



4 HORSEMEN BOOK 1

# THE DEVILS THAT TAKE HER

*INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHORS*

STORY  
BROOKS

CASSIE  
HARGROVE

# THE DEVILS THAT TAKE HER

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4 HORSEMEN

BOOK ONE

STORY BROOKS  
CASSIE HARGROVE

*To all of our readers who gave Deadly Seven a chance to  
thrive, this one's for you <3*

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# ALL OF THE INFO

Well, hello there!

Whether you're a new to us reader or joining us from the Deadly Seven series, we want to take this time to remind you that everything we write is dark and graphic. Content in this series is as follows:

- Kidnapping and forced imprisonment
- Graphic torture and unaliving
- A pet corpse (no, we aren't joking)
- BDSM practices that don't follow the real world rules
- Religious conflict and turmoil
- Mentions of past abuse of all types (this can get graphic)

## **THINGS YOU MAY WANT FOR FUTURE REFERENCE:**

SHADE - FAMINE

SPOOK - PESTILENCE

SHADOW - DEATH

SMOKE - WAR

# PROLOGUE

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## SHADE

A LONG TIME AGO, I swore to never trust anyone outside of my three brothers ever again. However, given recent events, I'm breaking my own rule.

The man standing before us is someone I could never fully trust. After all, he's almost as ruthless as we are, and his loyalties lie with a select group of people we are not a part of. That being said, I know a smart decision when I see one. Forming a continued alliance with Dimitri Koschov is one of the smarter decisions we could make, because we're also forming one with his new "family" of delinquents.

As the Horsemen, we already had a decent enough relationship with Koschov after painstakingly getting Shadow's brothers into his care. Although, *care* may be too strong of a word for it when they continually want to kill one another. But they needed each other, and we made it happen.

Now that Koschov and Shadow's brothers have a strong allegiance with the Deadly Seven, it's the reason behind this new agreement. As long as the Russian takes us up on our offer of a new, working relationship with someone he despises working for—with. This will offer a greater level of protection and security to all involved.

Dimitri Koschov is a smart man. He's wary of our very existence, as he should be. We don't abide by human morals. Such things are beneath us given everything we've been through, and nothing will change that. We are who we are. We

are the bringers of death and destruction upon anyone whose card gets passed our way.

“I can see the benefits of an arrangement such as this as long as we can also call upon you should the need arise,” Koschov barters, and I dip my head in acknowledgement.

“You may. Do we have a deal then, Koschov?” I ask him, knowing his answer already, but demanding a response all the same.

He reaches out and shakes my hand. “We do, but I will need to discuss it with the others. They need time to come down from the raid before I throw them into a pit of vipers.”

Ah, the raid. It was the whole reason behind putting Shadow’s half brothers in connection with the Russian in the first place. They were already working toward taking the same man down—a filthy excuse for a human—so we set out to have them connect and work to bring the bastard down, and they did.

Koschov is worried about telling the Deadly Seven of his connection to us, but there’s no point. The ink on his soul, tying him to us for life, dried a long time ago now. Worry is such a useless human emotion. Why worry over what you cannot control or change?

“Aww, are you scared your precious bird will castrate you?” Shadow teases him.

Shadow is in support of our business alliance, but he’s insisted we leave his brothers out of it unless it’s a dire situation. Should be easy enough, given nothing is ever dire to demons who have risen from Hell to rain death on earth.

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. We were created to cause destruction and mayhem, and we do it well.

The dark look that crosses the Russian man’s face is mildly entertaining. “You leave her and Kristen out of this, and that’s final. You want the Deadly Seven? Fine, I know they’ll play ball. But you won’t ever get close to Haliee,” he warns, and I sigh.

This is quite boring.

Honestly, the way they're all so protective over that girl is entirely exhausting. Not to mention, pointless. While they're afraid of her becoming a target, she's the only real threat to us between all of them.

Haliee Morgan—who used to be Hailey Shaw—is the wild card in their little family. The Deadly Seven are fairly predictable in their attacks if you've spent as much time watching them as we have. We make it a habit to know who could one day become a threat to us. If the Deadly Seven were to come for us for any reason, it would be easy enough to interpret their next moves.

Haliee, on the other hand, is much more clever. Where her men act out of rage, she analyzes every angle before making a move. Much like that computer nerd of hers, I suppose, just... deadlier.

“Aww, shucks! You think we'd harm a hair on their pretty little heads?” Spook cackles. “Now, why would we go and do a thing like that?”

“Enough,” I tell them, never taking my eyes off of the Russian. “We have just entered into a working relationship. You have my word we will not touch them. Even if the Seven were to ever come against us, we will leave the women alone.”

It's a promise worth making. Like I said, Haliee is really the one we need to be wary of because she's unpredictable. She is a terrible shot, but if she's close enough to us with a knife on hand, she could very well do some damage. Not to mention her father being well-versed in stealth kills after having to protect her from being trafficked over the years.

“Shade, did you hit your head?” Smoke asks me quietly, and I shrug.

“Dude, he's making a smart call. You've seen her wield a knife, yeah?” Shadow asks, shaking his head. “Let's not tempt the little vixen with a knife fetish. I'd rather not be looking over my shoulder, wondering if she's going to stab me. You know she stabbed one of her men, right? She's fucking ruthless.”

Dimitri snorts and shifts on his feet like the mention of her knife skills unsettles him. I wonder if there's a story there?

“You have one week, Koschov. Call Shadow when they're aware of this new development. If you don't tell them yourself, we'll do it for you, and I won't be happy.”

“I don't take kindly to threats,” Koschov warns in a low voice, and while he's a man worth being mindful of, I'm not afraid. Nothing scares me.

“It's not a threat,” I state, turning to walk away. When we're about to exit the building, I don't bother looking back as I say my parting words, “It's a Horsemen's promise.”

\* \* \*

BEFORE WE LEFT TO MEET KOSCHOV TODAY, I HAD ALREADY narrowed our upcoming jobs down to three possible candidates. Ones we could quickly process through while still focusing on the priest we're targeting.

Some jobs, like his, take months of planning, while others only require a small amount of meticulous planning before we execute the hired kill.

“Our jobs have been lacking fun lately. I wish we'd get a card with the Russian's name on it—at least he'd be a worthy opponent,” Spook speaks up once we're back home.

Our black cards are legendary amongst those in the know. It's rumoured that we'll destroy your life if such a card lands in our hands, but the truth is, we create the cards ourselves. Leaving a black card is a legacy within the organization who trained us. Each completed job leaves a black metal card, bearing the white horse on the front so there's no mistaking who's responsible.

See, we aren't the first of our kind...but we will be the last. The group of men that took and trained us to become the absolute monsters we are today, were once the same scared kids we were. It was a sick and twisted form of sacred legacy that began too long ago to truly track.

When the Horsemen started to age, they would take four kids from random places and raise them to be ruthless killers. Years upon years this went on until my brothers and I took out the previous group at only sixteen. We barely escaped, and we made a pact to live our lives the only way we knew how, but that we would be where the Horsemen ended.

None of us want to be the reason children suffer the way we had.

It ends with us.



# FAWN

*SIX MONTHS LATER...*

*FORGIVE HIM, FATHER. HE IS BLINDED BY HATRED AND KNOWS not what he does.*

It's a prayer I repeat multiple times a day.

*Swish, thud.*

I cry out as another lash of the priest's whip digs into my bare back. Gripping the chains holding my arms above my head, I try to think of something, anything, but the agony coursing through me right now.

*He's a Godly man, Fawn. Do as he says and you will please God. Surely, he wouldn't be doing this to me unless it was for good reason, right?* The thought tumbles around my head as I brace myself for the next strike.

He's never been like this with anyone but me. To everyone else, he's the gentlest of men. A true man of God. But he has anger toward my mother that I can't ever fathom. An anger and hatred that runs so deep there is no reaching him when he gets like this.

Each lash of his whip is my mother's penance for being a whore and having me out of wedlock while working as a harlot. That's what he tells me, anyway.

I've lived this way my entire life, never knowing anything else. My uncle loves me, I think, he's just so lost.

Unfortunately, I am unable to be the one to save him, or bring understanding to his rage.

“I’m doing this for your own good, Fawn,” he snarls as the whip cracks again. I grit my teeth as more prayers filter through my thoughts.

I cry out as the pain burns through me and the blood drips down my back. It hurts so much I just want it all to stop. But if Jesus can be nailed to the cross for our sins, then I can do this. I can.

“Don’t cry, you little—”

An explosion echoes through the church, followed by a deathly silence that fills the room around us in its wake. Nerve endings I thought were deadened by the whip flare to life, setting me on edge.

“What was that?” I ask, shaking in fear. Is this the end? Will this be how I die?

“Dammit! They’ve come for me,” he says in a panicked tone I’ve never heard before. “Get yourself dressed and hide, Fawn. I’ll deal with the rest of your penance later.” He releases my arms from the hook on the ceiling, and I drop to the ground as shots ring out.

Screaming out in pain, I scramble to gather my habit and throw it on, promising God I will properly adjust it the moment I find a place to hide.

“Be quiet, whore! They’ll find us!” my uncle snaps before he exits the cellar. It’s where he does all of my whippings because no one can hear us down here.

I don’t know who the *they* are that he’s referring to, but I most definitely don’t want them to find me.

“Oh priest, oh priest, you diddly fuck! We have your ticket, won’t you come collect?” I hear someone taunt from down the hall in a sing-song voice and realize there’s nowhere to run. Whoever they are, they’ve already cornered me, but maybe my uncle was able to escape.



I don't want to die, not this way. "Please, God, make it quick," I pray to the Heavens as tears run down my face.

"Oh look! A toy!" another voice sounds off, and it takes everything in me not to cry out. Who are these men? And why are they here, shooting up a church of all places?

More shots ring out as I scramble to the closet, hiding as quietly as I can. It's hard to catch my breath through the tears as more shots echo through the cement walls.

"Come on, priest! We already know you're here. We have cameras in every hallway." They do? Oh no! Have they seen what my uncle has done to me? Have they seen me naked in my crying, bleeding shame?

"We saw you bring that pretty little thing down here," another one taunts. How many of them are there? "You make her scream so pretty."

A shiver runs down my spine at the pleasure in the strange man's voice.

"You leave her alone!" my uncle barks, and several others cackle. It's a horribly evil sound that has my heart racing even more. Maybe I'm having a heart attack.

"That was too easy. Is she your sweet spot, diddle fucker?" a voice sneers. The others cackle as if they found their prey weakened and are now taunting him with death.

I shiver in terror as I clutch my rosary harder.

"She is none of your concern," my uncle spits out. He's clearly lost what little sanity that may have been left. Why didn't he just hide?!

"That is where you'd be wrong. She is very much our concern, as are you, priest." This man's voice is colder than ice, sending fear straight through me. "I hope you've confessed your sins, though I doubt God would forgive you your transgressions."

The sound of a scuffle, followed by my uncle's shriek, filters through the cellar door and makes its way to my ears. I

can only assume the thunk is the sound of a body dropping to the floor.

My hands fly to my mouth to muffle my cries, but it's no use. They saw my uncle bring me in here. They know where I am.

"Shadow, grab him. You and Smoke get his body into the trunk while Spook and I get the girl," that cold voice barks.

There's a shuffling outside of the cellar before the door bursts open. A small gasp escapes me and I slap a hand over my lips to try to silence any more noise from escaping my lips.

I watch frantically through a slit in the closet door as two large scary men take stock of my torture chamber. They're both dressed head to toe in heavy armour, and masks cover their faces. I can't see what they truly look like, but I can feel the evil vibrating from them with every move they make.

"She didn't leave this room," the cold one says. "Find her." For a brief moment, I wonder if he's in charge of them all before panic seeps through every fibre of my being when the blood from my back drips onto the floor with a plopping sound.

Oh no. No, no, no. Usually I have time to get back to the room and shower before it soaks through my habit.

"Here, girlie, girlie, girlie," the happy one sings. "We aren't going to hurt you...much." A chill runs down my spine as I watch the cold one look around, and the other one comes closer to me, flipping a table and kicking at boxes on the floor.

"Spook!" the cold one snaps, clearly irritated. But at least their sounds are covering up the continuous sound of my blood dripping to the floor.

"You're no fun, Shade."

"It's not meant to be fun. It's a job. Get in, get out," the cold one says as his boots stomp the ground until he's right in front of the closet door, making me woozy.

*Please, God, save me.* I send up a silent prayer before the closet doors are ripped off the frame. A terrified sound tears

through me, the scream bouncing off the walls.

*Please, God,. Save me.* I repeat, and it's my last thought as I fall into darkness.



# SHADOW

I LEAVE those fuckers alone for two minutes to stuff the bastard's unconscious body in the trunk and come back to find a fainted nun. It's a damn inconvenience. Rolling my eyes at her limp form on the floor, I look over to where Shade is standing, and he snaps his fingers before pointing down at her.

"This could be a problem we don't have time for," he states as his eyes run all over her, studying her like one would a wild animal.

She's a tiny nun, not a jaguar about to rip out his jugular. Dude needs to chill, though he has a point. Getting her unconscious body back to the car without raising suspicion could prove difficult. The priest was easy because he was in normal clothing, and we could pass him off as a drunken buddy. This tiny woman is in all out nun attire, and we don't have time to find alternative clothes for her.

I guess it tells us everything we need to know about the difference in their personalities if she lives in her habit twenty-four seven and he wears normal, everyday clothes to do whatever it was they were getting up to in here. But we already knew he was less than holy to start with.

"I guess we have a new chew toy then," Spook comments, rubbing his hands together with a huge smile on his face.

It was always the plan to take the girl along with the false sky-daddy prophet, but her having a heart attack isn't in the cards. I don't blame her for fainting after seeing Shade and

Spook in their tactical gear. After all, it's not every day the Horsemen knock on your door.

Technically, we blasted the doors in with a shotgun, but that's semantics.

Smoke slaps him over the back of the head before moving to her passed out form. He picks her up and slings her on his shoulder like a weightless sack of potatoes. I shoulder the sawed-off shotgun and scratch my head with the barrel.

“What exactly are we supposed to do with her? We're excellent at killing things, but keeping them alive? Questionable at best. How long do we need to hold her before we can hand her over?” I ask Shade, whose eyes haven't left the tiny little woman since she fainted.

Smoke's face draws up in confusion as he pulls his hand away from her back, showing it's covered in blood.

“She must have gotten hurt when she fainted,” Smoke says, shrugging with the limp nun still dangling off his back. A yawn leaves me as boredom starts to set in.

My calling is Death—not babysitting a terrified nun.

“I'm sure that's it,” Shade replies sarcastically as he finally takes a look around the torture chamber we're in. He pointedly ignores my question, making me think we have to keep the tiny thing alive for far longer than any of us fucking want to.

The chamber itself is impressive, but rage fills me as I think about the possibilities of what that soon-to-be dead fucker and this nun were up to in here. Did they take satisfaction in hurting people together? She doesn't seem the type, but I'll get answers from her one way or another. Her screams will just be a bonus when I make more blood run from her veins.

“It doesn't really matter at this point. The kahuna holy fucker is already in the trunk. There's no room for the little sinner here.” Spook gets a mischievous look on his face. “But we can totally sandwich the nun in the backseat.” He cackles, rubbing at his stomach and puffing out his bottom lip. “But first, I'm fucking hungry. We need to hit up the drive-thru.”

“Absolutely not. We have shit to do. Going to a drive-thru with a body in the trunk, and a passed out nun is *not* on our agenda,” Shade says like it’s a firm decision.

Unfortunately for him, I live to piss him off. And I’m the one driving.

\* \* \*

THE MOMENT WE STEP OUTSIDE THE CHURCH DOORS AND INTO the darkness of night, I look around, making sure there are no witnesses I need to dispose of. We definitely stick out to anyone that may be around us. Dressed head to toe in all black with steel-toed combat boots laced up to our shins, and wearing masks, we blend together to the point no one can tell us apart.

Only the four of us know to look for the little tattoos we have behind our ears, each one labelled with our calling. We’ve left no one else alive to connect each of us to our vocation.

I gently touch the white horse behind my ear and remember the day I was branded with it. The memory of smelling my burned flesh lingers, and I huff to push that fucked up shit out of my brain and lock it back in place.

Hopping into the clown car we boosted before heading here, Shade sighs loudly as Smoke smashes the seat forward and hands the nun off to Spook, who jumped in first.

“I’ll rock, paper, scissor you for shotgun!” Smoke demands of Shade, already positioning his hands to do a rapidfire game.

“Back. Now, moron. You’re all lucky I haven’t called an Uber yet and left you to fend for yourselves. This filthy excuse for a vehicle better make it back to my car. If I get any diseases, you best start sleeping with one eye open,” Shade threatens coldly.

It’s comical to watch him brush dust off his gear like it’s one of his expensive suits. I’m convinced the only reason he

doesn't wear one on missions is because they can't hold enough weapons.

"Bruh. Check his goddamn batteries. There's no way that asshole has a full charge with how moody he's been lately. It's like, worse than normal," Spook quips.

Once Smoke has squashed himself in the back, and sandwiched the nun between him and Spook, we take off down the road. Spook starts whistling a hauntingly familiar tune, and I tap my fingers on the steering wheel to the beat.

It's the same tune he used to whistle down in the prisons of hell we escaped from; the place where our demons were born. The sound of the gentle melody was the only thing that kept me grounded and sane enough to remind me I was still human.

A smile forms on my lips as I see the fast food restaurant approaching and hit the signal for the blinker. When Shade curses me out, the three of us burst into laughter at his expense. The man is wound up way too tight.

Pulling up to the speaker to look, the lady asks what we want before we even have a chance to scan the items and decide.

"Don't get your panties in a wad, baby. Give us a minute," Spook says from the back seat. He taps his chin with his finger as he scans over the options, and I can see the steam coming out of poor Shade's ears.

"Order when you're ready," she huffs as Shade stares dead ahead, holding on to the last of his sanity. He grits his teeth so hard a vein starts throbbing in his temple.

"Give me a double with light mayo. The moment you drown my burger in that goopy white shit is the moment I drown you," Smoke grumbles from the back, and I snort.

"You know what would be even better right now? A Lunchable. The pizza kit ones where they have perfectly portioned pepperonis and cheese for all three of the slices. I guess I'll have the chicken burger for now, but when we get back home, I want my Lunchables," Spook rambles as I turn to look at Shade.



“I. Will. Murder. Everyone. In. This. Fucking. Car,” he pushes out through his teeth, clenching his fists so tightly I feel like he’s about to break his own hands.

Turning back to the speaker, I place our order. I decide to get the little nun a small fry as well. You can’t torture someone properly unless they have the energy to give you the pretty information you seek. Or you can starve them out until they give up everything they have for a lick of a stale fry. Either way, it’s a win-win for me.

“Oh, and one vanilla ice cream cone for the big fucker beside me. He has hemorrhoids, so he’s got a sore asshole and could use a treat,” I finish, and Spook loses his mind in the back, cackling so hard the nun bolts awake and pales when she realizes where she is. We don’t need her screaming and drawing attention to us right now, so Smoke quickly pinches the nerves in her neck to knock her back out.

When she drops across his lap, Shade and I look in the rearview mirror at the same time to see the smear of blood she’s left on the seat where she was just sitting.

“How is she still bleeding? She will not be getting into my car while she’s bleeding out like a pig at a slaughterhouse,” Shade bitches as Spook grabs a discarded coat off the floor, pulls the nun back up to a sitting position, and throws it over her and the bloodied seat.

Pulling up to the window, I pay for our food as the lady stares us down like she’s questioning everything we’re wearing. “We had a costume party and somebody drank a little too much,” I say, hiking a thumb over my shoulder at the nun who’s now snoring away on Spook’s shoulder.

The lady snorts as she hands us our order and waves us off. I hand Shade his frozen treat before tossing the food into Smoke’s lap and pulling back onto the road.

“Hey, can I get one lick?” Spook asks Shade.

Without a response, Shade turns around and shoves the ice cream into his face before turning back to look out the

window. Without pause, he starts tapping his fingers on his thigh like he just might kill us this time.

“You know, ice cream up the fucking nose causes brain freeze. Learn something new every day,” Spook smarts off as he starts to wipe his face, blowing the ice cream out of his nose.

“I’ll have to give brain freeze a try sometime. I’m sure one of my torture victims would love a carefully crafted dose of liquid nitrogen in the sinuses,” Smoke says, tapping his chin at the thought of it.

War loves chaos.

Shade’s jaw ticks as his eyes move to the rearview mirror, checking on the girl. At this point, he’s beyond pissed to the point he can’t speak, and that makes me giddy.

The car gives a sputter as I try to push the gas pedal to keep us moving, headed toward where Shade parked one of his cars.

“If this motherfucker breaks down on the side of the road, I’m going to enjoy stabbing every damn one of you!” Shade snaps as he bangs on the dashboard like that’s the magical fix to all the issues this piece of shit has.

In hindsight, this was probably the worst car we could have stolen, but it’s too late now. All we can do is hope for the best at this point.

“Uh, I think a wrench may work better than your fists. Just guessing here,” Spook suggests. Shade finally snaps and launches himself into the back seat to strangle him.

I whistle and tap the steering wheel as the car actually does start to drive a bit better. I won’t give Shade the satisfaction of letting him know that though.



# SMOKE

DAMN, this job has been one for the books. Between the scared nun and the diddle priest fuck, we've had a good night. Though, what the fuck that mobster prick could want with a frail little nun is beyond me, but she definitely ain't being handed over in one piece. Not from what Spook just told us.

After we finally made it back to our compound, Spook ran off to grab some medical supplies to patch up the nun while I secured the priest in my torture chamber. Or interrogation centre, if you prefer a more diplomatic description.

“What do you mean, she's still bleeding?” Shade asks coldly, his body tighter than a rattlesnake ready to strike. “It's impossible!”

Spook doesn't even flinch at our brother's anger.

“I'm no doctor, but I know whip wounds when I see them. She has dozens of lashes on her back. A few must have been given just before we showed up. They're deep, which is why she's still bleeding.” Spook looks at Shade like he's a dumbass for not grasping this, but honestly, how were we to know the nun was being abused? It's a fair response.

“Did you bandage her up before running out here to tell us this?” Shadow asks, and Spook rolls his eyes.

This is fucking boring. I need to be in the basement torturing the priest, not here listening to petty, bickering bullshit.

“Fucking obviously!” Spook snarks. “Do you know how pissed this asshole would be if we got blood on the expensive-

ass sheets he insists on making us sleep on?” Spook waves his hand at Shade.

“Hmm, I’d like to see that. It’s been a while since we’ve seen a Shade tantrum,” I taunt. If I have to be here, I’m at least going to get my entertainment. Him choking Spook out in the car was fucking foreplay.

“I don’t know why I tolerate the three of you,” Shade mutters, dragging his hand down his face. “We’ll have to hold out on handing her over to Bartello.”

“Uh, say what, bro?” Shadow raises an eyebrow. “She’ll die. We will literally kill her.” He’s not wrong. She already had a heart attack before we could even make introductions. She won’t survive living here.

“If you’re capable of keeping your own asses alive, I’m sure you can manage a tiny woman, for fuck’s sake.” Shade rolls his eyes, a sign he’s grown tired of this conversation, but something is bothering him. We’ve known him too long, and his not wanting to hand over the second part of the job is a tell in itself. A fucking odd one, though.

“Why exactly are we not handing her over?” I ask, baffled.

“Bartello has intel we want. We all know he didn’t pay us nearly enough for a murder and a kidnapping. I don’t like being used. He’ll soon find that out.”

“So, we’re keeping the little thing as a negotiation standpoint? Damn. That’s cold, even for us,” Spook says as he sits down with one of his goddamn Lunchables. I watch as he carefully separates the nachos and counts them.

“Call it what you will, but he’s hiding something. Now that we have something he wants, maybe he’ll be more forthcoming about it.” Shade stands and waves his hand to dismiss the meeting, and that’s all I need.

“Peace out, bitches. I’m gonna go torture the devilish holy man in our cellar.” I clap my hands together and wag my eyebrows, making Shadow bark out a laugh.

“No explosives!” Shade barks as he leaves the room, but it doesn’t stop me from hollering back.

“Buzzkill! I don’t like when Daddy tells me not to play with my toys!” I’m gonna pay for that comment later, judging by the growl that’s left in his wake.

\* \* \*

“DAMN, PRIEST. YOU MUST TAKE A LOT OF FUCKING DRUGS TO snap out of the sedative that fast,” I taunt as I circle the chair he’s tied down to. It’s bolted to the floor so he can’t go anywhere, and Shade had the cellar fitted with drains for easy wash down after a torture session. Nice to know my brother loves me enough to not let me sit in that stank all day.

