beneath the pressure of my command and exposing her delicate throat.

I released the suction of my mouth to move to her neck, my fangs elongated from desire. Evangeline shuddered as they skimmed the base of her throat; the ghost of what was to come, what was to be desired. Her total and utter submission to me, and with it, the reward of a bite, a claim—*my* claim.

My ability surged from the anticipation, and my panther rumbled with a purr. Heat glistened her flesh and her clit pulsed over mine. The idea aroused her, and yet, she resists. I could sense it, her inner turmoil. She wouldn't allow herself to succumb.

Narrowing my gaze, I reached out to her entity, extending threads of my energy toward the leopard. With a whisper of a thought, I bid that ember of desire to ignite, to intensify, hoping the lustful flame would engulf her entity. I yearned for her submission to me, for that unbridled, passionate allure to consume her.

I could sense the sensations washing over her like a forest fire. And yet, Evangeline fought against them. She ground down on my pussy with purpose, as if fueled, and tears brimmed her eyes as her thighs trembled from the coursing sensations.

Her resistance was a tempestuous storm, and it kindled the dark flame which lit my entity in her presence. It was in her defiance—her unwavering determination not a single soul

could match—that I discovered an exhilarating fervor that ignited my own desires.

I pressed closer, our pebbled nipples brushing and my breath mingled with hers, as I whispered, “That’s it. That’s a good girl. Let go of your inhibitions.” My voice dripped with a commanding allure, enveloping her in its darkened aura.

Evangeline’s eyes, a turbulent blend of defiance and smoldering lust, locked onto mine with an unwavering gaze. They held a silent challenge, a silent declaration of her determination to resist. But within their depths, a flicker of crumbling resolve danced, hinting at the intoxicating seductiveness of surrender.

I surveyed her, captivated by the battle unfolding within her.

In that instant, a realization washed over me—a craving that defined my desire for omegas. I had spent far too long entangled with easily submissive souls. Those who yielded effortlessly to my commands and surrendered without hesitation. None of them possessed a spark, a blazing fire within their very being. None were comparable to her—Evangeline.

Her frost fire illuminated with such intensity that I feared the icy touch of frostbite. Yet, I would willingly embrace the sting if it meant having her at my feet. I vowed to claim her as my own.

She squeezed her eyes shut, wrapping an arm around my shoulder. Sweat broke across her hairline, and she whimpered, bleeding moans.

“Look at me, Evangeline.” I gazed up at her, her hips rolling down onto mine, our clits scraping.

“Stop it,” she grumbled. “Stop looking at me like that.”

“Like what?” I chuckled, a low rumble in the charged atmosphere. My gaze darkened, reflecting the depths of my desires.

“Like you wish for me to submit to you. Stop that. I refuse to succumb.”

A wicked grin formed on my face as I leaned in. “I don’t merely *wish*, snowflake.” I cradled the back of her head, drawing her closer as my voice filled with a dangerous edge. “I desire you to submit. And I’ll have what I want, even if I must crush it from you.”

Her gaze widened, revealing dilated pupils that swallowed the vibrant color of her irises. The glacial blue hue, reminiscent of her snow leopard, encircled her gaze. The sight pleased my primal instincts; knowing I held her feline’s attention captive beneath the intensity of my unwavering lustful glare.

It was the primal connection between predator and prey that ignited within me, fueling the fire that burned beneath my skin.

The slick from our pussies created a delicious mess, and with every scrape of our clits, the sensations drew her closer to the edge. Heat flooded her cheeks, staining them, and she whimpered. Her breasts bounced as she increased the intensity

of her grinding. Leaning on my elbows, I slowly matched her rhythm, choosing to admire the beauty chasing her euphoria.

I could feel her pulsating clit over mine, her channel bathing me, and it took every restraint within me not to flip us over and deliver her to the realm of pleasure. Heavy moans bled from her. Her clawed fingertips dug into the flesh of my waist. For now, I'd allow her to guide herself to that extreme, to find her ecstasy in this moment.

