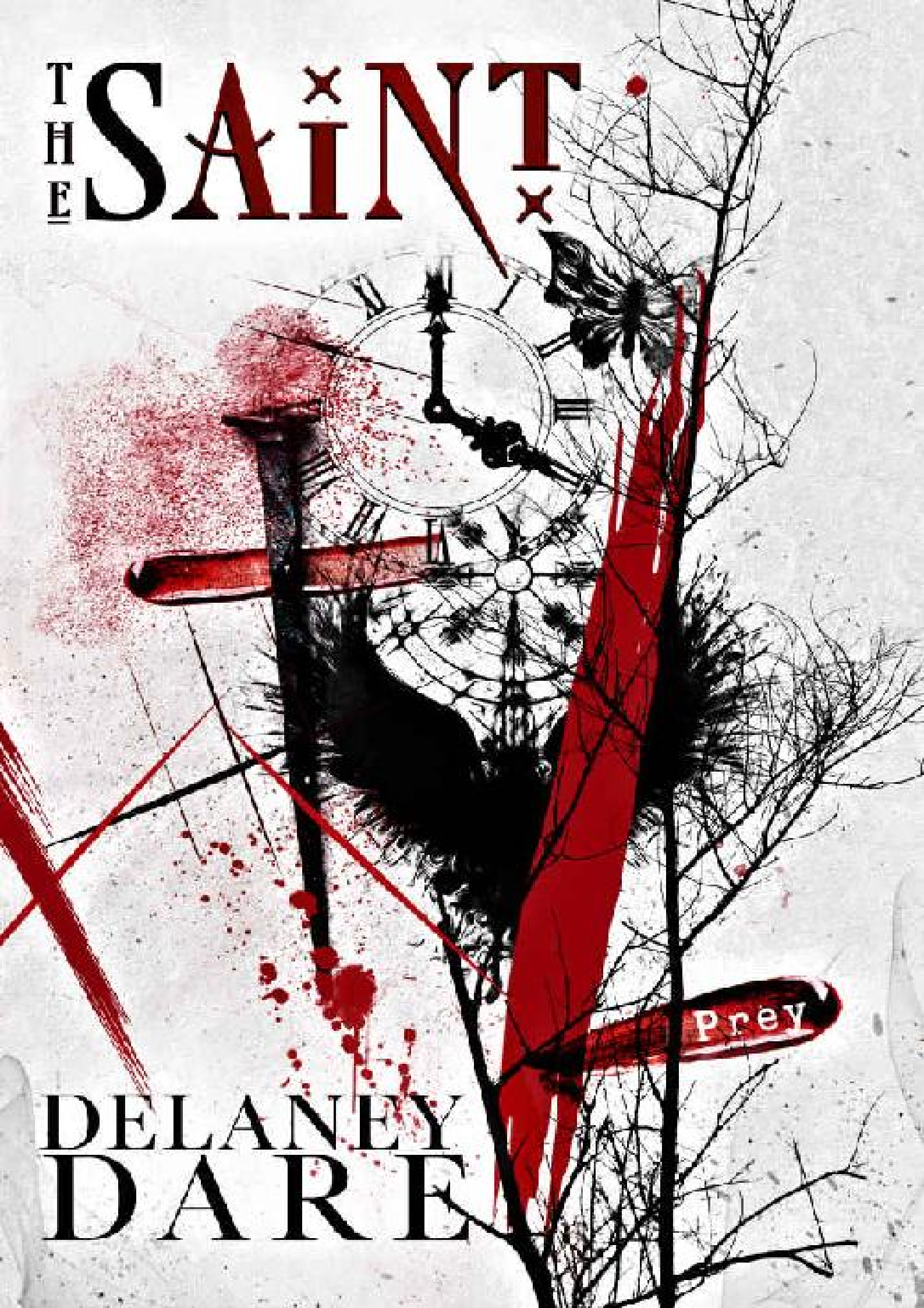


THE SAINT



Prey

DELANEY DARE

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H
E** **SAIN**^x**T**_x

PREQUEL NOVELLA

EXECUTIONERS OF MALICE

DELANEY
DARE

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THE SAINT

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Author Note

How do you feel when he leans over, grazes your ear with his lips, and tells you to shut the fuck up and take that dick like a good girl? Do you get that little tingle at the base of your spine? A little flutter deep in your pussy that makes you extra thirsty for some cock?

Hmmm. Thought so you little dirty reader, you.

Lucky you, you're in for a treat. This is a why choose romance which means there will be multiple dicks going in and out of our heroine. She may like it. She may wonder what the fuck is wrong with her. But it doesn't matter. Our hero's aren't going to be letting her go anytime soon.

These guys can be dangerous, possessive, maybe a little feral. They like the chase, the hunt. They won't hesitate to get dirty in more ways than one.

This is also a dark romance so it may have scenes and adult content that are triggering for some. These triggers include primal play, selling virginity, dubcon, a little cum play, and double penetration. There will be dirty talk. There will be twin stepbrothers. There will be an older man who wants all the control.

There's also a good chance you'll be reading a few chapters with one hand.

You're welcome.



Playlist for The Saint

Way Down We Go – Kaleo
I Wanna Be Your Slave – Maneskin
I Get Off - Halestorm
Problem – Natalie Kills
The Dame Says – Ivy Levan
Sweet Dreams (Are Made Of This) – Marilyn Manson
Porn Star Dancing – My Darkest Days, Zakk Wylde
Whore – In This Moment
Voyeur Girl – Stephen
Closer – Nine Inch Nails
Paint It Black – Wednesday Addams
Monsters (feat. Blackbear) – All Time Low
Rev 22:20 Don't Shoot The Messenger – Puscifer
Unholy (feat Kim Petras) – Sam Smith
Bad Girl (feat. Marilyn Manson) – Avril Lavigne
Remedy – Seether
Cry Little Sister – Marilyn Manson
Sex Metal Barbie – In This Moment
Raise Hell – Dorothy
You Don't Own Me (feat G-Easy) – Saygrace

*For all the readers who like it rough. Who like to be chased.
Who like to be hunted in the dark. Who wants the villain, the
antihero, to catch them because he's got a huge monster cock
ready to fill all your greedy holes.*

This one's for you.

Don't forget your cum rag.

Chapter One



PHOENIX

I rinse the blood from my hands, scrubbing my fingers one by one until they're clean and the sink is stained with sin.

Ours.

His.

It's all the same when it washes down the drain.

It's always the fucking same.

“Are you done giving yourself a manicure?” Lennox hovers in the doorway behind me, his tone light and almost carefree despite the terror we just unleashed in this house.

So maybe not everything is the same.

“Don't you have something else to do instead of being a pain in my ass?” I turn off the sink and lift my head, meeting his icy-blue gaze in the antique gold mirror. I don't look away as I dry my hands on a matching gold Versace towel that I'm sure cost a small fortune.

I should've wiped my ass with it.

Everything in this house is overpriced, and I'm sure it's all overcompensating for either a small dick or a complete lack of human affection. If the rumors about Brandon and Brett Van Arsdale are true, it's both.

Small dicks or not, it doesn't excuse their most recent indiscretion—talking about the Sons of Malice to nonmembers and using their position with the brotherhood to get laid.

They'd have been better off fucking their hands and keeping their mouths shut.

Lennox shrugs, smirking. "Both men are taken care of."

I'm momentarily distracted by a dimple appearing on one side of his mouth, but then his words seep into my brain and bring me to my senses.

"We weren't supposed to kill both of them." I sigh, shaking my head and pinching the bridge of my nose. "Jesus fuck."

I don't know who I fucked over in a past life, but it must've been someone pretty important to have the Ashby twins glued to my side for the foreseeable future. No one in the brotherhood particularly cares for me, and they know I don't give a fuck, so it was no surprise when they assigned me the dirtiest job they have—executing traitors. But I was shocked when the Wonder Twins, the sons of the *honorable* judge, were assigned to work with me.

I'm sure Donald loves knowing his sons are working with the black stain of the society. Maybe he shouldn't have pushed so hard to get both boys initiated instead of only the oldest. You know, as tradition has dictated for the past several hundred years.

Fuck, I hate that guy.

"Relax, Grandpa, I know the fucking rules," says Lennox. "The younger cousin is still alive. He's pissed himself and might have a broken nose, but he's still breathing."

"You're going to be the death of me."

"Not Ledger?" His smile is back, stretching across his face, and I ignore the shit out of the appearance of both dimples.

"No," I murmur, pushing past him and walking to the large en suite bedroom, where Lennox's twin brother is sitting on the end of the bed, hands clasped between his legs, watching over the remaining Van Arsdale.

Not that he's doing much.

He's on his knees, sitting in a puddle of his own urine, and crying softly as blood drips from his nose and the gash above his eyebrow. He and Brandon were practically raised as brothers, so I get it—he's fucking wrecked—but if he's going to survive this, he needs to pull himself together.

Between those two idiots and the twins, I've never been more glad to be an only child.

Ledger motions to Brett and plugs his nose before giving me an exasperated look and pushing himself to his feet. He shoves his hands in his front pockets as he moves to stand next to Lennox.

Aside from their eye color they're identical, but in all reality, they couldn't be more different. Ledger is sarcastic and a bit resentful of the life he was born into. He hates the games, the bullshit, the power that being a brother gives you, while Lennox fucking revels in it. He hates being the second born, and I bet he'll do anything—including selling us out—to work his way into the brotherhood's good graces.

There was a time when they hated each other, and although I'm not sure if they've fully moved past their issues, they've come a long way.

"I hope you've learned a hard lesson, Brett." Ledger crosses his arms and peers down at him, his tone terse. "The Sons don't tolerate liars or brothers who can't keep their mouths shut. The only reason you're alive is because they're allowing it."

"Fuck you," Brett mumbles, then swipes his hand along his face, wincing when his thumb hits his nose.

"Oh, fuck me?" Lennox takes a step toward him, his eyes darkening as his hands curl into fists. "Is that what you said, asshole? Fuck *me*?"

I press my hand against Lennox's chest, ignoring how his muscles tense under my touch, and push him back. The twins turn toward me with matching frowns and quirked right brows. Seeing them with matching expressions almost throws me off.

Almost.

But I tear my eyes away and shake my head. The movement is slight, but it's enough for them to take a step back and let me have the lead.

Lennox can call me a grandpa all he wants, but at the end of the day, they know I'm in charge, and as long as they are working with me, that will never change.

After taking a deep breath, I stalk toward Brett—a man I grew up with, a man I used to consider a friend, a man who's now so broken he must be willing to die. “Do you think we're here for fun? Do you think this is how I like to spend my Friday nights?”

“I don't know anything anymore.” He turns away from me, looking into the hallway outside the bedroom and choking back a sob. It's not like he can see his cousin's body anymore, and there's a good chance the reapers already came by to clean up. They may not be the most social men on the planet, but they are efficient.

“Don't you dare play this game with me. You and Brandon both knew the life you were born into. You can't sit there and pretend that you guys didn't know the rules, because that's bullshit. Everything was laid out during your initiation over a decade ago. I know, I was there, and I have to follow the same fucking rules you do.”

“Must be a bit easier from that throne of yours, *King*.”

My favorite curved blade—the one that just slit his cousin's throat—is pressed against the side of his neck in a split second. I lean down and grip the collar of his bloodstained dress shirt, then pull him closer and force him to meet my gaze.

His eyes widen, but he doesn't fight me.

He doesn't dare.

“Don't ever think I have anything easy.” I tighten my hold on him and allow my blade to sink into his flesh, cutting a thin line below his ear. “I didn't choose this life.”

“Please,” he whispers, his eyes closing briefly as I let the knife sink a little deeper and watch as the blood wells to the

surface of the wound.

“Remember the rules.”

“Remember your place,” Ledger adds, coming to stand at my side.

Lennox moves to my other side and lays a hand on my shoulder. “And if you forget who you’re dealing with, we’ll be back to remind you, but next time we won’t be so nice.”

With one last press of my knife, I release him with a shove. He falls back with a grunt, sprawling out on the exotic hardwood floor. And that’s where we leave him, laid out in his cousin’s bedroom in a puddle of his own bodily fluids.

We don’t say another word as we weave through the sprawling four-story mansion, an oppressive quiet filling the place just as much as all this expensive shit.

I’m feet away from getting in my Lexus SUV and the hell out of here when Ledger breaks the silence. “No offense, King, but you seem to be wound a little tight. You need to get laid.”

I pause, my hand hovering over the door handle, but I don’t turn around. “You offering?”

Ledger snorts and gives me a light shove as he makes his way around to the passenger side. Lennox remains silent, but I can feel the weight of his gaze on my back.

“The auction is tonight.” Ledger unlocks his phone and taps away at the screen. “Might be a good opportunity to get your dick wet for a few minutes.”

I hazard a glance in the rearview mirror, meeting his brother’s eyes for a couple of seconds before I turn on the car and head down the long, windy driveway. “Yeah, with my employees. I don’t fuck where I work. Besides, my dick is none of your business.”

“The auction is after hours.” Lennox rolls down the window and lights up a joint, taking a big hit before he continues. “And we’ll all be wearing masks. You can be as anonymous as you want to be. No one has to know a thing.”

Chapter Two



“**Y**ou’re late, Nova.”

I stiffen as the deep timbre of his voice wraps around my throat and squeezes, rendering me speechless for a multitude of reasons. As much as I hate to admit it, hearing his voice, knowing he’s so close, does things to me. Things it shouldn’t do, because Phoenix King isn’t just a dangerous man, he’s also my boss.

“I hope you’re not going to make a habit of this.” His deep-brown eyes fall on me, his tongue darting out to wet his lips. He doesn’t raise his voice. He doesn’t need to. “I’d hate to think you were taking *advantage* of me.”

My cheeks flush, and I find myself glancing to the floor as I think of all the ways I’d let him take advantage of me in that big office of his.

He could take me on his desk, against the one-way window that’s facing the stage, or he could push me down to the ugly beige carpet and fuck my mouth behind the door.

Something tells me he wouldn’t be gentle. He wouldn’t ask me several times if what he was doing was okay. He wouldn’t fumble with my clothes.

