



THALIA SANCHEZ

SLASHED

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Slashed

verb

past tense of **slash**; past participle: **slashed**

cut (something) with a violent sweeping movement, typically using a knife or sword.

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Hatef—k | The Bravery
Closer | Nine Inch Nails
Beautiful Is Boring | Bones UK
Animals | Maroon 5
Not Dead Yet | DEVORA
Tainted Love | Soft Cell
Desire | Meg Myers
Black No. 1 (Little Miss Scare-All) | Type O Negative
Disturbia | Rihanna
Make U Mine | Blood Orchid
all the good girls go to hell | Billie Eilish
Half God Half Devil | In This Moment
The Summoning | Sleep Token
Still Alive | Demi Lovato
Let's Kill Tonight | Panic! At The Disco
Below the Surface | Griffinilla
Kiss Me You Animal | Burn The Ballroom
I Did Something Bad | Taylor Swift
Psycho Killer | Correale
skins | The Haunting
HAUNTED | Isabel LaRosa
DO YOU REMEMBER ME??? | emily jeffri
AMERICAN HORROR SHOW | SNOW WIFE

SLAUGHTER HOUSE | SNOW WIFE
Night Crawling | Miley Cyrus feat. Billy Idol
Another Way Out | Hollywood Undead
Bad Things | Cults
Serial Killer | Moncrieff feat. JUDGE
I'm Yours | ORYL
RUNRUNRUN | Dutch Melrose
(Sigh) | Unloved
Judas (80s Ver.) | GABRIELLA RAELYN

[Spotify link](#)

Author's note

Dear reader,

First and foremost, thank you for giving this story and me a chance. It means the world to me. Before you go into the story, I must talk about what you will find in it.

Slashed is a short **horror romance novella** intended for mature audiences.

Please, know that reader discretion is advised as some of the content might be triggering. Some of the content includes, but it's **not limited to** (as I might've missed some): blood and violence, murder, misogyny/sexism (not from the main characters), explicit sex, unprotected sex, knife play, mask kink, panic attacks, ophidiophobia (fear of snakes), situations of panic and danger.

If any of the above is detrimental to your mental health, I encourage you to reconsider reading the story. Prioritize your peace and your boundaries.

Love,
Thalia.

*To everyone who watched Scream and developed a mask kink.
This one's for you.*

I have, indeed, no abhorrence of danger, except in its absolute effect—in
terror.

Edgar Allan Poe

Chapter One

Opening Scene

SADIE

OCTOBER 27TH

Muffled screams pierce the crisp night air as I stand in line, waiting for the last group to roll out of the haunted attraction. Dim red lights illuminate the entrance, where an old neon sign with bright bold letters spells the word Slashed atop the porch. A bouncer stands at the door, holding a walkie-talkie in his broad hand, almost making it appear minuscule. His gaze travels over us as he scans the lot.

Bobbing my head to the rhythm of the faint rock song playing outside the house, I turn to look at my two friends: Jennifer Strode and Nancy Prescott. They're wearing matching shirts, one saying, 'Dead inside' and the other 'Spooky vibes' with a skeleton between the words. A mix of fear and excitement covers their faces like a mask adhering to the flushed skin of their cheeks. Behind them, four white guys wearing varsity jock jackets attempt to

make small talk with us.

The haunted house of Slashed is an immersive experience of what a slasher movie would be. It starts with a full group and the deeper we go into the attraction, the people get separated and ‘killed’—which is just another way of saying they’ll get removed from the game—until one remains. The last person in the group to ‘survive’ will earn the title of Final Girl.

Since it was only Jen, Nance, and me, the organizers paired us up with the following group so we could get the complete experience. Oddly, the thought of being put together with four guys makes the competitive side of me spring to life. There were a few girls that needed more participants, but they matched us with men.

As if we required the help.

Annoyance sizzles under my tan skin, slithering through my veins like a slow-acting poison. My need to be the winner might have made me delusional, but I will win the stupid title.

I’m not scared easily. Well, like any other person, my heart races with jump scares, and I get a rush from watching gory horror films, but my instincts are solid. I inherited it from my grandmother. She could be crying hysterically and terrified, and still react with a clear mind.

Though, if I’m honest, I think I could make a good final girl, not just here, but in a real slasher setting. I know I could live through it, or I’ve fooled myself into thinking I could. Sometimes I can be incredibly delusional and need something to snap me out of it, even if it’s crazy enough, like signing up to be traumatized by a few scare actors in masks and gory makeup. If anything, we’ll laugh at each other later for believing we could go through it without sobbing.

Besides, someone was reselling the tickets at a cheap price. All the other haunted attractions were sold out in the area, especially five days before Halloween, so this seemed like fate. We needed to do something this week that wasn’t attending another miserable house party with last-minute costumes.

“Did you guys see the news?” A jock says, loud enough for us to hear.

“What news?”

“There’s a killer on the loose. They’re saying he escaped from prison.”

Nance lets out a choked whimper as she taps on her phone, looking up an article about it. Her bright blue eyes shine with fear.

“Oh God,” she mumbles under her breath. “This is the intro of a horror

movie. Someone's going to die and it'll probably be us. The cute girls always get killed first."

The guys snicker, elbowing each other as if they've made the greatest joke in the world. Assholes. I'd like to see their smug grins fade when we walk into the house. I bet my car that they'll be the ones to tap out and squeal at the first sight of danger. After all, the dumb jocks rarely make it alive to the finale.

Swiftly, I snatch the phone from Nancy's grip. She lets out a tiny squeak of protest, but I refuse to back down, and shove the device in the pocket of my black jeans. Her hands fly to my butt, and Jennifer interferes before we end up fighting like a pair of kids.

"Stop, he's just trying to scare you, Nance," she butts in, smiling at our frightened friend. "No one has escaped from anywhere, and if they had, there's not a single prison nearby."

Nancy nods, accepting the information, and her blonde curls bounce with the movement.

"Can I have my phone back?"

I shake my head.

"I'll return it after this is over. I know you, Nance. You'll talk yourself out of going in, and then it will cause a whole ordeal because we already paid for the ticket and signed the waiver," I remind her in a soft and persuasive tone, redirecting her thoughts to a practical problem.

"But didn't you read the fine print?" she presses the subject, her eyes pleading me to see some reasoning. "They can grab and chase and shove us into corners and different paths! That's fuckin insane! Are you sure we aren't signing up to be consensually killed? Because I don't consent to that."

A snort comes from behind us.

"Don't worry, sweetheart, I'll be here to cuddle you if you get too scared," another guy supplies, slurring his words a bit.

Loud cackles echo in the line, and I know for a fact they're drunk. Not enough to be shit-faced, but enough to not give a fuck about harassing us. Although, I guess they wouldn't care about doing it sober either. Catcalling seems to be something they do daily. Even the bouncer standing in front is giving them a cautious glare.

Next to me, Jen groans and crosses her arms above her stomach, adopting a defensive position. She's holding back from clocking the guy in public. If she waits until we're inside, then anything goes. She could play it off as if she

lost control of herself due to fear. Panic responses can be random and uncontrollable. I know that far too well.

We exchange a glance, and her brown eyes roll dramatically, showing that her annoyance is as big as mine. I imitate her actions, sharing the feeling for a split second before choosing to speak up. They'll continue to behave this way if we sit tight and ignore them.

I give them a once-over, noticing the pristine shoes and tailored jeans. All brand new and expensive. It's easy to profile them from their appearances alone. They carry themselves with an absurd confidence, and not the sexy kind. It's in the annoying way that comes off as stubbornly cocky. Nothing more than a bunch of rich, privileged kids who haven't known an ounce of responsibility in their lives. Spoiled rotten by equally privileged parents.

As much as I can smell their entitlement from a mile away, I can tell what their futures will be like. They're the people who peak too early in life, after picking on the underdogs, and think they'll rule the universe. The sad thing is that, in the world we live in, they'll probably grow up to become some hotshot senator because their daddies helped them get there.

Still, I arch a brow like I am better, and straighten my spine to say, "No one asked for your help, high school has been. Go back to the stupid frat house you crawled out from." Gently, I push Nancy to the front to install some distance between them and us. "Can't wait to be separated from them," I tell Jen.

"Agreed."

More muffled screams break the tension gathering around us, and I turn my head toward the side exit of the house where the other bouncer stands. That's where we'll emerge from once we escape Slashed. Half a beat later, a dark-skinned guy struts out with a triumphant smile.

"I made it!" he shouts, fisting the air in elation.

Our line breaks out in loud cheers, applauding and hyping him up. A worker approaches him with a yellow folder and a plastic medal, and inevitably, the corners of my lips twist into a smirk. They move from the exit, allowing more people to come out, and that's when I spot him. Not the now-titled final guy, but the man standing a few meters away from the spotlight.

From afar, I can't tell how tall he is. But there's something about the aura surrounding him that takes over the place, almost as if he were towering over the house's structure. Plastic covers his features; the shapes of small horns protrude from the upper corners, and a devilish static grin stands out among

the creases of the worn silver mask. White fabric stained with red splashes hug his torso under an open black button-down shirt, and I allow my gaze to travel along the length of his arms to the beginning of leather gloves.

Though I can't see his eyes with the mask, I swear he stares right at me. His head tilts to the left, and without missing a beat, his hand makes its way behind him for a second. Slowly, as if he has all the time in the world, he pulls it back with his fingers wrapped around the thick hilt of a hunting knife. Holding it up in front of him, he sweeps a leather-clad finger over the edge of the blade, teasing.

He must be one of the scare actors from Slashed. I could give this place a five-star review based on his performance alone, simply because he hasn't broken character outside of the house.

Even though I know this is an act, the inside of my mouth dries. A spark ignites in the pit of my stomach, almost turning into desire. It's not logical. I can't say I've ever had a kink for masked men or being subtly threatened with a knife, but watching him, I'm unable to stop the filthy thoughts from flooding my brain.

I'm still staring when one of the jocks slams against my back and I'm pushed forward. Jen and Nance come to my rescue before I eat the ground, holding me steady as I fight to keep my balance.

Cabrón.

A rush of heat settles above my cheekbones, and blood pumps in my ears. Anger fueling me.

"Sadie, don't." Jen's bronze hand clasps around my shoulder, forcing me to face the house when all I want is to turn and give the bastard something to think about. "We're almost inside. Come on, we didn't wait this long to get kicked out before we get to go in."

Her words keep me calm, but barely. I wish we'd had enough time and tickets to bring a group of friends. That way, we wouldn't have to worry about these assholes. If it weren't because we've been waiting here for an hour, I would walk straight up to the bouncer and ask to be paired with someone else. It's too late to back out now.

Searching for a distraction, I direct my eyes to the masked man, who hasn't stopped staring. The hand holding the knife no longer hangs in front of him. Instead, it's lowered to the side of his thigh, point facing the gravel under his feet. I look down at the blade and notice the low shine reflecting on the metallic surface as he twirls the hilt, fidgeting impatiently.

His position remains the same; still as a statue. However, his demeanor has changed. The energy shifted in the air, erasing the thin line between the caress of a tease and the stab of a threat. A menacing aura sharpens the rough edges of him, making him appear frightening. And it's when I finally notice that his stance is different. It has slightly turned to the left, away from me, and directed toward the group of jocks who haven't stopped laughing about the way I almost fell.

About how they shoved me, I correct myself.

Bitterness pools in my mouth, leaving an acrid aftertaste coating my tongue. But it's not enough to distract me from reacting to Silver Mark.

Chills spark along the skin of my torso, traveling up to my neck, where it descends my spine. Shuddering, I run my palms over the length of my arms, hoping to regain some sense of control. It doesn't do much to appease the turmoil creating havoc in my core.

"Are you okay?" Nance asks in a sweet tone. Her voice brings me to reality, pulling my thoughts away from the man.

I dip my chin into a nod as I say, "Yeah. I'm excited to start this." The lie slips from my lips as smoothly as the knife's surface.

A knot forms in my throat as the memory of him caressing the blade sneaks into the forefront of my brain.

I need to get it together soon. Distractions aren't something I can afford when I'm ready to kick these guys' asses.

"Next group," the bouncer calls, gesturing for us to come closer.

"Fucking finally," Jen mumbles and pushes Nance forward.

My feet barely move, staying in a spot where Silver Mark is still in my vision.

The bouncer walks toward us, holding seven neon red wristbands with the word Slashed plastered over them. A tiny flat box lies on top of it, resting on the skin of my wrist when he straps it as he goes through the directions one last time.

"Remember, Slashed works the same way a slasher film would. You may be stained with fake blood, and Slashed is not responsible for any damaged items or clothes. As you signed in the waiver, you consent to be chased and scared by our actors. They will use a variety of props that may look real but can't do any physical harm and will only scan the wristband. If a scare actor does so, it means you've been killed in the simulation, and you will not get to complete the experience. If you haven't been killed, the game will continue

until you walk out of the exit. The one to make it out will receive the title of Final Girl, Boy, or Person.”

He pauses as his eyes roam the group, squinting at the jocks behind us as if he knows they’re going to be a problem, so he adds, “Please, and I emphasize this, don’t physically attack our scare actors. Legal action will be taken if there’s an altercation. That being said, if you feel like Slashed is more than you can handle, I encourage you to press the box on the wristband. This alerts the scare actor you’re withdrawing consent and no longer want to be a part of the Slashed experience. The nearest staff member will escort you off the premises. Though be warned, you won’t be allowed to return inside the house. It’s game over after that.”

One jock snorts behind me. “Hear that? You can call it quits at any time, pretty girls.”

Jennifer makes a disgusted face, curling her lips and wrinkling her nose. “As if.”

“Everyone clear with the rules?” The bouncer asks.

Collectively, we agree.

But before I move my legs, I steal a last glance at Silver Mask, hoping he’s still there. Just to see him again.

To my satisfaction, there he is, standing in the same place. This time, he looks at me. The silver mask lowers in a nod, and a silent agreement forms between us. No words are needed to know the promise lingering in the air we share.

With a smile tugging at the corners of my lips, I step forward to enter the house.

He’ll meet me inside—within his dominion.

The thought alone is enough to make me shiver in anticipation.

Chapter Two

First Act

The click of the lock latching behind us echoes through the house.

Nancy's shoulders jump, and her icy fingers clasp mine, seeking for comfort as we venture deeper into the foyer. I give her hand a slight squeeze and smile. Her blue eyes stare back into me, terror swimming in her irises.

Jen takes the lead, stretching an arm so Nance can hold on to her too. Together, we act as a barrier to keep her safe from the unknown that greets us in the lobby and the pack of jocks behind us. They won't stop snickering and badgering one another, like a group of prepubescent teenage boys.

For a minute, I stand still, observing my surroundings. It seems like the best way to familiarize myself with the environment. The more comfortable I am, the better my chances are at winning this and right now, I want to win more than anything in the world.

Well, almost more than anything, I admit to myself, because if I had a choice, I'd be with Silver Mask. A sudden wave of desire hits me with the force of a tsunami, starting a subtle throb at the apex of my thighs. Instinctually, I clench them as I take deep breaths through my nose—the mix of odors lingering in the air is enough to distract me from the lustful thoughts invading me.

Exhaling, I continue gazing around the room. I memorize the décor, categorizing potential hiding spots, and looking for escape routes. Anything that could give me an advantage over my competition.

My mom would call me *pendeja* for willingly putting myself through this, but I choose to believe I'm stubbornly brave.

The entryway to Slashed is surprisingly illuminated.