With a thrust forward, rocking against her over and over again, fitting her over my pussy like a puzzle piece, I brought her closer. As her eyes rolled back, a thrum of satisfaction coursed through me. Shudders swept over her, tightening her muscles and hitching her breaths.

“Let go, snow princess. Come for me.” I breathed over her tender flesh, blowing cool air over her.

Her spine arched, thrusting her breasts in my face, and a strangled scream parted her lips. Her hips halted their rhythm, but I seized control of them and ground her to me. Gyrate her hips, I rode out her orgasm for her, watching as she completely shattered.

Hot arousal flooded from her, bathing our thighs in her pleasure. Leaning forward, I took her into a kiss and absorbed every last sound she emitted, like it belonged to me and only me. Her body twitched, and she leaned into me, her tongue gliding over mine as she writhed because of me.

The intensity of lust ebbed between us, and Evangeline pulled away, her breath mingling with my own. Her icy blue

eyes flickered with defiance, and it intertwined with the passion she held in them.

“I’m not one to break, Zara,” she whispered, and my hand on her hip shifted to squeeze her thigh. “Stop trying. You’ll never have me.”

Drawing closer, I tucked a strand of her hair behind her ear, brushing my lips over the soft curve of it. “Barriers are meant to be broken. Walls are meant to crumble. Believe you’re unbreakable all you want, snow princess. You’re a challenge I’m willing to face.” What little space left between us crackled with anticipation and Evangeline’s eyes fluttered shut in response, surrendering to the tantalizing sensations. “However formidable your barriers might be, I’ll have them crumbling before me, and you’ll bare that pretty neck for my claim.”

My hand tangled in her hair, tugging back so she was forced to expose her delicacy, and I licked a path down her throat. Her breath hitched and the heat of her pelvis ground on my thigh, the bud of her clit throbbing on my flesh.

“Do not mistake my intentions, Evangeline. I don’t seek to only possess you, but to unlock that submissive essence concealed within you.” My voice dipped into a low, velvety murmur. “When you finally surrender and submit to your nature, you’ll find ecstasy.”

CHAPTER SIX

Embers in the Snow

Five Days Later...

Evangeline

Standing amidst the sprawling training grounds, the sun's golden rays cast a golden sheen upon the courtyard. Silky strands of my blond hair cascaded down my shoulders, glinting like spun gold in the sunlight. My porcelain skin appeared ethereal, a stark contrast to the strength that lay dormant within.

The starkness of my appearance had become a cruel inhibitor, casting me as an outcast among the warrior ranks. Unlike my brother, blessed with sun-kissed skin that effortlessly blended with his surroundings, I struggled to hold even the faintest hint of a tan. The relentless rays of the sun turned my skin a fiery shade, leaving me resembling a ripe tomato at the end of each training session.

The scent of moist earth and fiery determination clung to the air, mingling with the anticipation that crackled like electricity around me. An air of urgency swept through the ranks like a whispering breeze, drawing my attention to the front of the group. I settled on the familiar shadowy figure of the panther alpha as her sleek figure transformed into her dusky complexion.

As I soaked in her appearance, trepidation engulfed me, followed by the undeniable magnetic pull toward her. Her narrowed gaze swept through the field before settling on me.

Within those dark irises I sensed ease settling her shoulders before she reined in all semblance of emotion and tensed her spine. Her piercing gaze cut through the depths of my soul, igniting a flame of desire.

Visions of what we had done infiltrated my mind, causing me to soften my punches as a thrum of arousal gripped my entity and coiled around me. Surely it was forbidden. But why the hell was it so tantalizing?

Why was it that Zara Nightshade's darkness called to me? Urged me to surrender my will to her and submit to her command. Why was it I felt the need to relinquish myself to these primitive instincts and emotions? Why her?

“Pounceguards!” Her voice reverberated the grounds with palpable authority. Zara clasped her hands behind her back. The movement exuded strength and confidence, captivating the attention of the troops under her command.