Hell, he might not even ask permission before he takes what he wants, and there’s a part of me that wants it that way, that craves it, while the other part of me, the part that’s louder, makes me feel ashamed, like there’s something wrong with me.

Doesn't matter, though.

Sex makes everything more complicated, and my life is fucked up enough. He doesn't even know my real name.

No one here does.

Plus, Mr. King doesn't sleep with his employees, something he explicitly told me during my interview, and he's never given me any indication that he's even remotely interested in what's between my legs.

Not that I'm interested either.

Yeah, that sounded totally believable.

He clears his throat and leans a shoulder against the wall by the side entrance of the club. *His strip club that he fucking owns.* A shiver runs down my spine as Phoenix stares me down with a quirked brow, twirling his signature curved blade between his tattooed fingers.

Darkness comes off him in waves, permeating the air around us and making it hard to breathe. Everything from his perfectly pressed clothes to the stubble lining his jaw and the intricate crown tattooed on the back of his hand screams danger. Control. Power.

This man rules in the shadows and revels in the night. The Dollhouse is his kingdom, and I'm merely a doll here to entertain his guests.

It's why he's dressed in a suit that costs more than all my clothes combined, and I look like I'm wearing an older, sluttier sister's hand-me-downs.

If I were smart, I'd get him and his tattooed hands out of my head. It'd be best if I go to the dressing room and promptly forget every dirty thought I've had about my boss, a man who's clearly dangerous. *So why am I so damn intrigued by him?*

Obviously, I have issues.

"I . . . I'm so sorry, Mr. King," I stammer, gripping the strap of my gym bag. His eyes flare at the sound of his name,

and I quickly lower my gaze to the black-and-gray rose tattoo at the base of his throat. “Car trouble.”

He studies me for what feels like hours.

I can feel his stare boring into my very thoughts, and I tremble in my red-and-black platform heels. He abruptly takes a step toward me, his blade flicking out and tracing the underside of my chin, forcing my gaze to meet his.

Arousal and fear course through me, warring with each other, and I don’t know what to feel except confused.

The point of the knife digs into my skin but doesn’t break the surface. My heart is racing a mile a minute, and I’m not sure how to get it under control or if I want to.

“Make sure it doesn’t happen again.” He moves the blade along my jaw and across my bottom lip. “You better get ready. It’s a big night. Don’t disappoint me, Nova.”

“Yes, sir, Mr. King.” I try to nod, but the blade digs into my flesh, and I struggle to hold back the moan clawing its way out of my throat. I don’t understand what’s happening to me tonight. Maybe it’s the after-hours event that has me feeling so off.

But I’m going to push that to the back of my mind for as long as I can.

His eyes flick over me one more time, his face giving nothing away, before his knife leaves my skin and he disappears into the shadows, leaving behind the faint wood-and-leather smell of his high-priced cologne.

Fuck me.

I’m not too proud to admit he scares the shit out of me as much as he turns me on, and disappointing him is not on my agenda.

Especially not when it’s my first night on the auction block. Or rather my virginity on the auction block. It’s not like anything good ever came from keeping my V-card anyway.

The auction is twice a year, and this one happens to fall right before Halloween. Which is perfect because everyone

will be wearing costumes.

I've been waiting for months, debating, convincing myself I can share my body with a stranger for a chance at true freedom. I might be on my own right now, but I've barely managed to survive, and if someone found me before I've saved enough money . . . well, it wouldn't just be my independence taken away.

Stripping may not be for everyone, but if it weren't for the Dollhouse, I'm not sure where I'd be. Probably still on the street, fighting to stay alive.

Before I run to the back, I take a look around the club, letting my gaze sweep along the fully lit stage. We're busy for a Friday night, which isn't unusual. The Dollhouse is the only exclusive club in Chicago catering to the rich and dangerous, and there are lots of businessmen who like to close deals with a half-naked woman in their lap and a glass of top-shelf liquor to quench their thirst.

Sarina is onstage, working around the pole, moving to Måneskin's "I Wanna Be Your Slave." Her movements are fluid. Mesmerizing. Exactly what you'd expect from a former ballerina, and I have to tear my eyes away from her flawless routine to head backstage.

To transform.

Here I can put on my mask and truly turn into Nova, a poised and confident woman who uses her body to live. To make my own choices no matter how good or bad they may be.

I'm so much more than some pretty little bird in a gilded cage, and I no longer have to hide from men who conceal their true intentions, the evil that lurks beneath their polished exteriors.

The men who come here may be monsters, but at least they don't cower behind masks and false personas. They own their corruption.

Some of them fucking revel in it.

Unlike my stepfather and the men who work with him.

“You’re looking very deep in thought for someone who’s about to go out and shake her ass in front of a bunch of strangers.”

Addy, my best friend and roommate, comes up behind me with a sly smile, slinging an arm across my chest and pressing her tits against my back. She’s a true friend with no sense for personal boundaries.

Her beaded corset scratches my skin, and her long, pastel-pink hair brushes along my arm as she presses a kiss to the side of my neck. Loudly. Just like she does everything. She pulls away with a wink, leaving behind a bright-pink lipstick print.

I glance in the mirror in front of my station and consider wiping it off, but I know the guys will love it, so I let it be.

“So, because I’m a stripper, I’m not allowed to have deep thoughts?” My lip twitches, but I do my best to keep my face impassive.

“Hello.” She drags out the word, trying to sound irritated even though she’s got a huge grin on her face. Addy lets go of me to wave her arms around the dressing room, where several other girls are putting the finishing touches on their hair or makeup. Or lacing up their thigh-high boots. *Damn, those are nice.* “We’re all strippers, and no. We’re only allowed deep thoughts about certain things.”

“Such as?”

“Like . . . am I wearing too much body glitter?” Her gaze flicks to the new girl in the corner, and she smirks. “Sometimes. Am I showing too much nipple? Never. Am I a miserable shrew who needs a big fat dick to help stretch out my unused pussy? Always.” She throws her arm back around my shoulders and meets my gaze in the mirror. Her perfectly shaped brows arch before she makes a point to let her eyes track down my body until landing directly on the area in question.

I bristle at her joke, pushing her arm off me and taking a step toward my mirror to pick up my signature ruby-red

lipstick.

With a frown, I toss my hair over my shoulder. “It’s not totally unused.”

Unless you’re only counting actual dicks.

She swats my ass with the back of her hand, steps over to the mirror beside mine, and starts winding her hair around a curling wand. “Your vibrator doesn’t count. You forget, Nova, that we share an apartment, and I don’t recall ever seeing a guest of any kind paying you a visit. I’m just trying to look out for you before you dry out and your shit closes up. You’re probably months away from being a born-again virgin.”

I tense but quickly shake it off with a laugh. I don’t need Addy figuring out just how close she is to the truth. “Gross. Thanks for that visual. And I’m pretty sure that’s for piercings and not pussy. The same rules do *not* apply.”

“They do.”

“They don’t.”

“Yes, they do,” Parker chimes in from across the room in a singsong voice, the small mascara wand in her hand never leaving her long and luscious eyelashes. “You don’t use it, you lose it. I’m pretty sure I heard a doctor say that on TV, so it must be true.”

“No one asked you,” I mutter, painting my lips with the crimson stain. “Neither of you needs to concern yourself with my virtue for very long anyway. I’m putting myself in the auction tonight.”

Addy gasps, her eyes lighting up as she turns to face me, curling wand in hand, and only half her hair curled. “No shit? I wish you would’ve told me earlier. I’d have gotten you a cake or something.”

“I didn’t know it was something worth celebrating.”

“Just wait until you get that wad of cash. Don’t get me wrong, stripping pays the bills.” Parker zips up her makeup bag, slips her silk robe over her arms, and crosses the room to

join us. “But being bought for the night . . . let’s just say the money is worth whatever they want to do with you.”

That’s exactly what I’m hoping for. I’m desperate for the cash, but I don’t tell them any of that. I can’t tell them anything. They can’t know why I really need the money. No one can. But it gives me a safety net in case I have to run again.

I suppress a shiver and fiddle with one of the many sequin straps crisscrossing underneath my sexy black bra.

“That’s what I’m hoping for.” I plaster a smile on my face. “I can get myself some new clothes, or I can finally trade in Bertha for an upgrade.”

I feel bad lying to them, but they’re better off. They all know me as Nova, the girl Addy plucked from the streets, the girl with no family. I refuse to tangle any of them in my fucked-up web. The best thing I can do is to give them plausible deniability. They can’t get hurt if they never know the real me.

Addy tosses her head back and laughs. “Bertha needs to be pushed off a cliff.” Noticing Parker’s raised brows and frown, she adds, “It’s Nova’s piece-of-shit car.”

Understanding crosses her face before she gives me a pitying look and pats my shoulder. The car isn’t that bad—it gets me from point A to point B just fine. Besides, it’s way better than taking the bus and standing underneath someone’s stinky armpit. Trust me, last summer was the pits.

Pun intended.

I didn’t have much choice anyway. Bertha was all I could afford, and it can double as a home if I need it to. When I left, it’s not like I could have taken the Mercedes I got for my sixteenth birthday.

“So, uh, you guys were here last year. What happens during and after the auction?” I twist my fingers in front of me and keep my eyes on the floor.

No one knows I’m entering the auction as a virgin, and they sure as shit aren’t going to find out until I walk out

onstage in a white costume, the color designated for those of us who are *innocent*.

I'd be lying if I said I wasn't nervous.

"I've been in the masquerade auction twice, and the first time the guy just wanted me to shut up and lay there." Addy laughs. "And the second time, this prosecuting attorney spent way too much money for me to hang out with him while he talked about his problems."

"Really?"

"Oh yeah. He wouldn't shut the fuck up. He bought me a nice steak dinner, though, so it wasn't all bad."

Parker dips between us and lowers her voice to a whisper. "The guy who got me last year didn't want to do anything except touch my feet. He had me try on all these different shoes. And, you know, I hate to say it, but he gave me the best foot rub I've ever had."

The three of us dissolve into giggles. Mine are more nervous than anything.

What if no one wants to spend the night with an almost twenty-year-old virgin? What if the guy who buys me is ninety and his balls hang down to his knees? What if he's disappointed with my lack of finesse?

Jesus.

If I was bought by an old-ass man and he thought I was lacking, that would be the worst.

"You're on next, Nova." Dominic, the head bouncer, sticks his head in the dressing room and sweeps his gaze along the length of my body, working his way from my black high heels up to the matching strappy lace lingerie. His blue eyes sparkle and he winks, a huge grin spreading across his face. "You look good tonight, doll."

I blow out a deep breath and cross my arms, my gaze narrowing on him. "You tell me that every night."

"Only because it's true every night."

“You’re an incorrigible flirt.” I try to keep my expression flat, but I can’t fight the smirk that tugs at my lips.

Dominic’s grin grows, displaying the dimples on either side of his mouth. “Only for you, doll,” he calls out before turning around and heading back to the main floor.

Addy slaps my upper arm. “I don’t know why you don’t bone that man and put you both out of your misery.”

“We work together. You and I have talked about this before, and my answer still hasn’t changed.” I shake my hands through my dyed-blond locks, teasing out the strands and making my hair look bigger.

If Dominic wasn’t a coworker, he’d be the perfect guy. The type of man I should be interested in. He’s always got a smile on his face, always doing what he can to brighten everyone’s day. Sex with him would probably be sweet, sensual . . . slow, and as much as I should want something like that, it does nothing for me.

“I know. But still.” She pouts, sticking out a perfectly shaded lip.

Parker gives her a pointed look. “Leave Nova alone. Be nice.”

Huffing out a quick laugh, I pick up the mask I wear every night I perform—an intricate design of black lace—and cover the top half of my face. My stomach twists into knots, and I take a deep breath to steady my nerves.

Seven months I’ve been here, and every night is the same.

I tell myself everything is going to be okay. *Lies*. That I’m safe here. *Lies*. That there’s no way anyone will ever find me among the millions of people who call Chicago home. *Lies*.

That tonight is going to put me one step closer to financial security.

One step closer to remaining underground for good.

Closing my eyes, I let the music wash over me. I let it take away the nervousness, the uncertainty, the insecurities.

I become Nova.

Sexy. Confident. Poised.

Ready to take on the world.

Chapter Three



GIANNA

After they start playing “Way Down We Go,” I step onto the stage, the music taking over, and I dance. I dance for me, for my freedom, for the life I want to have, and for the life I left behind. The raspy voice of Kaleo seeps into my body, and I become a slave to the push and pull of the beat. The crowd of men, their whistles and catcalls, along with all my worries, fade away.

It’s just me up onstage.

My hips roll and my hands roam down my body. I press my back against the pole, gripping it above my head, and slide all the way down to the polished floor.

Every movement is slow and calculated.

I spread my legs open. Wider. Wider still. And run the tips of my fingers inside my thighs. Up to my breasts. Through my hair.

And that’s when I feel it.

A change, a shift in the air, making it heavy and charged. It clings to my skin, circles the delicate column of my throat, and tightens. It fills me with an impending and maybe irrational sense of fear, but also with morbid curiosity.

I’ve never experienced anything like this before.

I imagine this is what it feels like to see the tantalizing dance of fire and long to touch the flame. You know it’s hot.

You know you're going to get burned. But you can't help the shaky hand that reaches into the heat.

I don't let it overwhelm me. I don't waver. I don't falter. As the heavy weight of a piercing stare cuts through me, I keep dancing.

I stand, then grab the pole and spin. My legs wrap around the metal on autopilot, and I work my way up, my thighs gripping the pole as I hook my right leg over my left and slowly lean back. My right arm sweeps down my body, and I hold the pole below my head, my legs opening to a split with the beat of the music.

It's a crowd-pleaser and has the cash raining.

The lights in the club flash to the crowd, and for the first time since I started this job, I lower myself and let my gaze wander.

The men are all wearing expensive suits, custom tailored and exquisitely fitting. You don't get into the Dollhouse otherwise.

These men are predators, and judging by the looks on their faces, they're hungry.

Good. More money for me.