An overhead bulb shines over our heads, allowing us to see the vast space of the foyer. Imperial stairs flow down from the top floor to the straight maroon rug that sits under our feet and stretches across the hall. Parallel to where we stand, open double doors greet us with glimpse of steps going down disappearing into the darkness. A white sign with a red arrow points up and another black poster points at a basement floor.

My throat constricts, even when I'm not scared. No, this is different than fear. It's a nervous anticipation that's caused an anxious sweat to break out at the base of my neck, condensing in the palms of my hands.

The two paths are a painful reminder that there will come a moment where my friends and I will be separated. *And it means I could choose wrong too*, says the voice in the back of my brain. If I don't pick correctly, it's possible I won't see Silver Mask again. I might get chased and pursued by another scare actor who does not know about the glances we exchanged outside.

Doubt laces a band around my throat, tightening it until I'm struggling to breathe for a few seconds in which I let the panic take the reins. It doesn't last more than a split moment, because Jen looks at me expectantly. So does Nancy.

For them, I do my best to snap out of this anxious trance and put my head back in the game. There's no place for Silver Mask in my list of priorities when we're trapped inside the house. I can find him afterward. I have no doubts we could sneak backstage somewhere.

Right now, though, the most important thing is to make sure I'm not separated from my friends. Especially when the jocks keep picking on Nance because they see her as the weak link.

I can't let that happen.

No, I won't allow it.

My hand clings to hers and I nudge her back to bring her closer to Jen and away from the guys. Protective instincts have kicked in and I don't want sweet Nancy to be anywhere near those assholes.

"So, are we moving or what?" Jock One asks, pushing past us to move to the front. His hands rest on his hips as his chest puffs out with dominance. "We can't stay here all night waiting for our tickets to expire. The tour only lasts an hour and a half."

I glance at my wrist, wishing I had my watch. If I'm to be trusted with time, I'd say it's only been a few minutes. I'm sure most people have spent a

little while wandering around before deciding what to do. However, his tone and imposing demeanor shows he wants to be in the lead.

“Don’t worry, ladies, we’ve got this.” Almost like he senses that none of us girls buy his big macho behavior, Jock Two squeezes between us and pats his buddy’s shoulder in a supportive way.

“There are different paths, asshole,” Jen points out, raising her jaw defiantly. “Do you want to make the wrong choice so early?” She arches a brow and purses her lips.

His mouth curls into a snarl.

He doesn’t love that we don’t fall to their feet.

I find it ironic that we’ve barely started the game and we’re already distrusting and fighting each other over a stupid decision, such as going up or down.

I glare at the guy, daring him to say anything in return. He’s the tallest among the guys and appears to be the leader of the clan. His skin has a slight olive undertone, and his eyes are dark brown. A mop of golden curls falls over the base of his neck, and his fingers rake through them. I recognize him as the one who pushed me.

“What? Choose already.” The blond turns, moving a hand around. “It’s simple. Up or down?”

“We don’t have to stay together,” I remind them matter-of-factly. “You heard the instructions. We’re bound to split ways. Might as well start now.”

“Nah, fuck the rules. We stick close until a nutcase with a knife chases us,” Jock Three states. “Until then, Sean and Ty can control themselves.”

At least one of them has half a brain cell working. I wouldn’t say he’s smart by any means, but his approach is better—only partially—than his friends. I don’t give him much credit. After all, he laughed when his friend pushed me.

Remembering what he called them, I decide the blond is Sean, and the other is Ty. I can’t care less, but it’s easier than calling them Jock One and Two in my head.

“They better keep it together,” Jennifer warns with a scowl.

“Bite me, spitfire.” Sean hisses, flaring his nostrils at her. “Let’s go up.”

“Actually...” I interrupt, stepping forward with my spine straight in aim to appear taller than I am. Not that it makes a difference because their frames tower my five-foot-five figure, but it matters to me. “I think downstairs might be good.”

Nancy stiffens and digs her nails into the back of my hand, almost cutting the skin. Though everything inside me is screaming at me to wince and pull my hand back, I refuse to do it. I don't wish to appear fearful. I want to look fearless in front of these douches.

"It's dark," Ty mumbles, clearly less concerned about being pegged as a coward. "Upstairs seems like it would be easier."

My eyes fling up to confirm his words, and he's not wrong. The second floor doesn't have the same illumination as the foyer. It's not an overhead bulb, but purple neon lights. An odd choice for a Halloween attraction, though who am I to criticize? That part of the house is giving an 80s slasher movie.

The darkness downstairs... I'm not sure. But I didn't want to follow along with the guys' plans, so I go against them, even when my friends shoot daggers in my direction.

"What, afraid of the dark?" I tease with a childish grin. "Think *El Cuco* will get you?"

"Down," Jock Three intervenes. "We can go to the basement. I'm Steve, by the way."

The other guy, Ty, hoots and laughs at Sean.

"Fine. Downstairs it is. Don't forget to hold my hand when you're afraid you'll piss yourself."

He wishes.

I nudge at Nancy's back. "Come on."

Nance spins on her heels, panic adhering to her soft doe-like features.

"No, you go first, Miss I'm-Not-Scared-Of-Anything."

Playfully, I poke my tongue out and call her a crybaby before leading the group to the basement.

Jen stays behind Nancy, imitating my actions of guarding her from the guys, and we all move down.

The stairs are steep and dark. Blinking, I do my best to command my sight to get used to the obscure thickness around my body, yet it's not enough to see the space. I can barely make out the silhouette of the railing next to me, thick and in rough shape. My right hand squeezes it. The crispness of the old wood scratches my skin.

Arming myself with courage, I dip my toes onto the first step, and it creaks under the weight of my body. My muscles freeze. I want to let someone go in front of me, allowing the terror to sink in and take control, but

I can't. Swallowing the dryness in my mouth as if I've choked down a bunch of sand, and I push through. I steadily make it to the end of the stairs and poke around, hoping to find a light switch.

I discover a single cord hanging from the ceiling and pull it.

Red neon lights spark through the large space. It's not an actual basement like I thought it was. Instead, a long hall unfolds in front with multiple doors at the sides. Five that I count. Two on each side and one at the end.

Tension builds in the room.

Not a single sound can be heard other than the huffs of our breathing patterns. We're on edge. Even if nobody wants to admit it, anxiety keeps us tense and reeling. It's like those moments in horror movies when you realize a jump scare is about to happen and you try to brace yourself for it, and it always catches you off-guard.

I venture deeper into the hall until the entire group is touching the ground. Panic rises in my system. My pulse hammers against the ribs. Sweat pools in the palms of my hands. Chills skitter down my spine, keeping me alert and hypervigilant.

Something's about to happen. I know it deep in my core. A heavy pressure forces my stomach deeper into my insides, while my heart crawls up my throat, getting stuck in my airways.

A deafening bang comes from atop the stairs, and Nance lets out a shriek that makes me jump. When a shadow appears on the steps, everyone backs away in my direction. Nancy screams the entire time, the noise vibrating in my ears.

I tug at Nancy's and Jen's arms.

"Move, dude! He's coming after us," Sean bellows, pushing his friends out of the way.

The door at the end of the hall swings open, revealing a new figure. It's an outline made of a swirl of shadows; the neon red lights casting an unholy halo around it. While I cannot distinguish the person's identity, I'm certain of who it is. The memory vividly pops into my brain as if it were happening in front of my eyes all over again.

And it is, and it catches my breath just the same.

The figure tilts their head, allowing the red rays to reflect off the mask.

It's him.

Silver Mask.

This time, he's so much closer than he was when I first saw him. In a

closed room, I can take in how tall he is compared to the frame behind him. I estimate his height to be over six feet high, though he might as well be a giant. It's different to see him being overshadowed by the outside world than to witness him where his aura drowns and overpowers everything around him.

He commands the place.

His stance bounces his weight from one boot to the other, swaying with anticipation as his hands fidget with the knife in the same way they did before. Rolling the hilt between his gloved fingers.

Silver Mask is even more attractive with adrenaline pumping through my veins, affecting my senses like a sweet cocktail.

My heartbeat races with a mix of fright and excitement.

This isn't real. It's a simulation. My brain knows this. I'm all too aware of that fact, but it doesn't change the way my body reacts to the scenario. Even though this is a performance, part of me wants to scream and allow terror to paralyze me, let Slashed win, and escape this tiny pod of hell.

The other side of me, the one that buzzes with the thrill of the adrenaline coursing through my veins, doesn't want the jocks to be the ones left standing.

I plan to outsmart them and deceive the masked man.

Somehow, the thought of him chasing me becomes appealing and exciting, instead of scary and off-putting. Almost... exhilarating, and it fizzes in my system, awakening my senses with its effervescence.

Even more conscious of what's happening, I move faster and more determined to achieve my goal, dragging Jen and Nancy with me toward the first escape route I find. They locked the one from the left side of the hall and I shuffle with the knob a few times before moving on to the right one. I twist it, and—thank God—push it open with enough time to squeeze my friends into the new room.

Ty, Steve and the other guy follow inside before Silver Mask catches us.

Sean almost reaches the doorway when a gloved hand wraps around the neck of his varsity jacket and pulls him back with a surprising amount of strength. My ears ring from the screams echoing around me, and I rush to slam the wood shut to prevent Silver Mask from eliminating us from the game.

However, this leaves Sean outside to fend for himself. Not that I'm mad about it. The earlier the Slashed actors eliminate them from the simulation,

the faster we can leave.

Still, it doesn't make it easier when his fists slam against the wood.

Fast, hard, and desperate.

Bang, bang, bang.

"Open the door! Let me in!" he shrieks. The shrill causes goosebumps to erupt over the skin of my arms. "Let me in, please! No, no, no..." His voice breaks into full blood-curdling screeches that reverberate in the walls and ring in my ears.

Then silence arrives. An eerie quietness that drills into my bones and fills the place under the erratic sounds of panting and wheezing.

"Holy shit," I murmur under my breath. "That was hardcore."

No wonder the tickets were so hard to find, and some people were reselling them after the first few reviews. I understand the need for the waivers because this isn't for the faint of heart. Hell, I doubt this is even for the strong ones. My thighs shake and thin drops of sweat gather at my hairline.

Wiping them with the sleeve of my jacket, I rub the back of a weeping Nancy.

"Oh, God. I want to leave already. This is too much."

"Shh, it's okay. They're acting. This isn't real," Jen croons.

"Dude, I didn't know Sean could scream like that," Ty jokes. "He's never going to live this down."

I hope he doesn't.

I'm petty. After he pranced around like a peacock, flaunting how we'd be safe with him, I'm glad he ends up being the first one to be eliminated. Karma seems to be in my favor tonight.

"Someone find a light switch or cord," I tell the rest, subtly reminding them we aren't secure yet. Another actor might be hiding in the corner without us noticing.

Besides, in the dark, we're vulnerable and easy targets.

Though it comes across as an order, I pat around to help too.

"Found it!" I recognize the voice as Steve's.

The switch clicks and a red light glows to life.

Jen lets out a choked gasp, pointing at the sliver of space between the wood and the floor where a thick liquid spreads from the other side. The scarlet hue throws me off, but if I didn't know any better, I'd say it's blood.

Fake blood, that is. The Slashed staff team seems committed to making

this event extra realistic. This is money well spent. I don't think I've ever visited a haunted attraction where they put so much attention to the details, to the point where it's almost real.

They weren't kidding when they said it'd be an immersive experience. I'm too deep into this.

"Good Lord," Nance croaks out, hiding her face in the curve of Jen's neck, who hugs her and hushes out comforting words. "Why did I agree to do this?"

"Dude, is that fucking blood?" Ty asks.

"Fuck, no."

"It's probably corn syrup mixed with food coloring," I provide. Not that I've ever seen real blood in that amount, but I've dealt with my fair share of fake blood for SFX makeup on Halloween and some short films I've worked on in college. This looks strikingly similar. "We've used that formula to make some effects in film class."

The hard bang of something hitting the door makes us all jump.

Is he planning to kick it open?

I get my response when the noise repeats.

I don't know how much they're paying him, but he's earning every dollar from the check. He's committed, I'll give him that.

Spinning on my heels, I search for an alternative way out. But there aren't any.

Bang.

I hope this is not one of those movie situations where the killer kicks it down within a minute, because we need more time to find a hint on how to get out of here.

There are no more doors or windows in this room. Plain walls with a simple wallpaper. No furniture or decorations aside from a single painting of an entrance hanging on the background wall.

Frowning, I approach it. It's odd and out of place. Too big for it to not mean something. It stands out. Besides, the design is straightforward, like it states an obvious message.

A clue.

I walk toward it, grab the edges of the frame, and yank it from its hook. Behind it, the small outline of a door appears hidden by the thin wallpaper, keeping it shut. There's no knob or keyhole. So, I'm guessing the paper is the only thing holding it together.

The new way out.

“I need a key,” I ask, moving a hand around.

The guys pat their pockets and a few seconds later, I get a car key dropped on my palm. Quickly, I insert it in the outlines to cut it. My heart drums at the beat of the banging coming from outside. Shaking my head, I focus on the task to fling open the small wooden lid.

Dim purple lights construct the length of a tunnel out of the room. Wide enough to be a regular hall, but it doesn't have any other way out, just this one and the exit. I peek inside to find out it's filled with water. This is what they meant by damaged clothes.

“Let's go,” I swing my head in its direction, and it's when I realize that the banging has stopped.

Either he's given up, or there's another way for him to sneak up on us.

Maybe this is the end of his area.

This only brings disappointment because I'm nowhere near done. I might be sick for admitting this, but the idea of him chasing me through the house was oddly thrilling. There are so many things I fantasize about that would have my grandmother clutching the pearls of her rosary. I am too far gone to be saved by her prayers and *Ave Mariás*.

Burying the disappointment deep into my core, I duck to fit into the small entrance to the tunnel. Unfortunately, the entry isn't too small for the jocks to fit through. It'd be easier to get rid of them if it were. My boots make a loud splash as I jump inside, and the rest of the group mimics the sound.

Jen mutters a string of curses. “This is perfect. You're going to pay for these shoes.”

For the first time since we started the game, a chuckle climbs up my throat.

“You wish.”

“I don't mean to alarm anyone,” Steve interrupts, “but I swear to God something touched my foot.”

He's not lying because a second later, I see a swish in the dark water. The unmistakable zigzag causes my larynx to clamp up. Another splash flashes around us, going through our legs.

Nausea rolls through my stomach.

There are snakes.

I don't know if they're fake or not, but the idea of having reptiles touching my body ignites a fresh need to flee. Losing control of my actions, I

wrap a hand around the wristband, fingers almost grazing the sensor to call a staff member to take me out of here. It's an immediate response that my brain doesn't even register. Triggered by unknown fears I'd never faced before.

The only times I've seen snakes have been at the zoo when a glass separates us. I'm not a fan of them, though. Scales make the bad tingles roam my body. A shiver runs down my spine as the grotesque image of a serpent slithering over me pops into my brain. It doesn't matter if they're fake. They drag the same, and I can't help but sprint to the end of the tunnel, consumed by a surge of terror.

For the first time tonight, I don't worry about my friends. No one matters other than myself, even going as far as pushing them out of the way so I can run faster and get out of here.

I want to escape this fucking water.

I need to see what's under my feet and make sure nothing else is touching me. I've never given thought about what dark waters disguise but now it's embedded in my brain. I don't think I'll ever be able to go for a night swim, even in pools. No one knows what can hide underneath, and I'm not willing to find out.

The mind is a powerful thing when it plays tricks on you, poking at your fears, and fooling you into thinking something's real when it's not. Because what if... What if this is an unethical place waiting to be shut down because they terrorize the attendees? One never knows when an establishment might take it too far.