“Grave news has been delivered by our Shadow General, Eesha Bhatt,” she began, her voice cutting through the bustling atmosphere. “Celestial Peak, a sanctuary to many feline beings, has fallen under threat.”

As Zara's damning words registered, my heart pounded like a caged animal within my chest. The horrors of what was at stake consumed my thoughts, and devastation washed over me like an icy wave. Within my mind, vivid images conjured the faces of the felines which resided on that mountain. My mother's warm smile shining amongst them, her gentle spirit woven into the very fabrics of their existence.

As the suffocating ropes of panic engulfed me, a familiar voice broke through the haze, and I pivoted on my heels.

“Fucking hell, Gigi,” he grumbled, gasping for calming breaths. His voice held a blend of concern and brotherly love, mirroring the anxiety gripping my heart. “Are you alright? This must be rogue hunters.”

“Mother’s on that mountain.” I ran a frantic hand through my hair, his widened eyes searching my own as we both found solace in each other’s presence. “If it’s truly the hunters, she and the rest of the leaps are in danger. It’ll be a slaughter.”

“I know, Gigi, but it won’t come to that. We’re the castle’s guards, the protectors of the feline realm. Remember our resilience.” Jasper clasped my hand, thrumming his determination to well within me. “We’ll do everything in our power to protect our innocents. We’ll fight for our mother, for our home.”

With his words, the ensuing chaos surrounding us faded into the background. Our determination as siblings—what’s left within our little leap—blossomed like resilient mountain avens pushing through the cracks of adversity.

“Evangeline!” The voice carried a resolute tone, and as I turned to face the source, serpent-green eyes locked with mine.

“Sergeant.” Jasper bowed his head.

“Zara?” I furrowed my brows, crossing my arms.

Her commanding presence loomed over us like an engulfing shadow, emitting determination. She approached with

purposeful steps, and a thrum of powerful energy radiated from her entity, bidding one to submit beneath its sheer power. But I knew I wouldn't give in. Not now. Not ever.

With measured strides, Zara guided us through the arched entrance of the feline palace. Each step echoed with purpose. We entered the war room, a cavernous chamber where maps adorned the walls, depicting the terrain we would soon traverse. The air within was charged with a blend of nervous excitement and steely resolve.

“You'll not be participating on this mission,” she demurred, and her expression hardened as her eyes narrowed into slits. Zara towered over me, her presence commanding and unwavering.

“Is that a fucking joke?” My anger came to a crest within me, my fingers curling into my palms. “Are you implying that you're leaving me behind?”

A surge of determination coursed through my veins, fueling the intensity of my gaze as I locked on Zara in a glare. The urgency of the situation burned within me, demanding I be part of the mission to protect the shifters—my mother—on the sacred mountain. But Zara, ever the pragmatic leader, remained resolute in her decision.

“What have I told you about your emotions, omega? As a Whiskerling in my ranks, you are required to rein them in. Defy me one more fucking time.” Zara chuckled darkly, her eyes ablaze with her panther. “We need impartiality on this

mission, and your connection to the mountain presents a conflict of interest.”

“You always confine me to safety, Zara, when you know damn well I can handle myself. I have the determination—the skills required to join this fight. Yet, you hold me back.” A mixture of frustration and ache pooled within me, drowning my heart in agony.

How could I simply submit to her order while danger loomed over those I held dear—what little family I had left?

Zara’s gaze softened, and she took a step closer. Her fingers found the soft of my cheek and warmth spread in my belly as my breath hitched.

“It’s not about doubt in your capabilities, it never has been,” she murmured. “Darling Blizzard, I cannot risk your safety or the potential for compromised judgment. Your presence alone could cloud your focus and hinder the mission’s success.”

Within my chest, my heart froze, and a surge of emotions washed over me. What had she just called me? Tears welled in my eyes, a torrent of conflicting emotions threatened to spill over. The loss of my sister still felt raw, a wound that refused to seal. And now, to hear her endearment fall from Zara’s lips, it was as if a floodgate had been opened, releasing a deluge of memories that crashed upon the shores of my heart.

With it, my frustration grew into a flurry, mingling with the sense of injustice.