As I spin around the pole again, intense green eyes catch my gaze. I feel like I've seen them before, but then I realize I'm being ridiculous and shake it off.

The man they belong to sits in the middle of a small table with a guy on either side of him. They're leaning toward the center of the table in a heated discussion. Well, everyone but him. He's sitting tall and stoic. His focus doesn't waver from the stage. From me.

The lights are too low, so I can't make out much else except for a mess of dark-brown hair, stubble that I want to burn the insides of my thighs, and broad shoulders that I'm itching to dig my nails into.

His eyes are full of lust as he tracks my every move like a hunter scrutinizing his prey. He radiates danger and a wildness

that should have me running for the hills, yet I can't seem to look away.

I wonder what it would be like to give myself to a man like him. Letting him dominate me with his raw power.

I dip and swivel my hips. I touch myself, imagining what it would be like to have a man like him caress me with his fingertips. I move for him as much as I move for myself. I get lost in the rhythmic beat and the heat of his stare. I close my eyes and picture us in a private room where I can dance for him—and for him alone.

I'd run my hands along his corded muscles, grind my body into his, watch his hands grip the arms of the oversize chair as he struggles not to touch me. I'd push myself into his lap, driving us both into madness.

He'd beg to put his hands on me. He'd fucking beg. And then I'd let him.

It's only when the song ends that I'm brought back to reality. My stranger is gone, and the only things that remain at his table are empty tumblers.

I'm filled with an emptiness and a longing I can't explain as I rake up the cash from the stage and make my way back to the dressing room. How I'm feeling is completely absurd, because he's a stranger. I know absolutely nothing about him and couldn't find him in this big city if I tried. He has no bearing on my life whatsoever. None. It doesn't matter that I've never felt like that before. Never felt so raw and exposed, yet wanted. Doesn't matter at all.

So why am I having trouble convincing myself?

“Damn, girl.” Parker waits for her turn off to the side of the stage, wearing her favorite bright-red lingerie. She offers me a fist bump. “That was fucking hot. Not sure where you found those extra moves, but you're not going to have any trouble getting bought tonight. Fuck, if I had the money, I'd make you my sex slave for twenty-four hours.”

I bump her fist and take a deep breath, shaking out my hair and wiping the sweat from my brow. “Thanks for that visual.”

“Your little Romeo bodyguard is waiting for you, and he looks ruffled. My money says he just went over the auction lineup. I bet you could calm him down.” She smirks and shimmies her shoulders, shaking the fringe hanging off the front of her top.

“Go shake your tits for money. You’re wasting your talents on me.” I laugh, give her a light shove toward the stage, and head off to find Dominic.

Turns out I don’t have to look very hard. He’s pacing the length of the hallway outside the dressing rooms, running his hand through his long dark hair repeatedly.

Parker’s right—he looks downright distressed. It’d be cute if I wasn’t suddenly bombarded with a nervous, reckless energy.

My heart pounds. The sweat lingering from my performance chills me to the bone, and I suppress the shivers racking my body. *Keep it together, Gianna. You don’t know if anything’s wrong yet.*

It does little to quell the uneasy feeling lacing up my spine. Am I worried about getting bought for the night? Getting passed over? Being at someone’s mercy? Kicked out before the auction starts? All of the above?

As soon as Dominic turns and spots me, he stomps over, stopping a foot away. He reaches for my shoulders but catches himself, his hands curling into fists. He doesn’t say anything right away, but his eyes flare with something I don’t recognize. Jealousy? Possession?

That can’t be right.

He flirts with me, yeah, but we’ve only ever been friends. He’s never crossed the line with me, and while I have to admit I find him attractive, there is zero chemistry between us. None.

Not to mention I’m working here only until I have enough money to get the fuck out of Chicago for good, which should be by the end of the weekend.

“You put yourself up for auction?”

“Uh, yeah.” I keep my gaze trained on the ground and my voice even. We may be only friends, but I don’t like the disappointment in his voice. “I need the extra money.”

“Dammit, Nova.” He sighs, running a fingertip along my jaw, touching me for the first time, and forcing my gaze to meet his. “You understand that if this guy hurts you in any way, you call me, and I’ll come pick you up, no questions asked.” He waits for my nod before continuing. “I mean it, Nova. These guys . . . you don’t know anything about them. Some of them are freaking criminals.” His voice drops to a whisper, and his fingers feather down the length of my neck. “I wish you would’ve told me.”

The pain and raw emotion in his voice level me, and I swallow past the lump forming in my throat. “I’m sorry. I thought you’d have tried to talk me out of it.”

“I would have.” He rakes his hand through his hair. “Look, I don’t have the right to tell you what to do, but please be careful. Even though the club fully vets these guys, there’s no way they can guarantee your safety. I need you to know that. They can take you wherever they want, do whatever they want, and there’s nothing stopping them from hurting you. Just because it hasn’t happened yet doesn’t mean it won’t.”

“I know the risks, but I appreciate you looking out for me.”

“I worry about you, Nova. I don’t have many people in my life that I care about, but you’re one of them. You’re special to me.”

My breath hitches in my throat, and my eyes well with tears. I don’t think I’ve ever had anyone genuinely worry about me before. Sure, Addy worries about the state of my vagina, but that’s not nearly the same thing.

I force myself to swallow and bite my bottom lip. “Don’t worry. I’ll be safe. I can look out for myself.”

“It’s not you I’m worried about,” he mumbles. His gaze roams over my face like he’s memorizing every detail, which is ridiculous, because I’ll be back tomorrow night. When he’s

finally satisfied, he backs up and nods. “You’ll call me if anything happens?”

“I promise.”

He nods again, raising his hand to touch my face one more time, but he stops halfway, curling his fingers into his palm. “They’re clearing out the club in thirty minutes. The men and women bidding will all be given masks to remain completely anonymous. You won’t know who’s bidding on you or who won until they choose to show you their identity. You’re up last after the new girl, Ashley. Let me know if you get cold feet.”

He doesn’t wait for a response before turning and walking off, leaving me with a myriad of emotions: confusion, excitement, nervousness, worry, but most of all determination to make this work.

I can’t let my conflicting feelings change my mind.

I need the money. I need the security it provides. I know the risks of going off property with a burner phone and the flimsy promise of protection.

Just like I know this is glorified prostitution at its finest.

Still, I can’t help but wonder if the green-eyed stranger who watched me dance is an exclusive member, if he’ll be around for the auction.

He probably left with his friends before my set was over.

With my bad luck, the best I can hope for is a guy with a foot fetish. At least I’d get a foot rub and a break from these heels.

I take a longer shower than normal, and when I get back to the dressing room, it’s empty. Half the girls left as soon as their regular shift ended, and the rest must either be actively in the auction or waiting off to the side of the stage. I’m not going to complain, because it gives me an opportunity to get ready without the remaining girls—mostly Addy—asking me questions.

After taking a couple of deep breaths, I open up my gym bag and pull out my costume. A white feathery fox mask, a beaded corset that ends in a wispy skirt with semitransparent lace sections running up the sides, and, of course, thigh highs and garters. Oh, and let's not forget the fluffy foxtail I crudely stitched on the back.

My insides clench as I slowly dress, then stuff my towel and the lingerie I wore earlier back in my bag. A warning sounds in the back of my mind, and I quickly swat it away.

Really, what's the worst that can happen?

It's fine.

It's all going to be fine.

I pull on the thigh highs and run my hands down my body. The material is soft and feels foreign on my skin. Despite the fact that it's lingerie, it still looks so innocent and pure. Something that's not yet tainted by the stains of the world.

Like me.

I shake my head and take several more deep breaths. I know what I am and who I've become. I'm not so delusional as to think I'm anything special, not anymore. Sex sells, and until tonight I was just selling the idea of it, selling lust, maybe. Tonight I'm selling myself, and you can't take that back. The man who buys me, whoever he is, isn't just a pawn in my game. He'll be someone I'll remember forever.

No matter what, it's worth it.

I'm fucking worth it.

Unlike the girls in fairy tales and romance novels, I don't need a man to swoop in and save me.

I'm using them to save myself.

Chapter Four



LEDGER

O f course she's going to be the last one up tonight. I'm not nearly patient enough to sit here like a good boy when I know she's so close, yet just out of reach.

It's driving me crazy.

Fuck, this girl is perfect.

The way she moved . . . fuck.

Every dip and sway of her hips oozed sex, and I couldn't keep my eyes off her. I even got Lennox and Phoenix to agree that she was *intriguing* enough. She's young, and even though she's dancing for money in front of strangers, there was an air of innocence surrounding her.

Innocence I can't wait to destroy.

"Are you sure you want to go through with this?" Phoenix looks up from his desk and runs a hand through his hair for the thousandth time. I've never seen him so ruffled, and I can't be more pleased.

I was only half kidding when I suggested we bid on one of the girls tonight, mostly because I knew it would get under Phoenix's skin. If he'd have called me on my shit an hour ago, we would've had a good laugh and I'd have gone home. Alone.

But now?

There's no fucking way I'm leaving this club without her.

“It’s not like this is our first time. We’ve shared a girl before.” Lennox turns around, pressing his back against the one-way glass and crossing his arms. He frowns as he assesses Phoenix. “What’s the problem with this one?”

Phoenix lets out a sigh, his gaze volleying between us. “This one is an employee.” He sighs again, and Lennox and I glance at each other.

He’s not entirely wrong, but we usually don’t hang out on the floor after a job, and I’ve never seen Nova before tonight. If I had, I would’ve spent a lot more time and money at his club. I get his hangup, I really do—he signs her paychecks, after all—but tonight is the perfect night for a little bit of mischief.

“That’s okay, boss. You can stay up here in your office, all by yourself.” I leave Lennox next to the viewing glass and take a few steps toward Phoenix’s desk. “And I’ll have your little dancer face down on her hands and knees while I destroy that pussy of hers and Lennox chokes her with his cock.” I lower my voice and take another step toward him, unbuttoning my suit jacket and running my hands down my lapels. “Such a shame you won’t be there to watch her cry for us.”

Phoenix tugs at his collar and swallows, his eyes tracking my fingers as they trace the line of my jaw.

Lennox smirks, walking behind Phoenix’s chair and resting his hands on the top.

He likes messing with Phoenix even more than I do. He knows what buttons to push and how hard. He used to do the same thing to me growing up, and I enjoy it when he does it to someone else.

“I want to make her beg for my dick. I want to see how much she can take.” He pauses and leans forward, hovering right behind Phoenix’s ear. “I bet she’ll look so pretty, stuffed full of cock, filled with our cum.”

“Fuck you guys. You’re all assholes. I hope you know that.” Phoenix flings a few papers around his desk and pins me with a glare. “Goddamn it.”

I grab my black bull mask from the couch at the back of the room, letting it dangle from my fingers. “Come on, brother. We have an auction to win.”

Lennox snags his matching mask and fastens it around his head. “I’m ready. I’d hate to miss out on this one.”

With one last glance at Phoenix, I snap the mask in place and go to leave. I make it a foot out of his office when he calls out, “Wait up, you fuckers. No one better figure out it’s me down there.”

“The masks are all the same, and if you put on a pair of gloves and cover up that crown tattoo, no one will know shit unless you want them to.”

He doesn’t respond to Lennox, but he does push his chair back, and after a few seconds, he falls into line behind us.

No one says another word as we make our way down the main floor. We push our way through the clusters of men, all in black bull masks with an elongated snout and silvery horns.

It’s not as crowded as it was when the auction first began. The highest bidders already left with their girls, and the remaining men seem restless.

They should, because they’re all going home alone.

It’s been a long summer since coming home from college, and I need this.

She’s special.

She deserves the hunt as much as I do.

It’s been a long time since I’ve been able to play the game and even longer since I’ve been able to enjoy it. The girls at college were all too eager to please. There was no chase with them. Half the time you’d come home, and they’d be waiting, spread-eagle on your bed or kneeling with their mouths open. Doesn’t matter if you invited them over or not. They were there.

There was no fight.

No excitement.

And after they swallowed your dick a few times, they thought they deserved a big fat ring and your last name.

It was my father and his money they wanted. My dick was just a way to get them the prestige and cushy life they desire.

Which is why the idea of purchasing someone anonymously is so appealing. She has no idea who I am, what kind of money and connections my family has. And best of all, no idea what she's getting into.

The crowd falls quiet as the hired announcer for these festivities steps back onstage. "Gentlemen, I can't tell you how excited I am to announce the last prize up for auction tonight. She's a rare gem, guys. We haven't had one of these in almost two years. Come on out, Nova. Let's show these men what they can have tonight."

I suck in a breath as she walks out onstage, her head held high, but despite her bravado, I'm close enough I can see her trembling.

Her fear is beautiful.

But not as gorgeous as her white fox costume denoting she's a virgin.

This just keeps getting better and better.

The announcer has her turn around, giving everyone a good view of her lacy corset lingerie and the fuzzy tail attached to the back. She's killing me. I can't wait to fill her ass with a plug that looks just like that fucking tail.

Phoenix sucks in a breath beside me as the guy has Nova bend over and run a hand along the tail.

Goddamn.

The starting bid is higher than it was for the other girls, but it doesn't matter. There's no amount I won't pay for her. She's going to be mine. Ours.

Ten thousand dollars quickly turns to thirty.

"Fifty thousand." I raise my hand with a nod to my brother.

"Fifty-five."

“Sixty.”

I glare at the man on the other side of the stage. I have no idea who the fuck he thinks he is, but he’s about to eat his teeth. “Seventy-five thousand.”

The announcer whistles as Nova turns around, her brown eyes as wide as saucers underneath her feathery fox mask. “Did I mention she’s a virgin? You’d be the first one to sink into her tight cunt. Her ass.” He leans down and whispers in her ear. She shakes her head and fidgets with the bottom of her short skirt. “Her mouth, too, it seems.”

Sonofabitch.

The bid goes up to eighty thousand dollars and loses steam, increasing by smaller increments until it hits ninety thousand.

Fuck this. I’m done playing games with these assholes. “One hundred and fifty thousand dollars.”

It’s so quiet you can hear a pin drop.