I know I paid for this—to be frightened, to experience such a macabre scenario. However, it doesn't mean I can't get scared. I feel like I'm three seconds away from having a premature heart attack at twenty-two years old.

I'd rather be chased by a masked man a hundred times over.

Where's Silver Mask when a girl needs him? He can swoop in with his prop knife and end this game already. I'm ready to drop everything.

Pins and needles prick along the length of my arms, sending shivers down my fingers. My pulse races in my ears and all I can hear is the swoosh of the blood rushing through me. The sense of panic is undeniable. It traps me in its web, minimizing the surrounding area. If I didn't know better, I'd swear the walls of the tunnel have shrunk.

It isn't until I've made it safe and sound to the other end that I regain control over my body. Thankfully, everyone had the same response because we've all crammed into the smaller new space. The lights here are messed up,

so the red glow flickers off and on every few beats.

I inhale, hold my breath for five seconds, and exhale softly. Then repeat the exercise three more times until the panic softens its grip on me, allowing me to take the lead again. With a clearer brain, my senses return to me, and I feel stupid for freaking out so badly.

Not that it's silly to be frightened, but I wasn't expecting to react like that after claiming I didn't get scared easily. It's okay to be spooked. Hell, Slashed wouldn't be doing its job if we remained stoic and unbothered through the entire experience.

I gotta give it to them.

This is the best—and simultaneously worst—haunted attraction I've attended. Not because it's bad, but because it's the only one that's caused me to lose my head in this way.

"Wait." Ty's voice drags me out of my bubble, pulling me back to the scene unfolding before me. "Where the fuck is Chip?"

Who the hell is Chip?

I blink a few times, attempting to adjust to the constant flickering to count the heads of the group. Jen and Nance stand together on one side, while Steve and Ty are on the other. Ty is correct. Someone's missing, the guy whose name I hadn't heard before.

He's... gone.

Not a trace of him lingering in the air.

"Was he in the tunnel with us?" Jennifer asks, her voice hoarse from screaming.

"Yeah, he was behind me," Steve says, then hesitates. "Was he?"

"He was in the other area, right?" I speak. My throat aches after slightly losing my head, and I bet it's going to be worse tomorrow morning. "I remember him there."

But somewhere along the tunnel, between the fake snakes and the room, he was dragged away.

Maybe he found another path, or the fear got to him.

It doesn't matter where he ended up because it means we're closer to ending this—only five more people to go.

Even if it makes me sound like an asshole, now that calmness flows in me, I'm glad the jocks have gotten eliminated pretty quickly.

A staircase rises behind us with a closed exit at the top, and we collectively climb upstairs in silence. I prepare for the next scare, unsure of

what's coming. After the tunnel, I'm sure we're bound to find something worse.

As we near the door, I allow Steve to pass me. The rest follow. Jen stands in front of me, while Nance holds onto my arm, walking behind me. At the end of the line, Ty bounces on the tip of his shoes, anxious to get the hell out of here, even when his face is masked by indifference.

Nance's nails dig into the fabric of my jacket. Her teeth chatter as she struggles to stay put. I want to offer to give up. Her wristband is close enough that it would take me no effort to press the button for someone to get her out. It'd almost be an act of mercy if I did it. Though I wouldn't do it without her consent.

"You okay?" I whisper. "You know you're allowed to leave at any time?"

From my peripheral vision, I see her head bob.

"I can do this," she responds. "It's going to be fine."

I look at her and feel pride bloom in my chest.

The girl is more than terrified, shaking like an anxious chihuahua, and she's still here, refusing to give up. That's admirable of her.

"I'm proud of you."

A shaky laugh abandons her lips.

"Oh, trust me when I say you owe me for this." She pauses. "Big. Time."

"Do your worst. I probably deserve it," I respond in complicity.

She hums in agreement.

A creak breaks the moment of tranquility when I reach the top of the steps, and when I turn around, I catch a glimpse of a silver reflection moving hurriedly further down the steps.

Silver Mask grabs Ty's leg and pulls hard. The force makes Ty lose balance and fall forward on the stairs, his chin hitting the edge of one sharp step. He lets out a pained groan as he tries to recover from the attack, but there's not enough time because Silver Mask tugs again, dragging him down. Like a trapped prey, Ty's hands fly around, trying to hold on to something, yet what he finds is the last thing I would've wanted. His fingers trap the base of Nancy's ankle, yanking her with him.

"Sadie!"

"Don't let go!" I yell, clinging to my friend's hand as she's being towed down by the jock.

Jen surrounds my waist with her arms, preventing me from falling too. I use the weight of my body to balance myself while stopping Nancy from

meeting the same end as him.

Sweat pools on the palm of my hands.

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

I won't be able to pull her free, not when the bodies trapping Nance are stronger than I am, not when my palms are sweaty. Another yank by Silver Mask, and Ty's hold overpowers mine because her hand loosens its grip and slips away, falling down the stairs alongside him.

The sudden weight shift hauls Jennifer and me back, and our butts meet the floor. But I'm too overwhelmed with the adrenaline and the need to help Nancy that I can't process the pain. I know I'll have some bruising from the solid tip of Jen's boot hitting my thigh, but it's the least of my concerns.

What happens later is a blur.

Jen screams louder than I've ever heard her before—almost screeching like a banshee.

One moment I'm staring at Nancy's horrified expression, blue eyes gawking back at me with tears spilling from them, and the next, Steve's figure blocks my view as he closes the door.

“What have you done?!” The scream abandons me, raw and gritty as I jump to my feet and grab the knob.

I need to help Nancy.

I must... I...

The metal of the knob clanks with the way I rattle it, trying my hardest to get it to push it, but it doesn't bulge. It stays put. Immobile, frozen as the time standing still in front of me as realize what's happening.

It can't open from this side.

Jen slams the palm of her hands against the heavy wood as she screams, “Nancy! Oh, God, Nance!”

And I stand there helpless, listening to the sharp shrieks of my scared friend on the other side.

Chapter Three

Second Act

I've never experienced cardiac problems in my life. According to my health checkups, I'm considered a healthy and average twenty-two-year-old woman with no underlying issues or risk factors. Yet, as I stand in the hall, listening to Nancy's screams, I feel my ribs constrict and send a twinge of pain. My sternum aches with the pressure lying on my chest, almost as if it were close to imploding on itself and crushing everything in its path.

Time drags around us as if someone had pressed the slow-motion button on the film to focus on the details, which is the same thing my mind does to process the scene unfolding in front of me.

Jen bangs her fists harder against the wood. Thumps echo in my skull, vibrating against the soft tissue of my brain. Sparks of adrenaline erupt in my nerves, making my muscles twitch.

"Nancy!" my friend bellows, her voice cracking with emotion. "Are you okay?"

"Stop being dramatic," Steve interrupts with a pitch of annoyance. "You'll see her again soon. She isn't actually getting killed."

The reminder is as sharp as a knife when it slices through the walls of panic around my mind.

This isn't real.

Nausea sways in my stomach.

It isn't fucking real.

Slashed is messing with my head. I can't even separate reality from fiction, though I'm unsure if this classifies as fictional. We're getting the same emotions as if we were experiencing the fear and horror of being chased by a killer. It doesn't matter if people are being killed or not because our

feelings are valid. That's the whole point of this haunted attraction being so acclaimed and feared. They do their best to put us in the throes of the experience.

Heat burns in my veins, scorching the vessels and boiling my blood with anger.

Who does he think he is?

We're allowed to care for our terrified friend who got left behind, thanks to his douchebag buddy. He grabbed her by her ankle and dragged her. She might be hurt if she fell down the stairs.

And Nancy was scared.

Even if this isn't real, it doesn't erase the fact that she was screaming and completely petrified. I made her come here because it was meant to be a fun experience for us friends to laugh about later.

It's not the same without her, and no final girl title will be enough to compensate or lessen the guilt jittering in my system for letting go of her. It wasn't my fault, I'm aware, but my guilt still wrenches in my gut.

"Shut the fuck up," I spit out, almost hissing the words as they slip through gritted teeth. "You don't get to call us dramatic for caring about our friend."

Steve rolls his eyes.

Now that his buddies are gone and my defenses have cracked, his true colors swoop in. He's as douchey as the rest of them, like I knew he was. I'm not surprised, but it's disappointing, nonetheless.

Men often are.

"Are you stupid?" Jen asks him. "Your little buddy attacked our friend."

"I wouldn't say he attacked her. He reacted to the scare actor abusing him," Steve responds, jumping to a defensive tone. His chest puffs out and his shoulders straighten. "I'm not sure it's legal."

I roll my eyes.

"He signed the same waiver as we did. He consented to be chased and scared." I jump in Silver Mask's defense, even when I don't know him. "What Ty did was pull our friend by her leg so he wouldn't be eliminated alone. That's fucked up, and we could file a complaint about your buddy if we wanted to."

Guessing we're not letting this go, Steve lifts his hands in the air.

Good. He will not be winning this fight.

"Whatever." His head shakes with disregard. "What's that thing you kept

saying earlier? We don't have to stick together."

Oh, he wants to part ways now. After they have eliminated his entire friend group? *That seems like the smartest choice*, I can't help but think with sarcasm. I couldn't care less if he goes off and gets wiped out around the corner. At least he won't be able to use us like Ty did with Nance.

Bitterness stabs my ribs as I think back to the expression on her face as her hand slipped from mine and she fell. Even worse when Steve decided to lock her away.

We're better off without him.

"It's not like you're doing anything productive here," I mumble.

I don't turn to see which direction he heads in, or if there's more than one. I haven't had the time to analyze where we're at. Nancy is my only concern.

"Let me call her," Jen announces and pats her pockets.

Sourness coats the length of my tongue.

"There's no point," I stop her. "I have her phone, remember?"

What a stupid thing to do.

I hadn't thought about getting separated when I took it. I wanted my friend to enjoy something I believed would be fun. This is possibly the last time she'll ever trust me to choose an activity. I'm sure they'll never even ask me to pick a movie after this. To be fair, I don't think I'd trust myself either.

Jen groans.

"Nance," she calls out again, slamming her open palm on the door. "Are you okay?"

A beat passes and realization washes over me.

"Wait, it has gone quiet," I notice, perching my ear against the wood. The sounds are muffled, but the screams have ceased. There are some huffs and noises I can't decipher, but no cries. That's a good sign. "I think it stopped now."

Her sigh is loud and full of defeat.

"I don't like this," she says, her tone straining into a whine. "We're never doing another haunted house again."

I scoff, feeling my shoulders loosen with the lighter tease.

"We'll see." I dig my elbow into her ribs. "Where did Steve go?"

Spinning on my heels, I glance around to take in the space. The lighting is dim, visible enough to allow me to look at the archways and exits of the vast hall, but not enough to say everything is crystal clear. I try to not let my

imagination take control, imagining what could be lurking in the darkened corners of the room.

Since we came from the basement, we're back on the base floor, but not near the foyer. This is a rough guess, but I'd say it's somewhere near the middle of the house. We walked—or ran—out of the end of a hall that stretches in front of multiple entrances. Each room glows with a different neon color that bleeds into the floor in front of me. Red, purple, and pink meet into a gradient that ends in the subtle darkness.

I don't love the idea of having multiple options, mostly because we don't know if we're going to walk into a trap like in the basement when not all the doors opened. We would've gotten trapped in the second room if it weren't for me. However, now we don't have as many people as we did then. It's us against a lot of unknown territory, jump scares, and actors waiting to chase us.

My skin itches as my thoughts drift to Silver Mask.

It wouldn't be that crazy if he found us again, right? He's been after us from the moment we entered the house, always appearing in the corners, seeking, hunting. Silver Mask a predator looking for its prey, and I'm waiting for him to catch me.

Not that I would go down easy—I like to think I can make him struggle—but I'd surrender in the end.

To him, only to him.

"I didn't see, nor do I care." Jen's voice breaks my fantasy with her sassy tone. "He can get fucked."

The corners of my lips tilt up into a smirk.

"I don't care either," I assure her, purposefully dragging my words. "Though, if I may say something competitive, I don't want him to win. There's only three of us left, and between us and him, I'd prefer if you and I won."

Jen chuckles. "Yeah, me too. Hope a scare actor gets to him soon."

Maybe Silver Mask will.

A girl can only hope he does.

If the odds function in our favor, he'll go after him first, but I wouldn't bet on it. I don't know exactly how the logistics of the scare actors work here. For all I know, he's confined to the basement, and we'll stumble upon other actors soon. Though, now that I think about it, we've only seen him.

I shrug away the thoughts.

“Let’s finish this. I’m sure Nancy will be waiting for us outside,” I say, nodding toward the open hall.

“If there are spiders in the next room, I’ll fucking sue,” she jokes, but I catch the tremble in her words as she stares at the empty space, cautious of everything. Her shoulders are visibly tense under layers of clothes. She hasn’t shown her fear the same way Nance and I have. She hides it in silence, keeping it contained in her frame.

I snort, trying to keep the ambiance light.

We need it after the stress we’ve been under in the past... how long has it been? I’ve lost track of time. I think it’s been around an hour. Maybe less, maybe more. Who even cares? The longest we can spend inside is a little over an hour, and that’s with bigger groups. So, it’s less than sixty minutes, that much I’m sure of.

“Let’s continue.” I nudge at her elbow. “I’ll protect you from the spiders.”

She rolls her eyes with annoyance, and I know I got her back. She’s broken from the spell that kept her tense.

“Which way?” Her pointer finger moves through the air, swaying among the options. “It’s clear you can’t trust my judgment.”

“We can go upstairs. I doubt we could get out of here without going through everything. Part of the game logistics and all,” she mentions, moving her hands around.

“Okay.” I dip my head in a nod, and we start walking.

The rooms along the hall are empty of people, though they’re full of furniture.

The silence is threatening. My pulse thumps in my ears with every step I take, like a bomb ticking before it blows up. As the entrance becomes clearer, I can’t spot anything particularly scary outside the normal spooky décor of the place.

They all look like regular living rooms. It’s strange that there could be three of them so far inside the house. I won’t wreck my brain attempting to put together the logistics of this architecture arrangement. It’s probably disorganized on purpose to confuse the attendees.

The closer we get to the last archway, white noise buzzes in my ears, and it’s not until I step inside that I see where it comes from. The room has a box TV from the early 2000s atop a stand against the wall. It’s on one of the input channels where it only has static. A second later, I realize it’s imitating The

Ring, and my heart drops to the pit of my stomach.

“If a girl crawls out and starts chasing us, I’m tapping out,” Jen mentions.

I shake my head and look for an exit before we’re caught by anyone else. Thankfully, everything is clear and empty.

Interesting.

You would’ve thought that a place like this, a haunted attraction, would have multiple actors working at the same time. I get that the principal theme is the slasher subgenre, but they’ve included other psychological elements. Maybe they only have one actor per group because it’s easier to play with people’s minds. Either way, it doesn’t ease the anxiousness coursing through my system.

Something will happen soon. I feel it in the pit of my gut, a tremulous warning that causes my insides to churn.

When I spot the exit, it directs us to a new archway that opens to the main foyer. We’re back at the beginning.

Jen and I venture deeper into the vestibule. The basement entrance is closed, so only the imperial staircases are left. Given the circumstances and after what we’ve been through, I can’t help but think they’re a serious safety hazard if people have to run up and down them while being chased. I don’t know how someone hasn’t sued them already because they fell.

Perhaps it’s why they have us sign the waivers before we enter. Too many risks for the sake of fun. They sell an experience, after all. I bet people, similar to us, have been shocked to find out their warning is more than a few words on paper to keep us on our toes. They mean them.