Turning toward Jasper, I searched for support within his eyes that held trepidation as he surveyed the Sergeant. “You understand, don’t you? I can’t just sit here while our mother faces peril.”

“Both of you are to remain behind. Is that clear?” Zara’s voice resonated with authority, cutting through the tension-laden air like a blade.

As I regarded Jasper’s reaction, his lips parted from shock, then eyebrows drew together with frustration. His irritation rose like a brewing thundercloud, darkening his features.

“Sergeant, you’ll need as many claws as possible out there. I’m more than a capable asset in the troublesome terrain you’ll be faced with.” His voice was tinged with an undercurrent of resentment as he attempted to reason with her. “Please, reconsider.”

Zara’s gaze flickered between us. “I know your capabilities, Pounceguard. But this is a matter of strategic decision-making. Your skills are needed here, protecting our stronghold and ensuring the safety of our loved ones. Trust we will do everything we can to succeed in the mission.”

The conflicting emotions within the room swirled like a tempest, intensifying the charged atmosphere. Jasper’s jaw clenched; muscles taut with internal conflict. Slowly, the storm within him abated, replaced by reluctant acceptance.

With a heavy sigh, he relented, his voice tinged with resignation. “Gigi, we must trust in our Manehunter’s judgment. She knows what’s best for both of us. I’ll keep you

safe within these walls, even if it tears me apart not to be out there.”

Left with no choice, I too dropped my resolve, clenching my jaw. As I turned away from the tumultuous scene, I could sense the conflicting emotions swirling around me—a bittersweet ache tugged at my heart. But within the confines of the feline palace, hidden from the chaos outside, a flame of hope burned brightly.

The passion that churned between Zara and me had ignited a fierce longing within, a hunger to prove myself, to show her the depths of my capabilities. Even after baring my vulnerabilities and delving into the darkest recesses of her being, she still sought to confine me to the limitations of my rank. I knew deep within my core she would come to regret her decision, underestimating the frost fire that blazed within my soul.

Zara’s decision would be a regret she would come to bear, for I would demonstrate I was a force to be reckoned with. An omega no longer content with being overlooked or underestimated.



As I languished within the confines of the feline palace, the passing days turned into an endless blur. Each passing hour only managed to intensify the worry that gnawed at my insides. An insidious whisper urged me to defy the orders of my superior, Zara—the very pantheress that ignited my soul and had thawed my frosty heart.

Queen Malia Asvar, once a formidable huntress, had imprisoned me in quarters alongside my remaining sibling. Under the unyielding command of General Eesha Bhatt, we were subjected to constant surveillance. These confining stone walls had grown to feel like a cage, filling me with unease and stifling my essence.

It was on the fateful first night that the general discovered my unique ability bestowed on us by our goddess. As the feline kingdom fell into a nightly silence, I projected my spirit beyond the castle boundaries. Unknowingly exposing myself to her watchful entity. The general possessed the rare gift of Reverie Enthrallment, a form of Phantasmal Enthrallment, and effortlessly subdued me.

Both the tigress general and the tiger king, Daitari, shared an extraordinary ability that granted them access to dreams, where they could influence and manipulate them. It was a power that bridged the gap between the realm of reality and fantasy. Through the majesty of their gifts, they could shape and manipulate the ethereal landscapes of the mind; weaving their influence into the fabric of imagination.

With a mere flicker of her power, General Eesha brought me to my spiritual knees, rendering me powerless and at her mercy. Since that moment, I had been confined within the castle, banished to the confines of my chambers for daring to defy direct orders.

A complex web of desires and alliances had formed within the kingdom when both the king and the general laid their

claim upon huntresses. Their forbidden love entwined with the fierce passions of the wild. It was a love that kindled conflicts and blurred boundaries. A magnetic force that drew them closer while threatening to tear apart the very fabric of the kingdom.