That motherfucking announcer puts his arm around her shoulders, and I want to cut it off. “Are there any other bids? No? Sold for one hundred and fifty grand. Please head to the right of the stage to make your payment and collect your prize.”

That’s right, assholes, my fucking prize.

I don’t move right away. Instead, I keep my gaze on Nova and the tail swinging from her ass as she makes her way off the stage.

That little fox costume of hers is perfect.

There’s a large expanse of woods behind my house that will do nicely.

My darling Nova—my little fox—stirs the wolf, the hunter, embedded in my soul. It feeds on the darkness, thrives on the depravity, and right now he wants—needs—the chase.

She will be hunted, she will be fucked, and she’ll never be the same.

Chapter Five



GIANNA

The longer I stand next to the stage, waiting to be claimed, the more trepidation sets in. My heart pounds, my breathing is erratic, and I'm regretting every decision I've ever made.

I sold my virginity for a hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

This man, whoever he is, can do whatever he wants with me, and there's nothing I can do to stop him. I can't. The money is way more than I ever dreamed of getting, and with it I can start a new life far away from this toxic city.

But damn, how much of myself do I have to give up?

All sorts of scenarios burn through my head like wildfire. Everything from the mundane to the dangerous, and none of them seem all that pleasant.

I could end up on my back, staring at the ceiling while a hairy, sweaty man thrusts into me a few times before grunting his release and collapsing on top of me. I could be forced to my knees to worship a man who can't even bother to look me in the eyes as I suck on his dick. I could be collared and forced to follow him around like a dog, begging for attention.

I could be gagged. Flogged. Shackled. Blindfolded.

Tonight will mark me in a way that can never be erased. I'll forever be changed, tarnished by this man. No matter what tale I spin, he will always have a piece of me. A piece I sold to him for my own freedom.

My stomach dips and my insides twist into a tight knot at the sound of approaching footsteps.

“Don’t turn around.” His voice is deep, and his words end on a growl that has the hair rising on the back of my neck.

I don’t dare move, let alone turn.

My legs tremble as the tips of his fingers run up the lace at my sides. His touch is light, almost reverent.

With a low hum of approval, he slips a piece of fabric over my eyes and ties it behind my head, submerging me in darkness. “That’s my good little fox.”

His hand is back on my body, trailing down my spine and searing my skin through the thin fabric at my lower back. I can’t see a fucking thing as he gives me a light push, and I take a few tentative steps forward.

Walking around in the dark like this is such a mindfuck, it’s no surprise I stumble after several feet. My hands jut out in front of me, and there’s nothing for me to catch myself on. I’m going down like the *Titanic* on its virgin voyage.

I have squeezed my eyes closed, fully prepared to land on my face in front of this man who just spent an unthinkable amount of money on me, when strong arms snake around my waist. The breath stutters out of my lungs as I’m pulled against a broad, muscular chest.

Holy fuck me. This guy is strong as hell.

I bet he could toss me around like I weigh nothing.

My clit throbs and I clench my thighs together. The last thing I need is him knowing how sick I am, how turned on I’m getting.

“I’ve got you.” His mask is rough along the shell of my ear, and his whispered words cover me in goose bumps. “We’re almost there.”

I nod even though I have no idea whether he can see me, and before I can take another step forward, his hand engulfs mine. Our fingers weave together, and he continues to lead me . . . I don’t know where. He said it was close, and I can’t help

but wonder if he's planning on using one of the private rooms at the back of the club.

"Watch your step here." All hopes of staying in the club are dashed as a door in front of us bangs open and a light breeze blows through my hair.

The lace skirt flits around my legs as I take a tentative step outside. The small heels on my strappy sandals click off the pavement as we move toward the low purr of a car. An expensive one by the sounds of it. It's nothing like the lurching and sputtering that my old Chevy makes.

He lets go of my hand, and without its warm comfort, my stomach flips and my insides knot up. My legs tremble as a car door opens and I'm ushered inside.

As I settle against the cool leather, I'm once again forced to question my sanity.

My virginity was always something I planned to give to someone special, a knight coming to save me from this dark world I've found myself in.

Silly, I know.

But sometimes, late at night, when the world goes to sleep, that dream is the only thing that gives me hope, that protects me from the nightmares that plague me.

Hope.

Such a silly little word, but it can mean so much if you let it.

That hope, that dream, is nothing but a fleeting memory. No one is going to save me now. I thought I could save myself, but this is beyond scary. I know nothing about this man. I don't know how old he is, what he does for a living.

I don't even know his name.

Panic swirls in my chest and claws its way up my throat, tightening around it, and I can't breathe. I'm fucking stuck and I'm responsible for putting myself here, for giving myself to some random man.

My pulse quickens and my heart races, but before I can throw off this stupid mask and try to make a run for it, his hands are on my shoulders and his lips ghost across my neck. He must have taken his mask off now that I'm blindfolded, which doesn't seem fair.

"Take a deep breath, little fox. I'm going to take good care of you." His hands trail back and forth across my collarbones, and he presses a soft kiss to my temple.

"Where are we—"

"Shh." He pushes in next to me, forcing me to scoot to the middle seat, and he fastens the seat belt across my chest. His voice is deep, and as it rumbles through me, I can almost imagine it belongs to the man who watched me dance. "Keep your mouth shut and I won't have to gag you."

I snap my mouth closed, his words doing nothing to untwist my insides or calm my rapidly beating heart.

He settles in next to me, his leg pressing against mine, and I try to angle my body to put a little space between us. His chuckle is light as the car door on my other side opens and a second person settles in to my left, forcing my legs back to the center.

Holy shit, there are two of them.

Holy shit.

And that's when it hits me. There's got to be someone driving the car. Does that mean there are three of them?

Surely not.

Right?

Maybe they have a driver. Maybe the man who bought me came with his friends and they're dropping us off. Maybe—

His hand clamps down on my knee from the right, and I nearly jump out of my skin. His touch is light as his fingers brush along the thin satin thigh highs covering my legs.

"She's a jumpy little fox." A voice to my left murmurs as a finger sweeps down the length of that thigh. There's

something about his voice . . . it sounds nearly identical to the man on my right, but his tone is a little raspier.

Brothers?

As their hands work in tandem, brushing along my stockings, teasing me, caressing me, my thighs clench together, and my body trembles.

One of them groans, a deep sound rumbling from his chest.

I have hundreds of questions loaded on my tongue, but then I remember the threat from earlier and swallow them down.

The car lurches forward and soft classical music begins to play in the background. The soft melody of the violins is a stark contrast to the mix of emotions warring inside me.

I'm scared, I'm so fucking scared, but I'm also turned on. I want their hands on me. I want them to take what they want and claim me *together*. I've never even had sex with one man, so I shouldn't want to be violated by two of them. I may not be very experienced, but I know enough to know that's not normal. *I'm not normal*.

After we take a sharp turn, the hands move up my legs, tracing the lace at the top of the thigh highs. One of them snaps the strap of my garter, and I bite down on my lower lip to keep from moaning.

"I think she likes a little bite of pain."

"We should see how wet that makes our little virgin. See how she responds to us."

"Are you wet right now, little fox?"

There's another groan, and the music is turned up, the tempo of the song increasing as I'm pulled to the edge of the seat. I let out a gasp and put my hands down beside me on the leather seat to steady myself. My right leg is hooked over a muscular thigh, followed quickly by my left, forcing my legs wide open. I've never been so vulnerable, so exposed.

"I'm only going to ask this one more time. Are you wet for us right now?"

My face is burning, and for the first time I'm grateful for the mask covering me as I nod. The legs underneath mine shift, widening the gap between my thighs. Even though I can't see a thing, I squeeze my eyes closed and bite back down on my bottom lip, cutting into it with my teeth. I need the sting of pain to keep me here, to prevent me from getting lost in the moment and losing my head.

Or at least that's what I tell myself.

There's a loud crack as one of the men slap my pussy, his fingers coming down hard on my clit and this time I can't help but cry out.

Before I can move, before I can try to close my legs, the thin fabric of my panties is moved to the side, and two fingers plunge inside me. They're so thick, and it's so fucking tight. I can feel my body trying to stretch around them.

"She fucking soaked. I can't wait to wreck this tight virgin pussy."

Those fingers drag in and out of me almost painstakingly slow, and I let out a loud moan as another set of fingers circle my clit. Their rough touch has me clenching around the ones inside me.

I arch my back. My nails are digging into the leather beneath me. I whimper. I moan. My entire body is on fire as lust tunnels through my veins. This is wrong, inappropriate, *naughty*, yet it feels so damn right.

The fingers inside of me curl, massaging a spot I didn't even know existed, and I nearly come undone. His strokes are long and slow while the hand on my clit moves fast, pressing down so hard he's drowning out the rest of the world.

He pinches my clit and I jerk, screaming as my legs shake. "Oh God."

"God isn't here, little fox."

"We're wicked."

"Sinners."

"The damned."

“There’s no place for God between us.”

“Especially not when we’re buried deep in your tight little cunt.”

Oh God.

My body convulses and my pussy clamps down on the fingers inside me as the most powerful orgasm I’ve ever had rolls through me. Wave after wave of pleasure crashes through me, and I swear my soul leaves my body. I may be blindfolded, but I see stars.

The car jerks to a stop. Someone curses.

It’s not until the hands leave my body and my legs are allowed to fall closed that I realize the car has been turned off and the doors are opening. Fuck, I was so distracted I forgot to pay attention to literally anything but how good it felt to be touched.

The seat belt is gone and I’m being pulled out of the car.

It’s quiet out here, too quiet, and I get the distinct impression we’re no longer in the city. If we were still downtown, the noise of the passing cars would overpower the serene sound of the breeze rustling through the trees.

“We’re going to take off your blindfold, but your mask stays in place, as do ours.” *They must’ve put them back on.* “You will not speak. You will not scream. You will not try to run away. At least not yet. Do you understand?”

I’m not sure which one is speaking, but his tone is harsher, more demanding, and as I nod, my legs tremble for a different reason. What does he mean, *not yet?*

“That’s a good little fox,” the other man murmurs from behind me, stroking a hand through my hair and across my shoulders.

The blindfold is carefully lifted off my mask, and I find myself standing before three men. Three men in dark suits, wearing bull masks to hide their identity. Two of them have the same build, while the third is a little taller and is wearing gloves.

Their eyes are glued to my body, and I can practically feel the hunger dripping from their gaze.

They're predators and I'm merely their prey.

“Sweet, sweet Nova.”

Chapter Six



PHOENIX

Ledger and Lennox are going to be the death of me. I may have ten years on them, and I may be more jaded. I may have taken more lives, but they know exactly what buttons of mine to push.

Especially Lennox. Before they started touching Nova I stood a fucking chance. I was going to drop them off at Ledger's house and go home to rub one out in the shower.

But not now.

Not after Ledger stuck his fingers inside her cunt and Lennox held my gaze in the rearview mirror as he played with her clit.

Despite the music, I could hear every little moan, every whimper, that fell from her pretty lips. I could smell her arousal.

There is no way in hell I'll be able to walk away now.

Even with the mask on, I can see her eyes widen as she takes the three of us in.

Her fear is almost palpable, a sweet temptation, and I can't wait to taste it.

Soon.

"My innocent little fox." Ledger circles her slowly, his eyes never leaving her body. Nova stares straight ahead, straight at me. Thank fuck for these masks. "I'm not a good man. I want to rip you apart from the inside. I want to own

you. All of you. I want to find out all your darkest secrets and desires and twist them into something unrecognizable. I want to swallow your screams. I want to pull out your beating heart and feast on your soul.”

She sucks in a deep breath, but to her credit she doesn't move.

“I'm going to give you a chance at freedom. One chance, Nova, to outrun the darkness within me. If you can get away, you can keep your virginity and leave unscathed.”

I groan, loosening my tie, and as my hands drift down to unbutton the top two buttons of my black dress shirt, I stop. She'd spot my tattoo in seconds. Instead, I take a deep breath, my fingers flexing at my sides, and I can't wait to wrap my gloved fingers around the delicate column of her throat.

“But if I catch you, I won't be letting you go. You can scream, kick, scratch, bite . . . it'll only make me harder, and in turn I'll be harder on you. If I catch you, I'm going to push your face in the dirt and let the earth muffle your cries as I pound into your filthy little cunt. I will destroy you. And so will they.”

She tenses and nods, but in truth she doesn't stand a chance. Not against the three of us.

“You have until the count of three, Nova.”

“One.” Lennox growls, unbuttoning the cuffs of his shirt and rolling his sleeves up his muscular forearms.

Ledger shrugs off his jacket and tosses it on the hood of my SUV. “Two.”

Before I can even utter the number three, she's turned around and is taking off toward the woods that run alongside Ledger's house.

Perfect.

She can run. She can hide. There's nowhere she can go that we won't find her, and when we do, it's game fucking on.

Chapter Seven



GIANNA

I don't even think twice. I run for the woods as fast as my feet can take me.

If they're going to give me a chance at freedom, to keep my virginity, I'm going to take it.

I need to get away from that SUV.

I need to get away from *them*.

A gust of cool wind whips my hair around, and it snags in the flimsy branches as I run past them. They're tiny spindly limbs like fingers trying to grab me, trying to slow me down, but I can't stop. I need to keep going. I jump over large rocks, thicker branches lying on the forest floor. *Keep moving*.

It's not until I've put a good distance between me and the vehicle that I realize I have no idea where I am. I have no phone. No transportation. Nothing.

They're going to catch me. They knew I didn't stand a chance.

The only reason I've gotten this far is because they want the struggle, the chase, the hunt.

It's because they allow it.

Sweat drips down my back, trails down the side of my face and along my neck. My pulse races and my body hums with adrenaline.

Do I really want them? Do I want them to own me? Do I want the filthy things he promised me? I shouldn't. I know I shouldn't, but God help me, I do.

I'm so torn.

My wild heartbeat and aching clit tell me yes, but my brain still screams no. It's dangerous. It's reckless. There's no telling what could happen when they get their hands on me.

So why does that make a little shiver of excitement run up my spine?

Working at the club must be messing with my brain. I don't want to be shoved down in the dirt and fucked . . . right? There's no way I want to be used by three men. No way I want them everywhere.