We’re too stupid to notice the truth before it’s too late.

I’m too caught up in my thoughts when it happens, when the heavy and sturdy body slams into my back, pushing me forward with the force of a train. It’s a miracle I don’t fall to my knees in that instant, and it’s probably because I’m too tangled up with the person to let my frame plummet down.

My reflexes work overtime as a scream erupts from the end of my throat, scratching the tissue of my larynx. My hands, fiddling with the lack of balance and panic, struggle to push the weight of the man who collided with me.

I have a one track of mind: breaking free. There’s no fucking way this will be the way I’m eliminated from the game. Not when we’re so close to finishing this thing. *Dios mío*, couldn’t they go after Steve first?

Annoyance knits my face into a deep frown. As much as they state we

shouldn't attack scare actors doing their jobs, I'm not sure I should be allowing them to trample me either. Literally. Hell, he rammed into me first. I'm not a genius, but the no-attacks policy should work both ways. Getting tackled by an employee doesn't seem like it'd be part of their contract.

I have a right to defend myself when prompted to.

I shift, attempting to untangle myself from the person.

My instinct is to hide the wristband behind my back, so he can't use the scanner on it, but I make it worse for the rest of our limbs because we get even more tangled with each other. We're a knot of body parts and panic, causing us to lose what's left of our balance and collapse.

Our bodies hit the hard ground, and I feel a pounding pain spread across my left hip. The tenderness pulsing in my muscles ignites a fresh wave of anger. This wasn't a slam made with finesse, and if it was done by a staff member, I'll have a fucking problem with the administration.

While moving, I catch a glimpse of a varsity jacket, and it snaps me back into reality. This isn't a scare actor lacking agility in his performance.

The man above me is no other than stupid Steve.

"Let go of me, *cabrón!*" The insult slips out of me before I choke it down. There's a different type of anger that only your mother tongue can satisfy, and I have it boiling in my system. Packs a solid punch and power, and this is one of those situations where I find myself returning to my roots because there's no other way to soothe the rage and annoyance I get from seeing Steve's face again.

He blinks; confusion clouding his expression. His eyes travel over my face, taking in the features as understanding washes over his, softening them.

"You scared the fuck out of me!" he exclaims, rolling off me with a thud.

Steve gasps for air, putting his hands over his chest as if he were holding his heart hostage.

You got to be fucking kidding me.

I can't believe he left before us and we ended up in the same place.

"How are you still here?" I question, standing up from the floor.

My hip throbs with pain, but I do my best to ignore it. I'm too angry to worry about the parts I will have to ice tonight.

"He's upstairs." His eyes drift up for a split second, almost paranoid.

This is far from the cocky man who was shit-talking to us a few minutes ago. How did he go from being overconfident to this? I shake my head a bit. I don't care about what has him distressed.

“Who is upstairs?”

“The guy from the basement. The scare actor,” he adds in a hushed tone. “I don’t know how he got out. There was only one exit, right?”

“I’m sure they have secret passageways, dumbass,” Jen provides, irritated. “And he probably knows where we are now.”

It’s almost as if destiny has it out for us because her mouth hasn’t finished pronouncing the words when he appears at the top of the stairs. The knife in his hand looks different. Same structure, but dripping... blood? *Fake blood*, I correct myself. His shirt has more splashes of red, too. An effect to stun people after eliminating many in the same way the killer of a slasher movie would. Again, kudos to the staff team for being so efficient with their special effects.

“Fuck!” Steve grits out, stands from the ground, and breaks into a sprint, leaving Jen and me behind.

Amazing. I didn’t trust him before, but after running away twice, he’s becoming a problem. Especially when Silver Mask is closer than ever.

Shit, he might win this stupid thing.

Taking a small step back, I grab Jen’s arm to catch her attention.

My mind is racing, thoughts flood my brain with the strength of a tsunami. Survival, even in a fake scenario, rules my body. How can I find a way out of this situation? If this were real, what could I do? There are no places to hide this time, no visible rooms with locks, no exits.

All that’s left are us girls and him.

“We have to split up.” I wait a second to think things through, in case there’s another option, but this is the smartest choice. If I choose to trust my intuition, I know this is the only alternative. This is the dumb moment of the movie where the main character thinks they can sacrifice themselves for the greater good and it fails horribly. “Look, there are two of us. If we split ways, we maximize our chances.”

Her brown eyes stare deep into mine, trying to check if I’m serious about this.

“You sure?”

I nod and order, “Run.”

Slowly, Jen backs away from me and after I dip my head again, she runs in the opposite direction from Steve.

Instead of taking a chance and running from him too, I stand still, observing him. He remains unmoving, staring and analyzing me.

I was hoping he would immediately rush to me, but he didn't.

Silver Mask simply stares. Tilting his head in amusement, almost like he's waiting for me to make the first movement, he points at the foyer behind me with the blade of his knife. Another silent message sent my way, one I can read clearly.

He's expecting me to flee, too. I dare say he's giving me the chance to do it. No, he's not waiting for me to escape. I get what he demands.

He wants me to run, so he can chase and hunt me like prey.

After all, this is what the entire night has been leading up to. To the instance when we were alone in the room with no one else to cause a distraction.

It's just us.

He and I.

"Are you coming after me?" I dare him, loud enough for my voice to carry through the space. "Or after them?"

Even though I know the answer. When presented with the choice, he's going to choose me. It might be self-centered of me to take a risk like this, but I'm the only person in front of him. Hell, I'm practically throwing myself at him, so he better make the right call.

I'm counting on it.

Silver Mask doesn't use his voice to respond. Instead, he points at the other stairs with the knife.

A slight frown appears on my forehead. Does he want me to go up, but not from this side? Unsure of what his message is, I step forward and see him shake his head. Okay, so he wants me to use the other one.

Wetting my lips with the tip of my tongue, I nod as I cautiously move along the length of the foyer to reach the rail. The smooth surface welcomes the touch of my hand, and I anchor myself to it to keep myself focused. I take a step and, from the corner of my eye, see him mirror my acts in the other direction.

My feet go up, his go down.

Frowning with confusion, I halt mid-step. He does the same.

Is he imitating what I'm doing?

I thought he planned on capturing me as soon as I reached the top, but now I fear he's doing the opposite. What if he goes after Jen? Tricking me into going upstairs so he can have a clear path to follow the others.

A knot appears in my throat—thick and hard. I struggle to swallow the

dryness scratching inside of my mouth.

Hesitantly, just to test a theory, I climb another step and analyze what he does.

Like I predicted, he mimics me. The higher I go, the lower he steps, but his focus is entirely on me. The silver mask faces straight in my direction, never once looking down his path to see where he's going.

His movements are instinctual, animalistic even, like a hungry lion waiting to hunt his prey. But they're also graceful—confident. Different from mine in every sense. My actions are clumsy and insecure, faltering when I misstep.

A waltz of danger and excitement forms between us. No, a waltz would be too slow and bland. This dance we form with our auras isn't made of the classic swaying. Instead, it's stealthy, transcendent, intense, and... passionate. Tension thickens, changing our dynamic as the desire slips past our defenses. The way we glide can only be compared to a tango. That's the perfect description of our parade around the foyer.

When I reach the top, Silver Mask approaches the bottom of my stairs and waits there. His patience is admirable.

He gives me a shallow head movement. Once again, his message is crystal clear. A single notice that our game has begun, and I break into a run, without knowing where to go. I just move my legs as fast as my body allows me to while not paying attention to my surroundings, which might be the stupidest decision I've ever made in my life.

Instinct drives me. I don't bother to check if he's following because the heavy thumps of boots behind me are noticeable enough. He is chasing me.

Hunting me.

My heart hammers against the sternum, threatening to break it with every passing second.

Ay, Dios.

Even my face tingles with the surge of adrenaline rocking me like I've never felt before. The danger, though fake, feels so imminent that my senses are in overdrive. Everything is heightened. The faint scent of smoke from the fog machine sneaks past my nostrils, distracting me for a split second and forcing me to notice the low cloud lingering on the floor.

I take a left in the first hall, then a right.

The front of my thighs burns with the force of my strides, and one of my shins tightens. I turn again at the next corner and promptly realize my

mistake.

“No, no, no,” I whisper between rapid pants when I reach the end.

The wall is solid when I touch it, with no creases of hidden passages in sight.

Carajo.

Being so focused on escaping clouded my judgment because I’ve found a dead end. And I can’t backtrack because I hear the footsteps approaching behind me. They’ve slowed down but have grown more confident.

Think, Sadie.

Blowing out the air from my lungs, I regain my control. There’s a way to outsmart him; I just have to find it. But...how? Looking down at the front of my top, I realize what I can use to escape. Discretely, I lower my shirt to show more cleavage, even when my breasts are half out of the bottom of the bra cups. Running with desperation will do that to a girl. Sweat drips down the length of my neck, and it’s not an attractive sight by any means.

Oh, well. I’ll manage with what I have.

Right now, what’s left is my looks. I’m not a traffic-stopping beauty, but I’m self-aware that I’m beautiful enough to grab people’s attention. After all, I already had his while I waited in line. This can work.

I’m confident it will.

Arming myself with the last bits of my charm, I spin around to face Silver Mask. However, I keep my wristband hidden behind me, in case my lame seducing attempt doesn’t give me the results I wanted. I’m not ready to let go yet.

He moves even slower now, deliberately cornering me. Being this near to him, I notice his mask is made of rubber. The silver comes from paint, and it seems flexible enough to bend.

I lift my chin to look at him properly.

God, he’s tall.

I’m not small, but I wouldn’t say I’m tall either. Average is the right word. I’m average in comparison to him, and he’s... extraordinary.

I don’t need to see his face to know there’s beauty behind the mask. Or maybe I’m fooling myself into thinking that a handsome man is hidden in the stoic devil disguise. Delusion might be my coping mechanism, but fuck. His entire essence radiates good-looking energy.

“You’ve caught me,” I whisper, using my lower register, hoping to sound sultry. Though it shouldn’t take much for me to do so, not when desire is

already deepening it. “What are you going to do now?”

In a swift motion, he leans in and pins me against the wall with his torso. It’s so sudden that my breath hitches. Then, he presses one hand on the panel behind me and with the other, he leads the prop knife to the delicate curve of my neck, grazing the skin with the edge. I mold my back to the flat surface, stiffening under the layers of tension.

My chest heaves with the air that enters and abandons my lungs. It seems to catch his attention because his chin lowers. Though I can’t see what his eyes are staring at, I guess my choice to expose the valley of my breasts was a smart move.

With no other sounds to fill the space, his heavy pants behind his mask echo in the inches between us. And I wonder... is he as affected by my nearness as I am with his?

I shouldn’t find being pinned by a stranger so hot, but I do. I’m absolutely depraved because his tall frame towering over mine has my mouth going dry.

Heat accumulates in my cheeks, and I’m grateful for the dim lighting of this area. It’d be too embarrassing if he could see the way my body reacts to him, to his actions. There’s no doubt I’m not the first person to flirt with a scare actor, but arousal awakens inside me so strong, it should be concerning.

Should is the keyword.

Because I can’t find it within myself to care about what I should be doing. Logic has no place left in my brain. The visceral lust growing in me clouds all rational thoughts.

My gaze flicks down to his wrist where the knife’s hilt meets the end, and I suck in a breath at the threat of the weapon. Fake, but it tricks my mind all the same. It’s part of the fantasy, to be put in a dangerous situation. I cannot believe I’m turned on.

I don’t think he’s noticed that one of his thighs has lodged itself between mine and that if I were to rock my hips, I’d be able to rub my core all over the length of it. The thought almost makes a whimper break free. I imagine what it would feel like, how it would send shivers down my spine when the seam of my jeans dragged along his muscles, hitting the spot every single time.

I want him. So badly, I can’t even focus on what’s happening. I forget all about the circumstances and where we are. Nothing matters anymore. I just want him closer.

His chest inflates and deflates at the same speed as mine—deep, constant,

erratic. Tension grows, wrapping us with a thick rope that only our bodies colliding and uniting can dissolve.

I glance up at the mask, and I wonder... does he want me, too?

Gulping, I allow the adrenaline and desire to take control of my entire being. The rest happens on its own. I'm not sure what pushes me to do it, but I use a hand to grab the hem of his shirt and pull him toward me. With the other, I lift the end of his mask, exposing full lips, and before I can process what I'm doing—maybe it was him who did it—, I crash my mouth against his.

Chapter Four

Third Act

A moan escapes me the second my lips brush his, and I'm taken aback by the bolt of sensations exploding in my system. Pure electricity travels down my spine, igniting every nerve in my body. I'm a bundle of overwhelmed receptors running on overload. Even my brain short circuits and stops working. When I kissed him, my mind had one purpose: to distract him so I could escape from this corner. But all my concerns and plans faded away with the touch of his mouth.

Silver Mask seems to be surprised by the kiss because his muscles harden and, perhaps unknowingly, the edge of his knife presses harder against my throat. My breath hitches in bewilderment and I freeze for a split second while I process what just happened.

The blade is colder and sharper than I expected it would be for a prop. Not enough to cut, but if he were to apply more pressure, I'm sure he'd be able to slice the sensitive skin open. Effortless and simple.

Hesitantly, I remain immobile with my mouth brushing his; the warmth of his breath leaving tingles on my bottom lip as I wait for the next move. My hand hasn't released his shirt, clinging to the fabric in hopes he will react soon, that he'll give me a hint—*anything*—to show he wants this as much as I do.

Though I'm unable to see his eyes, I picture them blinking when his head shakes and rubs the end of the mask on the bridge of my nose. It's almost as if he did it unconsciously while struggling to pierce through the shock.

Silver Mask lowers the hand he has on the wall. When I think he's about to withdraw, he curls it behind my neck and dives in, trapping my lips in a fierce and passionate kiss that matches the energy of our sensual tango.

The leather of his gloves smooth and hot on my skin.

Moaning, I melt against him and arch my spine to seek more contact. I ignore the way the edge of his mask is digging into my nose. Hell, I don't even think about the fact that he never lowers the prop knife. Part of me craves to feel the pressure on my neck, teasing me in ways I'd never imagined before. There's something about sensing the possibility of a threat, a the taste of danger, that sends a wave of arousal through me.

A groan vibrates against my mouth when he presses his lips on the curve of my cupid bow. I tremble with desire. The sound shoots straight to my core as he firmly pulls me closer, forcing a noise of delight out of me. My nipples stiffen. His hard and muscular frame emanates heat, and it engulfs me with his presence.

So direct, powerful, and dominating.

It's both too much and not nearly enough to be satisfying. I ache to merge with him, moving in synchrony. Fuck, I'm blinded by lust, fueled by the raw and visceral need for more.

As if he could read my mind, the thigh lodged between mine hikes up and I no longer have to rock my hips, or even buck them, to rub my pussy on it. Through the layers of fabric, the thick muscles push directly against my sensitive clit, stimulating it. Pleasure flutters in my lower abdomen. The friction is ever so slight, but I shudder like he's using his fingers on me.

Oh, God, it's so good.

My hips gyrate with their own volition and grind over him, establishing a rhythm that matches the pace of his sinful mouth. Lost in the overwhelming flush of desire, I use my hands to hold on to his shoulders, steadying myself to reach the perfect angle that rubs the seam of my jeans harder against the right spot. It sends tingles of pleasure under my skin.

"Yes, darling, just like that," he praises between kisses. My eyes roll to the back of my head, and I welcome his approval. "Keep riding my thigh."