As I pondered the actions of the highest power in our kingdom, a sense of disbelief washed over me. How could they bend their knees to our enemies and invite them into our very stronghold? It was a puzzle that confounded my understanding. And yet, beneath the layers of confusion, I couldn't ignore the unmistakable love they held for their mates. It was a love that thawed at the primal aspect of my being, the very instinct Zara had urged me to submit to. The conflicting emotions churned within me, wrestling between a desire for freedom and the yearning to embrace the warmth of connection.

What was it she told me?

When I finally surrender and submit to my nature, I'll find ecstasy.

Hovering near the war room, the bitter chill of anticipation clung to the atmosphere like frost, seeping into my astral entity. The walls echoed with hushed whispers, carrying the weight of impending danger. At that moment, I caught sight of Queen Malia, her nerves palpable. With her regal presence and flowing blond hair, she adorned herself in a resplendent royal Lehenga Choli. Beside her stood another huntress in a graceful saree. Her energy pulsed through her veins. I assumed she

was Eesha's mate, for I saw the bared claiming mark upon her throat.

With a voice laced with determination, I managed to convince the guards a walk around the palace would help clear my mind. They relented, granting me temporary relief from the confines of my quarters. It was an opportunity to glean any sliver of information, any fragment of news that might shed light on my family's fate...and on Zara, the pantheress I couldn't keep from my head.

The air within the war room grew thick with tension as my astral form slipped through. The atmosphere appeared to have frozen solid, trapping the anxiety and worry within its icy grip. Maps were spread across the table, marked with strategic points and potential dangers. The flickering light from the sconces cast dancing shadows upon the walls; their movement mirroring the uncertainty that plagued the room.

As I glanced around, my heart pounded. I could sense the general's piercing gaze upon me. Her command resonated through the air, slicing through the silence like a shard of ice.

"It appears we have a spectator, my queen." A cruel smile spread across her lips. "Please, enter the conversation, Whiskerling," she ordered, her voice dripping with authority.

A blush stained my cheeks as I heeded her words, sinking into my physical form just outside of earshot. Stepping into the room, the temperature rose to a boil, and I missed the chilly air my astral form provided. General Eesha, donning a modified Anarkali suit that combined tradition with military-inspired

elements, stood tall. Her presence emanated a brooding authority that demanded obedience. Her hazel eyes bore into mine, a steely glare that pierced through any facade.

“Tell me, Evangeline, what brings you here, defying direct orders and intruding upon this sanctum?” The general’s words dripped with an undercurrent of suspicion.

I averted my gaze, bowing my head at the queen before speaking directly to her.

“I didn’t mean disrespect by going against orders, my queen. I only seek information that pertains to the safety of those I care about,” I replied. “I can’t stand the thought of remaining in the shadows, oblivious to the fate of our troops and the fate of my family hanging in the balance.”

At my words, General Eesha unleashed a thrum of energy that coursed through the air. It sent a warning for me to stay away, to cease my meddling in matters beyond my station. The raw power of her command crackled in the air, sending a shiver down my spine.

“Wait, Eesha,” a voice called out just as I was about to collapse on the ground. “She’s an omega in your ranks? I thought it was forbidden.”

In that moment, a flicker of realization washed over me, like a glint of sunlight reflecting off ice. I could feel the contrast between the general’s energy and the electric connection I shared with Zara. The former held no allure, no magnetic pull. It was a cold, distant force that left me numb. But Zara’s

thrum, her commanding presence, ignited a fire within my soul, a heat that thawed the icy barriers I had once known.

“Enough pondering,” Queen Malia ordered. “The longer we wait, the closer our forces face peril. We’ll send reinforcements to the mountain to aid with the mission.”

“My queen,” I spoke, my voice steady but laced with urgency. “I know Celestial Peak like the back of my hand. Leaving me behind was the very mistake that led to the mission’s failure. I can be an asset, not a liability, if you allow me to aid the reinforcements.”

The general regarded me silently, her narrowed eyes holding a mix of curiosity and amusement. “Your spirit is strong, Whiskerling. I can see why my Sergeant pushed to allow you into my ranks,” she acknowledged, taking me aback with her statement.