Fuck. I have to practically hold back a moan. Even I don't believe my own lies.

A branch snaps behind me, forcing me to run faster.

I'm trying so hard to hear what might be behind me, but I can barely decipher anything above the pulse hammering in my ears and the leaves crunching under my feet.

My chest heaves with every ragged breath, and my legs begin to burn. I turn my head, trying to catch a quick glimpse of the forest behind me. I can't see any of them, but there's another branch snapping to my right.

I whip my head back around but not soon enough to see a rock protruding from the earth. My foot catches on it and I tumble to the ground. Something lashes my cheek and scratches at my arms as I fall into a heap on the forest floor.

With a groan I push myself to my knees, only to feel powerful arms wrap around me, stealing all the breath from my lungs and crashing us down into the dirt. His weight settles on top of me. The leaves crunch underneath, and their earthy scent combined with his spicy citrus cologne is all I can smell.

It's suffocating.

Dirt cakes under my fingernails as I claw at the earth, desperately trying to crawl away. It's pointless. I'm pinned

under his hard body, the muscles of his chest tensed against my back.

I scream into the night sky, bucking, frantically trying to shake him off, but he doesn't budge. I'm so deep in the woods no one will hear me.

No one but them.

I know I have only seconds before the other two find us. Seconds to get away and try to run again.

I have to try. I *have* to.

A large hand clamps over my mouth, muffling my cries. "Hush now, little fox." He rolls his hips, grinding his thick cock between the cheeks of my ass. Once. Twice. Each time he rocks against me is harder than the last. "See what you do to me? See how fucking hard you make me? You ran so beautifully, Nova."

My answering sobs are muted by his hand. His fingers flex, digging into my jaw.

The rustle of footsteps sound on either side of me, and I know both of the other guys have found us.

I'm scared. So fucking scared. But I'm also so turned on.

I like being chased, hunted, and I know that's fucked up. It's not something a normal person should want, but I like the exhilaration of knowing this breath could be my last before I'm taken down to the ground like an animal.

A tremor runs through me as he overpowers me. He's so strong, pinning me to the ground like I weigh nothing.

I can feel the raw power in his thighs, his hands, his arms. He's big everywhere, including his cock. His voice is deep and raspy, and I want to hear every dirty thing he wants to do to me. I want to be his lamb for slaughter. Which is absurd. I know it is. My head and my body are so conflicted, which is why, even as the tears stream down my cheeks, I wriggle my ass along his rigid length.

There is a demon living inside my skin, and she wants to get out.

He shifts, running his nose down the side of my neck and inhaling before his heat disappears. Before I can so much as protest, he's flipping the bottom of my lacy skirt over my lower back, his open hand raining blow after blow on my ass. Each crack is louder than the last, and I let out several screams followed by a low groan as a delicious pain blooms across my backside.

God help me, I like it. I like his roughened touch just as much as I like knowing the other two men are watching everything he's doing to me.

His grip on my hip tightens as he rips away the white thong. Before I can react, he wrenches open my mouth and shoves in the lace panties just as one of the others moves to stand in front of me.

"Tell me, little fox. Can you taste yourself on that scrap of lace?" His mouth is next to my ear, his breath stroking the side of my face. "Is your greedy cunt dripping for us?"

I shake my head, my breath coming in shallow pants.

"No? Then maybe I should check for you."

Chapter Eight



LEDGER

Her cries, her whimpers, the trails of tears streaming down from underneath the feathers of her mask and down her chin have my dick aching.

I can't wait to be buried in her tight cunt. To be the one who claims her virginity. To see my hand wrapped around her delicate neck as I wring orgasm after orgasm from her body.

I almost regret agreeing to share her with the others, but I'd be lying if I said I didn't want to see her struggling to suck Phoenix's dick while Lennox watched on the sideline.

Despite the fact that she wants this, my little lamb is still putting up a hell of a fight. The monster inside me loves the challenge, feeds off her fear, and wants to slake his thirst with her blood.

I pull the hunting knife from my pocket and expose the blade, cutting through the dirty corset. It makes a satisfying ripping sound as I pull the entire thing apart, letting it dangle from her arms by two thin straps. Her entire lower half is bared to me, and I lick along my bottom lip, taking in the delectable sight.

Lennox leans against a tree only a few feet away, his hand rubbing himself over his pants, as he takes everything in. I can't pretend to understand why he prefers watching over participating, but I don't mind putting on a show. He can watch me fuck Nova into the ground all he wants.

Phoenix stands by her head, and even though I can't see through the mask, I'll bet he's smirking as he watches her fight me.

She struggles against my hold, and I jerk her arms behind her, forcing her face to press harder to the ground. Holding her wrists with one hand, I pull the loose tie from my neck. A smile stretches across my face as I loop the tie around her delicate wrists and fasten them together at the small of her back. In this position, I can make out the outline of a raven tattoo at the base of her neck.

I can't wait to see my fingers wrapped around it.

She doesn't look so sweet and innocent now. Not with her face pushed in the dirt, her hands tied behind her back, and her naked pussy exposed and ready for me.

Virgin or not, she wants this. The sounds she makes, the weak attempt to fight me off her, the arousal I can smell all around her.

The moon is full and so bright I can see her clearly as she turns her head, her gaze going between the three of us.

Her blonde hair is wild around her head, her lipstick is smeared, her white clothes dirty, and yet she still looks like an innocent angel. Only she won't be my salvation. There is no hope for me, only destruction and vengeance.

The red marks on her ass are starting to fade, but the raw, primal need inside me keeps growing.

She's helpless like this. Completely at my mercy.

I trail my free hand up the outside of her thigh and across her hip toward her core. She trembles with each feather-like touch, and as I reach the apex of her thighs, she tries to close her legs. A growl rumbles through my chest, and I wedge a leg between hers and pry them apart.

"How wet is she now?" Lennox groans, taking his dick out of his pants and giving it a slow stroke. "Is she dripping?"

I nip at the skin at the base of her neck. "Be a good girl and let us see how drenched you are."

She releases a muffled whimper and goes limp beneath me. I run a finger through her slit, and it's just as I thought. Soaked.

“I'm going to ruin you.”

Chapter Nine



I *'m going to ruin you.*

Those five words are a promise of what's to come. Of my punishment for letting him catch me.

They're the last thing he says before he lifts my hips and positions the thick head of his cock at my entrance. There's something cool and foreign at the tip, but before I can question it, he winds his hand into my hair, forces my head back, and sinks inside my soaked pussy. It's tight, and I can feel my body resisting him.

This is different from having his fingers inside me. So much more than my poor excuse for a vibrator back at my apartment. There's nothing that's ever felt like this. Ever brought me so much pain and pleasure at the same time.

Never in a million years would I imagine losing my virginity like this, but now I can't imagine anything different. I don't want a man to touch me softly, to whisper nice things in my ear. I want it raw, powerful. I want it dirty.

The more he pushes inside me, the more it aches, the more I suffer, the more it burns.

But he keeps going. He doesn't stop until he's fully seated inside me and we both let out primal groans. Hell, it could have been all four of us for all I know.

He snarls and tightens his grip on my hair as he thrusts forward with wild abandon. He doesn't give me time to adjust,

to get used to his girth. He just ruts into me like a fucking animal.

He feels so big and it hurts. It hurts so fucking good.

The man before me unzips his dress pants and pulls himself out, giving himself a hard squeeze with his gloved hand. He's long, with metal bars running along the underside of his shaft, and my eyes widen slightly as I take him in.

I wonder if it hurt and how it would feel inside me. Would I be able to feel it as he moved?

He kneels in front of me and yanks the panties from my mouth. I try to glance at the third guy, but he grabs my chin and presses his cock to my lips.

“Suck me, princess.” His voice is raspy, strained, like he's struggling to maintain control of himself. It may not be something I've ever done, but he doesn't make me feel shy or shamed. He makes me feel strong, desired.

I love that I can bring this giant of a man to his knees. I love knowing I can take him to the brink of losing control, and I can't wait to push him over the edge.

Fuck me, I didn't know it could be this good.

I cry out as the man fucking me changes his angle, thrusting deeper and faster into me. The second man takes advantage, pushing his dick into my open mouth.

I'm so full.

Stuffed.

But I still can't help but wonder how much better it would feel being with all three of them, having them all touching me, all inside me. Something inside me must be broken, unhinged. This is my first time having sex and I'm already thinking about more.

About *them*.

My body is on fire and I'm so consumed with lust I don't even care if I burn alive.

I need more. I need everything.

I have no idea what I'm doing but I suck him just like he asked, loving the feel of the metal rungs on the underside of his cock. I can't wait to see them, to feel them inside me.

He groans, one hand sinking into my hair as the other wraps around my neck, and he pushes himself to the back of my throat.

I choke, I cry, but I'm powerless to move. To stop anything that's happening, and I don't want to. The tears come faster, streaming down my cheeks, soaking the mask over my face.

Over and over they pound into me from both directions. They curse, they growl, and they groan, sounding more like animals than men, and I fucking love it. The sounds of sex fill the forest, skin slapping against skin, gagging, whimpering.

Every thrust from behind makes me scream, cry, and whimper around the cock tunneling in and out of my mouth.

I give myself over to the sensations, how good it feels to let go and be used.

The hand around my throat tightens and another squeezes my clit. I jerk between them, my body trembling as another orgasm, this one bigger than before, courses through me.

I thought I knew what to expect. I thought I knew how it would feel, but nothing could prepare me for how fucking outstanding it is to orgasm around a girthy cock.

My pussy clenches as the man nearly pulls the hair out of my scalp. I barely register the spurts of cum hitting the back of my throat or the man pulling out of my mouth with a groan.

After a few more deep thrusts that have me falling forward, the guy behind me pulls out of me and pushes me flat to the ground. I get only a few seconds reprieve before he curses and paints me with his release, covering my ass and the backs of my thighs with his cum. I've almost forgotten the third one until he walks toward me and explodes, ropes of his cum going up and down my back.

Holy fuck.

Chapter Ten



She's fucking perfect marked with our cum. Defiled. Dirty. Completely ruined and utterly perfect. I don't need to fuck her to know how good she feels, how tight her cunt is.

I've never seen my brother lose control like that, never seen him so fucking brutal, and she took it all.

She was made for us to ruin.

Nova pushes herself to her knees and glances at me for the first time, really sees me despite the resin mask covering my face.

Her eyes are dark, and in the pale moonlight they look almost black, a stark contrast to the white feathers of the mask and her porcelain skin. There's something hauntingly familiar about those eyes, but I push that thought aside as I tuck myself back into my pants.

I watch Phoenix as he pushes to his feet and brushes the dirt and debris from his knees. Seeing him a little filthy makes him more touchable, more human, and I can't help but imagine what it would feel like being on my knees before him, letting him fuck my face. But then I brush that thought aside.

Nothing more can happen between us, especially now that we're working together, killing together.

He frowns as he pulls his phone from his back pocket and checks what I'm assuming is a message that just came through. With a grunt, he turns his phone toward me, and fuck me. His uncle has requested an urgent meeting, and when the

head of the Irish Mafia wants to meet with you at one in the morning, it can't be good news.

Phoenix King, a man caught between two worlds.

With a nod, he heads off toward his car, leaving my brother and me to play.

“Let me help.” I lean over Nova's back, admiring how good my cum looks on her skin, and I loosen the tie from around her wrists. I'm careful not to let her touch me as I hand the tie back to my brother and take a step back. Ledger tracks my movements, and I'd love to ask him how he's feeling about this, about her, but I know now isn't the time. We've shared someone only once before, and it wasn't nearly this good, this intense, and I didn't even touch her. I never touch them.

But Ledger?

I'm not sure if he stands a chance of walking away from her. He seemed obsessed the second she stepped out onstage.

After a few seconds, Nova hugs the ruined corset to her chest and hesitantly turns to look between me and Ledger. At some point during our furious fucking, her mask was knocked off-kilter.

I don't think there's a reason we need to keep these fucking things on, and I toss mine to the ground.

Those dark-brown eyes stare up at me now with a mix of awe, trepidation, and recognition.

She reaches up with one hand, the other still holding her clothes to her chest, and pulls the mask off her face, letting it fall. Her hand is shaking.

Fuck, her whole body is shaking.

And then I see why.

My stomach drops, and my chest seizes as I take her in. I mean, really get a good look at her. No. It can't be. Of all the fucking girls in the world . . .

I haven't seen her since I left for college, and it's been about two years since my father told us she ran away right

before she turned eighteen. He never told us why, just that she left and he's been searching for her since.

The man I was before I left would have handed her over in a heartbeat, but things have changed. I've changed. My brother and I may not be the best of friends, but we can tolerate each other most days.

Fuck.

I can't believe it's been over four years. Four fucking years and those deep-brown eyes of hers still affect me like nothing else ever has.

Her hair is different, dyed blonde, but other than that, she looks the same.

Or maybe I'm feeling sentimental because she has my cum marking her back and my twin brother just took her virginity. We are so fucking fucked.

Her lip quivers and she scoots out of reach, her eyes wide as she stares at my brother and me.

“Lennox? Ledger?”

Chapter Eleven



LEDGER - FOUR YEARS AGO

“Nice of you to join us, Ledger.” My dad looks up from his desk and gives me a pointed glance as I slip into his office and close the door behind me.

I grunt, which is the closest thing to an apology the *Honorable* Judge Donald Ashby will ever get out of me. Not only is he a piece of shit, but he’s a piece-of-shit father. Something Lennox hasn’t realized yet, and he’s brainwashed enough that he never will. I’m not even that late, but of course he’s already sitting in front of Dad’s desk, tossing me a look of blatant disapproval over his shoulder.

The fact that he’s doing it with my face just further confirms my thoughts. I hate that he’s my twin. Absolutely thoroughly loathe that people mix us up until it finally dawns on them that my eyes are green and his are blue.

Lennox isn’t above wearing contacts, either, so he can pass as my double. Something I’ve busted him doing on several occasions.