I whimper, losing focus on what I'm doing. His voice is deeper than I thought it'd be, but not to the point where it's scratchy like nails on a chalkboard. Only the smoothest wine compares, carefully curated and tasteful. The fact that I can barely see him in the dim lighting makes the sound of his voice send shivers down to my core where my pussy throbs.

"Did I say you could stop?" Silver Mask asks, scratching the front of my throat with the knife. A slice of a threat hidden in his words.

I gasp, and he seizes the opportunity to take the reins of the kiss, sliding

the tip of his tongue to meet mine, greeting it with enthusiasm. He tastes and devours, controlling the rhythm and demanding more. The hand behind my neck slides to my chin, grabs it forcefully, and holds me in place so he can annihilate me with his mouth.

Following his order, I resume my grinding. Even though my legs tremble and can barely hold me up. If it weren't because he's propping me against the wall, I'd probably be on the floor, unable to remain standing.

He sweeps the tip of his tongue over my bottom lip before he nibbles on it, dragging the swollen flesh with his teeth. Goosebumps erupt over my skin.

Even with his fingers on my chin, I tilt my head back to allow him better access, while seeking a comfortable position for us to kiss. But rubber isn't the most malleable material, and it's difficult to return the same excitement when my mind keeps drifting to the mask clawing at my skin.

Without breaking apart from the delicious way his tongue flicks against mine, I lead my hand to his face to remove it. He's faster. As soon as he realizes what my intentions are, he wraps his fist around my wrist, preventing me from getting rid of the inconvenient rubber.

"No."

The loss of his mouth is imminent, and I yearn for it. I blink in confusion once I wake up from the broken spell of his kiss. I take a second to realize what he said. It's so abrupt that I freeze in place. The temperature drops in the hall as the seconds tick by.

"No?" I echo, but my tone is more questioning than imitating.

"Mask stays on," he states firmly.

"You don't want to take it off or can't?" I ask, out of curiosity.

It could be a work policy that I'm unaware of, not that it matters. If he doesn't consent to be without it, I won't force him to. I must admit the mask is a major turn-on for me. It's not comfortable, but it does the job. Plus, I like the anonymity it provides. Though I would prefer full access to his face.

"Won't." It's his only response, and he softly unwraps my wrist to rearrange the mask over his features, hiding his wicked mouth from me. It feels cold and disassociated from the heated moment we were sharing.

Disappointment weighs on my stomach, fearing this has ended before we could explore this further. Not that I had big expectations. I was willing to go with the flow and see where it led, and I ruined it.

Sheepishly, I nod and mumble, "Okay. That's okay." But because I fear my impulsiveness has shattered the moment entirely, I dare to ask, "Are you

going to remove me from the game now?”

Silver Mask tilts his head, almost in amusement.

“Who said we’re done here?” he muses, a hint of laughter present in his tone. “Because I’m nowhere near done with you.”

To prove his point, he closes in the tight distance between us, allowing his chest to press into mine. His free hand caresses its way down my torso, grazing the swell of my breasts before continuing its path to my right hip. Fingers grip the flesh as he guides my lower body to oscillate on his thigh, establishing a low but steady rhythm.

I’m so turned on that even with clothes on, I can feel the wetness gathering in my panties. I wish there were no layers between us, so I could glide over him and have his warm skin touching aching pussy in the places I desire him most. This—riding his leg like a wanton woman—is satisfying, but not enough.

I need his direct touch—fingers, mouth, cock.

Any of the above, but preferably all.

“Please,” I whisper, closing my eyes to focus on the sensations, hoping they’ll intensify if I move faster, but I fail to rub the spot that makes me see stars. I can’t quite reach it with my clothes on, not like this. I’m millimeters away, yet so far at the same time.

Frustration creeps in, gnawing my bones.

“Please what?” he prompts. “Use your words.”

“I need…” My voice breaks into a whine full of want and desire. I don’t know what to ask for. Knowing what I crave in my mind isn’t the same as saying it aloud. Blood sizzles in my cheeks, flushing my skin. “More.”

Silver Mask hums, the sound vibrating low in his throat. “What else? Say the words, and you’ll get it.” My heartbeat pounds harder. “Look at me.”

I peel my lids open to stare deep at him, where I sense his gaze focus on me. even when I can’t see anything behind the veil of fabric covering the eye sockets of his mask.

“Touch my pussy,” I plead. “This isn’t enough.”

A groan of approval erupts from him.

“What a fucking good girl,” he mutters. “I’ve got you, darling.”

His fingers abandon my hip. Before he continues his journey, he removes one glove to graze the sliver of exposed skin over the hem of my jeans. He teases his way to the front of my pants, enjoying the thread of unintelligible whimpers emanating from the back of my throat. The texture of his bare hand

is different from the leather, though not less pleasant. Raspier thanks to the callouses adorning his palm. Silver Mask pops the button open with skill, and eases the zipper down, giving himself space to slide underneath the fabric.

However, he doesn't dive in the way I expect him to. Instead, he caresses the tiny bow of my panties. If I could go back in time, I would've worn different ones—a sexier pair. Perhaps a lacy thong. Something that matches the energy I have tonight. Anything other than the simple black cotton briefs I have on.

Silver Mask seems to find it amusing because he tugs on the bow and says, “Cute.”

A choked moan breaks free when he slips his fingers under the fabric and cups my pussy. His hand covers my heat with ease, brushing the slick folds, and parting them with the pad of his middle finger.

Instinctually, I buck my hips while one of my hands grips his neck to anchor myself. My nails sink into his skin, probably leaving behind a trail of crescent moon-shaped marks in it. He hisses, but doesn't complain. He wets his fingers with my arousal before he circles the hood of my clit, not rubbing directly or applying too much pressure.

It's... fuck...it's *perfect*.

I'm blinded by the overwhelming sensations exploding in my core. A high-pitched moan rasps its way out of my mouth, and I have no doubts that if anyone were to walk nearby, they'd hear me. I can't find it within myself to care about other people when I'm lost in the magnificent pleasure he's giving me.

Silver Mask must be experienced because he rubs me with skill and precision, knowing exactly where to stroke and how to do it.

I bite my bottom lip to muffle the moans.

“No,” he grunts as he lowers his head on my shoulder. “Let me hear you. I want to listen to every sound you make when I touch your needy little cunt.”

Somehow, hearing his dirty talk makes this whole scenario even naughtier. I love how he continues to ramble his filthy words in the crook of my neck, near my ear. I quiver and grip him harder.

In this position, the faint scent of perspiration mixed with the leathery hint of worn cologne hits my senses, and the primal urge inside me can't get enough of it. Intoxicating and addictive, that's how I'd describe his smell.

“You're so good at that.”

His chest heaves, puffing with pride as he continues to circle my clit.

Pearls of sweat wash down my skin, overheating with the impending orgasm building in my belly, rising in tidal waves, each of them bigger than the previous one. I'm reduced to shaky breaths and unintelligible sounds, my system feverish. A warning of what's coming hardens my muscles.

"I'm getting close," I tell him. I don't want to lose it, not when I can savor the sweet release. My orgasm is closing in, tightening my limbs, and causing my breath to hitch. But Silver Mask is cruel and sadistic because he stops giving attention to my clit. "No, no, no, *por favor*," I beg, my voice raspy with desperation.

"Tell me what you want."

"I want to come. Please, make me come," I plead.

He nuzzles my cheek with his face. "See? That wasn't so hard, right?"

Chuckling, he inserts two fingers inside me, catching me off guard. My back arches, and I tilt my head, hitting the wall behind me. Eyes rolling, I let out a choked moan. The heel of his palm brushes the sensitive bundle of nerves while his digits curve against my walls.

"What do you say?" Silver Mask asks, teasing my throat with the knife as his other hand drives me closer to the edge. "What do you say when you get what you want?" he insists, pressing the point of the blade straight over my pulse. "I won't ask again."

I push through the fog in my mind, praying for some clarity. But it's so hard when his fingers are buried deep inside me, thrusting at an unholy rhythm.

"I don't know," I mumble.

"You say, 'thank you'." He grits out. "Let me hear it."

"Thank...Fuck, thank you," I struggle to pronounce the words, my voice hoarse.

The waves of pleasure increase, and my muscles cramp tight for a second. Black spots appear in my vision, my thighs shake, and I lose control. The only thing I care about is reaching the climax, entering heaven, nirvana, and all the sacred places that would burn with this profanity.

I should probably go to hell, but instead of going lower, the ecstasy lifts me higher.

"That's right. Thank me when you come on my fingers."

And I do.

When the tidal waves turn into a tsunami, and the dam breaks with the

flood of exhilarating satisfaction, I thank him lavishly until my voice goes raw and gritty. I moan, scream, and seize the release of endorphins. I don't even notice when I bite the curve of his neck, hoping to drown out some of the noises erupting from me.

He grunts in my ear, accompanying me through the long and earth-shattering orgasm rattling in me. His fingers continue to thrust into me until my pussy stops contracting around him. It's when he removes his hand from my pants and leads it under his mask to suck them clean.

That alone is almost enough to make me come again.

My mind takes a minute to return to my body, the haze of pleasure unclogging my receptors so I can experience reality. Though still quivering with the aftershocks of my orgasm, I blink rapidly, recovering some clarity.

Dios mío, I'm never seeing heaven after this.

I rake my fingers through my sweaty dark hair, ruffling the strands as I catch my breath. Shifting, I drop my sight to the knife resting on my collarbone, and I touch my throat to check that I don't have any cuts. I know it's a fake blade used to create the effect, but I'll be damned if it didn't feel real for a second. It's sharper than any of the prop knives I've seen.

"That's a little sharp for a prop knife," I speak the thought out loud, my tone light, interrupting the silence that was filled by our panting. "Are you sure it isn't real?"

He huffs, and a short laugh emerges from him. Leaning in again, he skims the knife from my collarbone to trail up to my mouth, where it stops on my bottom lip.

"We could check if it is, darling," he offers in a low voice that causes the hairs on my arms to stand straight. "But I fear I might have to give you something to muffle the pretty little noises you'd make," he muses, and I choke back a surprised noise. However, my body reacts to him, igniting the lust flame again, even when I came less than five minutes ago. At my response, he continues, "Oh, you'd like that, wouldn't you? You would love to have me filling your mouth with my cock, keeping you from screaming."

My pulse drums at a rapid pace against my rib cage. He's not lying. After the mind-blowing orgasm he gave me, I'm not sure why I haven't dropped to my knees and returned the favor. But since I don't want to be the only one playing the game, I choose to tease him too.

Staring deep into his mask, I stick my tongue out and sink lower to lick the blade from hilt to tip, like I'd work my mouth on him if he offered me the

chance. All without breaking the eye contact.

That seems to be his breaking point, but instead of letting me be the one to kneel, it's him who slides to the floor, dropping his knife to the ground. In a swift movement, he undoes my left boot. Before I get the opportunity to ask what the hell he's doing, Silver Mask hooks his fingers on my pants and pushes them down along with my underwear, leaving me naked from the waist down.

I'm entirely on display for him and at his mercy.

Roughly, he parts my legs, hoisting one of them over his shoulder. His mask caresses my knee and I hiss at the unfamiliar texture that's exploring the delicate skin.

"Darling, you looked so beautiful riding my thigh," Silver Mask croons, inching closer and closer to my pussy. "I loved watching you get flustered with need, but right now, I would love nothing more than to watch you ride my mask. I want your scent all over me, so I can remember how it felt when I had my head buried between your thighs."

Chapter Five

Climax

My mouth goes dry at his request.

Don't get me wrong, I've had sex before. But there's a stark difference between having a vanilla encounter in the bedroom and being asked to ride someone's face while they wear a mask. Even having some semi-public play at a party doesn't compare to this. This is where my sexual exploration journey has peaked, because everything else after this will pale in comparison.

God, it's filthy. Almost too fucking indecent—yet I spread my legs farther to give him more access. Silver Mask grunts aloud as he buries his head deeper between my thighs, though all he does is brush the smooth rubber on my soaking wet pussy. I'm so slick that it glides effortlessly over the lips. Immediately, my hips buck at the sensation, and I mewl, the noise foreign in my throat.

A rush of blood travels over my face. I don't have a single ounce of control with this man, whose name remains unknown. Hell, I haven't seen what he looks like, but there's no one else in this world who could turn me on as much as he does. The sinfulness in his spirit matches mine, keeping me company in the profane fantasies that inhabit our brains.

His fingers grip my thigh above his shoulder so hard, he'll leave bruises, but I don't mind a forced hand on me while he says such dirty things to me. My pussy clenches around nothing, begging to be filled by him. I ache for the intense sensation of him filling me with any part of his body. He won't fuck me yet, not when he's on his knees, waiting for me to follow through with his request.

There's only one problem.

He's too tall to make this comfortable.

Unless he rubs his mask against my clit and does all the work, I can't quite keep my balance if I rock my hips. At least, I don't think I could do it without putting too much pressure on my left leg, which is already suffering some of the aches from my fall earlier. I wouldn't be able to focus on enjoying the journey, and I truly want to.

"Ride my mask, darling," he encourages in a soft croon. "Do I need to grab my knife again?"

The threat is subtle but promising. Goosebumps rise and I quiver in response. Before this night, the idea of being teased with a blade was intimidating, but I've made a discovery: I enjoy it a lot. I *crave* it.

However, as much as I want to act bratty to see what wicked things he does with it, I don't think I can follow through with his initial request. To taunt him would be pointless if I can't do what he asks me to, so instead, I shake my head and excuse myself by saying, "You're too tall for me to ride you like this."

"Then come here," he orders, and without missing a beat, he slides down and lies on the floor between my legs.

Demonios, I'm obsessed with him.

After we're done here, I will have to give him my number because I want a re-do in a proper bed. How could I not? He's so determined to have his face buried in my pussy that he dropped to his knees for me in the middle of a work shift.

Quickly, and not as expertly as I would've liked, I lower my body to straddle his face. My descent is more hesitant and slower than I intend. A slice of insecurity ripples through me, and the smallest blip of '*what the hell am I doing?*' echoes in the back of my mind. Am I really going to ride someone's mask until I come? He could lose his job and...

Silver Mask's hands wrap around my thighs and pulls me to his face. The sudden force puts my core over him and I whimper when my clit hits the ridges of the rubber. Clarity fades into the lustful haze. I bury my fingers in this thick, dark hair, using it to anchor myself.

All my worries disappear. This is all I needed to forget.

I'm wet and sensitive from my previous orgasm, so soon I'm rocking my hips back and forth at a fast pace. The rising tide of the upcoming release nears the shore. It's fast and dirty. My body demands I don't prolong this, it doesn't want to wait. Instead, I long for a quick and strong release.

One of my hands acts on its own, lifting the front of my shirt to free my breasts from the bra. I hook my fingers on the left cup, lowering it and caressing a puckered nipple. Then, I repeat the act with the other.

Closing my eyes, I revel in the swirl of pleasure inching me closer to the edge. It's fast and unprecedented. The adrenaline pumping in my veins has my heart racing. Everything is heightened. Is this what an out-of-body experience is like? Because I don't think I've ever felt anything like it.

He grunts, the sound muffled between my thighs. The vibrations shake the rubber, faintly beating on my clit. I rub myself roughly over the mask, ignoring the slight burn in my shins. It's so fucking good.

Lost in the turmoil of sensations, I clench my legs at the sides of his head and let myself explode with the strength of the orgasm. My sight turns blurry, tears sting behind my lids with the intensity of the climax, and my muscles twitch with each wave that hits the shore of my ecstasy. Panting, I lean forward and brace both hands on the floor.

The aftershocks tingle along my skin while I catch my breath.