“And here we thought you were just a gambling, sex trafficking, go-between. But you’ve been hitting the good stuff, huh, priest? I’m mildly impressed, actually.” And I am. My targets are normally a blubbering mess by now.

It’s not often I get to play with someone who has a huge tolerance for drugs. I wonder if that same tolerance translates to pain? We’re about to find out.

Stopping behind him, I stand deathly still until he starts to get a little shaky, wondering what my next move will be. My knife is at the ready, just waiting to strike when he’s least expecting it. I wait for what must feel like hours to him before he releases that first sob, then strike with deadly accuracy, slamming my knife into his shoulder.

“AHHHH!” he howls behind the gag.

“Music to my fucking ears, my man. Took you a bit to make a noise though. Good on you,” I praise him with a smile when I walk back in front of him. “You’re going to be a fun one.”

“I’m fairly certain someone told us at one point to not play with our food,” Spook says from the doorway. I turn to see him leaning against it, looking bored as hell.

I heard the bastard coming but clearly the priest didn’t, because he cries even louder, making Spook and I both cackle.

To be fair, we're trained to not be heard, we're just used to one another so we're usually able to catch it.

"Wow, you freaked him out, huh?" Spook teases with another laugh. "Let me guess, you stood behind him silently until he couldn't even sense you anymore, then pounced?"

I shrug. "It's a good way to start. You know I prefer when they're screaming from the get-go."

Spook nods, sobering up. "Just came to tell you she's awake. Well, she was. She screamed so much when I walked in that she passed back out so I gave her some drugs to chill." He rolls his eyes and huffs out an annoyed breath. "She opened some of the damn cuts, ruining all my hard work. Shade's gonna have a fucking conniption."

"Fucking hell. Thanks for the heads up." Once Spook leaves us alone again, I turn back to the priest. He's too quiet now, glaring at the spot where Spook stood. "Now, priest, I gotta ask. What the hell was a holy man such as yourself doing beating on a tiny little thing?"

He starts shooting off what I can only assume are curse words behind the gag, so I grab the knife and twist it in his shoulder before pulling it back out. The sounds that leave him are like a beautiful fucking symphony. Joined by the sight of his tears, it's a production to behold.

"At first, I thought she was your plaything and loved pain," I tell him, moving over to the table with all of my toys, letting his protests serenade me. "But given how terrified she is and how deep those lashes are, it's definitely not possible."

Dropping the knife to the table, I reach for my mini saw blade and hammer, and grin. God, this will be fun. "No, according to my brother, some of those lashes are very old. Were you whipping a child, priest? That's awfully fucked up of you."

I turn and walk back to him, openly playing with the saw blade while he eyes me. "I mean, for me to say that something is fucked should probably give you pause." Moving the

toothed blade to the side of his leg, just above the knee, I pause and look at him. “Don’t you think?”

I don’t give him a chance to answer before I swing the hammer down, embedding the toothed blade deep into his leg, feeling alive when his blood coats my hands. He hollers so hard, I see his eyes roll into the back of his head, and quickly grab the smelling salts from my pocket. Can’t have this fucker trying to take a nap during the fun part.

“Hmm, I think I’m going to enjoy playing with you, priest. Actually, I’ve decided to keep you alive for a while. I really want to take my time with you. You’re just so responsive.”

The colour drains from his face even more, and I know I’ve made the right call.

If I could, I would keep him alive for days just to play, but unfortunately, we’re on a time crunch so a few hours will have to do. It’s a shame we have such time constraints on us with this job because long and drawn out torture is my favourite.





# SHADE

“SHE REOPENED HER CUTS AGAIN. Tag, you’re it,” Spook chimes from down the hall.

“This isn’t a wrestling match. Let her bleed. Maybe it’ll keep her ass knocked out longer.” Shadow is being less than helpful, but I just shake my head and turn my attention back to the screen.

Smoke has gotten several good blade hits in—a favourite move of his because it’s painful as fuck but not life threatening by any means—but I think he’s getting ready to move on to something else.

“Shade’s going to go batshit when she ruins his Egyptian cotton sheets,” Spook sings out. He isn’t wrong.

Everything is clean and in its place. Orderly.

Control and authority are where I excel. It’s a deep-seated part of my very soul, and I don’t care if it bothers anyone. My need for control is great enough that if pushed, I’ll push back until the life drains from you in ways you’ve never imagined.

Famine is my calling.

“Try using glue or something then. I’m trying to get through these requests so we can work on our next targets. I want to make sure Shade doesn’t pick something boring,” Shadow replies, always on the hunt for his next soul to snatch.

Death never rests.

I roll my eyes at his statement. It’s like I live in a house with toddlers. We haven’t been children in a long time, if we

ever really were to begin with. Though, I suppose not everyone can be as cold as I am. I just prefer not to feel. Feelings cloud judgement.

“Oh, priest! You bleed well. How are you feeling?” I hear Smoke taunt. The priest cries and curses up a storm—for obvious reasons.

Once my brother discards the blade and hammer, he picks up a hunting knife before preparing the bubble wrap he sometimes uses as packing for the wounds he inflicts.

Good. He deserves to suffer for his sins. I’m not a religious man, quite the opposite, actually, but the priest has done things so vile he can’t rightfully call himself one either.

“Do you like my knife? It’s gorgeous, isn’t it?” my brother taunts, but a whimper from the other side of the room steals my attention.

It’s best for her to not wake up again. It would be detrimental to her own health if she acted like a scared little girl in a house full of depraved bastards such as ourselves.

We’re supposed to deliver her with the priest’s dead body, but that won’t be happening. I’ve grown tired of the games Bartello tries to play, thinking he’s the bigger and smarter man.

He’s not, and he never will be. No one on earth can beat us. They can try, but it’s impossible to kill something that doesn’t exist, and we don’t. To the knowing underworld, we’re a myth. There are a few rare people lucky enough to know of our very existence and still be living. But it only means they hold some form of value to us. Make no mistake, though. We will kill anyone when their value runs out. Loose ends leave room for vulnerability, something I will not allow.

“No, no, no,” the nun whimpers, tossing around, and I sigh.

“Hush. Go to sleep,” I order her in a cold, calm voice. I do not want to deal with this.

*Then why are you in here in the first place?*

Easy. I don't feel like listening to any more screaming outside of the ones coming from Smoke's chamber.

When she settles down and stops moving, I frown and stare over at her. That's odd. Maybe she can teach these other fools how to listen to what they're told.

"You know what, priest? I changed my mind," I hear Smoke say over the headset, drawing my attention back to the screen. "I'm going to try something new with you."

I watch as he discards the knife before moving over to the lift he has attached to the roof. Perfect. He's going to hang the man from the rafters which means we're finally getting somewhere.

"Please forgive him. He knows not what he does," the girl whimpers but doesn't move.

Out of curiosity, I decide to chance her waking up in order to gain some answers.

"Who, child?" I ask, then roll my eyes at myself. Like she's going to believe I'm a priest. Actually, I'm fairly certain I'd go to Hell for acting as one if I hadn't already been forged there.

"Uncle, God. H-he just...doesn't want me to become like mother," she whispers as tears stream down her cheeks, still fast asleep.

Does she truly believe she's talking to God right now? Fuck, that's some damage. Or drugs. Spook did shoot her up with painkillers after she woke up the last time.

"Your uncle?" I ask another question.

"Yes," she breathes through the tears. "Father Milligan."

Jesus Fuck. The priest was abusing her so she wouldn't turn into her mother? That's a different level of fucked up, and a lot like the shit we were put through as children. The knowledge leaves a feeling akin to pity sinking into my stomach. I don't like it.

"Sleep." It's the last thing I say as I turn my attention back to the screen.

Smoke has the bastard hung and stripped down to his underwear, already stained from piss and shit that he couldn't hold in.

*Weak.*

“I wasn't sure who I'd get to use this on first, but I've decided you're the lucky bastard.” Smoke shrugs. “It's only fair, considering all of the apparent abuse you've doled out on that girl we found you *guarding*.” He uses a mocking tone.

The priest bellows through the gag, and his entire body shakes fear from the implement Smoke is waving around like a lunatic. If I didn't know any better, I'd think my brother had truly lost it. But you can't lose sanity when you've never had it to begin with.

“Looks like a cheese grater, doesn't it?” he taunts the hanging man. “It's quite genius, really. It's my own take on one. Larger and much more dangerous for what I have in mind. Instead of grating cheese, the holes on my creation are mildly sharp and pointed, perfect for slicing through skin.” My brother walks around to the priest's back, and I turn the volume down in preparation for the unhinged screams about to meet my ears.

“Mmmm, the perfect canvas,” Smoke purrs, adjusting his dick before he moves in closer. “Let's get artsy, holy man.”

Watching on, I smirk at the screen as Smoke drags his implement down the priest's back, making him cry out in pain.

I change camera views just as Smoke drags the tool down in a second strip, slowly and thoroughly making the priest's back look like string cheese as his skin and muscle are torn to shreds.

“Yes. Scream for me, holy man! Scream and beg to the God you forsook!” Smoke cackles as he continues to drag down a few more strips before stopping when the priest passes out.

When he moves to the table and cuts a large chunk of bubble wrap, I know what's coming next. He tapes the bottom and sides to the priest's body, and I watch on as he grabs two

bottles of that horrid vodka we stole from Koschov months ago and pours it into the bubble-like pouch he's made.

As the priest screams in agony from the pain of the alcohol, I close the app down, knowing Smoke has a lot more to go before he's done. I'm satisfied in seeing some of the brutality take place. Now it's time to get to work on the finer things—like fielding inquiries for hire to find our next job, if we even choose to take one right now.

I unfortunately can't leave it up to Shadow or the others to choose our jobs. If I did, they'd accept every proposal we get, and that is not how the Horsemen work.



# SPOOK

“OH, YOU EDGY LITTLE BASTARD,” I say to no one as the fucking pepperoni shifts on my Lunchable slice again. It’s so hard to get them placed just right.

“Preacher man is all ready for you, my guy,” Smoke says, walking by the archway to the kitchen and knocking on the frame.

I lean over in my chair to see his departing back heading toward his room to shower off a whole day’s worth of torture and killing. He’s covered in blood from head to toe, making me jealous as fuck.

I miss torturing poor bastards, but Smoke needs it the most out of all of us. It’s the way he fights his inner demons. For me, it’s getting creative with math and using nature and chemicals to create new—and often deadly—concoctions for maximum effect.

Just as I feel the chair start to lean over too much, I slam it back to the ground and focus on getting this goddamn pepperoni in place. Once I have it settled, I pick up the plate of little DIY pizzas and slowly make my way over to the microwave. These little bastards are best when the cheese has been melted slightly.

Dead bodies can wait. My Lunchable cannot.

I run into my first issue when I get to the microwave and balance the plate in one hand to hit the button for the door to pop open. Placing the plate down, I shut the door and set it to twenty seconds and watch in fascination as the cheese melts



down smoothly. I wonder what would happen if we put someone's head in here. I'm gonna ask Smoke to do that next. That shit would be awesome.

When the microwave dings, I hit the button and snatch out my prize. Grabbing one that feels like lava, I bite off a chunk while breathing dragon fire to control the burn.

I toss the plate in the sink when I'm done and snort at the fact Shade's OCD ass is going to explode because I didn't rinse it off first. Patting my stomach in satisfaction, I head toward Smoke's torture chamber to start the clean up.

We have the perfect system here. Smoke tortures and kills, I'm a bioweapon genius, Shadow is the group's protector, and Shade is our leader. Not because he's better than us, but because he's the cold one. He could walk through fire and it would freeze on contact because he's that icy. Shade goes the extra mile to protect us, keeping us alive and ensuring we never lose another one of us again.

Shadow, my love, is the first to jump into the fire because he has the hardest time containing the memories and keeping them at bay. He's always the first to draw a weapon and will literally die to protect all of us. It's why he smokes so much, to try and find the calm he's constantly grasping for, that always seems just out of reach.

We have a system and it works. We're the Horsemen, the bringers of death and destruction. Without order to our chaos, we wouldn't have become who we are.

The second I hit the door to Smoke's torture zone, the smell hits me like a bag of bricks, shaking me from my thoughts and making me gag from the smell of shit mixed with so much blood. Killing fuckers is fun, but damn if these assholes don't leave a lingering stank.

I take my nose plugs out and tuck them into my nostrils before grabbing my gloves and a plastic apron. Putting my hands on my hips, I stare down at the dead man's body and look over Smoke's handiwork. The priest's back looks like it's been melted off. I scan the room and see a large cheese grater on his work table and roll my eyes.

“That better not be the one Shade just bought, goddamn it. You know how hard it is to use those annoying spin cutter things?” I ask the priest and sigh when he doesn’t answer.

“Yeah, I know it’s not your problem, but keeping basic household kitchen items intact in a home of fucking mercenaries is damn near impossible. Especially with Smokey-boy when he decides to get all creative. He’s the one who no doubt came on you multiple times as he was ripping your body apart. Never a dull moment with my brothers, I’ll tell you that, you holy fucktwat.”

I move over to where we normally keep the plastic wrap and don’t see it at all. Spinning circles around the room, all I spot to wrap this fucker up with is the bubble wrap Smoke likes to use the way a field medic would in the middle of a firefight.

“Well, I guess you’re about to have a popping good time, dude,” I tell the sky-daddy fuck and get to work, wrapping him up tightly and taping it all off.

I take a little longer wrapping this guy than normal because my intrusive thoughts win out more than normal as I pop a bubble here and there. My mind is such a bitch sometimes.

Once I’m finished with that, I kick him over and snort when the bubble wrap crackles and pops.

“I’m never using plastic wrap again,” I say before grabbing the bleach and slinging it all over.

Picking up Smoke’s tools, I dump them in the sink and douse them in bleach too. The asshole loves to use rusted shit on his victims, but Shade doesn’t love having to replace his shit constantly. If I have to choose between Smoke’s bitching or Shade’s, it’s a no-brainer. Cleaning it is.

I leave them to soak for a minute as I grab the hose and start spraying the room down to get rid of the God-awful smell that assaults my nose.

When we designed the compound with the drains Shade had insisted on, I created a cleaning agent to make life easier.

It all washes away with ease, leaving the room sparkling clean like it's never been used before. It took me a while to perfect it though. I kept getting sidetracked making homemade mustard gas by mixing different shit together. I mean, everyone needs to have some fun, right?

And hey, Shade's favourite hobby of choking me for being a righteous pain in the ass helped me cough up the fumes each and every time. Solid bro behaviour there.

Finishing with the floor and furniture that can't be moved, I quickly clean up the tools and put everything away. Taking a deep breath before grabbing the body, I heave the priest over my shoulder and make my way outside to store him in our industrial—sized walk-in freezer—Shadow's epic idea.

As soon as I open the freezer door, a face jumps out at me, and I lose my grip on the priest. He drops to the ground, and the bubble wrap pops off in rapid fire. Gripping my chest for a moment from the heart attack Bob just gave me, I take a deep breath then shove his dead self back into the cooler. Once he's back in place, I grab the priest and drag his body over the threshold into the freezer, the bubble wrap popping the entire time.

“Goddamn you, Bob, I don't have time to play with you today. I just got done with work and I'm not in the mood for 'shank-the-frozen-body-in-the-freezer' right now.” I point at the overly frozen bastard. “You know this is your fault, right? If you'd been a little better to me and Shadow, maybe we wouldn't have elected to keep you here so you can never rest in peace.”

“I think it's time for a shower, baby,” I hear from the door, and look up to see Shadow standing in the doorway. “We can piss on his corpse tomorrow. I promise,” he continues with that wicked smoulder in place.

He brings his joint to his lips and takes a long drag before holding it in his lungs for a moment. As he exhales slowly, I watch his throat work and I'm instantly hard. My arousal quickly deflates when I look back at Bob with pure hatred and anger.

“He could have had a chance, you know. He could have been here with us right now. I was right there. I had his hand in mine, and this son of a bitch put a bullet in the back of his neck,” I snarl as the memories of our escape slam into me.

There are no words to describe that vile place and what went down there. We kept the only trophy we could from our escape, and that’s this bastard’s body. It’s easy to take great pleasure in defiling it in various ways as we please, making sure his spirit never rests.

“We can’t change the past, baby. Come on, let’s get that shower,” Shadow replies, holding out his hand for me to take. I take a step and bubble wrap crunches under my foot as I look down and snort, enjoying the fact that I stepped directly on the priest’s crotch.

“Well, I mean, he doesn’t need it anymore, so there’s that,” I say with a shrug, taking Shadow’s hand in my still gloved one and walking off with him, leaving the bodies and memories behind in the freezer. Or trying to.



# SHADOW

I LEAD Spook back to my room as he drags his feet, still lost in his memories. It's not uncommon for us to have our moments, reliving the nightmares we've been through, but this time is harder than it should be.

Normally, I stay in Spook's room with him, but a change of scenery is needed to get him out of his head right now. Taking down a priest was clearly fucking with his head more than we thought it would. That's the thing about trauma though, it never strikes when you expect it to.

Guiding him to the bench just inside the bathroom, I help him sit down, then crank on the hot water. Once it's set, I work on stripping Spook out of his clean up gear and clothes. His nose plugs are still in as he sits there naked, and I snort at the ridiculous sight of it.

He's so goddamn adorable sometimes.

"What's so funny? Do I have something on my face?" he asks as he pats his cheeks like there's smeared blood or something. I tap my nose, and he realizes what I'm saying.

"Oh!" he exclaims, and then snorts so hard the nose plugs fly across the room.

I just shake my head at him with a smile, and start stripping down. Testing the water again to make sure it's not 'burn-your-nut sack-off hot,' I offer my hand to him, following behind him as he steps into the shower. The water runs over his body and sculpted abs, and I watch the droplets drip down

his back to his calves. That ass is one of the most glorious things about this man. He's toned in all the right places.

I pick up a washcloth and lather it with soap before gently cleaning him off, soothing his racing thoughts. Spook's head drops back and rests on my shoulder as I set to work, washing his chest before moving lower.

A moan leaves his lips, and I glance down to see him rock hard for me. Biting his neck at the same moment I wrap my hand around his length, still holding the cloth, he loses his mind.

"Fuck!" he screams as he thrusts his hips.

I grab his hip, dig my fingers into his skin, and guide his sweet ass back to my cock. Water is a horrible lubricant, so there won't be any pounding into him here. Fuck, I want him so bad right now. I want to fuck all of his lasting pain away until all he can think about is my cum filling his sweet ass.

I give his length a few more tugs before spinning him around and slapping the washcloth against his chest. He tries to wash my chest first, but I grab his wrist and shake my head.

"You can start at my feet, baby. Kneel," I demand. His eyes flare as he drops to his knees and gets to work, slowly running the cloth over my legs before taking my length in his mouth.

I hiss from the warmth surrounding me and tilt my head back as he swallows me whole. He continues to run the cloth over my lower half while applying the perfect amount of suction that has my balls ready to explode.

"Do you think the innocent little nun would sin between us? Imagine having her sweet untouched pussy, dripping wet for us as she begs for our cocks. She'd struggle to take us both, but she would because she would obey the Devils she traded her God for," Spook says, placing kisses along my pelvis.

"Is that what you want, baby boy? You want that sweet little sinner to worship us?" I ask huskily. I glance down at him as he stares up into my eyes.

“She could pull us from the depths of torment we’ve found ourselves in, you know. Just like the knife-loving vixen changed *them*,” he answers with his voice full of hope. Of course, he’s going to compare this situation to the Deadly Seven, a group we’ve spent a long time tracking in case they ever encroached on our territory.

“She wouldn’t survive us. Stop believing that we have a chance in a world that sacrificed us to the pits of Hell,” I snarl back at him, irritated that he’s searching for a way to save us. We can’t be saved. We are who we are, and there’s no coming back from that.

“We fought our way to freedom. We beat that place and those sick fucks. We deserve—” he starts to argue, but I snatch his chin in my grip and shut him up real quick.

“We deserve to have rivers of blood running in the streets, and a throne made from the bones of the people that forged us to become what we are. No mercy.” I stare down at him, waiting for him to finish my statement.

“No peace,” he replies as his eyes grow dull.

I hate seeing him lose his sparkle like this, but we can’t afford to bank on hopes and dreams. I can’t lose another person in my fucked up little band of bastards, especially for a woman that faints at the sight of us.

We tried once, to bring a woman into our fold, but no one can handle our darkness outside the four of us.

I kiss Spook gently, letting his chin go, and step out of the shower. I dry off and leave a towel for him as I walk out to get dressed. We have a holy man to deliver to the gates of our client tonight, along with a message. Unfortunately, we don’t have time for sexual fun and punishment. And a punishment fuck is exactly what my baby boy needs to remember the fucked up shit we thrive on and why no one would survive it.

As soon as I’m dressed, I head out to find Shade and start the process of getting this goddamn job over with.

“It’ll be the two of you tonight. Smoke needs sleep. I’ll continue to keep watch over the little lamb. Make sure they



understand the message,” he orders the second I find him, and I roll my eyes. We have yet to come across one fucker that doesn’t shiver at the sight of us, so these assholes will definitely get the message.

While Spook gets ready for the drop off, I retrieve the body from the freezer and head to the garage to stuff the stiffy in the trunk. Once the body is secure, I walk to the front of the car to wait for Spook.

Propping myself up against the hood of the car, I light up another joint. Inhaling the heavy smoke, my system starts to calm and my rage settles. I can normally control my emotions better but that hopeful look on Spook’s face slaughtered me.

I had hope at one time. When I was in my cell, I hoped we would all make it out of that place. That every single one of us could breathe in air that wasn’t filled with the smell of decay. But that hope died when I watched a boy, once so close to us, die right at the doorway of our freedom. A part of me died with him, and that hope disappeared, tasting like ash whenever it tried to arise again.

I take a moment to look around to see if Spook is hurrying his ass up and spot something on the windshield of the car, wedged between the wiper blade and glass. I snort, thinking Smoke got a parking ticket the last time he drove this vehicle, and chuckle at the thought of Shade losing his goddamn mind over it.

Snatching it up and opening the paper, my blood runs cold as I read what’s written.

*For men that banded together in the pits of Hell, you really have forgotten what it’s like to feel alive. Could it be you need a reminder?*

I roll my eyes at the stupid-ass message, letting the panic ease from my body. Spook really loves to toy with me all the fucking time. I ball it up and toss it in the trash can by the wall as Spook finally comes through the door.

“Cute little message you left, but that’s going to cost you later, baby. When we drop this fucker and get back here, that

ass is mine,” I growl at him. He looks confused as hell for a moment then shrugs as he gets in the car, waiting for me to join him without saying a word.

Yeah, that ass is definitely mine when we get back.



# FAWN

*HURTS. Everything hurts.*

Rolling over, I can't summon the energy to open my eyes as I try and recall what happened. Everything has been such a blur since those horrible men took my uncle and myself from our sanctuary.

The first thing I notice is the pain that normally plagues me for weeks after a whipping isn't there. The Lord has blessed me with this slight mercy, and I send a silent prayer, thanking Him for His grace.

I take a moment to listen to my surroundings and hear tapping not far from me that can only be from a keyboard. Taking a chance, I crack an eye open and almost scream at the pain that assaults my head from the light in the room.

"I know you're awake," the cold voice from before states.

I take a deep breath and try to stay calm, even though my heart races in fear. "Awake?" I swallow nervously. My mouth feels like it's coated in sand. "Y-yes, but I can't seem to open my eyes," I admit with a groan.

Squeezing my eyes harder, I try to push the pain enough to focus. Did they drug me? I vaguely remember waking up screaming. God, save me. This is a nightmare from Hell I'm not sure I'll survive.

"Then don't," the voice says, and it's only the years of abuse that keeps me quiet. If anything, I want to cry and scream while snorting at this man's audacity.

Who does he think he is? He kidnapped me, plans to do who knows what to me, and yet he thinks I should do as he says?

No way. It's not like I have much to live for. Whatever they have planned for me is probably worse than the fate of landing in my uncle's hands after mother died. If God wants this to be the end for me, so shall it be. At least I won't have to feel pain and fear anymore.

*Whoa, okay. That's a depressing thought, and wholly unlike me. Did I hit my head? I suppose it's possible given how badly it aches, meaning I probably have a concussion. Lovely.*

"Stop thinking so loud, lamb." It's a direct order, barring no room for argument.

"Can't," I grunt, pushing the palms of my hands into my eyes. Something has to shake me out of this. My entire body feels heavy.