My asshole brother is securely fastened to our father’s ass, has been since he found out about the Sons of Malice, the secret society we were born into, and it’s gotten only worse since the initiation. Or what dear old Dad had hoped would’ve been Lennox’s initiation into the Sons while I was rotting away in a box six feet underground.

There was a time when we got along, but lately he’s less of a brother and more of a nuisance.

If Dad wants any information about me, Lennox is right there to hand it over. Even if he has to spy on me to get it.

He doesn't seem to understand that I'm not his competition. I couldn't give two shits about being the older brother. It was two fucking minutes. I want nothing to do with the family legacy.

He can have all of it, the blood money included.

Which is why I don't—and never will—tell him jack shit.

Dad says jump and Lennox is right there to ask how high and then suck his dick for good measure.

“Where have you been? I told you to be here thirty minutes ago.” Dad glowers at me as I sit beside Lennox and slouch, spreading my legs out in front of me.

“Out.”

His face turns a light shade of red, but sadly he doesn't rise to the bait and tell me for the thousandth time how much he wishes I were more like Lennox. More obedient. More trustworthy. More concerned with the family empire. Just *more*.

I bet if I told him I'm working to make myself less and less like the prodigal son, the look on his face would be priceless.

The real reason I'm late—and I'd never tell this to either of those fuckers—is because I was getting my first of many tattoos. A black-and-gray skull with shadowed eyes, splotchy ink stains, and bisecting geometric lines placed perfectly on the side of my rib cage. Having different eye colors isn't good enough for me.

We aren't the same, and I need everyone to know.

I'm a different kind of Ashby.

“He obviously thinks sticking his dick in random pussy is more important than family,” my brother scoffs, curling his lip and tossing me a disgusted look. “You could at least wait until after dinner.”

I should've killed him when I had the chance.

I sink down in the chair and flash him a smile, knowing how much it pisses him off. His curled lip turns into a full snarl as his fists clench and unclench in his lap.

We both know he's not man enough to hit me. We also both know if he tried, I'd beat him to a bloody pulp on our dad's ridiculously overpriced area rug. Despite his ego and predisposition for the corrupt and immoral, I'm stronger. Quicker. And I'll survive anything these bastards throw at me just to spite them.

Dad clears his throat, leaning forward and tapping his index finger on the table. "Really, Ledger, could you be a bigger—"

A bigger *delight*? A bigger *cunt*? Whatever he's about to say dies on his tongue as the doorbell rings. Too bad. I was really looking forward to hearing whatever *prophetic* insight he had about my personality. I'm sure it would've been enlightening.

"Are we expecting company?" I look between Lennox and dear old Dad, neither of which has moved a muscle.

"Had you been on time like your brother, you would've found out I'm getting married in two weeks and—"

"Wait. What?" I sit up straight in my chair. Surely I heard him wrong. It hasn't even been a year since we buried Mom. Not that he's been broken up about her death. He wasn't the least bit surprised when the police showed up at our front door to tell us she'd been involved in a car accident.

Her death had been instant, but that did little to comfort me at night when the darkness crept in and the monsters refused to be kept at bay.

I've also got a nagging suspicion that Dad knew exactly what was happening, because he's the one behind the scenes pulling the strings.

"Don't interrupt me, you little fucking bastard." He slams his fist on the desk, jostling his cup full of pens and the only framed family portrait in this fucking place. He lurches to his feet, his face turning red. "When I talk, I expect you to listen."

I'd have thought by now you would have understood how things work around here. Then again, you've always been a little slow." His hand goes to his belt, and he runs his fingers over the hardened leather. "If I had time, I'd teach you a little respect. I hope I make myself clear."

"Crystal." I remain sitting, hazarding a glance to the ornate broadsword hanging behind my father's desk and grinding my jaw so hard it's a wonder I haven't broken any teeth. It's not the first time I've wondered if the blade was actually sharpened or hanging just for show.

I shift in my seat, putting pressure on my ribs to feel the sting of the fresh ink. I let the burn ground me. I let it remind me who I am. How different I want—*need*—to be. I refuse to be corrupted by money and power.

They need to be in control of everyone. I just need to be in control of myself.

"You will be nice. You will be courteous," my father continues, pulling on his suit jacket and walking around to our side of the desk. "I need someone to run this house and look nice hanging from my arm at parties."

Lennox nods as though he didn't cry himself to sleep after our mother's untimely demise.

Again, I rub at the raw flesh. I'm not like them.

But I have to play the game.

For now.

"Congratulations, Father." Lennox stands and slaps my father on the back, a sly grin across his face as he peers at me. He knows damn well I'm not okay with these sudden nuptials, but he also knows I'm powerless to say a damn thing.

I murmur my congratulations and quietly tack on a disparaging nickname as he walks in front of us, leading the way to the front door.

"Tsk-tsk, brother." Lennox leans toward me and whispers, "You don't want Father hearing you call him that. We both know he's not afraid to make an example out of you."

I don't spare him a glance as I grit out, "How about you fuck off and mind your own business?"

"How about I go find out where you really were today?"

"Like I said, Lennox, mind your own damn business. Unless you're looking for another one of my hand-me-downs." I pause, faltering in my steps, and this time I do glance his way. "And maybe while you're at it, you can crawl out from Dad's ass and get your own life."

"You may be older, but I want what you have. I want Father to hand everything over to me. You don't deserve the family legacy."

"I don't give a flying fuck. I don't want it."

His eyes flash, but before he can open his mouth, the door opens, and Dad turns on the charm. He goes through the niceties, introducing my brother and me to his intended. Nothing he says registers. Hell, I don't even notice the first thing about this woman.

I'm too busy staring at the shy brunette behind her. Her eyes are downcast, staring at her hot-pink toenail polish, but when she raises her head to meet my gaze, I almost stumble backward. Her big brown doe eyes widen as she looks between my brother and me. She probably didn't know about us either.

She looks so pure. So innocent. I'm almost suffocated with the need to corrupt her. To break her and then put her back together again.

I want to rip off her light-pink sundress, push her to her knees, and give her my version of a pearl necklace. I want to fill her with a need so consuming she'll beg for me to soothe her aches.

Her tears would be beautiful, and I would lick up every one as I stretched her around my cock and took every last drop of innocence and blood from her body.

"Lennox. Ledger. This is your new stepsister, Gianna."

Gianna.

Stepsister.

Off limits.

When I turn to look away, I notice a similar look of shock and awe written all over Lennox's face, and I fucking hate it. I hate that he's noticed her. That he no doubt wants the same sick and depraved things I do.

Just in case her new status as sister isn't enough, Dad leans down between us, his voice cold, hushed. "The both of you need to snap out of it. She's not a gift for either of you. In fact, I'm already making arrangements for her future. If either of you fuck things up, I'll kill you myself."

"Yes, sir." Lennox glances at me, that sly grin back on his face. "*I won't be a problem.*"

I snap my mouth shut before I say something that could destroy us all.

Gianna needs to run far away from us. All of us.

We'll only ruin her.

Chapter Twelve



Holy shit. *Holy shit.*

This can't be happening. There's no way.

No fucking way.

The stranger who bought me for the night, who just rocked my fucking world in a way I'm still not sure how to process, is Ledger. My fucking stepbrother.

He's always had an air of power around him. Dominance. But also a wild side just waiting to be set free. And Lennox, his twin brother,

Jesus Christ.

He just masturbated as he watched his brother take my virginity and their friend fuck my mouth.

Fucking Ledger not only took away my innocence but gave me my first non-self-induced orgasm. My entire backside is literally covered with their cum. Of all the people in Chicago . . .

I cross my arms, keeping my corset from sliding off and baring me completely. I've already exposed enough of myself, letting him throw me down into the dirt and fucking me while his friend had me sucking his dick like I needed it to live. *And liking it.*

They both stare at me—no, through me—like they're deep in the shadows of our past.

I haven't seen them in years, not since the night of the wedding, the union between my mom and their dad that I thought would change our lives—and, in a way, I guess it did. It just wasn't for the better. Of course, I didn't know that at the time. Back then I still thought people were good.

A lot's changed for me since that day.

For the twins, too, it looks like.

They were barely out of high school when our parents got married, and they left for college almost immediately, so I never knew either of them well. They were three years older, intimidating as hell, and I was scared to talk to them. Didn't stop me from looking at either of them the few times we were all in the same room together, and no one could blame me. They were hot as sin and entirely off limits. Not that it mattered anyway. Neither of them ever spared a glance in my direction. I was fifteen, awkward, and had no boobs.

Now the twins are bigger. Stronger. Lennox has a five-o'clock shadow and a hardened gaze that tells me his college life wasn't a big party, and Ledger is covered in ink.

I don't know how close they are to their dad, and I'm terrified to ask. Do they know why I ran? Would they willingly hand me over to another man after taking my virginity and sullyng me? Or would they just hand me over to their father and wash their hands of me now that they got what they want?

“Gianna?”

Ledger's voice comes out strangled as he leans back on his heels and runs a tattooed hand over his jaw and down his neck.

The hand that was over my mouth.

His dress shirt is partially undone, revealing more ink on his chest, and his sleeves are rolled up to the top of his corded forearms. I shouldn't look. I know I shouldn't, but I can't seem to fucking help myself. Not to mention that his dick was inside me less than five minutes ago.

Lennox's dress shirt is still buttoned, but his sleeves are also rolled up, and damn he looks almost as good as his brother.

Fuck, this is wrong for so many reasons.

If his dad found out where I was . . .

I can't be here.

"You have to forget you saw me," I stammer, wrapping my arms tighter around myself. "I need to leave."

He curses and pushes himself to his feet. "You think I can forget this? Are you out of your fucking mind?"

"You're going to have to. I'm not going back."

I can't—*won't*—go crawling back to my family's doorstep no matter what happens to me. There's no fucking way. I wasn't going to let them turn me into someone's property, a pretty face to smile and nod and look good at parties. To provide a male heir to keep the family secrets and inherit their fortune. To shrink into the shadows, wither away and be forgotten.

The men in my stepfather's circle are ruthless, powerful, and they won't tolerate a woman who doesn't obey. The women are there to look pretty and keep their mouths shut. A role my mother played perfectly.

I wouldn't.

"For fuck's sake." Ledger sighs, unbuttoning his shirt, shrugging it off his muscular frame and tossing it at me. "I knew you were going to be trouble the second I laid eyes on you. I fucking knew it, and I was drawn in anyway."

I slip my arms from the ruined corset and replace it with his shirt, inhaling his spiced citrus scent and letting it bring me a modicum of comfort. Just for a moment before I let the dirt and grime covering my skin bring me back down to reality. A reality where I'm no longer safe.

"Is this where you've been the whole time?" Lennox crosses his arms and looks at me expectantly.

Before I can answer, Ledger advances on me. "Shaking your ass on the pole? Selling your virginity to strangers for money?" Venom drips from every syllable, and he takes another step toward me, his green eyes blazing with intensity.

Like he has room to talk—he's the one who jumped through all those hoops to get himself an invite for the very exclusive auction. He's the one bidding on girls. He's the one chasing girls in the woods for kicks.

My stomach clenches and I push down the rising nausea. Not that I'm jealous, because I have absolutely no right to be. This was a mistake. A big-ass mistake. And he's my damn brother. Even if it is by marriage, it's not okay.

I shoot to my feet, my hands balling into fists. "You didn't seem to mind when you paid for me."

"That's different."

"Is it?" I cock my head to the side, my gaze never leaving his. I refuse to be shamed for what I do and how I have to survive. He has no idea the life I've been forced to live by his family's hand and has no right to judge my choices.

Lennox chuckles beside me. "She's got you there, brother."

Ledger takes another step toward me, leaning down to look me straight in the eyes. His nose brushes mine, and his chest rumbles with a growl. "You're fucking lucky I'm the one that found you. You can color your hair all you want; you don't blend in as well as you think."

I shrink back and bring my gaze to my feet. He's absolutely right. Which is why I need to leave. Like yesterday. "What now?"

"Now we go back to the house and take a shower. You look wild with all those twigs sticking out of your hair."

"Shouldn't we—"

Lennox starts his question but doesn't get to finish before Ledger gives him a firm no. Shouldn't we what? There are so many ways to finish that sentence, and despite what we did, what we shared, I don't know whose side they're on.

There's no fucking way I'm sticking around here long enough to find out. But I can't let them know that. I don't know about Lennox, but Ledger won't let me leave. It's written all over his face.

“And then?” I glance between them, brow raised.

“And then you’re going to tell me why you ran away and what you’ve been doing for two fucking years.” Ledger starts to walk away but stops and turns around, leaning back in my face and growling. “Don’t try to run off when my back is turned. We both know I’ll catch you, and you won’t like it when I do. Not this time.”

Chapter Thirteen



LEDGER

Gianna is careful to keep her distance as we make our way back to the house. Her arms are hugged tightly around her as if she's holding herself together. She remains silent, her gaze wandering from tree to tree and refusing to look my way, even when I offer to help her over a fallen log.

Her face stays blank as she puts her small hand in mine, and the second she's over it, she pulls away.

She's no doubt feeling the same shame winding around her stomach and squeezing her chest. I may have met her only a few times, but it doesn't change the fact that she's my sister and I just took her virginity.

Our parents are married.

I can't even begin to fathom how I'm going to sit across from her mom on Thanksgiving and act like I don't know what her daughter's pussy feels like squeezing around my dick.

That still doesn't keep me from wanting her. Especially now that I know how lovely her tears are. How much she wants me too.

Jesus.

Lennox is quiet at my side, occasionally tossing me questioning looks, and I know what he's thinking.

Our father has been looking for her since she ran away, and even though he never told us what happened, I know it was his fault. I just have no idea what he did. I'm sure Lennox

is more than willing to hand her over, but until I know more, that's not an option I'm going to consider.

Having her back, knowing that my family—me included—was the cause of her ruin, has my mind spiraling into a very dark place.

I've spent a lot of time in the darkness. Even before everything changed. More so after. It's where I feel my most raw. Exposed. I can see all my hard and jagged edges. All my damage.

She's already endured so much misery at my father's hand—she doesn't need my brand of chaos stacking on top of it. I'll make things only worse.