Esto es una locura, I think. This must be what madness is like, since I have no other words to explain how I ended up here. We're both getting into a lot of trouble if someone catches us or if there are surveillance cameras. But I'm too turned on to give a fuck about exhibiting inappropriate behavior in public. I've lost my mind somewhere during this immersive experience, going from terrified to aroused in seconds. Nothing makes sense anymore.

Do I even want it to?

Peering down at the fog dancing around my hands, I conclude I don't care. Whatever this is—madness or recklessness—I thrive in it. I've never felt more alive before. Though it might be the adrenaline and orgasms talking for me.

Silver Mask crawls under my body, grazing a wet trail up my torso, and taking a moment to press his head on my boobs. He can't get enough of me. He stops his journey under my body when his face is directly under mine. I wiggle over his hips, feeling his own arousal. His cock is hard under the layers of denim, lodged deliciously against my pussy, and I resist the urge to buck my hips. I distract myself from the ache by focusing on him. The mask shines with the remains of my wetness, and I can't help but feel like a naughty girl.

I flush with the mix of embarrassment and excitement.

"You're so beautiful, darling. You did so fucking good," he praises,

brushing the tip of his fingers along my back. “I wish I could’ve felt your clit pulse on my tongue when you came.”

My Lord, I don’t know how he does it, but I throb harder for him.

His voice seems to have my pussy on speed dial because it doesn’t matter that I just experienced a mind-blowing climax. I get turned on all over again. I’ve never had a partner who could coax multiple orgasms out of me in such a short period. Either he hits all the dark fantasies I’ve had in my life, or he knows which buttons to press to set me off like a rocket.

Perhaps it’s the adrenaline working overtime. Or everything all at once.

“How do you keep making me come?” I ask through heavy breaths as I caress the surface of his mask. “This is fucking insane.”

He chuckles, a deep rumble shaking his chest.

“Do you think you can give me another one?” he questions, ignoring my words.

Without waiting for a response from me, he leads a hand between my thighs but doesn’t touch me. No, his fingers find the button of his pants and undo it, ripping the zipper down.

My throat tightens.

“Are you going to fuck me?” My voice is a mere whisper.

His head tilts slightly to the left, pondering, though I can tell he’s only messing with me because he angles his hips to lower the fabric covering him. Ruffling the clothes down, he frees his cock and brushes the tip against my wet heat.

“Only if you ask nicely.”

“Please,” I mumble, bunching his shirt with my fists. I dip my mouth to the curve of his neck, peppering kisses over his pulse as I mutter fervently, “Please, please, please.”

“Please what?”

“Please, fuck me.”

“That’s my good girl,” he grunts. “Are you ready to take my cock?”

I nod effusively. “So ready.”

It’s not a lie. I’m soaked, the wetness sliding down my inner thighs and yearning to have all of him.

“Are you sure?” His tone is different, more serious than it was before.

My heart squeezes with sudden appreciation. That he’s asking for my consent after I came on his fingers and rode his face means the world to me. Silver Mask is not just assuming he can have me, even when he

absolutely *can*. I'm wrapped around his finger. All he must do is say the word, and I would do anything.

"If you don't fuck me in the next five seconds, I'll put my clothes back on," I taunt, nibbling on the skin of his neck.

He sucks in a breath.

He likes it when I bite him.

"You need to be sure because there's no going back," he warns, and as he speaks, he uses the tip of his dick to tease my pussy. It travels along my slit, moving from my clit to my entrance, and repeating the process. I close my eyes, focusing on the heavenly stir spreading in my lower abdomen. "If I put my cock in you, I'm claiming you."

There must be something very wrong with me. I shouldn't be this horny for a man I barely know. Any logical person would run away at those words, but then there's me, who molds closer to him. I'm obsessed with his dirty talk, with his possessiveness, with how he pleasures me before he cares for his own needs.

"Claim me," I encourage him. "Make me yours."

The noise that comes out of his throat is almost animalistic, a mixture of a growl and a grunt. Before I can utter another word, he drives his cock inside my pussy until it's buried all the way in, my clit pressed against his pelvis. A hoarse scream abandons me. I'm so full and stretched. Sweat drips down my hairline and my muscles quake, getting used to his length and girth. I never saw it, but I confidently confirm he's the biggest I've ever had.

"Your cunt takes me so fucking well," he says as he grabs a handful of my ass, kneading the flesh. "I knew you'd be such a good girl for me since the moment I laid eyes on you." Slowly, he lifts my hips over his cock before thrusting back in hard. "Knew you'd be mine."

"Ay, *Dios mío*," I whisper to myself.

"Mine," he insists in my ear without stopping his deep and rough strokes, claiming me with his body. "Say it."

"Yours," I mutter as I struggle to keep some of my senses. It's a challenge when he's fucking me so raw, ravishing me. "Don't stop, please."

Silver Mask continues his movements at the same pace, only sliding his gloved hand between our bodies to draw invisible circles on my clit. I see stars at the leather gliding smoothly over my sensitive flesh.

"Can you come again?" he questions, and I nod, unable to form a response. "I'm counting down from five, and when I reach one, you're going

to come around my cock like the good girl I know you are. Okay?”

Fuck, that’s so hot.

“Hmm,” I hum my approval.

“Give me your words,” he grits out, abandoning my ass to grab a handful of my dark hair, tugging on the strands. “Do you understand?”

“Ye—yes,” I stutter.

“That’s my darling.” His praise alone is almost enough to push me over the edge. “Five.”

The pressure in my stomach grows, spreading to my limbs, tightening them. His fingers circle faster around my clit, inching me even closer. If he doesn’t speed up his countdown, I’m going to come before he reaches the end.

“Four.”

He drives his cock harder in me. The slap of our skin slamming together echoes in the walls of the hall.

“Three.”

The sweet release is so close I can almost taste it. My body is tight and quivering, my pussy throbbing as I struggle not to shatter before he gives me permission.

“I’m going to come,” I warn.

His fingers pinch my clit, making me jump a little, but it’s not enough to keep the orgasm at bay. Like trying to piece together a breaking dam with a roll of tape. “Hold it.”

“I can’t,” I sob through the pleasure.

“Breathe, darling.” The hand fisting my hair, caresses my back, soothing me.

My skin is on fire, blood boiling under it, causing more pearls of sweat to pool in the creases of my body.

Shakily, I inhale through my nose, holding the air in my lungs for a few seconds before panting it out. Lost in the moment, I match the heavy pattern of his breath, and it somehow gets me even more aroused.

“Two. You’re doing so well,” he croons.

I clench my jaw, digging my nails deeper into his arms.

“Please.”

“Shh, we’re almost there,” he whispers, and I catch the strain in his voice. He’s struggling as much as I am. “Who do you belong to?”

“You,” I respond instantly. “I belong to you.”

“Good girl.” A beat passes by before he says, “*One*. Come now, my darling. Let me feel your pussy milk my cock.”

I don’t need to be told twice.

Relief washes over me as I’m finally able to unleash the orgasm. It hits me with the force of a thousand bolts. I lose all touch with reality, drowning in the satisfying climax, shaking me to my core. Tears spill from my eyes. Everything is too intense. After coming three times, my heart hammers inside me. My lungs scorch as if I’ve run a marathon, and my muscles are sore but soft at the same time. It’s a beautiful antithesis.

He doesn’t stop ramming his cock into my pussy as I come. No, it speeds up, pistoning harder and faster into me, dragging screams from my throat. He’s intensifying the orgasmic waves, causing my walls to flutter around him. Chasing his own high, using my body like a toy made for his pleasure, and I don’t mind it one bit.

He’s earned it after sending me to heaven and back.

Which means it is my turn to make him lose his sanity.

“Are you going to come inside me?” I rasp in a sultry tone. “Or will you brand me with your cum?” He groans in my ear. “You want to come all over my pussy so I can wear you later when I meet up with my friends?”

“Yes.”

“Then brand me,” I insist, meeting his thrusts and clenching around him on purpose to get him closer.

When he moans, I bite his neck, nibbling on the skin. It takes him five deep strokes to grunt and tense, quickly pulling out of me. With grace, I reach under me, circling his thick cock with my hand to pump him through his release. Ropes of cum plaster over my lower abdomen and mound, marking me with his seed.

I roll off him to lie back on the floor next to him. Panting, I turn my head to find him already staring. At least, I think he is because the mask has shifted in my direction. His gloved hand moves to the cum-covered skin, spreading it over my belly before he leads his fingers to my lips, coating them with his essence. Licking it with the tip of my tongue, I savor the musky and salty taste and realize it carries a mixture of both of us.

I should stand and get dressed, but if I haven’t been caught with him yet, I can spare one minute to appreciate him. The mask hides so much of the identity I so desperately crave to discover.

How has he given me the best sex of my life, and I don’t even know what

he looks like?

I reach for his mask, partially debating if I should yank it off. But he's trusted me not to do it, so I settle for caressing the creases and edges, memorizing it. The last thing I wish for is to forget a single detail. Sensing he won't allow me to lift it again to kiss him, I choose to press my mouth on the devilish grin of the design.

"Does this mean I'll complete the Slashed experience?" I joke, keeping the atmosphere around us light.

He sighs.

"You get to survive, Final Girl," Silver Mask promises, tapping my chin with his thumb.

Chapter Six

Resolution

Silver Mask watches me get dressed from the floor where he sits with his spine against the wall. He has one leg flexed and the other extended, and an arm resting over his knee. Though his demeanor is relaxed, there's some tension lingering in the way his fingers fidget back and forth with the knife.

I'm thankful he didn't spiral and flee after we finished. Instead, he waits for me patiently. Since he didn't get naked, it only took him a few seconds to put himself back in his pants and zip them. Meanwhile, I struggle to pull my tight jeans over sweaty legs, which is a hassle because it keeps sticking to my skin rather than sliding smoothly.

Stealing a glance at him, I notice his shoulders bounce with laughter. *El idiota* finds it funny. I huff and finish setting the fabric over my hips.

"Where did you drop my boot?" I ask, looking around at the light fog covering the floor.

This would be significantly easier if we weren't inside the attraction. All the effects of haze and dim lighting are annoying now that I've come down from cloud nine. It's a struggle to gather my things under these circumstances.

This is what porn doesn't show you. The scenarios are hot, but they never include the cleanup and aftermath where you're awkwardly fumbling around each other as if you weren't getting your guts rearranged minutes before.

"Allow me," he says, stretching to reach the boot near him. Then, he shifts to his knees to help me put the shoe on.

The awkwardness in the air disappears the second his hand touches my leg. Pure electricity simmers through the length of it, and I hum in approval.

Tipping my chin, I stare at him, mesmerized by the view. The dominating, mysterious man kneeling for me is a sight to behold.

I'd have him in that position every single day if he wanted.

"You look good like that."

He tilts his head. I can't see his face, but I imagine he's smiling.

"It's an honor to be on my knees for you," he responds, caressing my leg with his mask as he finishes lacing my boot. "All set."

"Thank you."

He pats my thigh before he stands. I had already forgotten how tall he is. His figure towers over mine, though he's no longer intimidating. It shouldn't surprise me how things have changed in less than an hour. After ravishing each other in the way we did, there's no room for fear, especially with how he worshipped my body.

I'm going to think fondly of him until the day I die.

I tighten my thighs as my brain brings up the images of his face buried between them.

"You might have to wash your mask before your next group," I mention with a shrug, attempting to sound casual.

Is there such a thing as telling someone they need to wipe off your cunt perfume from their mask?

He must be inhaling the scent every time he breathes. While certain things are cool during sex, I don't think that's something he wishes to do as he works. There are limits, right?

"Why?" he asks, confusion present in his approach.

Embarrassment prickles under the skin of my face.

"Uh, because of the smell?" My words come out as a question rather than a statement, but his tone makes me hesitate.

"Of your pussy?" he inquires. I dip my chin in a nod, flushing at his boldness. "I'd wear the scent of your pussy to my deathbed if I could, darling" he says, cradling my cheek in a gesture that seems almost... sweet, and odd contrast after the rough sex we had a few minutes ago.

A laugh breaks free from me.

"Huh, and they say romance is dead."

To my surprise, he laughs too, but doesn't touch the topic. Instead, he nudges my elbow and announces, "Come on, I'll walk you to the exit."

"How charming," I muse. "Do you do this to all the girls who bat their eyes at you?" I tease because I don't really care about other women. If he

does this daily, that's his business. However, I do have a slight concern about us not using a condom. I'm on birth control, but that doesn't protect me from any diseases or infections.

Silver Mask clicks his tongue and shakes his head. "Only to the ones who kiss me when I corner them."

I roll my eyes.

"Lead the way."

He extends one hand toward me. Although estranged by his affection, I grab it without knowing what to expect. His fingers lace together with my own, and I'm taken aback by how warm and comfortable it is.

I'm not sure if I've been deprived of normal human proximity with a guy, but the warmth of his hand holding mine is pleasant. Our palms fitting perfectly as if they belong together, which is an insane thing to think about a man I just met. Then again, we jumped many steps along the way, so I could say our bodies were a perfect match for each other. If we got to know one another, I might like him too.

I'm not delusional enough to believe I'm harboring love for him after an hour of adrenaline and raw fucking. But I can't say there isn't a connection happening here. You don't have sex like that with just anyone. There's a spark between us, one that could ignite and turn into all-consuming flames.

The future is unknown.

Without untangling our hands, we walk to the main floor, and along a tiny hall toward the end. Not paying too much attention to our way out of here because I'm busy wondering if I should ask for his number.

So, when the neon sign becomes visible, I halt my steps and take a deep breath to steady my thumping heart.

Nena, you asked him to come all over you. This is absolutely nothing, my brain reminds me when I grow insecure. Somehow, this feels different. When we were fucking, I was sure of what was happening and didn't have to consider rejection as a possibility.

I gulp, the anxiety knotting in my throat.

"This might be straightforward, but could I have your number?" I fumble over the words. Silver Mask stays quiet for a few seconds. "We could have a re-do, but you don't need to feel obligated," I offer.

He shakes his head.

"I would love nothing more than getting another chance to be inside you," he assures. "I don't have my phone here."

“Oh.”

I didn't think about that option at all.

“But tell me yours. I'll remember it.”

I raise a brow, surprised.

We don't live in an era where you memorize numbers. Of course, I know a few digits here and there, like my mom's and my best friends' numbers, but nothing out of the ordinary. Typically, we limit ourselves to insert the digits in our contacts, and that's it. If our phones can store it for us, why bother learning them, right? That's what most of the world believes.

“Seriously?”

He nods, and nothing in his body language hints that he's lying.

“I'll engrave the numbers in my brain, darling. Tell me,” he insists.

Doubtful, I recite my phone number, and mention, “My name's Sadie.”

It's odd that I have his semen smeared all over my abdomen, and we haven't exchanged names.

Silver Mask bobs his head in approval before parroting back my digits, proving he has remembered at least immediately.

“See? I have an excellent memory,” he mentions, though I notice he hasn't introduced himself. With a slight tilt of his mask, he points at the exit. “You better get going if you want to be the final girl.”

“You could still eliminate me from the game,” I remind him, tapping the blade of his knife with my index finger.

“I could, but I won't,” he replies. “I'll find you later, my darling Sadie.”

With that, he backs away from me, installing a prudent distance between us. He's letting me have my moment alone. I appreciate him for it. People wouldn't consider me a final girl if I made it out with the person who was supposed to 'hunt me'.

I run my fingers through my dark hair, detangling some knots, so I don't look like I got railed. Filling my lungs with oxygen, I straighten my shoulders and lift my chin high. Everything to make it seem like I was playing the game and not fucking my way to the top.