Honestly, if I could stop my mind from always thinking, it would be a welcome reprieve, but I've not found a way to do so yet. I doubt I ever will at the rate I'm going.

The man mutters something under his breath before shuffling closer to the bed, blocking the light from seeping through my lids. "Take these."

My heart races a million miles a second at his closeness, making my head spin from fear. Why is he so close? I need him to step away.

"Enough. Breathe and take these. Now." His words sink in after a moment.

"W-what?" I croak, my throat feeling dryer than the Sahara Desert.

"I do not find enjoyment in repeating myself. Take. These." His voice is so cold and growly, I find myself wishing he'd just disappear.

"S-sorry," I whisper, slowly removing my hands from my eyes and opening one just enough to see him standing before me. "Water?" I ask, not sure where the courage comes from.

But if he wants me to swallow down pills, I'm going to need a drink.

He moves to the side, allowing the light to hit my eyes, and I scream in pain as he steps back to block it.

“Here.” He holds the water and pills out to me, sounding annoyed.

“Thank you.” I take the pills from him and toss them into my mouth, not bothering to question what they are. He hands me the glass of water, and after the first sip, I drink it all down.

When was the last time I had something to drink? How long have I been out?

“Good,” he says coldly, drawing my focus to him.

The man before me is dressed in dark navy slacks secured by a belt. The shirt he's wearing is a very light shade of blue, so it matches well with the contrasting navy tie. It's not hard to tell he takes pride in how he looks.

When my eyes land in his face, I gasp quietly, stunned by the icy glare. He looks like a wicked devil, and I remember those eyes. Those striking grey eyes were the last thing I saw before I passed out in the cellar of the church.

His hair is dark and neatly styled on the top of his head, fitting his sophisticated look. I assume most people would think he's handsome if they were to see him on the street.

I've heard the younger girls at the church ogling over movie stars, and even seen a couple of their magazines in passing. He seems like he'd fit right in. After all, Hollywood is a breeding ground of sin and despair. His cool nature and looks would have him blending in with the crowd.

“Stop.”

I jolt. “Huh?”

“Stop staring. Rest.”

Gee, the man doesn't like to talk much, does he? “Rest. Right,” I state, remembering the pills he just fed me.

I still don't bother to ask what they were. If they don't kill me, then hopefully they'll help the pain in my head enough that I can try and escape from here.

Lying back down on the bed, I close my eyes and take a deep breath. "Am I going to die?"

"Of course. Everyone dies."

"Of course," I mutter to myself, rolling onto my side and giving him my back. I can feel a full ache where the sharpness from the lashes usually is, but it's nothing like I'm used to.

That's when I take note of my back feeling heavier. Did they bandage me up? Why would they do that if they want to kill me? It makes no sense.

*Unless they want to rape and torture me.*

The thought has me whimpering as tears form in my eyes. I guess there are worse things than death after all. I'd just momentarily forgotten them.

"Sleep," he orders, and as odd as it sounds, it slows my breathing a bit so I can pull myself back together.

Sleep now, and if or when I wake up, I'll make a run for it.

\* \* \*

HE'S STILL HERE. I CAN SENSE HIS DARK AND LOOMING presence, but I came up with a plan while I fell asleep. It's probably a terrible one, but it's the best option I have if I want to try and gain my freedom.

"I have to pee," I mutter, embarrassed that I have to say this to a stranger.

"You know where the bathroom is." It's a statement. He clearly saw me scope out the room during our last interaction.

"Yes, thank you," I whisper, slowly moving my body to sit up. The pain seems to have eased a bit, meaning the pills he gave me probably won't kill me.

No response. He stares at his phone, completely uninterested in me.

*Then why is he in here?* Shaking my head, I decide I don't care to know the answer to that question when my bladder is screaming at me. *It's now or never, Fawn. Stay strong and trust in God to save you.*

With more struggle than I care to acknowledge, I get myself off the bed and walk to the bathroom. Once the door is secured and locked, I quickly do my business before staring out of the tiny bathroom window.

I'm not even sure I'll fit through it, but I have to try. Taking a deep breath, I hold my breath and push it open. When it doesn't make a sound, the air rushes out of me.

"Let's do this," I whisper to myself as I start to climb through.

I'm small enough I'll make myself fit, even if the pain is excruciating.





# SHADE

*RUN, little lamb, run.*

It wasn't difficult to figure out she'd try to run. It's what anyone with any sense of fight would do in her situation. I am surprised she forced herself through that window without crying out in pain, especially after the beating she took and the drugs Spook gave her. Her back scraping against the windowsill must have been excruciating for her.

Oh well, not my problem. Not really, anyway. While she may have escaped the house, she'll never get far.

I watch the nun with a feral smile on my face. She stumbles through the woods, shaking like a leaf as her whimpers echo through the trees. God, I love the hunt. I don't care who I'm hunting as long as I get to let the monster within free.

"Please, God, help me find a way out," I hear her beg. Not that she's being loud, since that would be even more foolish than her trying to run.

No, I'm listening to her over the security system. Every inch of this property is not only fenced in and unbreachable, but also has state of the art security. Not that this poor girl knows that.

"God can't help you, little lamb. You're not in church anymore," I snarl out as adrenaline pumps through my veins.

The nun stumbles and falls to her knees, letting out a sharp cry. She's losing steam quite quickly. Running from us was a very dumb thing to do. She's wasting crucial energy she needs

to heal, but not everyone can be graced with a mind such as mine to make decisions that may seem scary in the moment in order to save yourself later.

If she had waited until she were stronger, at least she wouldn't be struggling so much. I suppose I can stop and appreciate her attempt to run and save herself from uncertain fate, though.

“Oh, little lamb. That had to hurt,” I taunt, making her scream in fear.

She fumbles around, trying to get back up. “Please, let me go!” Her sadness echo through the trees with every hiccup.

I laugh, a dark and ominous sound even to my own ears. “Run, run, as fast as you can. I like the chase.”

She cries again, picking up her bloodied habit and running, howling with every step. Whether it's from the pain on her back or the sticks and stones stabbing her bare feet, I can't be sure.

I play cat and mouse with her for a while, allowing her to tire herself out before she comes up against the tall fence, which is impossible to climb.

“God, why have you forsaken me?! Am I to truly die this way? At the hands of manmade devils?” she screams into the night air, falling to her knees.

The fight leaves her as her entire body slumps forward. If I had a heart, I might feel bad for her.

“Giving up already, lamb?”

“I mean this in the most direct sense,” she says, launching to her feet and turning toward me. “Go straight to Hell!”

She slaps me hard enough the sound echoes through the forest like her earlier cries, stunning me for just a moment as she takes off running.

“Big mistake,” I snarl. This woman is stoking a fire inside of me, bringing out the dangerous animal within. If she's not careful, she'll suffer dire consequences for toying with a beast.

She doesn't stop running, but flinches at the sound of my voice. Good, she's afraid.

It only takes a few more minutes before she loses steam and falls again, her sobs ringing out into the darkness.

"I've known monsters my entire life. Just because I fear you, doesn't mean I'll bow to your will," she hisses through her tears as I pick her up and toss her over my shoulder.

"Let this be your first lesson in survival."

"We both know I won't survive. You're going to kill me," she cries, broken and defeated as I carry her back to the house.

If I were a better man, I'd assure her she won't die, but that would be a lie. "Death is inevitable. Get used to it."

"You're heartless!" she wails as we walk through the door:

"Yes."

"Please, let me go!" she cries again, louder than before. Maybe she's not done fighting after all.

"No." I march through the house, back to the room we've had her in since she arrived. When we get inside, I drop her onto the bed, uncaring when she howls in pain. Weakness gets you nowhere. "Stay," I order.

Eyeing the nun closely, I move over to the closet and pull out a set of restraints. Smoke insisted we have them for every room in case the impossible happened and we needed to incapacitate someone quickly. Albeit, this is the first time they've been used for something other than Shadow and Spook fucking in random rooms.

The last time I caught them, I told them I'd kill them before disposing of their bodies if that shit left their rooms ever again. I have no tolerance for unnecessary mess and bodily fluids everywhere is exactly that, making it a murdering offence.

"No. Please, don't tie me up. I promise, I won't try and run again." She sobs uncontrollably as I cuff her hands, ignoring her pleas.

“Bad choices have consequences.” I don’t look at her as I finish securing her arms and legs to the bed.

After double-checking that she’s truly secure, I step away from her, my chest rising and falling in excitement. There’s nothing quite like seeing your prey tied up and vulnerable.

Smoke isn’t the only one of us that gets off on the violence—he’s just the most obvious about it since he’s a sadistic fuck.

“Please!” she begs once more when I take a step toward the door.

“Stop begging. It’s pathetic,” I tell her coldly before walking out and slamming the door, ignoring her cries of anguish. The others can deal with her from here on out.



# SMOKE

THE SOUND of Shade's stomping followed by the nun's cries wakes me up. We all knew better than to leave him alone with her, but that hard-ass needed a release, and I'm guessing Miss Prays-a-Lot decided to try to escape.

Sitting up in bed and rubbing my eyes, I know I didn't get as much sleep as I wanted to, but as the saying goes—the devil never rests.

I hop out of bed and head to the bathroom, take a much needed piss, and shower off my sluggish state.

Once I'm feeling semi-alive again, I head toward the kitchen to grab a bite to eat. Sifting through the almost bare refrigerator, I spot one of Spook's nacho Lunchables and glance around like a thief. My stomach growls like a bitch, reminding me how hungry I am. Spook isn't here, so I'll take the ass kicking I have coming to me for this.

I snatch the pack out and rip into it, saddened that it only took three bites for the entire thing to be gone. I'll never understand Spook's obsession with these damn things. There's never enough food to feed a grown man, yet he insists on having them as emotional support or some bullshit.

After tossing the trash into the bin, I head off to play with the little nun for a bit. I pass by Shade working away on his laptop in the office, and the first thing I notice is his posture isn't as stiff as it normally is. Chasing the woman must have done him some good after all.

When I approach the room she's in, I take a moment to listen to her broken cries and breathe in her despair as deeply as possible. I was there once. Hell, all of us were. This is the moment she'll figure out if she's tough enough to make it in this cruel, broken world, or if she's destined to die a mockery like so many weak people are. However, it really doesn't matter. Living with us, she'll be dead before long anyway.

I knock lightly for the hell of it and step inside. Her eyes track my movement as I grab a chair and slide it up to the bed, twirling it around before plopping down and resting my arms on the back.

"You know, it's kinda hard to sleep when you cry so damn much," I mutter, masking my amusement when her eyes flare with defiance.

"You're sick. All of you are sick. Let me go!" she screams, thrashing against the cuffs and chains holding her prisoner.

"I bet your mind is racing a million miles per minute, isn't it? All of the thoughts about the things that could happen to you? It's like a cycle of your worst nightmares playing on repeat, being spoon-fed to you over and over again." I know the feeling all too well. "I used to listen while Spook hummed during those times. His mind was different from ours, you see. He *liked* being hurt and tortured. It's where I first realized I wasn't scared of it myself. No, I began to thrive in it. I watched men be cut to pieces, and it made my cock so hard it was painful," I ramble thoughtlessly to her, lost in my memories for a moment.

"Were they bad men?" she asks quietly.

I glance down at her, noticing how calm she's become while listening to me. She looks curious, but fear and curiosity go hand in hand.

"Not always. Some of them just made bad choices. That didn't make them bad people," I reply, watching her carefully to see how she processes that.

"Death isn't always the answer. Sometimes prayer and forgiveness work too," she states like it's a solid fact.



“Has prayer and forgiveness ever worked to save you?” I quip, tilting my head slightly to study her.

“I’m not sure. It’s led me here with you all. I feel it’s a punishment,” she whispers as tears gather in her eyes.

“That’s unfortunate for you. We are the best at punishments,” I tell her with a smirk, getting up from my seat.

“Settle in, little sinner. It’s going to be one hell of a ride for you,” I taunt, giving her a wink before leaving the room, her gasping breath of shock putting a smile on my face.

I walk back to my room, quickly changing my clothes to take my bike out for a joyride. When I hit the garage, I find the key to my bike and hop on, starting the engine. As I turn the wheel to head out, a bundled up piece of paper on the floor beside me catches my eye.

Reaching down to grab it, I straighten it out and see the ominous threat. This could easily be a teasing note between Spook and Shadow since Spook loves to taunt him...but I’m fucking paranoid, and something about this just doesn’t feel right.

I change my mind about taking a joyride and decide to provide backup for my brothers at Bartello’s, just in case. After turning the bike off, I stalk over to one of the hidden weapons vaults stashed throughout the compound.

Once my gear is situated with everything in its rightful place, I leave the bunker and head back into the garage. My favourite pistols are strapped to my legs as I swing my leg over the seat of the bike to mount my beastly beauty, then race against the closing garage door, almost clipping my head on the way out.

Gunning the bike to maximum speeds, I fly down the road, taking the curves so tightly my knee almost scrapes the pavement. I love playing with my own death too fucking much—the adrenaline pumping through my veins, knowing that the slightest mistake could kill me is exhilarating.

It takes about thirty minutes less than it normally would to reach the block where Shadow and Spook currently are. After

parking my bike in an empty alleyway, I take off down the street to play I Spy on whatever lurks in the shadows. My paranoia has kept us alive this fucking long, so I always listen to my instincts. It's better to be paranoid and wrong than to get caught with our pants down.

I spot the two big bastards almost right away. Shadow leans against the car, smoking a joint while Spook trips up the steps to knock on the front door. Pinching the bridge of my nose, I exhale in embarrassment for him. He may be clumsy as fuck, but the man knows chemicals and toxins like the maddest scientist that has ever lived.

“What the fuck are you two doing here? This is my family's home, not my place of employment!” the geezer rages as he answers the door. He's not actually that old, but he's old enough to have fathered someone our age—if he'd ever had kids—so that wins him the fucking title if you ask me.

A couple of his personal goons step outside to act as a barrier between their boo and my brothers, and I have to snort. They are literally staring Death and Pestilence in the face right now without the slightest clue of just how easily they can be disposed of.

“Funny. You sent in a black card order, we answered. We don't take too kindly to extra baggage. It was a body drop job, not a body snatch, ya feel me?” Shadow rasps out as he exhales the fresh smoke from his lungs.

“I gave specific instructions...” the old man rambles as his cheeks turn red.

“And we don't take orders from anyone. You seem to forget just who you're dealing with here,” Shadow smoothly cuts him off, looking bored as hell.

I quickly scan the surrounding area to make sure everything is as it should be before zeroing back in on my boys. Spook sighs as he walks back down the steps toward the trunk of the car.

“Fine! There should be two bodies with you. One dead, and one alive,” the bastard snarls when he realizes Shadow

isn't going to back down in any fucking way. It's like watching a contest to see who has the bigger dick, and no one has beaten us yet.

With every pun intended, we're far too cocky to be overtaken. We will always be the biggest bad in these situations. We've made sure of it.

"Yeah, about that. What the fuck do you want with a sweet little Virgin Mary nun? You into some kinky shit or something?" Shadow asks, looking the man up and down.

The bald ass fucker is speechless as he shakes with rage, and fuck me, I need some fucking popcorn for this shit.



# SPOOK

I POP the trunk while Shadow plays his cock-tugging contest with the jackass like we're in a bad romance movie on the holiday channel, and they're fighting for the same piece of ass.

I grab the priest's bubble-wrapped body and heave the fucker out, relishing the sounds of snapping and popping. The guards shiver ever so slightly when they see the remainder of blood that Smoke didn't extract earlier, pooling in the wrap. As cold as the freezer is, he wasn't in there long enough to freeze. I know the human body has a lot of blood in it, but you'd think all of the blood I washed down the drain of Smoke's chambers was more than one body could hold. But this guy just keeps seeping and it's kind of awesome.

I grunt as I lift him over my shoulder and walk back toward the steps. The guards at least have enough brain cells to back up a couple of feet as I drop their Christmas present before them.

"Merry Christmas!" I exclaim, waving my hand at the priest. "He's wrapped up tightly. No Christmas tree for you though, our boy Smoke would have shoved it up his ass as a form of torture before returning him to you anyway," I finish, grabbing the black card with his name on it out of my pocket and throwing it down on top of him for good measure.

"How dare you! My order was for two bodies, not just one!" the raging bastard shouts.

"Yeah, well, we ain't your personal hitmen either. Be happy with what you got and forget about the girl. She's the

rest of our payment for that low-ball offer you threw out there. Next time, open your wallet more and we may be inclined to see the full job all the way through,” Shadow spouts off, still leaning against the car, smoking his joint.

The guard to the left of me goes to reach inside his coat like he’s about to draw a weapon on us, and I react on instinct. I whip out my own little weapon in the form of a nasty shot, and jab that bitch into the fat rolls of this fucker’s neck.

“Ah, tsk tsk. I wouldn’t move if I were you,” I say as the man drops to his knees, choking on his own blood. It’s a common reaction to the injection I just gave him.

The other men scramble like they’re about to fight us, but I hold up the syringe for them all to see with a wicked smile on my face.

“You know what carries some nasty diseases? Rats. I used to play with them a lot when they would scurry around my cell in the pits of Hell. They have one bitch of a bite too,” I explain as the guards hold their hands up, taking steps away from me and their fellow man. “When I escaped, I studied these rats extensively. Did you know some of them can carry the black fucking plague?” Right on cue, homie starts to vomit blood all over the pavement in front of him.

“I was able to condense this formula down so it only affects the one I administer this shit too, ‘cause we don’t need a pandemic on our hands, ya know?” I talk casually, tapping the needle against my temple in thought.

I turn and watch as the man’s lymph nodes swell to the size of a baseball. He coughs and splutters, drowning in the fluids building up in his lungs while his eyes bleed from the pressure, and he drops to the ground, twitching.

“Ah hell, that’s new. I’ve never seen their eyeballs pop out like that. Might have to tweak this shit some more. Was that overkill?” I observe, turning to Shadow who looks like he’s in the process of taking a quick nap.

“Damn. Well, anyway, there’s your two bodies. All accounted for. It was a pleasure to do business with you,” I

state, giving the bastard a bow before turning on my heel to head back to the car.

“Before we head out,” Shadow says, tossing down what’s left of his joint, “I think you all should know just why we’re feared the way we are. We aren’t controlled. We never will be. You do not order us to do a fucking thing. You forgot to properly piss yourself when we answered your black card.” He shoves the stunned guards out the way and runs the steps. Grabbing Bartello’s hand, he slaps it against the building, splaying his fingers wide.

“Wait! Please! I’m sorry!” He shakes violently.

Shadow ignores his pleas, slicing off two digits as the man screams in agony. I can hear Shadow’s grunt over the idiot’s screams as he has to put a little effort into getting through the bone.

“Two bodies, two fingers. These are mine now. The next time you want to hire mercenaries to take care of non-payers, remember this moment. We aren’t anyone’s lackeys, understand?” Shadow growls in the man’s face. He whimpers as he nods rapidly. “Good.” He drops Bartello and turns back toward the car.

Just to fuck with them, he blows a kiss at the guards as he passes by, watching them shiver in fear and respect. Why can’t motherfuckers understand this is the right way to treat people of our stature? It’s should be easy to recognize that we’re unhinged fuckers who don’t give two fucks about themselves, much less you.

Don’t fuck with the Horsemen. Period.

Shadow jumps into the car and starts the engine. He peels away from the house, giving the fuckers a one finger salute while my laughter echoes into the night, no doubt making the guards shit themselves.

“How about we grab something to eat before we head back?” Shadow asks, reaching over to grab my thigh and giving it a squeeze.

“Yeah, I’m up for it. Hey, there’s Smoke!” I point out as I see a bike roll up beside us, the big fucker riding it dressed out like he’s going to war or some shit.

“What crawled up his ass now? We were just doing a drop. We didn’t need fucking backup,” Shadow complains as I wave at Smoke excitedly from the passenger seat.

“Stop it. He likes to make sure we all stay safe. War’s always got a damn plan of action. You know this,” I sass back as he gives my leg another hard squeeze.

“That he does,” Shadow murmurs, still seeming a bit off.

I know he likes to be the protector of us all, but he needs to relax. Sometimes our memories ride us hard and we act out in paranoia, and I’m betting that’s exactly what’s brought our brother out tonight.





# SHADOW

AFTER GRABBING FOOD, we stop off at the park to enjoy some peace with our meals. Smoke skips rocks across the pond while eating his burger, and Spook chows down on french fries, carefully placing the same amount of ketchup on each piece.

Staring off into the dark tree line, I chew on my own food, but it tastes like ash in my mouth. I think about the note and watch Spook closely as the words circle around my mind. I might just truly be bored with life and need something to feel alive again, because he doesn't seem concerned about anything.

“Alright, you fuckers. We need to head back before Mr. Stick-Up-His-Ass starts sending his minions to retrieve us,” Smoke says, walking back over to us and tossing his trash in the bin beside the picnic table we're sitting on.

“Yeah, yeah,” Spook groans as he squirts another fry with ketchup. He goes to shove the fry in his mouth when we hear a pop, and Spook drops to the ground.

Smoke and I immediately jump up, draw our guns, and stand back to back to protect Spook and each other.

“We gotta move! We're too exposed!” Smoke orders.

“I'm ok, it wasn't a shot. Some fucker nailed me with a paintball gun. My french fries!” Spook sounds pissed the fuck off, and my tumbling heart calms almost immediately, knowing he's ok and not dead.

“Come on out! Show yourself,” I demand as Spook jumps to his feet and brushes himself off, groaning from the hit he just took.

I vibrate with rage at how goddamn close that was and knowing we’re going to have our asses chewed out by Shade for this.

“It would have been so easy, you know?” a voice says from a distance, clearly disguised. It sounds almost inhuman, and even colder than Shade.

We turn toward the sound, spotting a man dressed almost like Smoke and wearing a mask, laid back on a tree branch, swinging a paintball gun around like it’s a lazy Sunday.

“Who are you?” Smoke demands. “And what’s with the eighties’ voice box like you’ve walked out of a bad horror film?”

“Who I am doesn’t matter. But you all should really start being more alert. I could have taken each of you out so easily. Just, *poof!* And your lives would be over,” the mysterious man says, aiming the paintball gun at the sky and pretending to fire it.

“Is that a threat?” I growl at this asshole’s audacity.

My finger tightens around my trigger, but I know that’ll just land us in hot water. This fucker obviously wants something from us. Until we figure that out, he needs to keep breathing.

“Threat? You’d have to care enough to consider myself as such. Do you care? Or is Death becoming more and more your calling, more so than before?” the stranger replies in a twisted way. He rests his hands on his chest, still holding the paintball gun like he’s not in a face-off with the feared Horsemen.

“Shadow, I don’t like this,” Smoke mutters as he switches from scanning the tree line to the stranger.

“There’s no one else here but me if that’s what you’re worried about, War. Always the observant one, even with your victims,” the fucker pops off again, sending chills down my spine. He clearly knows more about us than anyone should,

but a question remains. How much does he know? And why does he know it? We can figure out the how of it after we know his motivation behind digging this deep to find us.

“How the fuck do you know so much about us?” Spook demands, voicing my very thoughts aloud. He’s already pointing his dart gun with some deadly concoction loaded up and ready to fire.

“You think the four of you are the only ones who terrorize the night? No, there are others out there who linger unseen in the shadows, biding their time and waiting for the right opportunities to arise,” the enemy replies, swinging his leg like he’s in a hammock.

“What’s stopping us from killing you right now, then? For someone so smart, it seems like an idiotic move to be here alone,” Smoke cracks out.

A cackle leaves the stranger’s mouth. “You won’t kill me. You want to know why I’m here,” he replies with confidence.

“Why are you here then?” I ask, my curiosity getting the better of me.

“All of you need to remember your own sins. Seems you’ve forgotten they exist while judging others for theirs. That’s a very weighted balance in your favour, don’t you think?” he asks, turning his head and looking straight at me.

Smoke growls and takes a step toward him, and the stranger lifts his hand and clicks a button as red dots appear all around us.

“Thought you said you were alone out here. You’re a liar,” Smoke snarls as he freezes in place.

“I am alone. I don’t lie, but I also don’t tell whole truths either. But this? It’s a little device of my own creation. It uses motion detection to zero in on targets. As long as you remain still, you’re safe. But one tiny little twitch...” As if on cue, a bird takes flight and a gunshot shatters the silent air around us.

The bird drops to the ground, and I swallow the massive lump in my throat. There aren’t many that have the assassination skills to match ours.

Something about this man and the way he carries himself has my mind struggling with a memory that just won't surface. It feels like déjà vu, and it's unnerving.

A car enters the park, shrouded by the trees, and my nerves go into overdrive.