All this time, I’d thought Zara had been pushing for me to be removed. But she’s the one who vouched for my entry? The weight of Zara’s actions and intentions shifted, as if the icy barriers around my perception melted away. It fueled a desire to uncover Zara’s true intentions within the connection we shared.

Beside General Eesha, her former huntress mate stepped forward. Her gaze bore into me, fierce and unyielding. “Eesha, she has a point. She’s a snow leopard, a shifter descended from the mountains.”

“Saira,” Eesha began, turning to her.

“Don’t dismiss her because of her status,” Saira asserted, her voice carrying a touch of urgency. “We can’t afford another mistake.”

General Eesha deliberated, the air crackling with tension as her gaze shifted between Saira and me. As moments passed, each second felt like an eternity, but then the general’s resolve solidified.

“Fine. Join the reinforcements. But their success lies in your hands,” she declared. “We’re counting on you, Whiskerling. Show us the strength of your spirit. Don’t let your queen down.”

Relief cascaded through my being, like a gentle snowfall settling upon my soul. What I’d fought for all this time has finally been granted to me—a chance to display my capabilities and earn the respect I deserved. Bowing at the queen and acknowledging the general, I sent a quick nod to Saira in a silent promise, thanking her for her support.



The daunting mountain loomed before me like a majestic guardian as I stood before Celestial Peak—my home. Taking in the atmosphere, the crisp air carried the biting chill of anticipation. The reinforcement troops, clad in winter gear, awaited for orders behind me.

“What’s the plan, Whiskerling?” General Eesha’s voice cut through the icy gusts as she regarded me with a cheeky smirk.

“Halt the troops here.” A growl built from my chest as my transformation took root. “I’ll scout ahead with my ability and ensure we’re not walking blindly into danger.”

With no need for another word, the general nodded with approval, and my eyes shut, allowing my consciousness to flutter into the atmosphere. Like a wispy phantom, I soared through the frigid sky, piercing through a blanket of snow. The world took on an ethereal quality; the mountain bathed in a soft, otherworldly glow.

Easily navigating the treacherous terrain, I plowed through the dense snowfall. Gusts of wind howled, threatening to veer me off course. But I remained persistent, driven by a churning desire to locate the feline pulling at my heartstrings.

Entering the darkness of a cave, I spotted her. Zara lay motionless, somewhere between beast and human. Her fiery golden eyes surveyed where I stood, and her gaze darkened with ferocity.

Before the pantheress could use up the last slivers of her energy to scold me, I retracted myself from the darkness encasing her and rushed back to the awaiting reinforcements. As I melded myself back into my physical form, the snowfall masked my frozen tears.

“I found Zara,” I announced, rising from the plush ground and steadying myself. “She’s alive. We must hurry.”



The crisp mountain air filled my lungs as we trudged through the snow. My heart pounded with a mix of anticipation and trepidation. The snow-capped peaks loomed majestically around us, their white expanse stretching as far as the eye could see. With each step, the weight of our mission grew heavier, but determination fueled our every stride.

As we reached the outskirts of the cave I'd ventured inside, an unspoken tension hung in the air. Shadows danced along the rugged walls, concealing Zara's presence. I felt her eyes upon me, a predator observing her prey. My breath hitched, a mix of fear and exhilaration intertwined within me.

Taking a step forward, I approached the darkness alone. My senses tingled with anticipation. In a powerful surge of movement, Zara emerged from the shadows, a magnificent panther prowling toward me. She pounced, pinning me to the ground with a fierce grace. I gasped; my heart raced beneath the weight of her touch.

As she settled her body weight over me, her beast melted into human, and I lay pinned beneath a naked Zara. A silent moment passed between us as I gaped into her serpent-green eyes, burning with fiery intensity. A growl rumbled from within her chest, and she closed the distance between us, desire swirling in the depths of her allure.

It was an intimate connection forged amidst the freezing winds and the untouched snow. Her tongue delved into my mouth, savoring me with slow, tenacious strokes. She kissed me softly at first. A gentle sweet touch, as if testing the waters

to see if I were real and not a figment of imagination, a mere fabrication stemming from illusion. When I responded with intensity, leaning into her and sinking a hand into her hair, she became frenzied and passionate.