Still, I can't help the anger that slithers up my spine, vertebra by vertebra, cementing itself deep within my brain.

My family did this to her. Chased her out of her own home. Forced her to survive.

My dad will pay. I can promise that.

“Are you guys going to tell your father you found me?” Her tentative voice breaks through the heavy silence, penetrating the darkness and taking the edge off my anger. Only the edge.

She chokes down a sob, and Lennox and I exchange another look, but I'm the one who answers.

“No.”

I've avoided the last two family dinners he invited me to, and I have no intention of going to the next one. He got what he wanted from me. I'm playing nice with the brotherhood and even accepted my role as executioner alongside Lennox and Phoenix without complaining. And I've been interning at Lockwood Corporation, something he set up for me.

Doesn't matter with him, though. He has eyes everywhere. I'm sure he'll find some reason to make me come home, and right now, I'll go. I'll play the game. I'll smile to his face while I'm planning to stab him in the back.

There's no way Gianna is safe. Not yet. Which means she needs to stay with me.

“Why?”

“Why what?” I bite out, and Lennox gives me another one of his looks. I'm getting real sick of getting those tonight. It makes me wonder if I can gently suggest he get the fuck out of my house and go home when we get back.

Her fingers brush across my biceps, the ghost of their touch tingling my skin. My heart hammers, and even the slightest touch from her has my dick twitching, getting ready for round two. I shove all that shit down and stop in my tracks, spinning around to face her.

Gianna stops inches from me. Her eyes widen, and her plush lips part as she takes a ragged breath.

I can smell myself all over her. The scent of my bodywash, the earthy smell of the woods, and the heady aroma of sex.

She smells like mine.

Leaning forward, I brush my lips across the bottom of her jaw and down the fluttering pulse in her neck. She tips her head to the side, giving me more access, which I take full advantage of, nipping and licking at her supple flesh.

I walk my fingers up the front of my dress shirt, button by button. It's too big on her, but I can still feel every little movement of her body underneath. I cradle her chin, trace my thumb over her full bottom lip, and smear the rest of the ruby lipstick.

As I stare deep into her eyes, losing myself in their pooling depths, I slide my hand to her throat and circle my fingers around her neck. She swallows, and I can feel her struggle beneath my grasp.

“Why what?” I repeat, running the tip of my nose alongside hers.

Her voice is low, barely a whisper. “Why would you help me?”

“I’m not letting you go just yet, little fox. Right now you’re mine—ours—and I protect what’s mine.”

“And if I don’t want to be yours? If I don’t want either of you?”

Lennox comes up beside me and growls as I tighten my hold on her throat, the low rumbling groan escaping her lips, letting me know just how much she likes this.

“Then I’ll call bullshit right now. I bet your cunt is already sopping wet and ready for another round with us.” I take a step forward, walking her back into a tree. I pin her there with a press of my hips and my hand at her neck. “Should I hold you in place and let Lennox take your ass? Should I force you to take both of us at once?”

I grind into her, letting her feel the erection growing in my pants. The sweet scent of her fear feeds my arousal, and I have to fight the primal side of my brain that wants to pull up her leg and fuck her against this tree. I want the bark to bite into her flesh and make her bleed as I take her without mercy. I want to swallow her cries, her screams.

And this time, I want my cum to drip from her pretty little pussy as we make our way back to the house.

Stepsister be damned.

Instead, I spin her around and lift up my shirt, exposing her ass. “Spank her.”

Lennox runs his tongue across his top lip and smirks. “With pleasure.”

He presses his body to her back, molding himself to her, and whispers something in her ear. She shivers and nods slightly, her hands curling into fists against the bark of the tree.

With a laugh that puts the Joker to shame, he brings his palm down, raining blow after blow on her porcelain skin. Gianna cries out at first, but those screams quickly turn into long, tortured moans.

Her ass turns a delicious shade of red, and fuck, I can see every single place his palm connected.

After a few more slaps, he runs both hands over her burning flesh, rubbing it, kneading it before spreading her cheeks open wide and exposing her tight virgin asshole.

She tenses but doesn't protest or move away.

The grin he gives me is downright sinister as he leans over her lower back and lets a trail of spit fall from his mouth to the top of her ass. We both watch as his saliva trails between her cheeks, nice and slow. With a wink in my direction, he slides a finger through the cum coating her skin and circles her asshole with it.

"I'm going to take you here, Gianna." He gathers more cum and pushes the tip of his fingers into her ass. "Not today, but soon. All of your holes will belong to us. You belong to us." He takes a ragged breath, and his eyes fall closed briefly. "Do you feel my cum in your ass? Do you like knowing I'm fucking it inside you?"

She whimpers and pushes back against him, arching her back and letting her head fall forward toward the tree.

He sweeps her hair to the side and bites down on her shoulder as he slides his finger farther inside her. She cries out, her hips moving back and forth as she fucks herself with his finger, driving the spit and cum deeper into her ass. "Please. Please."

Goddamn that's hot.

"Please, what?" His mouth trails down her back, leaving an angry bite mark on her shoulder. He broke the skin, and fuck if I don't want to see his bite marks everywhere. I want everyone to know she's ours.

"Please, Lennox, I need . . . I need."

I push myself between her and the tree, grabbing her chin and forcing her to meet my gaze. "What do you need, little fox? Do you need my brother to make you come?"

She nods with a moan, and I'm tempted to push Lennox to the side and fuck her again, but it's not my turn. Lennox hasn't gotten to touch her yet, and fuck if I'm not torn. I want him to touch her, to bring her so much pleasure she can't see straight.

But I also want to rip off his arms and beat him to death with them for touching her.

“You heard her,” I grind out, my jaw clenching as I reach up and grab a handful of her hair. I wrap it around my fist and pull until she whimpers for me. After taking a quick breath, I lean forward and lift up one of her legs to give Lennox better access to her pussy. “Get on your knees, brother, and let our darling stepsister come all over your face.”

He smirks before gesturing to her hands and I nod. He doesn't want her to touch him, and I'm more than happy to hold her in place while he gets his first taste.

“Eyes on me, Gianna. Put your hands on my shoulders. If you look away or let go, I tell him to stop. Understand?”

She gives me a weak nod as Lennox drops to his knees and twists between her legs. He's still fucking her ass with his finger, and the second his mouth connects with her pussy, Gianna lets out a long groan.

Lennox isn't the type to take his time, to start slow, to be gentle. I know he's eating her like a starved man.

Her hands are hesitant as they move up my bare chest and grip my shoulders. Her touch feels so good, too good. I'm already rock hard and ready to fuck her into tomorrow, but I grit my teeth and meet her gaze.

“Do you like Lennox's tongue in your cunt? Do you like knowing he's tasting us?”

“Oh God. Yes. Yes.” She whimpers, her legs quiver, and her nails dig into my shoulders. She's close, and even just watching her, seeing every emotion flit across her face, every flick of her tongue as it darts out to wet her lips has me ready to explode in my pants.

I get it now, the voyeuristic desire to see everything. I could stare at this woman every day if it meant seeing her come undone.

“What did I say about God?” I pull her hair, loving the way she pants for us.

“He’s . . . not . . . you’re sinners.”

“And now so are you.”

I crash my mouth down to her, eating her screams as she claws down my back, and her whole body is racked with tremors. I should let her come down from her orgasm, I should give her a second to catch her breath, but I don’t. I can’t stop myself from taking what I want, from taking everything she has to give.

If she can’t breathe on her own, I’ll give her my oxygen. If she can’t stand, she can lean on me. If she needs someone to take her pain, her pleasure, all she needs to do is look my way.

I’m going to wreck this woman just as much as she’s wrecked me.

I sweep my tongue into her mouth with a primal groan that vibrates across my chest. She tastes so sweet. I knew she fucking would. I swallow down her whimpers and moans. Her entire body is practically begging me to go faster, harder. So I do. My whole world is narrowed down to this moment, and I consume her.

Lennox clears his throat, and in one swift movement I release her and take a step back. If I touch her again, I won’t stop.

She stumbles forward, and Lennox quickly steadies her before tossing me a glare and heading off toward the house. I follow behind him, needing to put a little distance between Gianna and me, needing some space to think.

The four years I was gone for college made me forget how intoxicating her presence was, and I find myself leaning in for one more hit.

But I can’t let myself get lost in her completely.

At least not yet.

Not while my father is still aboveground. Not while he still has the power to destroy.

I have a goal. A destiny. And I won’t be swayed from the path. Even by my little sister.

“Don’t question my loyalty again, Gianna.” I glance over my shoulder, watching her push herself away from the tree and resume her trek behind me with shaky legs. “You’re ours until I say otherwise. I’ll be happy to show you again if you need another demonstration.”

She huffs out a heavy breath but doesn’t say anything further. She doesn’t need to. She just needs to accept the inevitable.

I couldn’t protect her while I was away at school. Honestly, once I left, I didn’t think about her as often as I should’ve. I was egocentric. So consumed by my own selfish need for revenge that I never stopped to think about the people who would get caught in the crosshairs. About her.

She was so pure and innocent and so far out of my league, I never thought to consider that she might like it dark. Rough. Primal. Raw. There’s no doubt in my mind that she does. Even if she’s still trying to wrap her head around it after losing her virginity like that.

When we get to the house, I open the door and usher her inside, getting a good view of a trail of dried cum on the back of her thighs. *Mine*.

I’ll mark her everywhere before I’m through with her.

Chapter Fourteen



GIANNA

The farther into the house I go, the more I tremble, the more my insides twist and turn. I'm sure my stepfather isn't here, but all it would take is one phone call, one text, to summon the devil and send me to hell.

We stop in the middle of the kitchen, and before I can open my mouth to beg them for a ride back to my apartment, Lennox's phone goes off, followed almost immediately by Ledger's.

They give each other an indecipherable look, communicating in a way that leaves me completely in the dark, and I hate it. I shouldn't because I don't want them—I don't want to be owned by them—but there's a big part of me that does. That wants to get to know them beyond what carnal pleasure they can bring me.

But I can't, and we all know it.

As long as their dad is out there looking for me, I'm a sitting duck. Now that the twins have found me, it's only a matter of time before he does, too, and the longer I stay in Chicago, the faster that clock ticks.

"We'll be right back." Ledger points at me, his green eyes darkening as they narrow on me. "Don't move. I mean it, Gianna."

I've no intention of staying here and letting them serve me up on a silver platter, but I don't say that. Instead, I keep my gaze trained on the ground and nod.

They're silent as they shuffle from the room, disappearing into the shadows of the house. They're far enough away that I can't make out a thing they're saying, until I hear the one word I don't want to hear.

Dad.

It's a good thing I wasn't planning on sticking around for these conniving assholes. Still, it stings that after taking my virginity, they are so eager to dispose of me.

They're still deep in conversation when I sneak back toward the door we came in. Very slowly I turn the knob and open the door just enough for me to slip out, and then I'm fucking gone.

The second the door closes behind me, I break out into a run, sprinting to the front of the house. I've no car, no phone. Nothing. Halloween might be right around the corner, but I doubt anyone would think I was dressed up for a party. Not wearing just a dress shirt and thigh highs with literal sticks twisted up in my hair.

But someone will stop. They have to.

Turns out someone took pity on me and picked me up from the side of the road before my stepbrothers even realized I was missing. Margret, an older woman who looked downright horrified by my appearance, was more than gracious to offer me a ride, and after convincing her I didn't need to go to the hospital, she drove me back to the club.

Karma must be on my side, because Riggs, one of the bouncers, was still at the club and let me get my bag without questioning my disheveled appearance. Now I just have to figure out how to get home, pack without Addy realizing I'm leaving, and get my payment from Mr. King on my way out of town.

It takes me a few tries to get Bertha started, but as soon as her engine sputters to life, I'm out of the parking lot, clutching

the steering wheel for dear life.

I'm still breathing heavy, still sweating, still so nervous they're going to find me before I have a chance to escape.

Tonight has been a long-ass, exhausting night and an even longer drive home. I spend the entire trip looking in the rearview mirror, expecting to find Ledger and Lennox behind me. It occurs to me at some point while I'm weaving through the early-morning Chicago traffic that I have no idea what kind of car either of them drives, so I won't even know if they're behind me.

Doesn't stop me from looking.

Or imagining that they're behind me at every turn and stoplight.

So I do what any normal person in my situation would do. I spend an extra two hours going up and down random streets—getting lost twice—before coming home.

I look back and forth, peering around the dimly lit parking lot. I don't see anyone, but that doesn't mean I'm not being watched.

After peeling my sticky legs off the seat, I slip out of the car and shift myself to the other side of the driver's-side door, then quietly close it. The cool metal against my barely covered backside reminds me that I'm not wearing anything but an oversize dress shirt and my stockings, with nothing underneath.

Because Ledger ripped my panties off and shoved them in my mouth. And I let him.

I don't even want to think about how much of my brothers'—*stepbrothers*'—cum is dried to the cheeks of my ass and down my thighs.

My stepbrothers.

How fucked up is that? Not only are they the only men to give me an orgasm, but Ledger took my damn virginity. No. He paid for it, which is so much worse.

After looking around the parking lot for another several minutes, I hug my gym bag to my chest and make a mad dash for my apartment. I'm sure I look like a lunatic, but I don't care. The faster I can get behind a locked door, the better.

If it's not Ledger and Lennox who find me, it'll be my stepdad, and I'm not sure which is worse.

There's little doubt in my mind what will happen if the Honorable Judge Ashby or one of his men locate me first. I'm not stupid. I know my fate if he gets his hands on me.

And then there are my stepbrothers.

If they get to me first, I have no doubt Ledger will fulfill his promise and remind me that I belong to them. A promise that sends an unwanted thrill running up my spine.

He'll play with me, make we want him, let Lennox have his turn—and then, I have no doubt, they'll hand me over to their dad.

I might like their brand of torture, their rough touch, but I'm not sticking around for the aftermath. I refuse to let any one of the Ashbys keep me under lock and key.

A bird in a pretty cage still isn't free to fly, and I need to soar. I can't be free with clipped wings and a collar around my neck.