“Ah, right on time. Always riding in to save the day,” the stranger comments as a flash grenade flies in our direction. We drop to the ground as gunshots fire, and I belly crawl toward where Shade just pulled up.

“And he has a little deer with him! How delightful!” the fucker says, confusing the fuck out of me.

What in the hell would Shade be doing with an animal in the vehicle with him? Ah, Christ! If he's referring to that sweet nun, then we're in some deep fucking trouble. No stranger should know her goddamn name, let alone that we have her in our possession. Shade is going to lose his fucking mind.

“Until next time, you glorious bastards!” the stranger calls out, and I barely have enough time to see him hop up on the tree branch, tipping his hat to us before disappearing.

That one gesture is jarring to see, because only one motherfucker has ever done that to us before—and he's supposed to be deader than dead.



## FAWN

“WHY, God? Why have you forsaken me in my time of need?” I question aloud as tears stream down my face. I can’t make them stop and I can’t wipe them away, so I’m left just letting them fall onto my soaked cheeks.

I wait for Him to answer me, but nothing comes. The pain medication the cold one gave me earlier has worn off, and now all I feel is pain. The emotional pain of God not seeming to care about the situation I’ve been forced into, and the physical pain from the lashes on my back and the cuts on my feet from my attempted escape. A useless effort, given the amount of security these men seem to have.

Whoever they are, they’re clearly shielded from the outside world—safe and protected within the very walls that hold me hostage.

Hurried footsteps echo down the hall, stopping at my door as someone unlocks it. Unease works through me as the tears fall harder. I’m chained in place. If they wanted to, they could do anything to me and no one would hear my screams.

“Get up,” the cold one orders as he slams my door open without so much as a greeting before ordering me around. Exactly how does he expect me to move when he’s chained me to the bed?

When I don’t even look at him, he scoffs and walks over to me, unlocking the cuffs and pulling me off the bed and onto my feet.

Wincing as pressure pushes into my wounds, words fumble from my mouth without thought, baffled by his aggression. “W-what do you want?”

“I don’t have time for you to be a whiny lamb. You need to come with me, since I can’t trust you to be alone,” he says coldly, dragging me behind him.

“Where?” I question, refusing to cry out in pain with each step I’m forced to take. When will it end? “Are you finally going to kill me?”

He doesn’t respond as we move through the house to another door. This one is bigger than the others I’ve seen as we made our way here, and when he uses a keypad to open it, I know why. Behind the door is a brightly-lit room filled with cars and trucks, the sight making me gasp in wonder.

Each and every vehicle is bright and shiny, unlike anything I’ve ever seen. There were a few parishioners at the church who always drove fancy vehicles like these, but most of them did whatever it took just to get by.

There were so many times I held someone as they cried about being broke and alone, wondering why God was putting them through such trials. And each time, I told them God never gave us more than we could handle. That we had to keep the faith when things got rough, and He would guide us through. It didn’t make a difference what their problems were, whether it be lack of money to feed their family, foreclosure on their house and business, loss of a loved one...it was always the same response.

Now, in this situation I’ve found myself in, I wonder what someone would say to me. Would it give me any hope at all? Or would it just make everything worse, filling me with a hopelessness I can’t see myself coming back from? Maybe I never helped a single person like I thought I had.

“Get in the car,” the cold one barks as a door to a nearby SUV swings open. I was so lost in my thoughts I didn’t even realize he’d moved us. “Now, lamb. I don’t have time for you to be stuck in your daydreams.”



He lifts me into the seat like I weigh nothing at all. He almost seems...angry. Devils can be angry, can't they?

"Are you going to kill me now?" My voice shakes as I repeat my question now that we're speeding down the road, headed to who knows where. I need to know.

"It would have been quicker and easier to carry your lifeless body through the house instead of dragging you while alive," he states, his eyes never leaving the road.

Given how fast we're going, that's something I should probably be thankful for. "I—" What do I say to that, though?

"No, lamb. I'm not killing you tonight."

*Thank you, God, for that small miracle. I think.*

The rest of the drive is made in silence as we weave through the other cars, never once stopping or slowing down until we pull up to what looks like a wooded park, where a bike and another fancy car are parked.

"You're to behave and remain in the vehicle. Do not make me chase you again, lamb. You will not like the consequences," the cold one says once he parks behind the other vehicles.

"Wh—" My words cut off when cold metal slaps around my wrist with a click.

"Insurance." He moves fast, whipping my arm in front of me and locking the other handcuff to the bar above the door.

Tears spring into my eyes and my body trembles. "Why are you so evil?"

"For every amount of good in life, there is twice as much evil, little lamb. Remember that as you continue to pray to your God for a rescue that will never come."

He pulls a gun from his jacket as his eyes travel the park around us, his entire body on edge. Is there a threat? An even darker being than him? That's kind of hard to believe.

"Oh, God."

“You know better than that by now,” he says in a chilly tone as he opens the driver door and steps out, his movements silent and lethal.

He aims his gun, ready as he moves through the park, taking in his surroundings like he’s ready for anything, and my tears fall harder.

When he throws something and a loud sound is followed by gunshots slinging through the air, I scream as fear overrides my senses. The cold one may not kill me tonight, but that doesn’t mean I won’t still die some other way.

*Please, God, save me from this Hell, I beg of you.*



# SHADE

I'M GOING to kill them. Each and every one of these fuckers are going I feel my hands around their throats, I swear it. I don't know how many times I've told them to always act like someone is around the corner, ready to strike. I just wish they'd damn well listen.

It wasn't hard to tell something was wrong when they'd been gone as long as they were. I'm aware of how they like to dick around, but when no one answered my calls, I did what any sane and logical being would do. I tracked them to the park and just knew something had gone wrong.

Getting little lamb into the car was practically a nightmare, too. She started wailing and thrashing around when I threw her over my shoulder, leaving tear stains on my cashmere suit that will cost a good penny to get out.

"Yo, he's about to blow his top," Spook mutters as we walk back into the house.

"Good. Grumpy mean-butt," the little lamb grumbles quietly over Smoke's shoulder.

I choose to ignore her remark. The only one to react at all is Spook, but even his snort lacks its usual humour at my expense.

"Take her back to the room and make sure she's tied to the bed," I order Smoke, and he nods, walking toward the rooms.

"Dude, you look like you've seen a ghost," Spook says behind me, making me turn to assess the both of them.

He's right. Shadow does look like he's ready to lose his shit, and that's never a good thing. Spook has a gash on his head that will need to be taken care of as well, but that can wait until we sort this mishap out.

"Yeah. Maybe," Shadow replies cryptically.

"What were the three of you doing in such an open area?" I snap when I hear Smoke's footsteps heading back toward us.

"Save us the lecture, Shade," he states when he rejoins us. "We're more than aware of how fucked we were. But I don't think he wanted to kill us."

Think. He doesn't think?!

"We are not afforded the luxury of *thinking* anything," I remind my brothers. "We're the Horsemen. We deal in facts, because we know better than anyone what thinking gets you."

"He didn't want us dead," Shadow croaks, shaking his head like he's trying to dislodge a bad memory. "I think he's toying with us for leaving him to die."

"What?" Spook questions his lover, just as confused as the rest of us.

"Did no one else see the way he tipped his hat before disappearing?" The anguish in his voice speaks volumes, and we all know exactly whom he's referring to.

"Shadow, baby... that's impossible," Spook tries to tell him. I agree, it is impossible.

Ethan wouldn't have survived a shot to the back of the neck. We watched him go down, another piece of us dying as he landed on the ground.

"Whoa, hold on." Smoke is vibrating. "You're saying you think it was Ethan? Bro, that's not possible. We watched him die," he states, mirroring my thoughts.

"I'm telling you what I saw. He's the only son of a bitch I've ever seen tip their hat that way." Shadow runs his hand down his face, looking exhausted. "Think about it. He seemed to know an awful lot about us when we don't allow anyone the

chance to gain that type of information. And he knew the nun's real name."

"We were kids," I reply. "We've changed. If by some miracle it were Ethan, he still wouldn't know us. It has to be someone else." Like Koschov, though that would be a foolish move on his end. But he is one of the only ones to know more of our inner workings given our unique ties.

"He didn't actually know that much when you think about it," Smoke states, drawing my attention. "Half of what he said could have been an educated guess. Well, minus the nun's name. That part is a bit fucked."

"Maybe. But I'm still not comfortable with anyone knowing the way we operate. They aren't even supposed to know of our actual existence." It's too...calculated. "I'll be installing more security around the compound."

"You want me to call our guy?" Spook questions, but I shake my head.

"No, I'll do this myself." I pause as a thought occurs to me. "Actually, I'm calling in a favour. We need to keep this in house until we find out who this new target is and what they want. There's only one computer expert I trust to come into our home. Especially right now."

"No! Absolutely fucking not!" Shadow snaps out of his fog, shaking his head. "You are not to get my brothers involved in this."

I understand where he's coming from, I do. We went to a lot of extremes to make sure Liam and Donovan were protected with Koschov. But once I clear the Russian bastard, we're going to need them.

I won't let anything happen to my family in our goddamn home, and that includes Shadow's bastard brothers. Family is fucking family.

"I need to clear Koschov first to make sure he isn't this masked crusader." I shake my head. "Once I check the cameras surrounding his mansion, I'll know. And if he's clear, we need their assistance, brother." He goes to interrupt me, but

I hold up my hand. “We have a contract with them, and now is not the time to argue.”

“So no more jobs?” Spook pouts, making Shadow scoff. He’s clearly still pissed over the idea of getting his brothers involved, but he won’t fight me too hard on it. I don’t think so, anyway.

“Yeah, okay,” he snarks at Spook. “You really think we’d be able to get away with not killing someone for any amount of time?” He rolls his eyes. “The scared little nun would be dead before we could even blink.”

“That would be a pity, given how entertaining she’s becoming,” Smoke chimes in, giving me a headache. He couldn’t just keep his mouth shut, could he?

“That’s not important right now.” Turning to Shadow, I make sure I have his direct attention. “Ethan is dead, brother. But we’ll get to the bottom of this.”

He gives me a stark nod. It’s obvious he doesn’t fully believe me, but he’s clearly worried enough over the ghost of our childhood friend that he’s willing to let Liam and Donovan be involved.

Whatever our newest enemy showed him that the rest of us didn’t see has fucked with his head.

“Spook,” Smoke calls for his attention. “Did you write a weird ass letter and drop it in the garage?”

Shadow’s head snaps up, eyes widening as Spook responds. “Letter? What letter?” he questions in confusion. “Baby, didn’t you say something about a letter before we left?” He looks to Shadow.

“Yeah, there was a note on the car. I thought you wrote it to fuck with me.”

“Uh, nope, not me,” Spook admits, and I’m on high alert.

“What did it say?” I bark, my entire body rigid.

“Hold on.” Smoke rummages through his pockets, pulling out a crumpled piece of paper and starts reading from it. “*For men that banded together in the pits of Hell, you really have*

*forgotten what it's like to feel alive. Could it be you need a reminder?"*

Grabbing my phone, I do the only thing I know can be done right now. When our head of security answers, I snap, "We're going into Dark Lockdown. I want you to sweep the compound, lock it down, then send everyone home. And I mean everyone!"

"Fuck, this isn't good," Spook parrots my thoughts.

No, it really isn't, and it looks like I'll be needing more from Koschov than just Liam's computer skills. Our once impenetrable fortress has been breached and that means drastic measures must be taken.

Now, more than ever, we trust no one.





# SMOKE

THIS IS REALLY FUCKING BAD.

Dark Lockdown is a protocol Shade came up with when the compound was first planned out. The rest of us joked about how paranoid he was and how no one would ever be able to bypass the insanity of our security measures.

Clearly, we were wrong. Though it still seems impossible that someone was able to bypass each and every measure unless they were a part of creating the system in the first place.

Which begs a different question. How the fuck did the crew we vetted get this past us?

“Spook!” Shade barks at the sullen bastard. “Stop bleeding on the goddamn floor!”

Shit. In all of the uproar, I almost forgot about Spook’s injury.

When the insane bastard in the tree shot him, he went down hard, hitting his head off the picnic table on the way down. Thank fuck it wasn’t a real bullet, though. I’m not sure I’d survive losing another one of my brothers.

“Fine,” Spook grumbles. “I’ll have the little nun doctor me up. She owes me anyway.”

“Christ. Smoke, go with him. If she’s going to be unrestrained, we need to make sure Spook doesn’t shock her to death.” Ooh, someone is cranky about our prisoner being afraid.

“Why?” I taunt, standing to join Spook. “You afraid someone else will have fun with your new toy?”

Shade growls and shakes his head. “Just go. None of us have time for chasing a stray lamb. Especially now we’ve been made aware of a possible escape route.”

Fuck. When he puts it like that, yeah. The last thing we need is the sweet little nun escaping and going to the authorities, leading them back to us.

This shit has become a fucking nightmare.

“I can go,” Shadow states, staring Shade down. Between his fear of Ethan still being alive and taunting us, and the idea of his brothers getting involved, he’s fucking pissed.

“No. I need you with me to get everything set up.”

And that’s the end of that. What Shade says, goes. He always has our safety first and foremost in his mind, and none of us argue with him because we know he sees things we can’t.

The bastard’s analytical mind is often terrifying. It also happens to be extremely useful in our line of work. I think we’d all be dead if it weren’t for his ability to be so cold and calculating.

Ruthless. That’s a good word for him.

“Fine, let’s get this shit dealt with. The sooner my brothers are back where they belong and not fucked up in my shit, the better,” Shadow snarls, making me wince internally.

He’s not wrong. We went to a lot of trouble to make sure his biological brothers were protected from our shit. Getting them involved, even if briefly, means potentially putting them on our enemies’ radars.

Mind you, living with Koschov in his uptight mansion with the Deadly Seven gives them the upper hand against anyone, so they should be fine.

Those Seven are a fucking force to be reckoned with. Each of their pasts’ mirror some of our darkest memories, making

them the vigilante bastards they are today. But unlike us, they have morals—to an extent—and I can admire that about them.

“Let’s go play with the pretty nun.” Spook claps his hands together.

“You’re incorrigible, you know that?” I shake my head as we start toward her room.

“I got shot! I deserve to have a little fun,” he protests, and I snort.

“You got hit with a paintball, not a rocket launcher. Don’t go getting all dramatic on me now.”

“Have you met me? I love flair!” Spook cackles, his voice echoing through the halls.

This could get interesting. I wonder what it will be like to have Spook and the Ghost Brothers in one building? Shade’s going to have a fucking aneurysm.



## FAWN

A SHARP LAUGH down the hall sends a shiver through my spine, stopping my attempts to get out of the restraints the cold one has insisted on. I suppose I did try to run, but I think this guy made them even tighter than the cold one did.

“Yeah, yeah, we all know you have a flair for the dramatic,” I hear someone say near my door.

My heart is pounding out of my chest as their footsteps stop right outside.

*Please don't let them be here for me, God. Please. I'm not ready for the level of darkness these men hold. Why are you punishing me?*

I have spent my life devoting myself to God. I've trusted Him through everything my uncle put me through and stood strong in my faith. But this is a level of despair I've never felt before, and I find myself questioning my faith now.

What did I ever do to make Him so angry with me that He'd land me in the hands of these sinful men out to hurt and kill others?

“Come on, then. Let's get this over with before Shade makes you scrub the entire house with bleach,” one of them says as the door to my room swings open.

“Fuck that. He can do it himself if he's being an uppity prick about it. I'm the one bleeding here,” the other whines as they step into the room, closing the door behind him.

“Oh, he’ll clean it up alright. Right after he strangles you in your sleep so he can use your body as a mop.”

*Holy Hannah.* *What have I been thrown into?* I feel like this is worse than the lion’s den. At least lions will kill you rather quickly.

“He’d have to get through Shadow first *and* ensure he can’t wake me up. I wish him the best though.” He salutes the other one as they both laugh.

Turning to me, the one whose head is bleeding speaks. “Well then, little sinner, how good are you with a needle?”

Wait. What?

“I-I...excuse me?” I stammer, making the other one snort, but he doesn’t say anything.

“Needle. You. Can you sew?” the bleeding one asks me like I’m five and can’t understand him.

“What kind of a question is that?” I ask, perplexed and afraid. What the heck does he want me to sew?

“It’s simple, really. I stitched you up, now it’s time to return the favour.” He shrugs.

Oh, well, that’s simple enough. But before I can say anything, the other one scoffs.

“She’s clearly not understanding,” he says, taking a step toward me with a menacing look on his face. He’d be so handsome if not for the demon riding inside of him that’s so clear to see. They all would.

All I can see in any of them, though, is pure, unadulterated evil.

“I’m going to untie you and hand you the first aid kit,” he starts, his voice low. “You’re going to sew my buddy up, and be a good nun, then lay down without a fight.” Butthole. “If you so much as try to run again, I’ll call Shade in. I reckon he’d love another chase.”

A shiver runs through me. No, I’d rather not do that again right now. My feet are battered and bruised, and I’m not sure

I'd even be able to make it out of the window with how sore everything feels. But that doesn't mean I have to just blindly listen to them either.

Making note of the cold one's name, I stiffen my shoulders. "And if I don't?" Best to know all of the repercussions now, right?

"Then you're of no use to us, and we'll kill you," the bleeding one says. Maybe that's my best option. "But don't think for a second it will be quick. We like to play with our toys first."

I swallow down the sheer panic his threat brings as they both smile at me hungrily. "Fine," I spit out, angry that they won't just end me.

Why does such evil exist? That they get off at the mere discomfort and pain of others is horrendous.

"Hey now," the bleeding one says. "Before you untie her, maybe we should make sure she's not going to make me look like fucking Frankenstein or some shit."

I roll my eyes at his idiocy. Like a few poorly placed stitches on his forehead is going to be so bad? It's still better than living with a lifetime of lashes on your back.

"Hmm, good point," the one closest to me agrees. "Can you sew Spook here up?"

So that's the bleeding one's name? Suits him. He has an almost spooky sort of presence about him. With his bald head, dead eyes, and hard features, he could easily pull off being a member of the living dead.

"Yes," I sneer through gritted teeth.

"Can you sew skin though? You're not going to puke on me or something, right? Shadey-boy really wouldn't be happy with vomit." Spook shakes his head, making me snap.

"Yes, I can sew skin! I've sewn mine back together on more than one occasion. Now, are you going to force me to help you so I can get back to being alone? Or are you going to



stand there and keep bleeding like an idiot until the other one uses you as a human mop?!”

Holy moly. I have no idea where that came from, and by the look of shock on the others’ faces, they weren’t anticipating my outburst either.

*Lord, please forgive me for losing my head.*

“Smoke?” the one called Spook says. “Grab the first aid kit for me. I’ll undo our little sinner here.”

“Yeah, good.” The scary one named Smoke moves into the bathroom as Spook undoes the bindings holding me to the bed.

“I guess there’s a fire under your habit after all, isn’t there, little sinner?” he teases, releasing first my hands then feet, stepping back to allow me to sit up.

“I don’t know what you’re speaking of,” I state, flattening my skirt down with shaking hands. What has gotten into me?

“Mmm, I see you, baby. First, you let my boy Shade chase you like a wild animal, then you snap at us? You’re gonna be fun.” He smirks.

Something about the way he says baby makes my tummy flip, confusing me. Is it fear? Panic? I’ve never felt like this before, and I’m not sure I like it.

“Don’t scare her, man. Unless you really do want uneven stitches,” Smoke snarks as he throws the first aid kit onto the bed beside me, making me jump.

“But I like her scared. The smell of fear turns me on,” Spook states, and my hands start shaking uncontrollably.

He’s deranged.

“It’s your head, dude,” Smoke states with a shrug.

Spook gives me a warning look. “If you make me look like a botched science experiment, I’ll make you pay for that. Don’t fuck up.”

Oh, gosh. This is a nightmare.



# SHADOW

IT'S BEEN a cluster fuck of a week, clearing out staff and relocating them to the safe houses we have for every employee to be re-vetted, and sweeping the entire compound for bugs and cameras.

When they signed on to work with us, they gave up their previous lives. For as long as they work for us, they live a decent life, even if it's a very secluded one. But if their usefulness runs out, they're made aware of the consequences.

Their families, if they had them, assume they're missing or already dead. If we no longer have a use for them, their bodies show up somewhere random, looking like they're connected to a long-haul serial killer that doesn't actually exist. It's a cover we created to keep cops off our asses while still giving the families some closure in the end.

I just hope we don't have to kill any of them. Truly, I've gotten used to their presence and like how they work around us. Training someone else is always an annoyance.

Exhaustion rides me hard as Shade rattles off the stuff left to do in order to complete Dark Lockdown. Usually, I'd be a lot more attentive to this shit, but I can't right now.

My nerves are in overdrive because my biological brothers are set to arrive today. Since learning of their existence, I've done everything in my power to see them out of harm's way and into the hands of a man that has the ability to protect them without majorly corrupting their souls. He may not be any

better than us, but I know they are safe and well looked after with Koschov.

Bringing them here is like playing Russian roulette. We may be feared, but fear generates loathing and hatred that, in turn, brews the need for challenge. We may be a myth to the world, but there are still those who want to challenge myths and win the title of being the best, making them enemies of ours.

Knowing this skilled fuck is watching us, and that we've chosen to bring them here, feels like we're slapping a huge bullseye onto their foreheads. We may as well be saying 'here are more targets. Have fun!'

Spook nods along to Shade's droning, and I glance at his stitches. The nun did an impressive job patching him up—I'm not sure there will be a scar left when he's fully healed.

A high-pitched ring sounds out, alerting us there's movement at the front gate, and my heart jumps into my throat because I know it's them. I take one glance at the computer screen to see Donovan's ass hanging out the car window, mooning the camera. Liam cackles from the driver's seat, and Dimitri sits in the back seat, yelling what I can only assume are obscenities at them.

"What in God's name was that?!" the nun shrieks from the kitchen, followed by a crash that can only be our dishes landing on the floor.

After two days of being in the first stages of Dark Lockdown and sending the entire security team home, Shade decided we needed some help around here. After all, our maid is currently being re-vetted as well. Hence where the nun comes in. Smoke slapped a GPS tracker on her like she's an inmate on house arrest and put her to work. To say she's pissed would be an understatement, but I think it helps calm her too. She probably wishes we weren't around.

"They seem like so much fun," Spook sighs dreamily, bringing me back to the computer screen. He rests his fist on his chin, looking like a kid at Christmas at the idea of having someone else to run shenanigans with.

Shade looks like he's already on the verge of shooting them as he reaches over and pushes the button to open the gates. He's on edge more than any of us, taking this breach as a personal affront to his skill set, and it's making him a cantankerous dick.

I feel a supportive pat on my shoulder and turn to see Smoke giving me a tight smile. They're all aware of how much I argued against this, but Shade is right, like always. We need our systems swept and analyzed and Dimitri's help to temporarily replace men in our quarters.

The four of us head outside to greet them as Dimitri stumbles from the car, smacking Liam on the back of the head in the process. For someone his age, he still has lightening fast reflexes.

"You bastards!" he yells at them, then switches to Russian. I'm not fluent, but I understand enough to know he's threatening to kill them in their sleep. They're like one big happy family.

When he's finished cursing them, he turns to us. "Horsemen." He nods his head at us, using little words. Dimitri Koschov is a lot like Shade that way. "My men will be flying in shortly, on a plane I should have been on myself." His growl is clearly directed toward my brothers, and I wouldn't put it past them to have gotten impatient and fucked with the old man somehow.

"Don't be so grumpy, brother husband. You were dragging your feet! We simply rushed the process along. We wanted to see Shadow, and you wanted to keep fucking our woman. While I appreciate Kitten's pussy as much as you do, we have to stay professional," Donovan states, pulling a serious face like he's the head of their operation.

Dimitri snarls and goes to launch himself at my brother, but Smoke catches him midair.

"Are you sure putting your brothers with him was the best decision? I mean, he looks ready to murder them," Smoke questions as Liam plays with the security lock on the garage.

He literally got out of the car and bailed straight for it, not even taking the time to say hello.

“Yeah, I’m sure,” I mutter as Donovan walks up to me like he’s about to give me a hug, arms wide and open.

I open my own arms, baffled as to why he’s so fucking touchy but not wanting to offend him. At the last second, Donovan punches me in the balls. I drop to the ground like a sack of shit as fire licks up my spine, my stomach curling in on itself.

“That’s for thinking we’re some weak little pansies, asshole. Missed you big bro,” he says, patting my cheek and walking off.

“Hey! I happened to like that dick!” Spook argues as he stomps off after Donovan, ready to battle it out over my aching dick.