With every caress of her fervent tongue and roaming hand that sought to claim every inch of me, made me shiver in anticipation for more, for all of her. Her intensity was a testament to the depth of our bond and the resilience of our passion. It was a bittersweet embrace, fueled by both longing and regret, a reminder of the arduous path we had traveled to reach this point.

In that fleeting moment, time stood still. The world around us faded into a hazy blur as our hearts spoke the language of devotion. Our noses bumped, then Zara pulled away, panting. I licked my lips to savor her, moaning at the addictive taste.

Zara's glowing, fiery eyes receded back to serpent-green as she surveyed me, her breath brushing my cheek.

"Foolish little leopard," she murmured, her words a whispered fragile melody. "But goddesses, I'm so proud of you. Your courage knows no bounds."

Emotions surged within me, a whirlwind of passion, longing, and a newfound sense of purpose. We had come so far, overcoming obstacles that threatened to tear us apart. Our journey had been a treacherous one, rife with uncertainty and doubt, but here we were—two souls intertwined in a fragile dance of resilience and passion.

The touch of Zara's lips lingered on mine, imprinting a memory that would withstand the test of time. We knew the dangers that lay ahead, the battles we had yet to face, but in this stolen moment, we found solace and strength.

“Sergeant.” A voice cut between the moment, and Zara removed herself from me reluctantly.

Unclasping a cloak from my hip, I wrapped it around the panther's shivering body. Her breath came in misty gusts. The general, followed by two Pounceguards, appeared by the entrance. Relief washed over the atmosphere, followed by trepidation about the situation. I wrapped an arm around Zara's middle, huddling her close to my warmth as we exited the cave.

We carefully regrouped outside, the cold, biting wind whipped through our forms. Zara's arm around me tightened, and I peered up at her, noting dried blood clung to her dusky skin. Her serpent-green eyes were still ablaze with anger and determination. As the general approached, she recounted the events that led us to the desolate cave.

“Dark magic aided the hunters—the damned shadow stalkers.” Zara's voice was thick with indignation and frustration. “The witches cloaked their presence, shielding them from our senses. By the time we sensed their intentions, it was already too late.”

Her weathered face gave away the intensity of the encounter, her expression mirroring the weight of the situation she had endured. Even as she hunched over, pressing a palm to the

healing wound on her abdomen, her grace was a constant reminder of her prowess as a warrior—as our sergeant.

General Eesha's gaze narrowed, her eyes scrutinizing Zara as she absorbed the gravity of the situation. As we moved forward on the terrain, we came across the site of the ambush, just outside the outskirts of feline villages on the mountain—where my home, my mother, was. Zara gestured toward the macabre scene that marred the pristine snow, corpses strewn across the ground like discarded puppets.

“Although our troops perished, the hunters paid a heavy price for their audacity,” Zara grumbled, her voice laced with a mixture of satisfaction and ferocity. “They lie as lifeless corpses now, their blood staining the purity of the landscape.”

I watched as General Eesha's expression shifted; a flicker of admiration and caution crossed her features. Zara's dominance over the battlefield was unquestionable, her deadly skills honed to perfection.

The scape was shrouded in an eerie stillness, broken only by the soft crunch of snow beneath our feet. The aftermath of the battle lay scattered around us, a grim testament to the clash of forces that had just transpired. Zara, her pantheress eyes gleaming with a mix of determination and a touch of darkness, surveyed the aftermath with a predator's gaze.

Amidst the fallen bodies, there was one survivor. A lone hunter who clung to life, his breath ragged and eyes filled with terror. A growl built within my chest, and the desire to rip his throat out clung to me. Removing herself from my grip, Zara

approached him with an air of quiet menace, her steps deliberate and purposeful. Her very presence seemed to cast a shadow over the snow-covered terrain.