Here goes nothing.

I twist the door handle and swing it open, bracing myself for the celebration I witnessed when the guy from the last group exited Slashed.

Except no one cheers for me.

Outside, everyone murmurs, exchanging confused glances. Red and blue lights bathe the area, and I take a second to realize they come from police

cars and ambulances. They're sirens. Emergency teams crowd the lot.

"Sadie!" Jen's alarmed voice cuts through the night as she runs toward me, slamming her torso against mine when she wraps her arms around my body. Her entire frame is shaking as she hugs me. "You're alive! Oh my God, you're alive!"

Confusion sprouts in my chest, spreading through my veins, and knitting my forehead into a frown.

"What are you talking about?" I ask, grabbing her shoulders to push her back and look at her face.

Tears spill down her cheeks. Relief present in her features.

"They're dead," she tells me. "I found a body after we split up. It was the scare actor."

My frown deepens.

"What do you mean?" I'm so lost and confused. "He followed me."

Jen shakes her head.

"No, Sadie, you're not understanding." She pauses for a second to exhale a shaky breath. "The guy chasing us wasn't a scare actor at all; he was a killer. He murdered the actor assigned to our group and the other jocks too. Nancy..."

Where is she? Where's my best friend?

My stomach drops at the realization. When Nance got locked away, she was shrieking with terror. I thought... This was supposed to be a game. Guilt prickles my body like needles pocking holes in my skin. My knees grow weak, almost making me crumble, but I keep clinging on to Jennifer to keep from falling.

Horror ties a thick rope around my chest, crushing it with its weight as it takes control of my anatomy. Frantically, I look at my surroundings, trying to catch a glimpse of my blonde friend.

I hope she's okay.

She has to be.

"Where's Nance?"

Jennifer wipes the tears from her face with the sleeve of her shirt. Red rims her lashes, showing she's been crying for a while.

"The ambulance just took her. She had a nasty wound from the stairs, and they think she has a concussion," Jen explains, skimming over the details. "She was with Ty when he... you know."

I don't know what impulse takes over me, but I ask, "Did... Did he hurt

her?”

What will knowing accomplish?

The guy that worshipped my body a few minutes ago is a murderer. He killed people in cold blood, and held me at knifepoint. I was too naïve to understand what his threats meant. When he mentioned checking to see if the knife was real, did he mean slicing my chest open with the blade?

The blade.

I licked the blade.

Nausea rattles my stomach because I licked it. My mouth was in contact with the same knife that took people’s lives. It probably still had blood from his victims, and I put my tongue on it.

I glance down at the front of my attire, noticing the dried blood stains on my shirt for the first time. *Real* blood from people I met. He must’ve transferred them from his clothes to mine while we kissed. I wipe the blotches, hoping to remove them, but nothing works. I didn’t like the jocks at all, but did they deserve to die in such a horrible way?

“Sadie, are you okay?” Jen’s hands pat my shoulders and then cradle my face to refocus my attention. “How did you escape?”

“Escape?” I echo.

I wasn’t in danger.

Was I?

My mouth dries, making it difficult for me to swallow as I remember the events.

When I lifted his mask and his blade pressed against my throat, was he planning to kill me there? If I hadn’t hooked up with him, would he have sliced me open or sank his knife into my body until I stopped breathing? My mind runs through the gory scenarios, and my blood freezes in my veins, leaving me frozen solid in front of my friend.

Her lips move, but the words don’t reach my ears. I blink and shake my head, commanding my senses to react. Whatever she’s saying seems important.

“The killer, Sadie. How did you escape him?”

Saliva gets stuck in my throat.

I press a hand on my abdomen, and while the shirt prevents me from touching skin, I think about his semen smeared over it. It’s not an answer I can give her.

“I don’t know,” I respond, keeping the truth inside. “I thought he was a

scare actor, so I ran.”

“You ran?”

I nod absently.

“I ran. He never caught me,” I lie.



The cops interrogate me three times before taking Jen and me to the hospital, even when we're both unharmed. Part of the protocol, they say. Something they got to do to make sure I wasn't harmed.

Though I don't want it, I endure the lengthy procedure as I reflect on what happened. I went into Slashed and hooked up with a scare actor, except he wasn't who I thought he was.

He's a killer.

I was in danger, and my messed-up brain never acknowledged what was going on. I've invented a new level of clueless and stupidity. Yet... that somehow saved me? He had a knife against my neck the entire time. He could've killed me, but he didn't. Not even when we were done.

The slasher seems to have spared my life because I fucked him. Is that what happened?

I think that's what shocks me the most. I don't believe it to be possible.

He had plenty of opportunities to stab me or slit my throat, but he didn't. I'm not trying to romanticize that he allowed me to live. I'm not special. I was bold, sure, but was that enough to make it worth his while? I mean, obviously, there's the part where I let him fuck my brains out, too.

But it makes no sense for him to spare my life, especially when I have sufficient evidence on my body to help identify him. I still have his dried semen on my skin. It'd only take a conversation with a nurse at the hospital and a sample collection for them to gather his DNA. However, to do so, I'd have to blurt out the truth I've been denying the entire night.

I'm not sure why, perhaps it's shame or a messed-up urge to protect him because he let me live, but I don't tell the cops about our encounter. How would I even come clean about what happened?

Hi, remember when I denied having close contact with the killer? I lied because the reality is I know what he feels like, seeing as I had his cock inside me.

It wouldn't go well.

I could aid with the investigation if I spoke up. Silver Mask killed four people tonight; I should help to get him behind bars. It'd be the morally correct thing to do. But the words never abandon my lips, not even when the doctors check me and confirm there's nothing wrong with me. I haven't been harmed, and my only aches come from when Steve slammed into me and from the rough sex I had.

I never mention the latter.

Especially not when we're allowed to see Nance for a few minutes, as they'll be keeping her at the hospital through the night for observation. Two surveillance officers stand at the hall in case Silver Mask plans to come back and finish the job.

My beautiful sunshine friend has a row of stitches along her jaw, crossing her chin where the skin split open. Her eyes blink a few times when she spots us around her bed and a soft smile curves across her lips.

I caress the blood-stained golden curls resting on her shoulders. Jen walks to the other side and gently holds her hand.

"Hey," I whisper, afraid I'll start crying if I speak any louder.

"You're never allowed to make plans, ever," Nance says in a low rasp, almost too weak to talk.

A watery laugh emerges from the back of my throat, pushing past the lump lodged in there.

"Never again," I promise. "I'm just glad you're okay."

From the corner of my eye, I see Jen smile without showing her teeth. It's forced, and it doesn't reach the rest of her troubled expression.

I have to talk to her. She needs to know what happened, even if she never forgives me for withholding the truth from her.

So, I wait until we've said our goodbyes to Nancy and are in the empty hospital elevator to break the silence.

"Jen, about tonight..." I drift off, not knowing how to approach the subject, that the killer didn't hunt me the way everyone thinks.

I didn't have a traumatic experience, witness a murder, or find any dead bodies. While my best friends were getting tormented by what they encountered, I was too busy fucking the man who committed the crimes.

What kind of person am I? One rotten on the inside.

There's no logic behind my actions. Perhaps the shock lingering in my system excuses me. It's a good explanation for the way my throat closes

when I attempt to utter the words.

Am I protecting him? It doesn't feel like I am. Mostly, I fear I'm preserving myself and my dignity. I took pride in being someone who caught on to things that other people didn't, yet I saw every red flag tonight and decided they weren't enough. I heard screams, cries for help, blood, and had a knife against my throat, and I shrugged it off as nothing.

Jen holds my hands, squeezing them tight. I want to shake them off mine because I feel so undeserving of the comfort she's trying to give me. The last thing I want is sympathy for my lies.

"Is it okay if we don't talk about it?" Her voice wavers and tears well in her eyes. "We went through something incredibly fucked up, and I can't think about it anymore."

Slowly, I nod.

"Of course," I mumble sheepishly.

Because we had different experiences.

She found a corpse left by Silver Mask; I was begging for him to come all over me.

We are not the same.

What is wrong with me?

"I need to go to the bathroom," I announce once the elevator doors slide open.

Without waiting for her response, I jog toward the nearest restroom, pushing the door and locking myself inside.

Panic rises in me, numbing my senses, and collapsing my lungs. My breathing becomes a hardship, my sight turns blurry, and my ears ring incessantly. I'm lost in the turmoil separating me from my frame until it feels like I'm living in a foreign skin.

Looking for grounding techniques, I stare at my reflection, focusing on what I can see.

Dark, tangled hair. Big and anxious brown eyes. Blood-stained shirt.

Inspecting my body further, I spot some scratches on my jaw where the blade of the knife scraped me. Nothing that would bleed through, but enough to have red marks along the curve. I lower the hem of my jeans, checking the bruises forming on my left hip both from the fall and from his hand grabbing me during sex.

Grazing the abused flesh, a memory slashes its way to the front of my brain.

I'll find you later, my darling Sadie.

It was a wicked promise, and now I can't help but wonder... Is he going to kill me once he finds me? I don't doubt he will.

It's only a matter of time, and the clock isn't ticking in my favor.

Chapter Seven

The Final Girl

OCTOBER 31ST

My nightmare starts out as a sex dream. After five consecutive days of having the same repetitive dream, I've become acquainted with the events.

It begins the same way. I'm pinned with my chest against a wall, naked and helpless. At his mercy as he caresses my curves with the edge of a cold blade. The cool sensation on my warm skin makes me shudder in anticipation. I enjoy it, panting for more. In a rapid motion, the mystery man spins me around. Though I can't look at his face, it's always blurred to keep his anonymity, I know it's Silver Mask. In the dream, I mold my body against his. Then he holds his knife high in the air before slicing it between my ribs, cutting me open.

The last thing I see is his silver mask getting splattered by my blood.

I wake up shrieking in horror, fumbling around my bed as I command my heart to slow down. Glancing around with a hand over my chest, I make sure I'm alone in the room.

I always am. Nothing in my bedroom appears to be different, yet I scan every detail. Everything is right where it belongs. I'm the only one out of place, freaked out and paranoid, waiting for the day he will come for me and turn my nightmare into a reality.

The cops are looking for him, but they can't do a lot without a physical description of the killer. No one saw his face, not even me. For all we know, he might be wandering around with his chin up high, laughing at the system.

There's not much I can do to help with the investigation, either. All the

details embedded in my brain will not confirm his identity. I don't remember anything of relevance. What would I say? *Sorry, I don't know what he looks like, but I vividly recall the sounds he made when he came on me.*

There's not a person in the world who would believe me after that statement. Hell, *I* can't take myself seriously. What are the odds of going to a haunted house attraction and unknowingly fucking an actual killer? The chances are so slim that I refuse to even confess my sin to anyone.

After the hospital, I haven't tried to talk to Jen about it. Nance is entirely out of the question since she bursts into tears every time she remembers what happened, and I fear the fragile state of her mind. And I refuse to speak with the authorities about it.

Once the truth comes out, I'll forever carry the shame of my mistake like a scarlet letter over my chest.

Though, deep down, I'm aware I only feel ashamed because of how badly I crave for it to happen again.

It makes no sense.

He's dangerous and promised to find me, which means I sealed my death sentence days ago. So why do I still ache when I think about his face buried between my thighs? Why do I get wet when I remember how he controlled my orgasms?

Closing my eyes, I sigh in defeat.

I can't keep living like this. This constant back and forth is killing me, shedding every ounce of sanity I have left. This is my slow descent into madness. With each day that passes, I'm one step closer to losing my mind. I'll break down soon enough, and he'll take the opportunity to finish me off then.

Running my fingers through my sweaty hair, I pull on the strands to release some of the frustration accumulated in my body. I climb out of bed and head to the bathroom, but not before I grab the knife under my pillow.

While I'm impatiently waiting for my death, I refuse to go down easily. Unlike the jocks, I won't be caught off guard by Silver Mask. So, even when I don't stand a chance of winning, I carry a knife with me everywhere I go.

Honestly, I need a miracle. But I doubt I'm in God's good graces after the way I behaved in Slashed. Abuela's prayers can't save my rotten and corrupted soul. All I have left is delusion because hope isn't enough to help me survive.

Peeling off my clothes, I turn on the shower and hop inside. I place the

knife next to my shampoo bottle and let the water roam over my body, washing away the guilt and misery.

There are so many things I could've done differently that night. I should've requested a group change the second I saw the jocks and knew they were going to be trouble. I should've tapped out of the game when Nancy got stuck with the killer.

Hell, I shouldn't have made my friends go with me.

But no amount of over-analyzing will ease the guilt poisoning my system. I blame myself for what happened either way because I didn't connect the dots sooner. It doesn't matter that I wasn't aware of the murders because I had the knife against my throat. Part of me noticed the sharpness, while the other part was too blinded by lust to notice.

I'm afraid my subconscious knew it was real all along. I just refused to believe it.

I felt the metal scratch my skin and thought about the possibility of him slashing my neck if he wanted, yet I didn't recoil in fear. Instead, I melted and begged for more.

The root of the problem isn't even him, it's *me*.

I pursued him.

I kissed him.

I pleaded for him to fuck me.

There has to be some crossed wires in my brain, some rational reason to explain why I'd behave so... irrationally. I just don't know what. And not having a good answer is probably why I wait for him to honor his promise and come after me. Maybe he can put an end to this spiral. To be quite honest, I'm not sure of what I would do if I had him in front of me. Contrary to what I believed five days ago, I am not final girl material.

I survived by doing the exact things that get horror movie characters killed.

Seeing red flags and choosing to ignore them? Check.

Making dumb decisions? Check.

Running upstairs with no way out? Check.

Having sex while a killer is around? Mother fucking CHECK.

I stare at my wrinkled fingers. I've lost track of how much time has passed in the shower and have been wasting water. On top of being stupid, I'm also irresponsible. Somehow, being worried about my impact in the environment should be the least of my concerns when I helped a murderer

escape and now he's hunting me.

Like I said, I'm beyond fucked up.

Shrugging my thoughts away, I tilt my head to rinse the rest of my hair when I hear the bathroom door creak as it closes.

Flinching, I jerk against the wet tiles, searching for the knife.

My heart rattles in my chest, wanting to break free and escape from its destiny. I bite the inside of my cheek to prevent any noises from slipping out. I've made plenty of mistakes that would get me killed, but I won't call out to see who's there. Not when I know the answer.

The shower curtains aren't see-through, but I don't have a doubt that he's here.

He found me.

I hold my breath and tighten my fist around the hilt, listening to the water gurgle down the drain. I don't know how this night will end, but I refuse to die like the girl from Psycho. I will go down fighting, and I'm sure as hell not getting killed in the shower.

The light switch clicks off, and the bathroom is left in total darkness. I stand still, commanding my lungs to consume oxygen while I wait for the steps to get closer. A hand moves the drapes, and my instincts take the lead, swishing the knife around. I push through the fabric, slamming my body at full force against the figure behind it.

The blade slashes the curtains, slicing skin at the same time the rod breaks from the wall, crashing atop both of us.

"*Puñeta*," I grit out, shoving the shaft to the ground where it clangs.

"What the hell are you doing?" he screams. "Fuck!"

The darkness in the bathroom is deep enough to prevent me from seeing the details of what's happening, but I make out the silhouette of his body crouching and holding his right bicep.

I stare down at my hand holding the knife, and I touch the blood-soaked blade. Nausea rolls through my stomach. My heart rate spikes, making me dizzy, and I bright spots dance in my vision.

Dios mío.

Am I about to faint?