“Death. Pain. Destruction,” Shade rumbles from somewhere beside me.

It’s that moment my stomach gives way, and I roll to the side as I puke.

“Dead. You’re all dead.” Shades fumes as he stomps off. As my sight returns, I see the space where his freshly buffed shoes were, right in my puke puddle.

All I can do is lay my head down and laugh at the ridiculousness of all this. Honestly, if puking on Shade’s shoes is what gets me killed, so be it. It’s still fucking funny given everything that’s happened lately.

\* \* \*

ONCE EVERYONE IS SEATED IN OUR WAR ROOM, SHADE PAUSES while he works on making sure his presentation is perfect. We’ve never had outsiders in here before, so we’re all operating outside of our comfort zones.

A small crash down the hall draws our attention, and Shade sighs. “Give me a moment. I need to speak with our...

maid.” Liam looks confused as he tilts his head and watches Shade walk away. Their curiosity is warranted.

I still remember Smoke begging her to run again after they secured the GPS tracker on her. He wanted her to run so Shade could work off some of his anger, but she just snarled at him with disgust and refused to say a word. Pretty sure she wanted to kick him in the nuts though. Just a guess.

“Are you kidding me right now?!” I hear her snap at him, and I have to steeple my hands in front of my face to keep from laughing.

That tiny woman has a fire in her that has been coming out more and more with each day that passes, regardless of the threats we make. She’s even starting to roll her eyes at some of those threats since we never make good on them. Or haven’t yet, at least.

Shade comes back into the room as Dimitri’s lips twitch, trying to refrain from laughing at Shade’s expense.

“Woman troubles?” he questions, and the look Shade throws him would have a normal man crying on the ground, but Dimitri just smirks.

“Okay, so you obviously have a loose end that needs to be tied up. With this bad boy right here that my guy Oliver and I invented,” Liam waves a USB stick in the air, “I’ll be able to rip through any of the tiny little holes that may have been planted into your otherwise impenetrable network, and lock it down further. Not only that, but it’s equipped with a trace back that will give us some information on whether the system was compromised from within, or the outside. It’ll also, hopefully, lead us to who is doing the hacking,” Liam finishes as Donovan nods along, yawning, like the only interest he has is in action.

“My team should be arriving shortly, so we can get men in place to do another thorough sweep for any bugs that may have been planted. If there are any cameras, listening devices, trackers, et cetera, we’ll find them. Whoever this man is, he will not have access to this place when we’re finished,” Dimitri adds as Shade blows out a breath of relief.

This is uncharted territory for us. We made the gates of this place so secure, not even a fly can get in without detection. So how the fuck did this threat? It's eating us all alive, and we want some goddamn answers.

I feel a hand grip my thigh under the table as I focus on the conversation at hand. When that hand moves up to my cock, it quickly thickens and sweat breaks out on the back of my neck from how good it feels.

I take out a joint and lean back in my seat, giving Spook better access to let him have his fun for now. I love how easily he can bring me to the brink of insanity without letting on to the rest of the room just how skilled he's being. It's such a damn turn on.





## FAWN

THERE WEREN'T a lot of times I was allowed to watch TV growing up, but sometimes I'd be able to sneak a movie in when Uncle and the nuns were too busy to watch me. One of those movies happened to be *Cinderella*.

I didn't understand why Cinderella was so upset in the movie, outside of her step sisters being horrible human beings, obviously. But I get it now. I feel for her.

Back then, I was always helping out at the church and it felt like something I was supposed to do. It was my way of honouring God as a young girl. But cleaning for these men? There's nothing honourable about it.

Now, I understand why Cinderella so badly wanted to get away. She was a prisoner, forced against her will to do their bidding, just as I am to these men. These evil and disrespectful heathens, treating me like their personal slave. Not to mention the looks the scary one, Spook, gives me when no one is looking. I don't know what to do with the mixed feelings those looks stir inside of me, especially after he held me the other day.

"Hey, come here," Shade's voice calls, sending shivers down my spine. He'll always be the cold one to me.

Deciding I've had just about enough of him refusing to treat me like a human being, I ignore him and keep walking. If he wants my attention, he can use my name, darn it.

"I know you hear me, little lamb. It's best to answer a beast when you're summoned," he growls, and that's it.

Whirling around, I snap. “Are you truly this daft?!”

Feeling liberated when his eyes widen slightly, I continue. “Do this, do that. Hey you!” I lower my voice when I remember they have guests. “I have a name. I am a human being, and I would greatly appreciate it if you stopped treating me like an object.” I cross my arms over my chest and tap my toe on the ground.

“Snark gets you nowhere. And let me be perfectly clear, lamb.” He leans in, getting his face close to mine and connecting his cold gaze with mine. “You are an object to us. Nothing but a slave and a toy, and you’d do best to remember that,” he seethes, then stands and fixes his shirt sleeves like they aren’t always immaculate.

I’m no psychologist, but I’d guess he does it out of reaction to emotion. It doesn’t take a brilliant mind to see how badly I set him off, I’ve just come to not care. If they were going to harm me, I feel like they’d have done it already. And as he just reminded me, I am a slave to them and nothing more.

Before I can speak up and argue, he silences me with a sharp wave of his hand. “Go and fluff our guests’ rooms, then take a nap. And try to rein this attitude in before I’m forced to react, lamb. When you wake up with a better attitude, I suggest you get to making a dinner that won’t poison us all.”

“How dare you?!” I snarl, but he turns and walks away, moving back into his office and ignoring me completely. “You’re darn lucky I’m a woman of God, because anyone else would have killed you in your sleep! UGH!!!!”

“Whoa, girl, those are some big words for a tiny thing such as yourself,” I hear from behind me, making me squeak.

Turning, I see the older of their guests, standing a few feet from me. He’s as well-dressed as the cold one, but there’s something slightly gentler about his face. Like he’s not as hard and cold as Shade. Dare I say, maybe not as dangerous either?

*Fawn, if they’re connected in any way, they are evil. Stop being so naive. Birds of a feather flock together, and it’s not in*

*the direction of the Lord.*

“Sorry,” I mutter, taking a few steps back.

“It’s no harm to me. You actually remind me of a couple of women I adore. Well, aside from the religious thing. I know for a fact neither of them have ever set foot inside a church with any faithful intent,” he states, and my eyes widen.

“Y-you... You’re dating two women? Adultery is a sin!” I blurt out, making him laugh deeply. My cheeks heat with both shock and curiosity. How would that even work?

“Oh, no. I’m dating one of them, the other is like a sister to me. However, I do share my woman with the other two nitwits that joined me here.” I can tell by the look on his face that he’s enjoying my discomfort. “What would your precious book say about that?” he asks.

“I—uh.”

He laughs again and it rumbles deep in his chest. “My, my, they’re going to eat you alive, little thing.” He winks, and I swallow hard before pointing in the direction of my room.

“I’m sure I know nothing of what you’re referring to. I’m going to go. I’ll come deal with your rooms later,” I stammer, feeling my cheeks flare even more.

*What is wrong with me?!*

“Mmm. I quite believe you don’t understand, actually. Our rooms are fine as they are. We’re grown men who can take care of ourselves. Be careful around here, girl. You’re not in Kansas anymore,” he warns, whistling a tune as he turns away.

That is one movie reference I actually recognize, and I agree.

“We’re not in Kansas anymore, Toto,” I whisper to myself as I make it back to my room. “We’re not in Kansas at all.”



# SHADOW

TAKING A DEEP BREATH, I push open the doors to the wing of the compound where my brothers and the Russian are staying.

Dimitri sits on one of the armchairs in the sitting room, his phone jammed to his ear, his jaw clenched tightly as he listens to whoever is on the other end of the call. I can hear my little brothers fucking about in one of the other rooms.

“I need to call you back, Siren. Give me a bit, alright?” he rushes out before hanging up the phone.

Ah, he was talking to that wildcat of his. No doubt trying to explain why my brothers drugged his ass and thwarted his carefully crafted plan to leave their place.

“Between your brothers being idiots and my hanging up on her, I’m probably in some massive shit when we get back home.” He sighs and shakes his head. “But you and I need to have a little conversation about that book you stole from my office months ago.”

Oh, that. Well, we’d already been negotiating with him to form a business alliance for weeks, and our patience with his unresponsiveness had worn thin. He had a book with information on the priest and many other marks we might be interested in, and we were already there. Really, it’s his own fault for asking us to guard his precious Dove and woman anyhow, and it’s not like breaking into the mansion was all that difficult with my skill set.

“As a way of, let’s call it repayment, I told your brothers everything you didn’t want them to know.” I’m about to go off

on him when he holds up his hand. “You knew who I was when you stole the book, even leaving me a little note to go with it.”

Fuck him for being almost as shady as we are. “I guess I can’t blame you. I would have done the same,” I grumble, glancing at the door to the room they’re in.

“You know, Death, your brothers have taught me that family doesn’t have to be complicated. Your chosen family is what you make of it. Actually, Dove and the Seven have taught me that as well,” Dimitri states, snapping my gaze back to him.

“I chose to save them. Once the CIA kicked them out, I made sure they were away from me. You were already on our father’s trail, so they were safest with you. If I had to, I would make the same decision all over again. The Horsemen have too many enemies, and there is too much blood on my hands. I couldn’t be what they needed, nor could I ensure their survival when we ourselves were barely alive,” I tell him honestly, taking a seat on the couch and pulling out a joint.

Heavy conversations make me uncomfortable as all hell.

“None of our hands are clean, Shadow. Fuck, the Seven were barely living, only getting by on murder and mayhem.” And a few bitches here and there, but I won’t point that out. Most of them were almost celibate, but Lust fucked around enough for all of them and then some.

“But you know how much Haliee changed that for them. You’ve been watching them far longer than I have.” He shrugs. Damn, the man is touchy-feely these days, isn’t he? “You also know my Siren changed that for myself. They say what the devil can’t do...” he lets his words trail off, giving me a thoughtful look.

“Did you just quote Halsey to me?” I blink in surprise. “Listen, I’m glad it’s all sunshine and roses for your merry gang and shit, but it’s not like that for the four of us. We’re devils incarnate, Koschov. No woman can bring our demons to heel before her.” I give him a pointed look, knowing damn well he knows the four of us don’t have souls.

“If you were beyond saving, why did you save them?” Dimitri asks, hiking a thumb over his shoulder. Behind the door, Donovan seems to be quacking like a duck while Liam gushes like he’s having a goddamn orgasm over a computer. It’s a little disturbing, honestly.

I shrug and look away, taking a smooth hit of the paper roll pinched between my fingers. The smoke filling my lungs slowly helps to relax my mind as Dimitri continues to speak.

“You aren’t doomed, Shadow, just lost. What do you want to fight for?” Dimitri questions, cocking his head to the side, studying me.

“Fight for?” I grimace, the words tasting sour on my tongue.

“Fight for,” he repeats, and I stare at him like he’s grown a second head. “The four of you have spent so long being dead inside, you forgot what it’s like to be alive.”

“You know, that cute little note this asswipe left for us said the same fucking thing. You fucking with us, Koschov?” I snarl, tightening my fists, almost burning myself on the cherry of my joint.

“If I wanted to piss off the Horsemen, I wouldn’t play mindless games. I will say, after seeing the note from your admirer, it holds some merit, don’t you think?” Dimitri shakes his head, looking bored with my aggression. “However, the intent behind such a note seems rather...childish.”

“Look who showed the fuck up! How’s the dick hanging? A little low and to the left?” Liam jokes, stopping me from asking Koschov to elaborate.

My brothers barrel toward me, tackling me deeper into the couch. When fingers graze my sides in an attempt to tickle me, a smile threatens to leave my lips. I watched these two grow up, horsing around like this and always wondering what it was like to be so carefree.

My heart gives a violent tug at the memories of how much they drove their moms batshit crazy, but the women loved



them with everything they had. They never once took their situations out on them, and I'm grateful for that.

Having them here now feels a lot like what I imagine home is meant to feel like. Dimitri's words about what I want to fight for filter through my mind, and as much as I hate the idea of feeling fucking anything, these men are something I would gladly fight for.

An image of the little nun flashes in my mind. Her eyes filled with sadness and so much pain as she clings to hope and faith that her supposed God will save her from the devils that have taken her. Just the thought of her has me clenching my jaw as my brothers start rambling.

Liam and Donovan fill me in on their life since coming into contact with Dimitri, and I listen intently, distracting myself from the frustration building inside of me over our prisoner.

"So, like, kitten takes the old man by surprise and kisses the corner of his mouth, leaving him stunned stupid. I was cackling and Don popped a boner after she tried to stab him," Liam rambles as Dimitri pinches the bridge of his nose.

"That woman has really got you hung up, huh?" I finally crack a smile at Dimitri as he swats his hand through the air to banish the feelings she brings out in him.

I continue listening to them chat happily in their recounts of their woman, but a lead ball sinks into my gut. I may very well be fucked. As they yammer on about their love, all I can see is the nun's sad eyes staring back at me before merging into Spook's oh so hopeful gaze when he spoke of her in the shower the other day.

The question now is, can I truly handle having her between Spook and I? Am I capable of sharing the one shred of life that brings me happiness?

Unfortunately, I don't know the answer to those questions, and it fills me with unease.



# SPOOK

AS I REACH the little sinner's door, I hear her hissing out a prayer that sounds more like a curse, and I can't help but giggle.

To be polite, I rap my knuckles on her door before pushing my way in. "So," I start in a teasing tone, "it seems like you pissed off the big man again. You've got a lot of hellfire under that habit of yours there, nunny," I quip, joining her on the bed. She has one arm cuffed to the headboard while the other is crossed over her chest, and she's pouting. It's fucking adorable.

"He literally ordered me to 'fluff their rooms,'" she says, bringing one hand up to use air quotes. "I had a chore list a mile long, and he wanted me to drop everything, including the mop and bucket I was holding, to go fluff their room. Where does he get off?!" she snarks angrily, crossing her arm back over her chest as she turns to stare at the wall beside her again.

"Well, if you'd like, you can come hide some bodies with me. We can even make a game of it." I nod my head like it's the greatest idea I've ever had, because it would be seriously fun. But the look of horror on her face clearly says it's the worst idea she's ever heard.

"Joking," I say, holding my hands up in surrender, even though I wasn't really.

"You know, you could just, I don't know, let me go? I won't tell a soul about you, and I promise to never think of any of you again," she asks, making herself sound hopeful.

I chuckle. “Afraid that’s not going to happen, little sinner.”

“Eh, it was worth a shot,” she replies with an eye roll like she’s already come to the conclusion that she’s stuck here with us.

Whistling a familiar tune, I unlock the cuff holding her to the bed and narrow my eyes on her. “Who cuffed you?” I’m trying to figure out who would have had the time to come in here between the meeting and now, but I’m coming up blank.

“Oh, I did. I told ice man I’d rather cuff myself to my bed than take on another chore for him. As you can see, I’m a woman of my word,” she snarks again, and I toss my head back, roaring out a laugh. This spitfire is growing on me so fast I wish Shadow would catch up with me.

“You are definitely something else, little sinner,” I mutter, staring at her as my laughter dies off.

“Hopefully a good kind of something, or else I’ll just be a dead kind of something,” she murmurs, and I feel this need to hold her and calm her fears. Sadly, that’s not my place and never will be. Shadow made sure to tell me exactly that the other night.

Letting out a sigh, I stand, getting ready to leave her room. I’m not even sure why I came in here in the first place, to be honest. I just wanted to see her.

“Why do you let him walk all over you?” Her voice stops me in my tracks. It’s such an innocent question from an outsider’s perspective, but I don’t see how anyone would assume that.

“Walk all over us? He saves us time and again when we do stupid shit. Shade may come off as cold and detached, but every single move he’s made on this giant chess board of survival has been to ensure we live another day,” I declare. “He’s strategic and analyzes the impossible in order to make sure we always come out on top. He doesn’t walk all over us. The three of us know he’s the one that’s able to see moves we would never even imagine, let alone anticipate.”

“Why do you have to fight so hard to live?” she asks softly.

I turn around and see her studying me like she can see through to my very soul. If I hadn't witnessed her terror not too long ago, I'd say she was the best actress in the world for confronting me about this.

This girl has me so fucking addicted to her now, she's going to be sorry for showing me any form of kindness. I get attached too fucking hard to things that intrigue me, and she's no exception.

“If I tell you all of our secrets, will you tell me all of yours?” It's cryptic, but that's who I am. I tilt my head to the side, waiting for her reaction, and just as I knew she would, her eyes shutter closed for a moment. When she opens them again, that fire is a lot dimmer as sadness and misery takes its place.

“You know all of my secrets,” she concedes with barely more than a shrug of her shoulder.

“Did you know that the larvae of tortoise beetles can create a shield of toxic shit around themselves as means of protection?” I toss out a random fact, trying to dig my way out of this heavy shit we've found ourselves in.

“Excuse me?” she asks, clearly bewildered at the abrupt change of topic.

“Science. Toxicity. Poisons. My top three favourite things in the world. I learned how to extract diseases and poisons from insects. I guess you can say it became a sort of defence mechanism. You'll never understand the lengths you'll go to survive until that's the only thing you have to live for, little sinner. I learned how to survive because my only other option was death. I'm the son of a prostitute, and I was never meant to make it past ten years of age. I decided to say fuck those odds, and I took whatever the fuck I wanted.” She watches me intently, but I'm not finished.

“You claim your God is so great and powerful, right? Why do you suppose He'd forget about a kid like me, then?” I ask

her, genuinely curious to her response. I'm trying to get her to see reason where her faith is concerned. Maybe then she'll open up to the possibility of fixing our fucked-up selves. Shadow, most of all.

"God doesn't tamper with free will. It wasn't Him that made your mother's choices or decisions. It *was* Him that sat beside you through your pain, though," she replies, her voice filled with passion.

At this rate, I want to throw my hands in the air, because this is ridiculous. It's like she's so brainwashed to the ways of her cultish beliefs she can't see the truth of the real world. A world where devils like us rule and her God does nothing to stop us. You would think her being our prisoner would have taught her something by now.

"That's enough Bible lessons for me for one day. Shade wants you to have dinner ready for the new arrivals soon," I tell her, my head hurting from the sheer frustration she causes me. "You might want to hop to it, little sinner."

"God may have had a plan for you, but the Devil works just as hard to own you, Spook," she mutters. I almost don't catch it from across the room, but her words hit home a little too hard and I finally realize what the tightness around my throat is.

I've never been a master of my own life. I'm collared by Satan, and he's tightening his hold on my leash, slowly dragging me back to Hell where I belong. Since her Satan truly holds my leash, it's going to be fun corrupting my little sinner, drawing her into temptation.

"Move over," I order, and her eyes widen. "Humour me. Give me just a small bit of the trust you give to your God so freely."

I wait for her decision, and when she scoots over to make room for me, I know damn well she's willing to let this devil in, even if it's only a little. She wants to find a friend in this situation she's had forced upon her, so a friend is what I'll be. For now, anyway.

Sitting down on the bed beside her, I make my move. I lie down on the pillow, grab her around the waist, and pull her down into my arms, forcing her to cuddle me.

She gasps in surprise before hissing, fighting like a hellcat to escape my snuggles, but I will not be deterred.

“Calm down. If you relax, I’ll sing you a song,” I whisper into her ear. She freezes and remains rigid against me, but I prop my head up on my free hand and stare down at her.

I start to hum that hauntingly familiar the tune I hummed on repeat during our time in captivity. She slowly starts to relax against me, lulled into a sense of calm and peace from the tune.

“I need to make dinner,” she says, and I scoff.

“Meh, you can take a bit longer, I won’t tell anyone,” I reply with a wink, and she settles back into me.

We stay that way for the next hour, her breathing evening out when she falls fast asleep against me. It feels so good and right, I could damn well cry. I just spend the time staring down at her serene face, memorizing every line and mark on her.

I’m so lost in her, I completely miss the big bastard by the door until his shadow casts its way across the floor. When my eyes snap up to meet Shadow’s, I see rage pouring from those beautiful depths as confusion washes over me.

We’ve never been monogamous, and the bitches have been aplenty throughout the years, so watching him get so bent out of shape over this one little woman is giving me some major whiplash.

Whatever his problem is, he better get on board fast because I need this tiny little lady to fix us. And I’m going to make damn sure she does just that.





# SMOKE

FOR A GUY who loves his brothers, Shadow looks like he's about to lose his shit and take out everyone at the table. I know he didn't want them here, but he shouldn't still be pissed at the outcome. Actually, I thought he spent time with them this afternoon.

"Holy crap, this smells way better than my Lunchables," Spook gushes. I swear he's about to drool over the food on the table.

He's not exactly wrong. The feast the nun has prepared does smell amazing. Roast chicken with some sort of casserole, salad, and freshly made dinner rolls? It's hard to go wrong with a hearty meal like that.

"Please, it's just chicken. Put your tongue away," Shadow snarks at Spook, and Shade eyes him carefully. It's not normal for Shadow to speak to any of us like that, but especially not Spook. He loves that crazy fuck.

"I think it smells amazing!" Liam claps his hands with glee. "I'm starving."

"You wouldn't be if you had followed my plan rather than drugging me and then driving through the night without stopping," Dimitri hisses across the table from him.

"Brother husband, we already told you it was a necessary evil. Things like this can't wait." Liam shrugs like it's not a big deal, but it really is.

You have to be another level of insane to drug a powerful man like the Russian they share a woman with. Then again,

I'm not really a proper judge on levels of crazy. I did just shred a man's back with an oversized homemade cheese grater the other day. Fuck, that was fun. I have so many new creations to try out, but I need a new victim to play with first.

"Where is the chick anyway? And seriously, what's with the nun getup? Is it like a kink thing for one of you?" Donovan chirps, looking right at Shade. "It's you, isn't it? You're wound up so tight on the outside, but deep down, you're a freak with an innocence fetish, aren't you?"

A laugh escapes me as Shade glares daggers at him. "I've killed men for less." Ooh, he's threatening murder on Shadow's brothers already? This whole visit is going to be a shit show. I need popcorn.

"Boy, did a snake crawl up everyone's asses while I was visiting the little sinner?" Spook questions, and a small gasp sounds from behind us.

"I'm sorry," she stammers, blinking with a wary look in her eyes. "I forgot to bring the gravy." She rushes over to the table with a pot in her hand. "You don't have a gravy dish, so this will have to do."

"Sit down and eat," Shade orders when she tries to run away.

"I really don—"

"It wasn't a question, lamb. Sit." She does as she's told but not without glaring back at him. She's been full of sass and attitude today, and I like it.

Little Miss Fawn is keeping us all on our toes, making the lockdown just a little less boring.

"OHMYGAWD," Spook moans through a mouth full of food, obviously not waiting for the rest of us. Not that he ever does. When Spook wants to eat, he eats, and nothing is going to stop him.

"Close your mouth, brother, you look like a pig eating from a trough," I tease him.

“At least he doesn’t behave like one that’s about to eat you,” the nun mutters, and we all turn to look at her in shock.

“How do you know about pigs eating humans, lamb?” Shade asks, and she shrugs.

“You make me clean everything in this place. I may have read some things along the way.” Her nose crunches in disgust as she stares at her plate. “You’re vile and disgusting beings, just so you know.”

“Come now, little sinner, that’s mean,” Spook whines. He just spent the afternoon being friendly to her, so I’m sure he’s taking it as a personal attack even when it isn’t one. If anything, she’s just reacting the way most people would to the things we have just lying around the compound.

“Enough!” Shadow curses, pulling away from the table and his plate and glass crash to the floor, shattering.

“If everyone keeps breaking the dishes, I’ll be buying you all children’s plastic ones,” Shade grumbles, referring to the glasses the nun broke when the front gate alarm went off.

“Why not? You’ve already put me in timeout,” Fawn mutters, and I smirk.

“Keep up with the mouth, lamb, and I’ll show you what a spanking looks like,” he threatens, making her cheeks burn red.

Not for nothing, but the image of Shade tossing her tiny body over his lap and tanning her ass has my dick hardening. Fuck, this is why I spend time alone. I don’t need a woman messing with my head, dammit.

“That’s hot,” Spook rasps, and Shadow snarls.

“Clean this up,” he directs at the nun, and I frown. Sure, we’re treating her as a maid, but we haven’t gone out of our way to be cruel to her the way he seems to be doing right now.

She must sense his anger too, because she nods and gets up, leaving the room, obviously grabbing shit to fix his mess.

“That was harsh, baby, are you okay?” Spook asks him, concern laced with anger. “You can’t be mean to her like that.”