As I watched, a primal part of me stirred, both captivated and unnerved by the display of Zara's dark side. She was a force to be reckoned with, a predator unleashed. With a chilling intensity, she crouched before the hunter, her eyes narrowed as she delved into the depths of his soul.

A moment of silence hung heavy in the air before Zara's voice, laced with an edge of cruelty, sliced through the stillness. With her claws extended, she seized the hunter by the throat, tugging his hair back to expose his neck. She dug into his flesh so hard she left crimson marks that spilled blood.

"Tell me," she demanded, her words dripping with an icy venom. "What conniving scheme are your rogue Gladsheim hunters plotting? Speak now, for your fate hangs by a thread."

The hunter, his body trembling with fear, could not resist the overpowering aura Zara emitted. The truth spilled from his lips, an impending doom and a brewing storm. Another battle loomed on the horizon, one that threatened the very existence of our kind. His words painted a grim picture. A reminder that the hunters, even in the wake of their vanquished Gladsheim organization, still harbored a burning flame of vengeance within their souls.

"We will stop at nothing," the hunter confessed, his voice filled with a mix of despair and grim determination. "Our sole purpose is the eradication of felines and shifters from this

planet. You may have dismantled our organization, but the fire within us still burns.”

Zara’s eyes darkened, her expression a blend of anger and resolve. The weight of the revelation hung heavy upon us, the magnitude of the battle ahead threatening to engulf our thoughts. But in that moment, as the cold winds whispered through the barren landscape, I saw a fire ignite within Zara’s eyes. It was the fire of defiance, of a warrior unwilling to surrender.

“We will not perish,” Zara declared, her voice resonating with a fierce determination. “Hunters may harbor their flame, but we possess a fire far greater. We fight not only for our survival, but for the very essence of who we are. We will not be extinguished.”

Her words echoed in my ears, a rallying cry that ignited a flame within my own soul. In the face of impending danger, our resolve grew stronger. We would not succumb to the darkness that threatened us; we would fight, not just for our survival, but for the future of our kind.

With the truth finally revealed, Zara executed the hunter. She sliced his throat in a swift motion, cutting through sinewy muscle and tendons; blood splattered across her face. Silently, she watched as he choked on blood, gurgling filling the atmosphere.

As the wind howled around us, carrying with it the echoes of battles yet to come, Zara and I locked eyes, our gazes interweaved in an unspoken vow. We would face the coming

storm together, hand in hand, united against the forces that sought to extinguish us.

AFTERWORD

As you turn the final page of this novella, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude for joining me on this exhilarating journey. I hope you found yourselves captivated by the unfolding story of Evangeline Winterthorne and Zara Nightshade.

Now, as the story reaches its frostbitten zenith, where icy tension crackles and questions beg for answers, I invite you to embark on the continuation of their journey. Part Two beckons, a glistening landscape awaiting your arrival on my website. Surrender yourself to the frigid currents of emotion, the avalanche of action, and the heart-rending dilemmas that await.

To delve deeper into the frosty passion, visit:

<https://antonellasinner.wixsite.com/antonellanovels/provoking-a-panther-part-two-edition>

Prepare to be embraced by a world where darkness and desire collide, where passion and peril weave an intricate dance like the northern lights. Unveil the answers to the

lingering questions, unravel new layers of mystery, and explore the depths of love amidst the encroaching shadows.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

For as long as she can remember, Antonella Sinner has always had a passion for reading. Growing up, she always asked herself what she wanted to be and has always answered with the same: a writer, creating and fabricating stories she so wishes she could find on shelves. Today she writes dreamy romances full of paranormal beings of all kinds with a few touches of spice here and there.

Born and raised in New York City, Antonella lives with her beloved furbabies, Juliet, the Shih Tzu she's had since she was nine, and her recent adoption, Major, the spoiled brat of a Persian cat her family loves to call the Pharaoh of the block. When Antonella isn't writing her next fantasy she's either binging a TV show or nose deep in a fantasy romance book.



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Rochelle J. Simas, an indie author who is a huge supporter of independent publishing. She writes under many different pen names:

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