I shake my head, forcing myself to stay conscious.

"Did you just fucking stab me?!" he shouts, grunting in pain.

"You broke into my house five days after your murder spree. What did you expect? I thought you were trying to murder me!" I yell back, louder than

I intended to.

I've reached rock bottom in the way I least expected. Somehow, I don't think my brain processed that I would have to hurt him when I carried the blade with me. Nor did I consider how I would react to wounding a living, breathing person.

"Murder you?" he echoes, sounding confused. "What are you talking about?"

I frown, but don't lower the knife, keeping it high between us. As squeamish as it makes me to think about stabbing him, I will still do it if he comes at me.

"You said... Why are you here?" I interrogate when I'm unable to connect a coherent sentence.

"I told you I would find you." Although his words are strained due to pain, his tone is nonchalant. "Can you stop pointing the knife at me?"

"No!" I exclaim immediately.

"Sadie," he groans. "Please, will you lower the knife?"

I gulp.

"Do you plan on killing me?"

"If I wanted you dead, I would've done it when I had you pinned against the wall, don't you think?"

A scoff abandons me. Of course, I've thought about it.

It's all I have been able to think about.

"That's not an answer."

"No, darling. I'm not plotting to kill you tonight or any night," he mutters, sliding to the floor without letting his arm go. "Will you drop the knife already and help me bandage this?"

I don't obey.

Well, not entirely because I keep the knife up high, but step back to find the first-aid kit under the bathroom sink. I don't know why I'm helping him; I simply do it. Hesitant and distrusting, I pull out the box and hand it to him.

The silhouette of his head sways to his left, motioning at me to sit with him.

"Please?" he adds.

My naked body shakes with fear as I descend to my knees next to him. Even when I'm the one with the advantage, I feel miniscule. If he wanted to, he could turn this against me. I doubt I'm a worthy opponent, yet he doesn't make any comments about my fragile state. Instead, he waits for me to act,

letting pained noises abandon his lips.

For someone so lethal, he's not great at handling pain. Though it's possible that the adrenaline sizzling in my system has heightened my senses, making everything louder.

With one hand, I open the lid of the kit, shuffling to find some antiseptic and gauze.

¿Qué estoy haciendo?

He has infected me with his madness, poisoning away all the parts of my brain that scream at me for being near him when he can kill me. I wouldn't be able to catch his lies. For all I know, he's tricking me because he finds it amusing.

"You're scared of me," he observes, and I may be insane, but I swear I detect a slight edge of hurt in his words.

I use my teeth to open the sterile packet.

"Why shouldn't I be?" I retort. Using sass isn't my best move, but I never said I was writing the tutorial on how to defeat a killer when you're naked in a bathroom. I'm acting on pure instinct here. "You killed four innocent people."

He has the nerve to laugh. To shut him up, I pat the antiseptic wipe over the area he holds before pressing a bunch of gauze on it to stop the bleeding. As expected, his chuckle turns into a hiss of pain.

"I wouldn't say they were innocent." It's all he says in his defense.

"So, you consider yourself to be... what? A harbinger of Justice?" Sarcasm drips from my words and his muscles tense. "Is that why you killed them? Did you find them guilty of something?"

"I don't want to talk about them."

His comment is cold as steel and sharper than the knife in my hand, so I reluctantly drop the subject. The last thing I need is to trigger him into changing his mind about letting me live.

"What else do you want to talk about?" I inquire, arching a brow, even though he can't see my facial expression.

"Why are you scared of me?"

The pressure I've been holding back for the past few days returns with the strength of a hurricane, trapping my chest with its weight and clogging my throat. My organs crumble and I shake once again, struggling to keep my grip steady on his wound.

Softly, his fingers cover mine over his biceps, gentle and caring. I cannot

understand how he can be so comforting to me and lethal to the world. The hand he's using to give me solace is the same one he used to murder four people. Blood will forever stain his touch, yet against all logic, I find peace in it.

I close my eyes, anchoring my wild emotions to the tranquility evoked by his palm. Exhaling the fear wreaking havoc in my system, I compose myself enough to answer, "I don't know."

"Have I done something to scare you? I mean *you*, not who I've killed."

Wetting my lips with the tip of my tongue, I ponder his question.

It's hard to respond because the experience from Slashed is distorted in my brain. I can't quite separate the act from reality. I don't know where the line was drawn. When he chased after me, was he doing it with an ulterior motive, or was he following my game?

"It's complicated."

"Explain it. I want to know what caused you to be so terrified of me."

A watery chuckle emerges from the back of my throat.

"I—I don't understand why you let me live," I confess, looking down to hide the tears burning in my eyes. There's no need for me to shy away when the darkness of the room protects me, but I don't want my weakness to show. "It scares me because it means I did something that caused you to change your mind about taking my life."

"Sadie..."

"It's stupid," I cut him off, shaking my head. "It doesn't matter how I feel."

"Of course, it matters." He brushes his thumb over the back of my hand, drawing invisible patterns on the skin. "You're mine, remember?"

My heart skips a beat at his words, and I hate myself a bit more for the way it flutters. With every minute that passes, I lose another chunk of my morals.

"What did I do?"

His sigh is loud and long.

"I don't kill women," he states. "Never have and never will."

"Is that all?"

He turns his head away from me.

"No," he mumbles, but stays silent for a brief instance. "I wish I had a better answer for you, Sadie. I didn't go to Slashed intending to meet you. Actually, you were a plot twist I never saw coming, and I almost forgot my

plans the second I noticed you standing with your friends.”

“Why me?”

“I don’t know,” he confesses in a soft, raspy voice. “For so long, I’ve been numb, unable to feel anything but rage and anguish. My world had stopped spinning ages ago. I went to Slashed hoping to die at the end of the night, to be set free from the misery dragging me down. Then, I saw you, and I felt for the first time in years. The world started moving again.” Slowly, he abandons my hand to lead it to my body, brushing the tips of his fingers along the naked skin of my arms. His caresses continue until they reach my face, where he dries the tears rolling down my cheeks. “Tell me you don’t feel the same connection, and I’ll disappear from your life. It’ll be like we never met. In the future, I’ll be nothing but a faded nightmare to you.”

The knot in my throat tightens.

“And what about you? What will happen if I ask you to leave?” I wonder out loud.

“The world will stop spinning again.”

My heart thumps faster, wanting to run away from the heavy meaning of his confession.

“I’m not special enough to end your world. I was just a girl at the wrong place and time.”

He drops his hand, letting it fall over his lap.

“Is that what you believe? Darling, you do not realize how unique and incredible you are. I don’t know many girls who would confront a cold-blooded killer with a knife.”

I hold back a wave of laughter.

“Maybe, you know I wouldn’t be able to kill you.”

“Oh, I’m sure you could. If you genuinely wanted to, you could end this right now with just a simple slice,” he says, grabbing my fist wrapped around the hilt of the knife, and without giving it any importance, he places it against his throat. I choke back a distressed moan, completely horrified at the idea of harming him. What if he uses my hand to kill himself? “But I’m taking a page out of your book and trusting that you won’t kill me.”

“I didn’t know I was trusting you with my life at the house,” I remind him with a nervous edge.

“I think part of you always knew the knife was real.”

My chin trembles.

Because I did. Despite of everything I’ve tried to convince myself of, I

knew the blade was real, and I loved it.

Unable to hide the truth any longer, I drop the knife, letting it fall to the floor with a clang. Like a dam cracking under the pressure, I break into wild tears, shamefully crying in front of him. The sobs rip my chest apart one by one, gutting me from the inside out.

His arms engulf me in a pacifying hug, serving as a refuge from reality. He moves me to his lap, and I straddle him, finding a more comfortable position as my pain spills from me.

“What am I doing?” I sob against his chest. “I’m losing my mind.”

It should be fucked up how safe I feel between his arms, like nothing in the world could harm me as long as I remain protected by him.

“I’ve got you. It’s okay, let it out, darling.”

And I do.

I cry out harder, evicting the pain and exhaustion inhabiting me. Every tear I spill is another part of me I mourn. As much as I want it, I can’t go back to being the same girl who was excited to attend a haunted house attraction. I’ll never be the same person who hadn’t faced death and danger.

And I grieve for the woman she could’ve become.

As I lose the old Sadie, I welcome the version of me who finds solace in the arms of a killer. I think I always hid her in the gruesome parts of my brain, waiting for the perfect opportunity to eclipse my heart with its darkness. I’m freeing the obscure wolf living inside of me. I find it poetic that I experience the rebirth of my soul, entirely naked in his embrace.

“My brave final girl.”

Keeping my eyes closed, I brace my forehead against his, feeling the feathery touch of his warm breath over my lips. For the first time since he appeared, I realize I miss the rubber texture of his mask because he’s not wearing it.

“You’re not wearing your mask,” I whisper, more to myself than for him.

“It serves a purpose. I didn’t come here for that reason.”

“Killing?”

Gently, his nose nuzzles mine as he moves his head downward into a nod.

“Yes, the mask is only for killing, which is why I’ll never wear it around you.”

My breath hitches.

“Do you promise?”

“I promise, darling,” he mumbles, leaning in to kiss my tears away,

drying the skin with his lips.

It's a gentle act, full of devotion.

An unwavering sense of relief sets in the pit of my stomach, dissipating the tension accumulated in my muscles. All reason abandons me, and I'm left in a shell of iridescent bliss.

This stranger, a cold-blooded killer, is my ataraxia.

Delicately, I lift a hand to touch his face, memorizing every crease and texture. The skin of his forehead is soft and free of blemishes. Thick brows arch over his eyes, followed by long lashes. I've always found it amusing, if not a little irritating, that men always seem to have longer lashes than women.

I smile and continue my journey, discovering what his appearance is like without seeing his features. Intimacy is born in bizarre places. Sometimes we rely too much on what we can see, rather than getting to know another person by our other senses. Touching, smelling, tasting, listening.

A slight bump rises on the bridge of his nose. Maybe at some point in his life, he broke it and it didn't heal properly. The skin over his jaw is rougher than when we kissed in Slashed; he didn't have any trace of facial hair. I wonder if his preference is to have it shaved, or if he occasionally grows a beard.

He has a scar over his left cheekbone. It's small, no bigger than an inch, and by the feel, it's an old wound. Perhaps from his childhood.

I stop at his lips, tracing the marked cupid's bow. He has a full and smooth mouth.

I reach the conclusion that my jagged killer is a beautiful man, and I'm at his mercy.

"Promise you'll never harm me," I ask, my tone pleading.

"I swear," he vows. "I protect what's mine."

His mouth hovers in front of me, stealing my breath and making it his.

"Am I yours?"

"Always mine. Forever mine."

And he seals his oath to me by conquering my lips with his.

The searing kiss shatters me from the inside, shaking me to my core. In an instant, I'm burning for him, aching in the flames of this untamable passion. His mouth doesn't ask for permission. It takes and takes until there's nothing left of me to offer, until we're so close together that I can't tell where he begins and I end.

He consumes me, obliterating everything in his path, erasing the

memories of each guy who came before him. No one exists anymore, just him.

Moaning, I reach for the hem of his shirt, tugging at it. We break apart enough for him to discard the piece of clothing, pressing his naked torso against mine. I venture my hands over his body, discovering more scar tissue over his chest and back. My heart constricts painfully. Someone doesn't earn scars like the ones he has without going through a circle of hell.

I want to ask about his past, to know every story behind them, but I don't. Instead, I kiss them, feeling his muscles tense as I trace the healed wounds with my lips. A groan vibrates in his chest before he grabs a fistful of my hair, tilting my head so he can devour my mouth again.

His other hand slips between my parted thighs, where I throb for him. The pads of his fingers rub small circles on my clit, closing in on the sensitive spot with each passing second. It doesn't take long to get me to the edge, but he doesn't let me fall apart. Instead, he unbuttons his pants, and I help him free himself.

I wrap my hand around his thick cock, giving it a slow but steady stroke. I lift my hips and glide the head along my slit, lubing it with my wetness before I sink down on it. Inch per delicious inch stretches my pussy, filling me slowly. A moan escapes me as I tilt my skull back, soaking in the pleasure.

Unlike last time, he doesn't mumble filthy words in my ear. He sucks on my tits as I snap my hips against his, using him for my satisfaction. Teeth scrape around my nipples, and I hiss. Covering the aching tips with his lips, he soothes the pain and licks tenderly. He worships my body, overriding my system with his touch. Mouth on nipples, fingers circling my clit, cock thrusting deeply.

"Mine," he grunts.

Picking up his pace, he wraps my waist with one arm, forgetting all about his wound. Driven by lust and pure, carnal need, we move in synchrony.

Chasing a little death in the throes of passion, we meet each other.

Skin to skin. Heart to heart. Soul to soul.

We clash together until we implode around each other, coming so hard I lose contact with reality. In this moment, we're the only ones existing in the world.

"Am I yours?" he questions.

I cradle his face with one hand and let the other wander to his chest until

it rests against his heart. For an instant, I swear his pulse matches mine as if it were one heart instead of two.

“Always mine. Forever mine.”

Epilogue

Post Credits Scene

SILVER MASK

I've never met anyone who's both equal parts heaven and hell until I saw *her* standing across the lot with her friends. The coldness vanished from my soul, and I felt warm for the first time in what feels like forever.

I watch her sleep, I feel *everything*.

My body comes to life to experience her vibrant aura.

Sadie's an angel lying next to me. Dark hair haloing her tan face illuminated by the sliver of sun slipping through the curtains of her bedroom. Her mouth slightly parted open, breathing out in her slumber. She's peaceful this way. Ethereal. So different from the firecracker who challenged me twice and had me chasing after her for more.

Sadie recognizes my darkness without attempting to change it or fix my morality. She doesn't ask questions about the reasoning behind the blood I've spilled. Instead, she accepts it, nurturing the tormented side of me with her warmth.

I crave her.

Obsession has laced a red thread around our souls, and bounding our lives until the moment death comes for one of us. I hope, when that fatal day arrives, that it takes me first. No hell would be worse than breathing in a world without her in it.

“See you soon, my darling,” I whisper, pressing a kiss on her forehead.

I set the note I wrote for her on the nightstand where it’ll be easier to spot.

When she wakes, I won’t be here. Though this isn’t an ending, not when our story has begun. It’s the promise of a future, and I can’t wait for the day where our paths meet again once the chaos I’ve caused dies down.

Until then, I leave her with a vow of solace.

*I'll come back to you.
Don't forget, you're always mine.
Forever mine, Final Girl.
Yours,
Kill.*

Acknowledgments

Okay, wow.

I never know what to write when I come here because I don't think there are enough words in the dictionary to explain how hard and exhilarating writing a story is. This year has been a hard one—personally and creatively—and I was writing another book (more like trying to) when I got the first idea for *Slashed* two months ago and decided to take the jump and write this instead.

The support I've gotten for this story has been overwhelming in the best ways, and I couldn't have done it alone. My bestie always says that writing a book takes a village, and she's not wrong.

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Lots of love,
Thal.

About the Author

Thalia Sanchez is an old soul trapped in the body of a twenty-three-years-old woman. She's from Puerto Rico—born and raised—and lives complaining about the heat with her dogs and parents. She began writing at the early age of thirteen and soon discovered there was nothing else in the world she would rather do with her time... Other than reading and procrastinating. She's an animal lover, music addict, and professional fangirl.

When she's not writing, you can find her procrastinating on Instagram, pinning images on Pinterest, and laughing at memes and TikToks.

Keep in touch with her!



Also by Thalia Sanchez

Sweet Talkers Series

[Sweet Keeper](#)

Sweet Desire