“Jesus! Stop acting like she’s anything more than a slave, Spook. She’s nothing,” he says, storming out of the room and leaving us all speechless.

“So, that was eventful,” Liam says, looking around at Spook, Shade, and myself. “Is this a normal thing for our brother?”

“No.” Spook frowns. “He’s not himself right now.” He’s careful not to say too much. We haven’t told them about Shadow’s insistence on this new enemy being our dead friend. It isn’t really any of their business. Our past is better left buried where it belongs, and it’s not pertinent to locking this bastard out of our systems. Still, it hasn’t been an easy few days for any of us, especially him.

“I need a drink.” Shade reaches for the glass of whiskey he brought to dinner with him and tosses it back.

“Should someone check on him?” Donovan asks, and we all shake our heads.

“No, he needs some space right now. He’ll find me when he’s ready,” Spook replies, looking both thoughtful and turned on.

Shade and I both know what that means, so we’ll make sure to leave them alone tonight. Those two can get loud as fuck when they’re going at it, especially when anger and emotions are being worked through, and it’s not something either of us want to listen to.



# SPOOK

I BANG my head against my bedroom wall as I contemplate a lobotomy. Smoke would do it for me.

We've been working so much the last few days, setting up for Dark Lockdown, that the paranoia is starting to set in. We're being watched, stalked, and hunted, and it's new territory for us. Not to mention ghosts from our past haunting us. It feels as though our sins are coming back to remind us of the debt we owe to Hell for our wrongdoings.

It's not time for us to leave this earth yet, but it sure feels like the Devil is trying to reclaim us. And since the Devil can't get to us, it almost feels like the little sinner was sent to be our ruin. She's been surprising us with her attitude, going from helpless victim to a sassy and sarcastic ball of fun.

Every time she snaps at Shade—something the rest of us tend to avoid—I watch his eye twitch and try to hold back the rumble of laughter that wants to escape. The uptight asshole might have finally met his match in her. Shade likes being a million steps ahead of everything, but she's meeting him head on at every turn, not even breaking a sweat.

I bang my head against the wall again, trying to get her out of my head. Shadow said we were too broken for her to fix, and she'll never see us as anything more than the villains in her story. But holding her in my arms earlier was glorious. It felt like she belonged there.

Just as I'm about to bang my head again, I'm pushed against the wall hard as someone wrenches my arms behind

me. I grit my teeth and heave out a breath as the pain in my shoulders has tears threatening to leak.

“You’ve been an absolute brat lately, baby. Unfortunately for you, I’ve decided it’s time to pay you back for it,” Shadow whispers into my ear.

I feel his lips ghost down my neck and shivers erupt down my spine as he keeps a grip on my arms with one hand, running his other down my body. He moves it up and over my chest, and I know what he’s about to do.

“Shadow,” I warn through my teeth as he latches onto the collar of my shirt and rips it down the middle. I silently curse, knowing better than to let the insult in my head fly when he’s this worked up, but I liked that fucking shirt, dammit! But I like when Shadow fucks me into oblivion more.

This is what we both need to get out of our heads.

He works the buckle of my belt free, and pops the button on my fatigues open. Shadow’s skills never cease to blow my mind.

When my fatigues drop to the floor, Shadow rumbles in approval. “No boxers today, huh? I guess you do listen to some shit I tell you,” he groans, sucking the skin where my neck meets my shoulder. He texted me earlier this afternoon and told me to make sure I wasn’t wearing any boxers, and I did what I was told. I like being a good boy for him...most of the time.

My cock hardens almost instantly as I wait for him to touch me. I know better than to beg, though. The last time I begged Shadow for anything, he edged me for two months straight. Sadistic bastard.

“Cat suddenly got your tongue, baby?” Shadow rumbles behind me as he grabs hold of my cock, giving it a gentle tug.

“No, Sir.” I gasp, that one little tug shooting straight to my balls.

“Mmm, good boy,” he praises, and I want to melt.

Letting go of my aching cock, he lifts his hand to my mouth. “Get these nice and wet for me, baby,” he orders and dances his fingertips along my lip.

I immediately open for him, sucking his fingers vigorously and wishing it was his dick. The asshole goes straight to the back of my throat, making me swallow his fingers and triggering my gag reflex. Closing my lips to keep the spit around his fingers, I start sucking on them even harder while grinding against the wall to find some kind of relief.

Shadow eases his fingers out my mouth and lets my arms go. “Hands on the wall, and don’t fucking move them,” he orders as he parts my ass cheeks with one hand, using his soaked fingers to rub my hole and drive me higher. When I shift my ass back to give him better access, a sharp slap graces my ass cheek, leaving a sting in its wake.

“What did I say?” he growls.

“Not to move my hands from the wall. You didn’t say I couldn’t put my ass out,” I snark, feeling frustrated with his slow pace.

He proceeds to spank me twice as hard as before for giving him lip, and I moan, loving the pain he gives me.

“You want to repeat that to me?” Shadow asks casually.

“You said for me not to move, Sir,” I grunt, hissing when he brings his hand down for one more slap.

“Good boy,” he praises and starts rubbing the sting out.

I feel him kneel behind me and want more than anything to lean my head against the wall as I feel his cool breath hit my puckered hole. The first touch of his tongue makes my eyes cross. When he rims me, my knees start to shake uncontrollably. I’m dying to feel any part of him inside of me.

Shadow finally takes mercy on me and eases back, moving away from my body. Deciding to listen to what I’m told, I don’t take a peek as I hear the scrape of a chair, waiting for him to tell me what to do. I know he needs the control more than ever tonight with how wound up he is over everything.



“You want it badly enough?” he taunts. “Then come ride me like you fucking own it.”

I whip my head around and see him still fully dressed with only his hard cock out. He slowly jacks himself off and squeezes the head as pre-cum leaks from the tip.

When he spits directly on his length and starts slowly massaging himself again, I groan, about to lose my fucking mind.

I turn around and I ease myself down with his guidance, slowly slipping his cock into my ass. The incredible stretch has me gritting my teeth in concentration, trying not to lose focus when it already feels so good. Soon, I’m settled in his lap with the entirety of his nine inches inside of me, fitting so deep it’s like he was made to be there.

“I said ride me like you want it, baby, not sit on it. Don’t make me repeat myself,” he strains out like he’s having a hard time not pounding into my ass with all of his might.

Him handing over this bit of power and control has me smiling a little, but I know better than to let it go to my head. He’d throw me off him and leave me aching if I truly acted like I was in control of this situation.

“Yes, Sir,” I state, and ease up and back down again, using the arms of the chair as a brace.

Soon, I find a good rhythm as I bounce on him, moaning like a wanton slut. Only Shadow can bring this submissive side out of me. His dark energy is like the finest of wines, each thrust like a large sip, coaxing me to my limits.

Without explanation, he grips my hips in a fierce hold and pounds into me from below.

“Fuck!” I scream, and my balls tighten as he hits that perfect spot inside of me.

A gasp at the door has me turning my gaze. When my eyes clash with the little sinner’s, she’s holding her rosary in one hand and clutching her mouth in horror with the other.

It's time to put on the show of a lifetime to test Shadow's theory and see if she can be a part of this fucked up family.

I moan like a porn star, grinding against Shadow as he starts fucking me even harder. "Fuck. Yes, right there!" I yell as my cock pulses from my release that my love has catapulted me into.

I feel Shadow start to swell inside of me and know he's close.

"Give it to me. Please, baby, I need you to fill me up. Leave me dripping with your cum for days," I groan out as Shadow snarls and clutches me tightly to him, pulsing deep inside as he fills me with his load.

When I can see straight, I look back at the door and see the nun still staring. This time, it's not just horror I see etched on that pretty little face. No, our little sinner looks curious as the fires of lust blaze deep in her gaze.

"Don't worry, baby. We'd train you up so good first, driving you mad until you're begging us to take away that ache between those sweet little thighs. I bet if I reached inside that habit right now, I'd find you drenched, wouldn't I, little sinner?" I let her nickname slip from my mouth as Shadow eases me back to his chest and glances over my shoulder at our Peeping-Tom.

"Shut the door on your way out," he orders, not giving her any attention. He rubs my chest and places tender kisses to the side of my neck, loving on me the way he always does once we've worked out our demons.

I chuckle and shut my eyes as I hear the door give a soft click, and relax into the love of my life.



# SHADE

“WE NEED a job to go on, Shade,” Smoke says from across my desk.

Pinching the bridge of my nose, I sigh. “As much as I know that, we have other things to worry about.” I shake my head. “Besides, we can’t leave for a job until the other three leave.”

“Does Liam have any idea how much longer it will take to set up the new system?” he questions, and I nod.

“Two more days at most. I think that little shit is going at a snail’s pace to try and spend some time with Shadow.”

Smoke snorts. “Gee, you don’t say. But I don’t blame them either. Shadow is the only one of us that has any family left, and none of them had an easy life. Liam and Donovan admittedly had it better than the rest of us deranged bastards, though.”

He’s not wrong. They had loving mothers who raised them together while the rest of us were being forged into the monsters we are today. Just the thought of our past has the hair on the back of my neck on end. I remember everything we went through like it happened yesterday.

I can recall the sound of my brothers’ screams as they were being tortured into doing things no child should even fathom. I remember my torture too. But more than that, I remember the exact moment my humanity shut down and I became the cold fucker I am now.

“Don’t do it, Shade. Don’t go there, man,” Smoke says, but his voice is farther away than normal.

I shouldn’t think about the past, but sometimes I can’t help being haunted by the memory. My first kill, the one they forced upon me, was my mother. When I refused, cried, and begged, they told me it was either kill my mother, or they’d slaughter my entire family while making me watch.

Mother was the one kind thing in my life. Another human being forced to survive the man who fathered me. A man I despised and took care of the moment I was able to. I would have let them slaughter the bastard that day, relieving me of the burden of killing my mother, but I had my little sister to think about.

*“Please, baby, do it. Don’t let them get her,” she’d begged me.*

*“Mommy, I can’t!”*

*“You have to, Tristan. Do what you need to in order to save her like you couldn’t save us,” she whispered with tears running down her face.*

And I did. It took a while, but eventually I saw it. I saw the look of pleading in her eyes. She wanted to die. Not just to save my sister, but because she was just done with life. She wanted out, even if it meant destroying the boy I was in the process.

I simply nodded and climbed into her lap, hugging her with all of my might. I cried with every second that passed before as I raised the knife in the air, swinging it down and stabbing her in the side of the neck.

For three days, I sat with her dead body, soaked in her blood. No food or water was given to me in that time either. It was my punishment for arguing with them in the first place instead of doing what they wanted.

Every second I sat with her corpse, my mother went from the woman I knew as my light to someone I despised for making me kill her. For begging me to end her life so she didn’t have to live through the abuse and pain anymore.

“You couldn’t stop it, Shade. You did what you had to do in order to save Claire,” Smoke says, pulling me back from the memory.

“Didn’t do a whole lot of good, did it?” I snap, feeling the anger rise inside of me. What I wouldn’t give for a nice chase in the dark right now.

“Her death wasn’t your fault, and you killed that bastard for everything he did to her.”

Yes, I did, and I did it with a smile on my face. I skinned my father alive over the course of days, cauterizing his deeper cuts so I could relish in his pain. I forced him to suffer for destroying my sister until she killed herself. I made him relive everything, memory by memory, as I took his life with my bare hands and one sharp blade.

Claire saw one way out, and she took it. I’ll never blame her for that after the confessions he made to me that week. Hearing everything he put her through gave me the perspective I needed to grieve for her.

“You’re right, we need a job. Quick in and out, but enough to get our heads right.”

“Thank fuck. I’ll let the guys know we’re scheduled to head out once the others leave,” he says before pausing. “Uhhh, what do we do with the nun while we have a job?”

“We’ll leave one of Koschov’s guards in charge of her. They’ll be on lamb duty while we’re gone. She’ll be locked in her room and have food delivered to her,” I tell him, getting a little hard at the idea of her fighting me on this.

Her fire is something none of us expected, but it’s almost a welcome change from the mundane we’ve grown accustomed to.

Smoke lets out a low whistle. “You better add bars to her windows then.”

I raise an eyebrow at him. “Clearly, you haven’t been near her room recently. They’re already there; she just hasn’t seen them yet.”

“Oh, fuck. You put them into the walls so you can make them come out whenever you want, didn’t you? Goddamn, man, you’re fucking scary sometimes,” he says, clearly proud of my sadistic side.

The fight and screams she’ll let out when I make those bars come out are exactly what I need.

Soon. So very soon, little lamb.

\* \* \*

## **FAWN**

I WALK BACK TO MY ROOM IN A DAZE AFTER WITNESSING Spook and Shadow in such a sinful act. What is happening to me? Why can’t I breathe?

Uncle always preached about the ungodly nature of men being with one another, the same way he did of women being together. It’s a sin. An abomination in the eyes of God. Yet, I feel so hot, I can’t catch my breath.

Maybe the devils have finally won, slowly stripping me of my righteousness in God’s eyes and turning me into a harlot just like my mother.

“No, Fawn, get it together!” I whisper, making my way to the bathroom and getting ready for bed.

Taking my habit off, I carefully fold it and lay it in the bin to be washed. I’m still baffled that they found more for me to wear, but deep down, I’m ashamed to wear them. It doesn’t take a genius to know they were stolen from another church because they don’t fit me very well.

I wash my face and brush my teeth, checking myself in the mirror to make sure the dress slip is still in place. A proper woman of God cannot be seen scantily dressed, even in slumber.

Once I’m satisfied everything is as it should be, the lights are the next to go before I climb into bed. Tossing and turning,

my mind goes to images of Spook and Shadow's bodies together, accompanied by the sounds they made. The sliding and grunting, the shooting fluid. The screaming.

Before long, my centre is drenched and I feel unclean, but nothing I do will make it stop. There's an ache I've never experienced before, and I know it's lust. It has to be. We learned all about it at the monastery, but they didn't tell us it would feel so uncontrollable. They said our faith would be strong enough to push beyond it if such feelings occurred.

I don't see how to move past this. It's everywhere. Every part of me is aching and overheated. So, I do the one thing I know I shouldn't do, unable to stop myself.

Reaching my hand under the covers, my fingers graze over my underwear just once. The shock of pleasure that shoots through me has my head spinning. I'm about to stroke myself again to test the waters when a loud clanging jolts me upright with a scream.

"I'm sorry! God, please forgive me! I know it's a sin and I've failed you!" I wail, my hands covering my eyes as I fight against my shame.

It's not until the tears have subsided into pure exhaustion and I'm about to fall asleep that I see the bars on my windows. That must have been what I heard, but it does nothing to ease the pain in my soul.

I'm trapped with no way out, stuck in this pit of despair forever. And I deserve every second of it for going against Him.





# SPOOK

“THANK FUCK! The warden finally let us out of jail!” I cheer as I get my first taste of fresh air since Shade initiated lockdown.

“Stop saying it like that,” Shadow groans, already over my hyper ass bouncing around the back of the SUV. Smoke has already threatened to tie me down multiple times, some of them before we even left the compound. My brothers need to chill. I can’t help it. I’m fucking giddy to be out and free.

“We’re getting information on a Mr. Thomas for company embezzlement. Apparently, his boss knows people who know how to list a hit on the dark net. Fucker wants his money back or body parts scattered,” Smoke says, updating us on our newest task.

“Fucking boring! I want to do a raid on a military base and steal a fucking jet or something!” I whine, still bouncing and jolting around.

Shadow reaches his limit with my bullshit because one minute I’m jumping around, and the next, my face is mashed into the seat with his knee digging into my back and my arms wrenched behind me.

“You totally moved like a ninja, you know,” I wheeze out through fish lips.

“Stop. Fucking. Moving!” he roars, smacking my ass hard as fuck with each word like that will somehow drive the message home.

It doesn’t.

All he's doing is making me want to act out more. I want to test his limits and see if I can get him to fuck me to burn off some of this energy before we get to our destination.

“Spook,” he warns as I wiggle my ass back, trying to get him to snap.

“Swear to God, I'll stop this car right now and turn around if you two don't start behaving!” Smoke barks from the driver's seat, clearly agitated.

“None of you will have to worry about anything if I blow up that vehicle while you're on your way there. I've had it with your foolishness! Act professional, or I'll send you to an early grave just to give myself a goddamn break!” Shade snarls over the SUV's comm link.

I hear roaring laughter in the background, sounding strangely like Shadow's brothers, and I sigh dreamily. “I like them,” I comment as Dimitri starts yelling obscenities at them.

“Is there a reason you're listening in on our private channel right now, Liam?” Shade asks with a deadly edge in his tone.

“Your system is wide open to me, dingus. I'm a techno god,” Liam chirps back, proud as punch he can best Shade this way.

“Isn't that like a music genre?” Smoke asks as his face draws up in confusion.

“Kids these days have no sense of humour, I swear,” Liam replies with a sigh.

“Remove yourself from Horseman business immediately. If you don't, I'll remove your head and shove it so far up your ass, you'll be tasting your own brain matter!” Shade snarls as Dimitri releases a sigh.

“I've tried that threat before. They tested it out on one of our targets to see if it would actually work,” the Russian replies in defeat. Aww, he's clearly had a rough time of it, dealing with these two. Sucks to be old!

“Is there no decency left for respectable business?” Shade grumbles, the edge to his voice enough to tell everyone he’s at his limit for bullshit today.

Even over the phone, I can picture his red face and steam coming out of his ears as he fumes. Maybe he’ll get little sinner to run just so he can chase her again. I’m quite sad I missed that, actually. Our fearless leader doesn’t let loose nearly enough if you ask me.

“There’s no honour amongst thieves!” we all reply at once.

We freeze as a new voice joins in on our declaration. Shadow eases off me and helps me into a sitting position before locking me to his side, trying to protect me like he always does. He feels like he’ll always be able to keep me safe as long as he can touch me. Even from a voice, apparently.

“How the fuck are you doing this, you slimy bastard?” Liam hisses out as Shadow and I share a look of uncertainty.

“You truly aren’t the techno god you think you are, little brother. Do you mind if I call you little brother? I’ve grown quite attached to the Horsemen, and you are an extension of one, after all,” the voice chimes in.

It has to be the voice of the masked asshole from the park because no one else would be brave enough to fuck with us like this. Is it brave or stupid? I suppose only time will tell.

“It’s a pleasure to make your acquaintance. How would you like to come over here for a chat? I can promise that you’ll never leave,” Shade responds. His voice has dropped into the menacing tone he uses for shady business deals or dealing with our targets.

“Still cold as ever, old friend,” the prick sneers, and chills run down my spine.

Now I know Shadow’s not full of shit. This is fucking Ethan back from the dead and haunting us. A memory paralyzes me as I flashback to Ethan’s eyes blowing wide as a bullet crashed through the side of his neck, narrowly missing me. I didn’t even hear the gunshot because I was screaming in

agony as life drained from his eyes and he collapsed to the ground.

“I find it quite entertaining, this game of deceit you’ve chosen to play. I, myself, love mind games as much as the next villain, but our friend died and we all watched it happen. You won’t shake us with this foolishness,” Shade says, calling him out.

I notice Shadow and Smoke shaking their heads to clear them the same way I just did. For a moment, this bastard really had us believing Ethan was alive. I swear, when we get ahold of this guy, I’m going to gut the motherfucker and add him to my freezer collection.

“See, I’m not so sure. It’s clearly shaken your foundation enough to do a Dark Lockdown on your compound. There must be some merit to it.” The masked idiot chuckles as he casually tosses out the code name only the four of us and our head of security knew.

I grip Shadow’s thigh in my hand, needing to ground myself before I do something stupid. I can hear Liam furiously pounding away on his keyboard as he tries like hell to get a lock on this dickhead.

“I wouldn’t worry about Mr. Thomas if I were you,” the asshole continues. “I took that trash out this morning. Call it a favour, if you will.” He did fucking what, now? Jesus Christ, he knows way too much about our business dealings if he already knows about the newest recon we took on.

“What exactly is in this for you? What do you want from us?” Shade growls over the line, and I find myself holding my breath as I wait for an answer.

“The four of you owe me. You don’t currently understand all of the chess pieces that are being strategically moved around the board while we play this deadly game of life. One day, when you least expect it, I’ll come to collect. Until then, be good boys and get information on Sal Cormier. The clock is ticking. Your move, Horseman. Tick-tock,” he says before his line drops, replaced by silence.

“Dammit! You bastard! I almost had him locked!” Liam screams as we hear crashing noises. Dude doesn’t take defeat well at all. I’m not sure he’s ever met someone as good with technology as him—other than the computer nerd for the Seven, and even he isn’t quite up to par—so this can’t be easy for him.

“Look’s like we’re turning around then,” Smoke states in frustration.

“Can we actually trust anything this bastard says? Do you think he really did fuck with our mark?” Shadow rumbles from beside me.

“I do believe it, yes. Not because he wants to be on our good side, but because he’s trying to manipulate us into helping him with his hidden agenda,” Smoke growls, white-knuckling the steering wheel.

I’m suddenly exhausted and drained of all the energy I had a few minutes ago. All I want to do right now is go to bed. The only thing that would be even better is if the little sinner let me use her tits as pillows.

I could use some cuddles after this bullshit.



# SMOKE

*YOUR MOVE, Horsemen. Tick-tock.*

Who the fuck talks like that? Honestly, he's probably a sociopath. One I would love nothing more than to cut apart piece by agonizing piece as he screams from the pain of shedding his mortal skin.

Sociopaths lack human empathy and the ability to care about anything, but they can still feel pain. Actually, they're the most fun to torture because they'll laugh right along with you as blood drips from their mouth. Too bad for them I know the right spots to hit.

This bastard masquerading as our long dead brother is going to get the worst torture I've ever doled out. I will invent ways to make him bleed, keeping him alive for weeks—if not months—as I torture him beyond his breaking point.

No one fucks with the Horsemen.

“The nerd is looking into this newest card we've been handed,” Shade starts off as we sit around the table.

He's talking in a combination of Swahili, French, and Spanish. We came up with this code years ago, and I'm confident this imposter prick won't be able to crack it if he's listening in somehow.

“Do you really think that's wise?” I respond, staying with him. The last thing we need is for this guy to know we're chasing the bait he's dangled in front of us.



“You have any other ideas? Clearly, my brother is already known to him, so we go with the next best nerd we’ve got.” Shadow is slower to respond, his anger making it hard for him to sort through and pick apart each language and merge them into our coded one.

“Can you guys shut the fuck up with your weirdass pig Latin, Spanish wannabe shit?! I’m trying to focus!” Liam barks out.

“Liam! Go to the basement. You always focus best there. And no calls out. As of right now, we’re on lockdown as well. I’ll make arrangements to ensure we’re not followed when we leave,” the Russian orders, and Liam glares at him.

It’s pretty clear he shares the same blood with Shadow, even if it’s only via their departed sperm donor. May he never rest in peace and be continually eaten by maggots for all eternity.

Bastard.

“Goody, we’re trapped with our brother for more bonding time. If he gets his dick out of Spook’s ass long enough, that is,” Donovan snarks. I have to stop myself from pointing out just how alike Donovan and Spook are because that’s some fucked up imagery Shadow doesn’t need.

“Christ, how are we related?” Shadow groans.

Spook cackles as Dimitri and the brothers leave and head to the basement to figure out how this bastard is getting into our systems. Again.

“Where’s the nun?” I question, realizing we haven’t heard a peep from her since we got back.

“She’s in a time out. One of Dimitri’s guards is delivering her dinner shortly,” Shade says, waving a hand in disinterest.

“Time out? Shade, she’s not a child. What the fuck happened?” My guess is he was on edge and she needled him until he banished her to her room.

“She’s a pain in my ass. One I cannot afford tonight, and her snark grated on my nerves. Can we move on now?”

“Why can’t I deliver food to the little sinner?” Spook whines.

“Because you have googly eyes and a hard-on for the lamb. She’s business, that’s all.” Shade gives him a pointed look, but Spook doesn’t give a shit.

“It stopped being business after Shadow cut Bartello’s fingers off, reminding him who we are and how we’re keeping her as collateral,” Spook counters.

“We still don’t know what that moron wanted with her. Until we do, I’m not comfortable with releasing her. Besides, she’s seen our faces. She can never be free. Are you prepared to end her?” The second Spook snarls, Shade shakes his head. “My point exactly. She stays under our control, and you will not be the one to tend to her.”

“Can we trust them not to allow her to escape?” Shadow asks, and I have to agree. We don’t know these guys. What if one of them has a bleeding heart to save the poor nun being held captive by the devils themselves?

“We can. I’ve thoroughly reviewed their entire lives and service with Koschov. I’ve also chosen the meanest of them all as an added precaution.”