Addy lets out a low whistle as I burst into the apartment and lock the door behind me. I make sure the dead bolt is fully engaged and then secure the chain. With a heaving breath, I drop my bag next to the worn armchair and, even though we're on the third floor, turn to head to my room to make sure my window is locked. But before I can take a step, Addy tosses a bundle of multicolored unicorn yarn at my head.

I turn back around to see her sitting up on the couch with a raised brow and a knitting needle brandished in one hand. If it were anyone else, I'd be wondering if I was seconds away from being stabbed, but Addy would never. As strange as it is, knitting is her escape from the world. She would never purposely get blood on her favorite set of needles.

“Excuse me, Miss No Pants.” She waves the needle back and forth with every word before thrusting it in my general direction. “Don’t think you can come running in here like a damn feral animal, looking like . . . that, and just go to your room.”

“I don’t look like a feral animal.” My hands go to my hair, sticking out in literally every direction and embedded with twigs and dead leaves. I’m the textbook definition of feral.

She cackles, her eyes dancing with delight, despite my distressed mental and physical state. “Your makeup looks like something Harley Quinn would be jealous of, you’re covered in dirt, and your hair has fucking branches sticking out of it. I’m guessing you didn’t get a bath and a foot rub.”

“No, I did not get a foot rub.” I bite my lip as I fidget with the bottom button of Ledger’s shirt and debate on what to tell Addy. We all had to sign NDAs before the auction, so there’s only so much I can tell her about my *date*—not that I’d want to go into details with her anyway. She has no idea who I really am. I’m a girl she rescued from the street, a girl who has no family.

“Are you okay?”

“Of course. I’m good. Everything is fine.”

Everything is certainly not fine.

I glance at the dirty white sandals and ripped stockings, remembering the way the three of them chased me through the woods. The way the leaves crunched with every step. The way the wind swirled around me, whipping against my flesh. How adrenaline worked its way into every cell and made me feel so fucking alive.

And then Ledger caught me. Forced me to the ground. Cut the clothes from my body. And fucked me like he owned me.

And the others . . .

Fuck.

I don’t even know who the third man was, but I guess it doesn’t matter. None of it does.

“You don’t seem fine.” Again with the raised brow.

I shrug, trying to make it seem insignificant even though everything has changed in a matter of hours. “It wasn’t what I expected. I don’t quite feel like myself right now.” I’m no longer a virgin with barely any money to my name. “And I’m pretty gross. I’m sure it’s nothing a shower and some sleep can’t fix.”

“You’re sure?”

I nod, knowing I’m lying straight to her face. There’s no future for me here, and no amount of showers will be able to fix that. I have to leave. It’s not safe for me. Not now.

But I don’t tell Addy that. I can’t.

Instead I give her a small smile and start working on my plan to escape this city. “Actually, do you think you’d be able to cover for me tonight?” I flex my arms and twist my back. “I’m feeling pretty sore. I don’t think I’ll be able to dance for a day or two. That guy really did a number on my back.”

“I bet he did. Anyway, not a problem. I’m sure Phoenix will understand. He usually gives the girls from the auction a break for the next day or two.” She goes back to her knitting, looping the yarn around the needles and lengthening the small square she started yesterday. “Just make sure you shower before you go to bed.” She scrunches her nose but doesn’t look up from her work. “You smell like jizz and dirt.”

I laugh and head straight to the shower. I let the water beat down on my shoulders and wash away the grime. I scrub off what’s left of my makeup, the dirt on my skin, and as the water starts to cool, I feel normal again. I can almost remember the innocent girl I once was. The naive child who thought her mother would always be there to protect her. And the scared little girl who grew up wanting what she never had, a dad.

I got what I wished for. I just didn’t realize how lucky I was when I had no other family.

My stepfather’s a well-respected judge, and almost everyone knows who he is. He’s the poster boy for morality, for always doing the right thing, for taking the high road.

People would be surprised if they knew the real Judge Ashby. He was—is—just as bad as the criminals he sees in the courtroom, maybe even more so. He doesn't wear his evil on his sleeve like they do—he hides it behind a mask, a facade so fake the devil would be impressed.

Hours pass as I lie in bed. Every time I try to relax, I hear the tiniest noise and am instantly wide awake.

First it's a stray branch tapping on the window.

Then it's Addy pouring herself a bowl of cereal to eat before bed.

Then it's the footsteps in the apartment above us, Mrs. Martin getting up early and watching the morning news.

None of it is Ledger or Lennox pounding on the front door or breaking through my window to catch me as promised. Or worse, my stepdad coming to take me back to the life I ran away from. To give me back to the faceless man he promised me to when I turned eighteen.

Hopefully that means my stepbrothers haven't told their dad. Yet.

As soon as I hear the front door close later that afternoon, and I'm sure Addy is gone, I spring into action. I fling open my closet and frantically try to pack everything I own into two large duffel bags and an old but sturdy cardboard box. Sadly, aside from a few pairs of shoes, almost everything fits.

I make a couple of trips down to the parking lot to load everything in the car, and I make sure to lock the apartment every time I go out the door and every single fucking time I come back in. I also make sure to keep my eyes peeled on literally everything around me, but the only person I run into is Creepy Ted, the man who lives next door, and he's no one of importance.

He doesn't pose any threat, at least not any immediate one I can think of. He's always watching Addy and me. More like leering at us. But that only makes him a pervert, not a criminal.

Although I haven't seen his porn history, so I can't be 100 percent sure.

After locking the door securely behind me as I enter, I check the apartment one last time to make sure I didn't forget anything and grab my purse.

I'm almost to the door when I decide to leave a note for Addy. If I don't tell her anything, she'll just worry. At least this way I know she won't come looking for me.

My eyes water, and I struggle to swallow past the lump in my throat as I slip into the kitchen and tear off a sheet of paper from the notepad she keeps by the fridge. I grab a pen from my purse and stare at the blank page for several minutes.

Nothing feels right. What do you say to the woman who essentially saved your life? Who pulled you from the gutters when you were starved, dirty, ready to give up, and gave you a reason to live?

There aren't words to describe the gratitude and love I feel for her as a friend. As my family.

But I have to try. She has to know I'm okay.

Addy,

I want to start by telling you that you are a truly amazing friend. You gave me clothes, food, and a place to live when everyone else pretended they didn't see the dirty girl living next to a dumpster. You took a chance on me when no one else did. I love you more than you'll ever know and will be forever grateful for everything you've done for me.

Something has come up, something I can't talk about, but I have to go. Please don't

come looking for me, just know that I'm safe.

Wishing you the best life possible.

Nova

A tear slides down my cheek as I leave the note on the kitchen counter, letting my fingers glide along the page before grabbing my purse and heading for the front door.

I've got the chain off the door when the knob turns, rattling slightly, and I freeze. My blood runs cold, and it feels like the floor has dropped out from underneath my feet.

They found me.

Chapter Fifteen



“I should have known you’d follow me here. I’m not in the mood for any more of your shit tonight.”

“Did you really think I was going to sit at home and let you find her by yourself?”

I may not be able to tell them apart by their voices, especially hearing them through the door, but I know it’s Ledger and Lennox.

Fuck. I was close. So fucking close.

If I’d been ten minutes faster, they’d have never found me. Now I have two options. Open the door and hand myself over to the devil or . . .

No. Scratch that. I have one option.

I’m not giving up, not after having two years of freedom. Not after knowing what it’s like to fly out of the cage and stretch my wings.

“Shut the fuck up. We don’t want her to hear us, you idiot.”

Too late for that.

I take a silent and tentative step backward, and then another. My heart is hammering in my ears, so loud I can barely hear anything else. But it doesn’t matter. The only thing that does is finding a place to hide. They can’t take me if they can’t find me.

With my purse hugged tightly to my chest, I try to run as quietly as I can down the hallway toward the bedrooms. Mine is the first one they'll check, so I can't hide there. The bathtub is out. I've seen way too many horror movies, and there's always a girl who gets killed while trying to hide behind a flimsy shower curtain. Not today, Satan.

I make a last-minute decision and a hard right turn into Addy's room. The front door creaks as it's swung open, and I know I have seconds before they're heading back here.

Addy's room can be described only as chaos. Her closets are overflowing with lingerie and demure summer dresses, dirty clothes and shoes litter the floor, and the cedar chest at the foot of her bed has a blanket halfway out the top.

The front door closes and, holy shit, they're in my apartment. My chest heaves with every shallow breath, and sweat trickles down my back.

I look around the room again. There's nowhere to run. Nowhere to hide. The footsteps are getting closer and I can *feel* the walls closing in on me. They're coming. They're going to find me. Shit. Shit. *Fuck*.

Before I can second-guess myself, I dart around the bed and practically swan dive underneath.

Thank God for the clothes strewn everywhere and the hideous floral bed skirt that falls almost to the floor. Their voices jar me.

"Do you think this is her room? It's pretty fucking empty. What if we got the wrong apartment?"

"Do you think he'd lie to us about where she lived?"

"No, I don't think so. Not after tonight. There's this other bedroom down the hall, but she has a roommate, right?"

"Yep. Been here a while too." One of them sighs. "Fuck. What if she skipped town already? There's no fucking way we'll find her if she's already left Chicago."

"She couldn't have gone that far. We'll find her."

“This is a fucking mess. What are we going to tell Dad? He’s been up my ass for hours, sending text after fucking text. You may have your own place, but I have to go back there, and if you think he’s not going to question me, you clearly don’t remember your childhood.”

“I don’t really give a fuck what you tell him so long as it’s not the truth. Tell him you went home with some rando from a bar and got your rocks off. He doesn’t get to know anything until I want him to know.”

They said they wouldn’t tell their father they found me. Lies. *Don’t question my loyalty again. You’re mine and I protect what’s mine.* That was nothing but another pretty lie to placate me so I’d go along with their twisted game.

Fuck me, defile me, and then throw me in the pits of hell.

“He’s going to be pissed.”

“He’s always fucking pissed.”

They’re out of my room, and it sounds like one is walking this way while the other is going back toward the living room. The footsteps are right outside Addy’s room, and I clamp a hand over my mouth, choking back the panic winding its way up my throat.

The air vibrates between us, and I’m surprised he doesn’t walk straight to me. He may be feet away, but I can feel his presence, the dark waves of energy that roll off him. *Lennox.*

“She left her roommate a goodbye note. I just found it in the fucking kitchen. Goddamn it.”

He slams something down, maybe his fist on the counter, and I suck in a breath.

“Motherfucker. We fucking missed her. Shit. Come on, Lennox, move your ass. I’ve got to make a few fucking calls. I can’t let her get away.”

Lennox should be going to the other side of the apartment and joining his brother. But no, he doesn’t immediately turn and head far away from me. Instead, he takes a few steps into Addy’s room and pauses. I can imagine him looking around,

taking in her mess, maybe wondering how close we were, if she knew more about where I'd have gone. He stands there for what feels like hours before finally turning and heading down the hall.

I breathe out a sigh of relief, pressing my cheek against the rough carpet and closing my eyes. The boys are still talking, but their words are fading, and it's not long before I hear the creak of the front door. And then silence.

But I don't dare move.

Not yet.

Time ticks by slowly, and I let several minutes pass before I slide out from under the bed.

I take one last look around Addy's room, whisper a goodbye, and go.

My steps are cautious as I make my way out of my apartment. To be honest, I'm half expecting Ledger and Lennox to be waiting outside the door, but the corridor is empty. It's a good sign, but I'm still on edge the entire way to my car, looking over my shoulder and straining to hear every little noise.

As soon as I see Bertha, I increase my speed. If I can make it to my car, I'll be fine. I'll be safe.

The closer I get, the faster my heart beats. Almost there.

"Going somewhere, Gianna?"

I don't have time to move, to panic, to fight before I drop my purse next to my car and everything goes dark.

Thank you so much for reading *The Saint* by Delaney Dare. I hope you loved reading the prequel to the Executioners of Malice trilogy and much as I enjoyed writing it.

And I know there are questions.

What happened to Gianna? Did Ledger and Lennox find her or was it someone else? Need to know what happens next? Preorder *The Wicked* [HERE](#).

I appreciate each and every one of you for taking this journey with me.

As an Indie Author, I would love your help spreading the word about *The Saint*. If you enjoyed the story, please consider leaving a review on [Amazon](#), [Goodreads](#), or even referring it to a friend. Even a sentence or two makes a huge difference.

Thank you for taking this journey with me.

Delaney

If you want to keep up with Delaney Dare, you can join her [NEWSLETTER](#) for all the up to date information about upcoming releases including sneak peeks and giveaways. Or you can find her on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [TikTok](#).

Also by Delaney Dare

Executioners of Malice

[THE SAINT](#)

[THE WICKED](#)

THE SINNER

THE DAMNED

Standalones

UNHOLY VOWS (Declan and Eve)

Acknowledgments

Holy fucking shit. Well, I wrote this book intending it to be the start of a MF mafia standalone and then it morphed into a why choose trilogy which means that it had to be the start of three whole ass books with three big ass cocks. It also means I had to rewrite the whole damn thing. Why do I do this to myself? I don't know.

Krista asks me the same questions all the time and I don't know how to answer her either. But she's also the special person in my life who isn't afraid to ask me the tough questions I hate to love. Damn you. (You know I love you). You're my best pal and you're always there to keep me in check and make sure I'm going to make my deadlines. You listen to me when I need to whine about things, figure out my story, and wonder what the fuck I'm going to do next. You're my ride or die.

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And I especially want to thank YOU! Thank you for reading. Thank you for making it to the end. And hopefully, thank you for loving it.

Delaney

About the Author

Delaney has always been a fan of Halloween, skulls, neon, and a sexy man in a mask. Dark romance is her guilty pleasure and she's been sitting and waiting to bring you all the twisty fucked up things that are living rent free in her mind. She loves to read everything from a light romcom to a dark why choose series loaded with trigger warnings. Her dream is to make writing a career and get out of the bluegrass state to travel more.

She can nap with the best of them, likes hot cocoa with way too many marshmallows, and big loud dogs. Her guilty pleasure is watching *The Holiday* no matter what time of year it is and baking any kind of cookies.

You can join her reader group, [HERE](#).