“That’s good enough for me! Now, about this job,” I say, bringing us back on track. “Is it legit?”

Shade shrugs, switching back to our language to reply. “It’s too soon to tell. I refuse to not look into it, though. I won’t be blindsided by this cocksucker anymore than I already have been.”

“So we split resources?” Shadow asks, joining in.

“We do what we have to in order to get ahead. No one beats us. He said it’s our move, but I won’t be forced into making it too soon.”

“I’m hungry,” Spook says in English, making us all groan. “What? I am. Did you make sure to stock up on my Lunchables?”

“Baby, now really isn’t the most appropriate time to talk about that,” Shadow explains, but he shrugs.

“I can’t keep up when I’m hungry. You’re all going too fast.” Standing up, he bends to give Shadow a quick kiss. “Fill me in when I can absorb this shit?”

With a look to Shade, who nods, Shadow agrees and Spook heads to the kitchen to feed his fucking obsession.

“I think that’s enough for one night. I’d rather not go over more until Liam has secured the compound again,” Shade says to us once we’re focused back on him. “Somehow, this guy has breached our compound twice now. I don’t like being made a fool of, brothers. I’m setting some things up to protect us, but it will be Dark Lockdown on steroids. Fair warning, you’re going to feel like you’re in prison. Get comfy because once those three leave, the hunt begins.”



# FAWN

THE GALL of that man absolutely astounds me. Twice now, he's banished me back to my room for a supposed time out. Honestly, he doesn't want my attitude, but apparently being quiet is also annoying to him. Maybe he shouldn't continue to hold me captive since all I ever do is tick his grumpy butt off.

*Be patient, Fawn. Wait them out.*

The inner voice I've always assumed was God speaking to me is on crack today if it thinks I should give these devils any patience at all. Clearly, it was Satan himself whispering to me all of these years, guiding me down the path of horror I've lived.

Maybe there isn't a God. Maybe I've devoted my life to a deity that just doesn't exist and my life is a complete joke.

*But you just said Satan exists, Fawn. Logically, that means he has to have a counterpart.*

"Oh, shut up, brain." I'm in the middle of a battle against my mind when a harsh knock lands on the door, jolting me.

"Who is it?" I ask, but they just knock hard against the door three times. "Who is it?" I ask again, but again they just knock three times, this time even harder. "I'm not just going to open up the door to someone so rude," I huff.

No one responds, but I hear something being dropped at my door and a key turning the lock before they knock again. This time, I finally open the door to be met with a man dressed in all black and armoured to the nines with guns and weapons. The sheer panic that runs through me is palpable. I can't see

his face, but I know he's one of the guards that arrived with the Russian man. There were no guards working around the house before they arrived.

He points down at the tray of food on the floor then back at me, still saying nothing. Grabbing the tray, I move it to the table beside the door and turn back to him.

“Thank you. I'm sorry you have to babysit me, but I appreciate the food.” He doesn't respond, but gently pushes me back into the room and swings the door shut with a slam, locking me in once again. “Well, that was rude.”

Taking the tray to my little table, I curl my nose at the smell coming from whatever is under the plate covers. It reminds me of what the deep fryers would smell like in the church kitchen after being on all day long.

My suspicions are confirmed when I reveal what's underneath, and gag. Some pieces of dark breaded meat glisten in the low light, showing off how greasy it truly is. If I leave them to their own devices for meals, their cooking may kill me even if they don't.

By the time I've forced enough food down in order to survive the night and wake up with my fire again, I feel like this may be some form of torture via the digestive tract. The texture of the meat was even worse than the smell, and if I thought it *looked* greasy, it *felt* like it had been soaking in oil for days.

Packing everything back onto the tray, I almost miss the piece of paper sticking out from under the can of soda that came with dinner. It's much too late in the evening for caffeine, not to mention the sugar content, so I didn't even bother thinking about it. Back at the church, the nuns were very strict on eating only foods that came from God and the earth. We weren't allowed to eat processed foods, leaving those products for the kids that came through.

“What are you?” I ask the paper curiously as I pick it up. Turning it over, I can't believe what I'm reading.

*Eat up, miss. You'll need your strength for the coming days.*

Six times, I read it over with shaking hands. What's supposed to be happening in the coming days? Who is the letter from? Are they toying with me?

A loud bang on the door is followed by my screech of fear before I can catch it.

"Lamb? You alright?" Shade asks through the door, sounding pained. I'm sure it's really hard for him to pretend he cares about little ol' me in here.

"Be careful not to give yourself a brain aneurysm, ice brain," I mutter and head to the door. "I'm fine, you just frightened me." It's not a lie. He did terrify me. Though, anything would after reading this letter.

The note feels like a piece of hot coal in my hand, reminding me these men truly can't be trusted. Not that I was beginning to trust them, but this is a stark reminder that I'm truly not safe here for even a moment.

"Touchy little lamb," he grumbles on the other side of the door. I'm not sure I was supposed to hear him. "Did I catch you playing again? Is that why you shrieked?" he taunts, making my stomach curdle.

*No.* He's the one who saw me? Are the cameras in my room infra-red? Oh, God, I think I'm going to throw up. If this man, or any of them for that matter, actually saw my sinful behaviour...

"You know, little lamb, I can feel you panicking through the door," he says, making my head spin. It's too much. Between the threatening note of things to come, and now this admission of sorts, I'm never going to earn forgiveness. Uncle was right. Being a harlot is in my blood.

"Go away," I rasp, my breath coming faster as I move toward the bed.

"Why should I?"

"Because you banished me into this room," I say with a little more edge than before. "Clearly, you wanted nothing to do with me. Now leave...please."

The use of my manners is engrained into my very being, but sometimes I wish I could just tell them to go suck a darn lollipop. I'm tired of being polite to all of the monsters holding me captive. First my uncle, and now these men? I'm truly destined to suffer for all eternity, aren't I?

"You should have heeded the warning." His voice is cold and dark, making my heart race faster.

Maybe he's the one planning something. Maybe my time of being just a slave and maid is over and they want something else from me. Something I'm unwilling to give.

"I need the tray, lamb," he says, and I swallow the bile rising in my throat.

"Then come in and get it," I snark, my voice clearly shaking with fear. I still think I deserve brownie points for effort, though.

The sound of a sigh is followed by him unlocking the door and opening it, eyeing the room for anything suspicious before stepping in.

"You look like shit."

"Best not come any closer then. Never know if it's contagious," I reply, deciding this is my best chance of keeping them away from me for a while. Besides, I feel extremely ill, making it easy to pull off.

Shade watches me for a moment to see if I'm telling the truth before he shakes his head like he's disappointed. Maybe even disgusted?

"Point taken. You're to stay in your room until we know that you're not going to spread anything to the rest of us." He walks over to grab the tray, looking it over. "Hmmm."

"I'm not hungry," I tell him truthfully. My nerves are shot now, so at least it's not a lie anymore like it would have been ten minutes ago.

"Sleep. When you're not a walking plague, you can clean the place from top to bottom to make sure the rest of us don't catch whatever this is," he snarls, looking uncomfortable.



“What?” I question, not sure I heard him correctly.

“You heard me. I don’t repeat myself, as you well know. Unless you need another reminder?” Just the idea of being chased by him again is enough to subdue me...for now.

“No. I heard you,” I say through clenched teeth. I hate how weak I feel against him. Against anyone. It makes me feel pathetic.

“Good. See that you remember it,” Shade says, moving to the door. “Try not to be a naughty little lamb, yes?” He smirks at me before closing and locking the door behind him, leaving me to sink into uncontrollable shame and fear.

Something is coming and I need my strength. Even Shade’s cold words said so, didn’t they? To heed his warning? It definitely felt like a nuanced threat and not just pertaining to when he banished me to the room earlier.

*God, why? Why have you let this happen?*



# SHADE

“YOU’RE sure you’ll be able to stay on top of this guy from your place?” Smoke asks Liam as we sit down for the final meeting before the three of them head home.

“I’ll be fine,” Liam states, then turns his head to me. “I don’t know how he keeps hacking in. It’s almost as though he’s embedded into the system itself without leaving a trace. Every time we patch it, he comes right back in using a different route.”

“I know. You’ve done a good job of helping us,” I reply, my agitation clear.

It’s not directed at Liam and he knows it. It’s at this fucker who keeps playing with us. And possibly somewhat over an annoying prisoner that isn’t reacting to my taunting the way I’d hoped she would. So I’ve once again sent her to her room to be alone. I want her fire, not the defeated and silent girl walking around the house recently.

“I still can’t believe you won’t just let me wipe the system and replace it. If we start from the ground up with all new equipment, he won’t be able to break into your systems again.”

I admit, it would be easier to do so to keep this guy out, but it’s not the game I want to play. I want to know his every move and be aware of where he is, even if it’s just the knowledge that he’s cracked into our security again.

“No. I want to know when he’s watching us and how often. It will be a lot harder to find him if we shut him out

completely, and he may resort to more drastic measures than this toying he's doing currently. This way, you'll have a better chance at back-hacking him. Eventually, he's going to get complacent and make a mistake," I explain for the third time.

I hate repeating myself.

"At least we have the gates and some of the compound cameras changed so he can't access those anymore. It'll be a lot harder for him to sneak onto the property without being seen," Shadow mentions from across the table.

"That's true. But when you're ready, I think you need to overhaul this shit with mine and Oliver's new system," Liam says, and I give him a look.

Oliver Weever has a brilliant mind much like Liam's, but he specializes more in surveillance and hacking rather than coding, which is Liam's specialty. He's also a member of the Deadly Seven, who are all living at Koschov's pretentious mansion.

"Shade, don't look at him like that," Shadow warns. "You're not killing them. They're off limits."

"We don't allow people to survive who work on our compound in any capacity. We let a few live once, now look at the mess we're in." I should have killed everyone who worked on our place, but I allowed the designers of the security system to live in case something went wrong. It was a very unique, one of a kind system no one else would have been able to fix had it malfunctioned. But clearly, letting them live was a mistake.

"As much as I'd like to wrap my hands around their throats until they stop breathing, I'm going to have to warn you. You can't touch them without the wrath of myself, the Seven, and our women," Dimitri reminds me, and I sigh.

"Your stay has become uneventful and boring. Move onto the other matter at hand so you can be gone."

"Finally! I'm getting hungry and the little nun is cooking something up that smells delicious. Even better than my

Lunchables,” Spook says excitedly, rubbing his hands together.

“Sal Cormier,” Shadow starts, ignoring Spook’s comment about food and the nun. It’s a drastic change from the last time we all sat together for one of her meals. “From what I’ve been able to uncover so far, he’s been working as a security guard for twenty years. He’s actually a part of Bartello’s employ, but he’s nowhere near the top. He doesn’t even see the boss man or get anywhere near him.”

“That’s an odd coincidence.” Drumming my fingers on the table, I continue to listen to my brother speak.

“Maybe, but this guy could very well be trying to make us look one way as he goes another.” He’s refrained from calling the imposter Ethan recently, but I know he still believes it to be our long lost friend.

“Of course he is,” I tell him with a wave of my hand. “That would be the obvious choice. But the smarter choice would be sending us in a direction that didn’t involve someone we’ve already scouted.”

“That’s the thing. Until we had his name, he didn’t even show up on the records. He’s so low on the totem pole that he wasn’t even on our radar,” Smoke says, shaking his head. “Why bring our attention to someone so innocent? It’s a waste of time.”

“Actually,” Dimitri says, grabbing all of our attention. “I’ve been going over the reports myself, and something is most definitely off with his record.”

“Meaning?” I question, and he focuses on me.

“I watched my father forge shit like this for years. He was a pro, but if you pay close enough attention to the details, there are signs that portions of their lives have been fabricated. For instance, it says he’s been a guard for twenty years. But not once has there been a promotion or even a move to a similar position in another building. What security guard working for a man with dozens of properties stays in one spot for twenty years?”

“Someone who’s complacent?” Donovan snarks, but I get what Dimitri is saying. I’d have caught it myself later today once they left and I had time to read over everything Shadow found in more detail.

“Complacency isn’t it. Not in Bartello’s world. For his own security alone, he’d bounce his guards around and change them out often. Leaving one person in the same place for twenty years is like handing them the secrets to your entire empire. It doesn’t make any sense,” I explain, sitting up straighter.

“There’s another thing,” Dimitri states. “The ages don’t match. He was born in Holand, but if you cross reference the city databases with birth records, there’s a seven year discrepancy.”

“How did you get his birth records?” Spook asks, shocked. “Shadow couldn’t find anything online.”

“I have associates everywhere. Just because something isn’t available digitally doesn’t mean it’s not accessible. One of my trusted associates from that area owed me a favour. They went into hospital archives and found what we needed. Oliver should be sending it to you shortly. He’s working on the untraceable, unhackable link as we speak.”

It seems forming an alliance with Koschov is proving to be fruitful after all.

“Thank you,” I reply, and he dips his head toward me. “We’ll need to dig as deep as possible and uncover everything we can about this man. We’ll start with trying to rebuild his life from the day he was born and work our way up. If documents are forged, then there’s something someone is trying to hide. And we’re going to find it.”



# SHADOW

AFTER MY BROTHERS LEFT, we decided as a group that Spook and I would do a check in on Mr. Thomas, the recon job this imposter says he took out already. We aren't trusting the word of this jackass. We need to see for ourselves that he was truly dealt with.

Spook gives a low long whistle as he looks around the destruction of our mark's apartment. It was a shithole to begin with, but now with dry blood coating the walls, it looks like his apartment came straight from the most gruesome horror set ever built.

"That's a lot of passion and overkill for somebody that supposedly doesn't matter," Spook remarks, looking around at the body parts that have been scattered everywhere.

This guy literally tore Mr. Thomas apart.

"He's playing games with us," I murmur, as I pull out a joint and light it up.

Taking the first hit, I hold the smoke in my lungs for a minute as I take in the scene around me. I recall the file we had on this shitbag, and honestly, his execution is fitting considering the crimes he committed. We would have killed him after the recon mission for his crimes anyway. Mr. Thomas was known to love torturing women until their hearts gave out, so this is kind of poetic irony that he was torn to pieces while alive. There's no way blood would have shot everywhere like this without a beating heart pumping it through his veins.



It's also worth noticing the killer's signature, claiming this kill as his own. Every killer has a signature. We leave our black cards, and this fucker seems to fancy himself the likes of Satan because, on the far wall near the kitchen and drawn in blood, is a figure complete with horns and pointy tail staring back at us.

"So, what? Are we supposed to call him Satan now or something?" Spook asks, toeing a stray arm with his boot.

"We shouldn't call him anything. Imposters don't deserve recognition, and Shade is fucking sure this asshole isn't Ethan. Come on, let's head out. There's nothing left for us here," I remark and turn toward the door as I hear the click of Spook's phone camera. He's likely documenting the gruesome scene and this asshole's signature for Shade to analyze later.

Pushing outside into the alleyway at the side of the building, the dead of night blankets me in a warm greeting. The first thing I notice when I look around is a group of men standing around my fucking car. That's five bodies I'm about to fucking drop. No one fucks with my car, and I'm ready for some violence.

"Well, hello there. Beautiful night for a stroll through the park, don't ya think?" Spook calls out to them as he walks up behind me.

I see the smirks lining all of their faces, probably thinking they have us exactly where they want us. They have no idea what they've gotten themselves into tonight. Rage has been my constant companion recently, and Death and Pestilence are always up for violence.

"Awful cocky of you, considering we have you cornered. Do you really think being a smartass will get you out of this unscathed? I want your fucking money and the keys to this sweet ride," the leader of the soon-to-be-dead-men says, pulling a knife and flipping it open.

My eyes catch on the when it catches the moonlight, and for the first time in what feels like forever, I fucking smile. I know how deranged I look when I smile, and the four men standing behind their leader shift on their feet when they see it.

“Come over here and take them,” I rumble, keeping my eyes locked on the asshole as my smile stretches across my face.

“Goddamn it, Shadow! Stop smiling! You’re scaring them, and I want some action too!” Spook complains beside me as the man with the knife rolls his shoulders and heads toward us.

I hear Spook huff—a clear indication my baby is pouting—and move over to prop himself against the wall. He’s already bored, knowing that once I dispose of this motherfucker, the rest of them will run.

The moment the asshole gets close enough to swing his blade at me, I strike out, quick as lightning. Knocking the blade from his hand while snatching him by the throat, I slam him back against the brick building.

I squeeze his throat as hard as I can while he wheezes and claws at my hand, kicking out while his eyes are wide, pleading to his buddies to save him. It’s too late, though. I feel the moment his trachea collapses beneath my grip and grin like the monster I am.

When I press my fingertips deeper into his neck and feel the first traces of blood stain my fingers, I laugh hysterically, my body filled with glee.

“Holy fucking shit! He’s ripping his throat out!” I hear one of the others scream, followed by the sound of retreating footsteps as the leader’s gang abandons him, scattering into the night like the worthless cockroaches they are.

When I’m satisfied the leader is dead and past the point of resuscitation, I drop his lifeless body to the ground and tilt my head from side to side, cracking my neck to relieve the tension.

“Are you happy now? I don’t have a body of my own to drop, you big bastard. You get to have all the fun,” Spook rants, stomping over to the car, but I lock it before he can open the door.

“Let me take you on a date,” I all but blurt out.

Spook rears his head back like he's been slapped and stares at me like I've grown a nipple on my forehead or some shit. "I'm sorry. What the fuck did you just say?" he asks, stunned.

My skin starts to crawl as I stare at him while Dimitri's words come to the front of my mind. *What are you fighting for?*

"I said, I want to take you on a date. I'm shit at this, so it'll more than likely just be killing some scumbags, but doing it together constitutes as a date, right?" I ask, starting to feel unsure of myself.

I don't ask Spook for shit. I just fucking take. That's the dynamic of our relationship, and he loves it when I force him to submit to my will. He thrives on it. But with his little nun obsession, maybe if I give him a more gentle side of me, he'll be able to finally put her out of his mind.

His eyes narrow on me as if he can read my mind. "Are you fucking jealous?!" he asks, his voice raised.

I open my mouth to tell him to get fucked, but Spook asking me that unleashes all of these thoughts that have been swirling round with no destination. With one question, he's pinpointed the truth behind my unease the last while.

"I don't know. Maybe I am," I grumble like a scorned child.

I've never had to share him before, at least not his love and devotion, with someone else. This is uncharted fucking territory for me.

In my moment of clear unease, Spook throws his head back and laughs like the bastard he is. The bastard I need in my life to keep me steady, not that I've let myself admit that to him or anyone else. We're Horsemen—we don't do this touchy-feely shit.



# SPOOK

MY LAUGHTER slowly starts to subside, and I wipe the tears from my eyes while I stare at the big oaf in front of me. “Unlock the car, babe,” I whisper, and crook my finger in a ‘come here’ motion.

I never imagined I would see Death, who is always so damn growly and demanding, look so unsure of himself. It’s doing things to me I can’t even process right now.

When we’re settled in the car and pulling away from the curb, I mull over how much of an ass he’s been lately. Couple it with the fact he’s been jealous this whole time, and it all makes perfect sense.

A smile slowly starts to stretch across my face as I see him white knuckle the steering wheel. He’s probably pissed that I haven’t said a thing about the date he proposed we go on, but called him out instead.

I’m going to enjoy turning his shitty attitude around and making his damn night.

Turning toward him, I reach over and start to undo his pants, my mouth already watering at the thought of taking him deep in my throat.

“Spook, wh—” he starts, but I silence him with a finger on his lips.

“It’s my turn to be in charge. You’re going to shut the fuck up and let me swallow your dick. We will discuss little sinner after your mood has improved,” I direct.

My love's eyes widen in surprise and he lifts his ass, still maintaining speed and control over the car. With a couple of quick tugs, I'm able to get his pants down enough for his already thickening length to bob out, and fuck, does he look delicious.

I waste no time laying over the console and taking his cock to the back of my throat, needing him as much as he needs me. His groans are instant as I begin working my tongue over his length.

When he tries to thrust his cock deeper into my throat, I graze him with my teeth, a warning to sit still or I'll stop. When he settles back onto the seat, I get back to work, hollowing my cheeks and sucking while my head bobs up and down the length of him.

I feel his hand come down on the back of my neck, but he doesn't push me down or try to take control at all. It's like he's grounding himself so he doesn't wreck us. It would suck to die right now, but what a hell of a way to go. There are worse ways to die than with your man's cock deep in your throat.

"Fuck, Spook, I'm close," Shadow hisses out in warning, groaning like my pace is killing him.

I feel him about to cum and back off, coming up for air with a pop.

"What the fuck!?" Shadow snarls. He may be a sadist and enjoy torturing me, but he can't stand edging in the least.

"Tell me why you think Fawn would be a bad thing for us? Why are you so convinced she wouldn't be good for us?" I ask him simply, ignoring his attitude.

"Are you fucking ser—" he starts to yell, but I don't give him a chance to finish. Leaning back down, I suck the tip of his cock, swirling my tongue around and tasting the pre-cum that keeps pouring out of him.

"Ah, fuck. Goddamn it," he groans, smacking the steering wheel with each curse.

I pop back off him and sit up now that I've short circuited his attitude. "Do you truly believe you'd lose me to her?" I

question, narrowing my eyes on him.

Sweat beads his brow as he takes rapid breaths, grinding his jaw so hard I'm surprised he hasn't cracked a tooth. "No, I don't think I'd lose you. I just thought I could be enough to make us both satisfied with what we have," he grits out.

I lean over and suck him down again, and he hollers in agony, so close to cumming, but we need to settle this first. Popping back off again, I sit up and ask another question.

"Don't you want more? Don't you want a fucking home, Shadow? What about fucking kids one day? I'd like that!" I exclaim, watching as his face turns to shock.

I lean over and take him as deep as I can so he doesn't have a chance to lose his fucking mind over the fact I may like to have rugrats one day. I don't stop until I feel his cock thicken as his orgasm takes over. Greedily swallowing every single drop, I don't realize the shift in the air until I feel his grip latch onto the back of my neck while he slams on the brakes.

Fuck, I'm in deep shit now.

"Kids. With all of the fucked up shit we do, YOU WANT FUCKING KIDS, SPOOK?!" Shadow tries and fails to keep the disgust from his voice.

"Maybe." I shrug. "The idea doesn't repulse me. At least if we had kids, we know no one would ever lay a hand on them. That they'd grow up safe and loved with a family."

"We aren't capable of love, Spook. Christ, we're monsters who roam the earth, seeking to devour everything in our path to satiate the bloodlust inside of us. Love is a fucking myth." The second the words leave his mouth, his face grows pale. "Wait, I didn't..." he starts, trailing off as I silence him again.

"Yeah, you did, Shadow. But it's ok. We fell into this space of need and just enjoyed each other, but we've grown apart so much," I whisper as I take in all the years we've been together. My chest tightens as tears threaten to break free from my eyes.

"Are you... Are you breaking up with me?" Shadow asks, utterly shocked and dumbfounded with his dick still hanging

out.

I nod my head, hoping this little act might help him get his head out of his ass. There's no way in hell I'd ever let this man go forever, but I need him to snap back to fucking reality to see there's so much more to life than he's allowing himself to live. I need him to realize that love truly does exist in this world, and what we have is so fucking special.

"Fine. I'll respect your space," he huffs, finally tucking his cock away and putting the car in gear.

*Oh, fuck, Batman.* I hope my plan didn't just backfire because there's no backpedaling my way out of this decision. Now, it's up to Shadow to find his way back from the darkness. All I can do is hope like hell he doesn't leave me brokenhearted.

The drive back to the compound is silent, my heart aching deeply as I contemplate a takebacksies with him and giving up on my quest just to have him back with me, but I can't.

I thought I mattered more to him than the essential blow-off he gave me. Fuck, this hurts more than anything they put us through in the hellhole we were once prisoners of.

Only this time, I think it just might fucking kill me.





# FAWN

EVERY TIME I SEE SHADE, an overwhelming shame shoots through me. Just knowing he heard me in my deepest moment of depravity and has chosen to taunt me with it is like having hundreds of insects crawling all over my body when I can't move. I know, because my uncle used it as a form of torture once in a while after he discovered my fear of spiders.

Spook, bless his scary soul, has tried to make me laugh since I've become more withdrawn, and I appreciate it, but it won't change how I feel. In the end, I'm still here as an unwilling prisoner to them. I can't let his seeming nice behaviour pull me into their evil.

"Have you cleaned the guest wing yet?" His coldness washes over me, making me sink in no myself.

"Yes. I'm heading to my room now. Goodnight," I answer him and leave, not giving him a chance to say anything more.

When I get back to my room, there's a stack of clean sheets on the bed that are out of place. I clean this room and every other room in this place outside of Shade's. I've never once stepped foot into the rooms he inhabits. Spook told me it's because he's a germaphobe with control issues, and that's fine by me. I want nothing to do with knowing a deeper and more intimate side of that man.

Actually, I've seen and read things in this house I didn't even know existed, and I've cleaned some pretty vile things off of some of the bedsheets in this place. But not mine. Mine

are always pristine, and I change them weekly. Yesterday was that day, so why are these here?

Curiosity gets the better of me. Checking the lock on the door, I look around the room to make sure I'm truly alone before moving over to the bed, separating the pile piece by piece until a piece of paper reveals itself to me.

Sucking in a quiet breath, I wonder if this is another game. A note like the one I received with my dinner the other night that warned me to keep quiet, and to eat. That things were far from over yet. I've been on edge ever since.

"Don't open it, Fawn. Just flush it like you did the last one. At least if something happens to you, you'll be able to say you never saw it coming," I tell myself quietly as I stare down at the paper. But I can't ignore it.

When I unfold the page, I can't believe what I'm reading.

*You've done well to keep the first note quiet. Now I need you to do it one last time for me.*

*My name is Jefferey Morgan, an agent with the FBI. I've been undercover with the Russian man for a long while now, trying to get close in order for us to bring him down. As luck would have it, I ended up here.*

*Tomorrow night, eight o'clock, I will come to your door. When I knock, let me in and I will get you out of here.*

*- Agent M*

CAN I BELIEVE THE WORDS WRITTEN HERE? OR IS THIS SOME sort of sick and twisted test these devils are playing on me? In the end, it doesn't really matter. I can't ignore even the chance of being rescued. And if this is some sick game for one or more of them, they have to know I won't turn an opportunity like this down.

There's also the chance, regardless how slim, that it could be real. The guard Shade assigned to me has never once spoken a word to me, he's never shown a true act of kindness, and without this letter, I would assume he's one of them.

Another lackey to do their bidding. And if he is an FBI agent, it would make sense that he never gives me any form of attention, right?

Footsteps stomp down the hall like they're on a mission, warning me Shade hasn't given up his taunting yet. I should have known he wouldn't allow me to just blow him off like that.

I eye the lock, double-checking I truly did lock it before I head into the bathroom, quickly flushing the note down the drain. "Come on, come on, hurry up." I'm pleading with a toilet. How has this become my life?

"Fawn, open the door," Shade bellows, making me jump.

"I-I'm in the bathroom," I respond, breathing a sigh of relief when the paper finally disappears with a whoosh.

"Now, lamb!" Wow, he sounds so angry.

Rushing to the door, I unlock it just as he's about to break it down. His chest heaves in his white dress shirt as he fights for breath, looking every inch the menacing devil he's warned me he is.

"Sorry, I needed to use the bathroom," I tell him, praying to God for forgiveness over the small lie. I did need to use the bathroom, but not for the way this man is going to think I meant it.

"Where is it?" he asks, pushing into the room and almost knocking me onto my butt.

"Where's what?" I ask, my heart racing as my head spins. He couldn't have seen it, right?

"Don't play coy with me, Fawn," he seethes, ripping the bed apart. "If you flushed whatever that paper was and try to hide something from me, I'll bring that guard in here and kill him at your feet. I'll make sure you're covered in his blood and safe in the knowledge that you could have saved him. You'll watch the life drain from his eyes for daring to defy me."

My hand flies to my mouth and I run to the bathroom, only making it to the bathroom sink before I lose the contents of my stomach at the imagery he's painted.

With every wretch, I search my brain, trying to find any plausible reason for flushing that note down the drain where he won't make his threat a reality.



# SHADE

SHE'S LYING TO ME, I can feel it.

When she received the first note with her dinner, I waited her out, assuming she didn't bring it up because she was angry with me for treating her like a child. I figured she would mention it to us when she was in a better mood, but she didn't.

Our little lamb hid it from us. I can only assume she flushed it just like she has with this one. Maybe my threat was harsh, since she can't seem to stop vomiting, but I loathe lies and secrets from those I allow into my life. She may be a prisoner in this house, but she should know better than to toy with the beast inside of me.

"Are you about done?" I snarl, searching through her room as she continues to be sick.

The days following that first note, I asked my brothers if any of them had left her one, but they had no idea what I was referring to. I even asked the other three before they left but they knew nothing of it either. That left me with one other option.

I started watching Koshcov's guard, the one I assigned to her. He is the only other person on the compound to remotely interact with our little lamb. He never shows her any form of attention, never speaks a word to her, or looks at her with more than a passing swipe of the eyes. So why has he now left her two notes? Notes in which she's refusing to tell us about.

"You're a cruel human being," she cries from the bathroom.

I chuckle coldly, making my way over to where she's now standing. It's clear she's shaken up, but I push into her space and force her back to hit the wall, blocking her in with my arms. The way her breath catches in panic and fear thrills me. Her fear is my greatest excitement, and I've missed this.

"You knew that about me already, lamb," I hiss, leaning my face into hers. God, she's beautiful like this. So vulnerable and afraid. "I loathe liars. Are you being a bad nun and lying to me, little lamb?"

She whimpers, her whole body shaking with pupils blown so wide I can barely see the iris. Little lamb likes the fear, does she? Hmm, we're training her well, I see.

"Please," she whispers, tears brimming her soft eyes. "Don't hurt him, I ca— I can't see that." Such an innocent in our fucked up world of murder and debauchery. She has no business being tied to men like us, but her fate was sealed the moment we decided to keep her as collateral damage against Bartello.

"Then tell me what the notes said, Fawn." Her name is a growl on my lips as I fight to take what I want from her.

It's the first time I've gotten a reaction out of her in days that isn't quiet sadness. Her fire and fear have quickly become my favourite parts of the day.

"I...he was just trying to be kind to me, cold one." A war of emotions cross her face as she tells me that sweet lie. Maybe not a full lie, because I truly believe she's incapable, but there's more she isn't saying. I can see it in the way she holds herself and feel it in the energy her body is creating against mine.

"Cold one." I smirk down at her and raise my eyebrow. "I suppose it's better than ice brain." Fawn's eyes widen in shock. I don't think she realizes just how obsessed I've become with watching her every move. I see everything.

"Oh."

"Oh, yes, I heard that too," I tell her. Leaning into her, I brush my lips against her ear. "I hear everything, little lamb."



Every prayer, every cry, every time you curse me out in a wholly innocent way. Everything.”

“I would apologize,” she whispers, her voice raw, “but it would be disingenuous.” Her eyes lift to meet mine and in that moment, I see how truly tired she is, but I laugh all the same.

“We’ve established how I prefer truth,” I respond, watching her swallow. “What did the notes say, Fawn?”

“I told you. H-he was just being nice and making sure I was okay.”

“Such pretty lies for someone seemingly innocent, lamb. That first night, you were terrified of your own shadow. That’s not just someone being kind,” I growl, my agitation mixing with the desire and need she’s stirring.

Fawn stays silent, not speaking a word as I stare her down, and it pisses me off. If she won’t tell me the truth, I’ll get it directly from the source. Pushing off the wall and stepping away from her, I stomp to the door and open it. “Johnson!”

Her guard comes around the corner in full gear. “Sir.”

“What did the notes say that you left for our prisoner?”

“Sir?” he questions, and something about it angers me even more.

“Is everyone deciding to try and play dumb today?” I growl, and his covered face stares back at me. Not once do his eyes leave me as I speak to him. Dimitri trained him well, but clearly not well enough to keep his nose out of matters that don’t involve him.

“Sir,” he says again. “I’m not sure what you’re referring to.”

“Then allow me to remind you.” Moving fast, I grab him by his tactical vest and slam him against the hallway wall. “You’ve written her two notes now. Notes in which she has hidden and refuses to tell us about.”

“Shade! Stop it!” Fawn cries out, her voice shaky. “Please, stop!”

“You want to tell me why you’re leaving her notes?” I hiss, ignoring her pleas.

When he doesn’t respond, I pull back and slam my fist not his face, glorying in the feel of his flesh moving under the ski mask.

“Nothing to say?” I question, and he shakes his head. “You have a fucking death wish, Johnson. Answer me.”

No response.

I pull away just a fraction to give myself some momentum, then swing my fist into the side of his bulletproof vest, landing right near his kidney.

“Stop it!” Fawn begs, but the guard just pushes out a whoosh of air.

“Hmm. Tough guy, huh?” I start wailing on him with every ounce of frustration and pent up anger, beating him bloody until she jumps onto my back, throwing me off balance.



# SMOKE

I'M NOT HOME for more than a second when the sound of someone getting beat to hell reaches my ears, entwined with female screams.

“The fuck?” Making my way toward the sounds, I get there just in time to watch the little nun jump on Shade’s back, throwing them both off balance.

“Stop hurting him!” she cries as they fall to the ground. I’m about to say peace out to the little nun—because if Shade lands on her, she’s fucking toast—when he twists around to take the brunt of the fall.

“Stop it, stop it, stop it!” she wails as she clings to Shade like he’s a monster trying to harm someone she loves.

My eyes catch the guard leaning against the wall, clearly having been put through the wringer. He may be dressed in all black, but the way my brother’s knuckles are bloody and beaten, the guard is definitely in rough shape, and most definitely bleeding.

“Someone want to tell me what the fuck is going on here?” My voice snaps them out of their battle on the floor, and Shade spins around, pinning her to the ground.

“You could have been killed!” my brother barks at the little nun, and she flinches. “Never ever get involved in a fight.”

“You were killing him!”

“I told you I would. Be happy I didn’t slit his throat at your feet,” Shade responds coldly, and she whimpers.

“Yo, still here, and still lost,” I look between the three of them. “Johnson, the fuck you do?”

“He left her another note,” Shade answers for the guard who’s still leaning against the wall. It’s impressive, I’ll give him that. Most people aren’t able to continue standing when Shade lays in on them.

“Ah, hell, man. You’re an idiot.” I shake my head at the guard, then focus on my brother. “Well, then...what did it say to warrant a beating?”

Shade snarls and glares down at the girl. “Fawn here decided to destroy it before I could find out. And she refuses to tell me what they’ve said.”

His chest heaves as he stares down at the woman that’s had Spook all twisted up and Shadow on a rampage, and I know she’s ensnared the rational one out of us all. At this rate, she’s going to have them kill each other if someone doesn’t speak some goddamn reason into them.

This? This is why I prefer being alone and keeping my distance from her. She’s a fucking liability, and I don’t like it. Not one damn bit.

“Okay, so you decided to, what? Beat it out of Johnson? Dude.”

“Let me go!” Fawn chooses this moment to speak up and starts fighting against Shade’s hold.

“No,” he tells her simply, and she screeches.

This fucking woman. I get the appeal, but she’s not good for any of us. Even if she were to magically give up her belief system, she’d never be with more than one of us without seeing it as an abomination. In the end, she’s going to tear us apart if we aren’t careful.

“Hey, chill with the banshee shit, nun. I’m trying to have a conversation here!” I snap, and Shade’s eyes narrow on me.

“Watch it, brother,” he warns, and I sigh in defeat.

“Fine. Back to the notes. You don’t know what they said, she won’t tell you, and clearly Johnson has chosen this

moment to become a goddamn monk. Now what?"

"He just wanted to know I was okay!" Fawn interrupts, her voice filling with panic. "Please, don't hurt him for showing some compassion. Not everyone is as cold as you," she whispers as tears stream down her face.

It's not the first time I've seen her tears, and I'm sure it won't be the last. She's definitely a crier...but it is the first time I've seen any form of emotion other than anger or frustration on my brother's face. Ever.

Now, I kind of hope I'm wrong about her tearing us apart. If she can make Shade—the most uncaring son of a bitch to ever exist—show human emotion, maybe she can bring us together instead. But what would that even look like?

"Will you stop fucking blubbering if I promise not to kill the bastard tonight?" Shade asks her, his voice hard and cold. She doesn't see the difference in him the way I do, but it's there.

"I ca—can't help it!"

"Jesus Christ, help me," he curses and moves to stand up, pulling her with him.

"D-don't use the Lord's name in vain," the nun scolds him, and I can't help but bark out a laugh. Fuck, this shit is ridiculous.

"Baby, we've said a lot worse things than that, and it ain't ever gonna change," I tell her with a shake of my head.

Shade eyes me at the use of a pet name, and I can't really tell you where it came from. It's not like I've spent any amount of time with the woman outside of our conversation that first night. That shit hit too deep way too soon, and I've kept my distance since.

"Go to bed, Fawn. You'll be assigned a new guard in the morning. Johnson is being shipped back to Koschov in the morning," Shade orders her, and her shoulders slump.

"Don't. He'll be killed for not doing his job. I heard that Russian man on the phone once, and he ordered someone to

murder one of his guards at home!” she wails, and Shade pinches the bridge of his nose.

“Lamb, he’s not coming near you. I can’t trust him or you,” he snarls, and his words make her flinch.

Oh, she doesn’t like that one bit, does she?

“Please, ice brain?” she whispers, and my brother snorts, tilting his face to the ceiling. “Just, you said you wouldn’t kill him.”

“Precisely, little lamb, I won’t kill him. Tonight. I make no promises over anyone else.”

Fawn looks between us, eyes wary and filled with distrust. She thinks we’ll kill him the second she closes that door, but we won’t. Shade is a man of his word. Johnson is safe—for the night at least.

“I’ll make sure the moron stays alive. Go to bed and let me clean this up. You don’t look well,” I tell her, already wishing this night was over.

Shit has gotten much more complicated since she entered the picture. I have to wonder if that’s a fucking coincidence and she’s just bad motherfucking luck, or if this stranger is taunting us because of her.

Either way, I think we need to have a brotherly discussion and set some serious fucking ground rules going forward, because we’ve lost our footing. Between this bastard enemy and everyone catching fucking feelings, life’s a mess.





## FAWN

MY NERVES ARE a mess when I get out of bed in the morning. After I came back into my room last night, I was so worn thin I didn't even bother cleaning up the mess Shade had made of it.

I cleaned up the sink and brushed my teeth, using up all of the energy I had left before falling into bed still fully dressed. I cried for hours as images played in my head on repeat of Shade beating the guard over and over again. I'm almost positive I heard bones snapping over the anger and grunting, but whether that was the guard or Shade, I can't be sure.

"How did this get so out of hand?" I whisper into the air, careful of my words now that I know he's been watching my every move.

One minute I'm just their slave, only sure of the fact that I'll never be free, and the next, I have a note from an FBI agent saying he's going to rescue me. Tonight.

Of course, after the near death beating he received, I'm not so sure he's going to bother with me now. Trying to rescue me may very well have gotten him killed.

"Get out of your head, Fawn. You have a mess to clean," I admonish myself, looking around the room in disdain. "Even if you didn't make it." The last part is said in a murmur so the cold one doesn't hear. I'm not sure I can face him today. Actually, I think I'll stay in the room and avoid seeing any of their faces at all.

\* \* \*

BY NOON, I REALIZED SHADE AND SMOKE MUST HAVE WARNED Spook to leave me be today. I only saw him when he delivered my meals, and when he realized I wasn't in a good place, he left me be. When he left dinner tonight, looking sad, I felt bad. I still feel bad, but I'm also completely on edge and doing my best to hide it so Shade doesn't show up here.

We're minutes from eight o'clock, and I'm so nervous my heart feels like it's about to beat out of my chest. How are we even supposed to get out of here? I mean, I know he's FBI, and I'm sure he has a plan in place, but is he aware of how closely Shade watches me?

Frig, I still don't even know if he really is FBI, but I have to try and get away from here. Being a slave to four evil men can't be how the rest of my life goes, right? Surely, I serve a greater purpose than this.

A knock on the door causes me to jump out of my skin and I barely hold on to the scream that tries to break free. The second I unlock the door, the guard pushes into the room, still dressed in all black from head to toe like he's been on duty all day.

"I-uh, wasn't sure you were going to show," I tell him truthfully, locking the door behind him.

"I told you I'd be getting you out of here. I'm a man of my word, miss, but we have to hurry." The man's voice is smooth and velvety with a deep timber. It feels like a warm blanket, but I'm fairly certain it's because I've put him on a pedestal for choosing to rescue me.

"Okay, but...are you aware of the cameras in my room?" I hiss, looking around wildly as though Shade will just appear before us and kill him.

"The cameras are on a five minute loop to give us time to reach my team at the edge of the compound. I'm sorry, but I have to do this," he states.

Before I can ask him what he means, his arm swings up and he stabs something into my neck, making me feel weak. “Y—”

“You’ll forgive me, miss,” he says, and it’s the last thing I hear before everything fades into nothingness.



# UNKNOWN

HER TINY LITTLE body drops to the ground and there's a moment where I feel bad for not catching her. Then again, the broken ribs, nose, and all around body in agony will do that to a fucker.

Shade beat my ass like I insulted his mama, and I had to grit my teeth and take it. The fact that he can't see how much he actually feels for this girl is fucking hilarious to me.

Playing these so-called Horsemen like my own personal deck of cards is the highlight of my life, truly. When they finally figure out that the Russian and his crew of mobsters aren't even safe from me, they're going to lose their goddamn minds.

I cackle and grunt as I bend over to retrieve the tiny woman at my feet. As a distraction, I purposely moved the rotting corpse belonging to the guard I switched places with somewhere I knew they'd find it.

By the time they sound the alarm to notify the others of an intruder, it'll be too late. I'll be long gone with my prize—the daughter of Anthony Bartello in my hands, and the Horsemen ready to do my bidding. After all, they'll have to come to terms with how badly they covet the little deer before they'll realize they want to rescue her from the clutches of the devil himself.

It would be so much simpler if these dumbasses could just get behind my tactical brilliance. It's not my fault they were too stupid to look deeper into why the deer is so important to

Bartello. Every move I've made over the last few years has been carefully planned and laid out to perfection to make these men follow my command, starting with grabbing the girl for me.

I could have easily done it myself, but it would have thrown everything off balance. I needed them to steal her so I could use her to control them. I knew once she was here, she'd worm her way into their world, making herself invaluable to them in tiny little ways.

The poor little deer isn't even aware of how much control she holds over them, spending her entire life hidden away in a fucking nunnery. It makes the Horsemen's eventual fall that much sweeter.

I'm running out of time as I heave the nun over my shoulder, hissing through the pain that shoots through my ribs. She can't weigh more than a hundred or so pounds soaking wet, but my ribs are in fucking agony.

Grabbing the can of spray paint from my pocket, I quickly paint my emblem on the wall, making sure to leave it dripping red like the blood of all my enemies.

Once I'm satisfied with my work, I shove the can back into my pocket and move to the window. I toss my last little parting gift on the bed, knowing full well Shade is going to go ballistic when he reads the note I've left for them.

I push the bars loose, watching as they give way easily. Setting this part of my plan up earlier in the day wasn't easy. The deer slept longer than normal today, probably avoiding the misery she felt for the beating I took, but I always prevail victorious. I smile wickedly at the thought of her caring little heart. Feeling anything in this world is stupid. You can't pity anyone, or you'll just become another name in the Book of the Dead.

Grabbing the can back out of my pocket, I toss it over my shoulder, knowing damn well they'll check it for fingerprints. I love being a ghost that haunts their asses, and this treat will be a doozy for them. One more headfuck for them to deal with when the prints come back as their dead best friend.

I barely get the nun out of the window and onto the ground as the alarm sounds. I rasp out a laugh, crawling out the window and picking up my loot. This poor girl is going to wish she'd stayed here when she realizes they aren't nearly as evil as I am.

She's going to crack.

She's going to break.

She's going to wish she were dead.

But I'll make her stronger. I'll guide her to be the most vicious of us all.

Only a queen can command the Horsemen, and it's in her blood to rein.

She is meant to rule her court like a true queen. And a queen, I'll fucking make of her.

\*\*\*

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TURN THE PAGE FOR CHAPTER 1 OF THE DEADLY SEVEN

DEADLY SEVEN: THE  
COMPLETE SERIES



## CHAPTER 1: TORREN

Hell.

They say it's a place of fire and brimstone. A place you go when you die, but for the seven of us? That's complete and utter bullshit.

Hell is the life we were thrown into while growing up. Things only got better once we were forced into the same group home several years ago.

That's when we went from seven fucked up kids alone in the world, to a group of delinquents everyone was afraid of.

Alone, we were vulnerable. Easy targets.

Together? We became an unstoppable force that no one messed with.

We're the outcasts. The town murderers. Cross us and you're liable to end up in a shallow grave.

"Let me go!" the man screams as Creed cuts through the skin on his neck. "Please, I didn't do anything," he whimpers as the blood drips down his neck.

It's not a fatal wound.

No, Creed likes to play with his toys, causing the maximum amount of pain before he kills them.

"I sense a liar," Creed cackles like he's high as a fucking kite. He's not, at least not where drugs are concerned.

He's high on the kill. The sight of the blood, the smell of the fear permeating the air.

He won't be our first or our last.

What do you think happened to all of the people who wronged us? We couldn't let them live to hurt others like they had hurt us.

We were never going to let that happen, so we became the monsters that everyone feared.

Harm the innocent and we will hunt you down.

"Please. You have to believe me! I'm not dumb enough to cross you! That's a guaranteed suicide mission!" he screams like a little bitch as Creed's knife slices open his clothes, drawing blood from his chest along the way.

"I wish I could believe you, Pete. But just because you know it's a suicide mission to cross us, it didn't stop your urges. Did it?"

The guy visibly pales, pissing himself in the chair as he looks between us. "Wh-what are you talking about?" He's pale as fuck, and I snort while the others glare at him.

My brother, Lukas, moves to tower over him. Danger radiating off him like it's strangling the man so much he can't breathe.

"You fucked up. Just because the station has no evidence of you touching that little girl, doesn't mean we won't act," he sneers at the man in disgust before laying a punch to his gut.

That's right. Lukas, the oldest of all of us, is a cop.

This kind of thing won't stand where he's concerned. Not after what happened to me.

He swore an oath to protect this town and the victims of assholes like this guy, but sometimes the law isn't enough.

That's where we come in.

The Deadly Seven, each one of us representing a different deadly sin with our own fucked up twists.

Lukas, he's Pride. He hates himself for not knowing what happened to me when I was left with our mom, while he had a good life with our father. He prides himself on doing better, and never letting that sort of thing go unpunished again.

Creed, he's Wrath personified. The man has anger issues and it's a dangerous game with his dissociative disorder. He doesn't feel anything other than anger and hatred.

Then you have me, Envy. I hate anything and everything to do with people who think they're better than everyone else because of social standing, or thinking because they're sneaky, that they won't get caught.

We will always catch them.

"You can't be serious! What are you accusing me of?" he wheezes through the pain of my brother's repeated punches to his stomach.

"Destroying a little girl," I hiss, stepping up to him. "You think you can hurt a kid and we wouldn't find out about it? Big mistake." I lift my fist and punch him in the side of the head, knocking him out cold, and Creed whines.

"Why'd you go and do that? You know I can't have my fun when he's not conscious." He narrows his eyes at me as I roll mine.

"Because I think the rest of the guys need to be here for this. Now that he's admitted to his sins, albeit rather disgustingly," I curl up my nose at the acrid smell of piss surrounding us. "They need to be here for the reckoning."

He glares at me before letting out a growl and nodding. "Fine. Call them in. Let's give this asshole the brutality he deserves."

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## AFTERWORD

Whew, that was a wild ride, huh? And how about that cliffy? Oof, that's going to be a killer...but don't worry! By the time you read this, we're already working our dark little hearts away on Book 2.

Did you love the Horsemen? Who is your favourite so far? Please feel free to message us on Instagram and tell us about your favs, your theories, etc. We love to hear them!

In the meantime, breathe and maybe drink some water and grab a snack? If you're anything like us, you probably got lost in the book and may have forgotten we need those things to survive hahaha.

- Lots of love,

Story and Cassie

# ABOUT CASSIE HARGROVE

Cassie Hargrove is an author of all things romance. She is a stay at home mom of three crazy kids. Nine year old autistic twins, and a sassy six year old that 100% takes after her mother.

She lives in a small town with her husband and children, three cats and a dog. Writing is something she's enjoyed her entire life. It brings an element of calm into the chaos of life.

[Newsletter](#)



# ABOUT STORY BROOKS

Story Brooks also known as Cat Vann lives in Myrtle Beach with her husband and children and all the fur babies. She started off as a dedicated bookworm from the moment of birth and since starting writing the stories and fantasies playing out in her mind.

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